



STRATEGY BRIEF:

Retention of Effective Educators in High-Need Schools

LEA Leaders can use this brief to learn more about:

- What are the challenges of retaining educators in high need schools?
- What effective practices can LEAs use in planning and implementing effective retention strategies for high need schools?
- How can LEAs address likely challenges, constraints or considerations when designing and implementing strategies for retention of teachers and leaders in high need schools?
- What can I learn and apply from the work of other LEAs around the country?
- Where are LEA-facing resources to support this work?

Context

Retaining effective teachers and leaders can be challenging in any context and is even more critical in high-need schools. Pennsylvania’s high-need schools often lack sufficient qualified teachers, and teachers stay in these schools for shorter periods.¹ High teacher turnover also drains limited budgets. High-need schools have a greater share of newly hired teachers in their first year of teaching.² Effective teachers are distributed unevenly among students of different socioeconomic backgrounds.³ Building on the information outlined in the Retention Guide and the Educator Placement Guide, it is important for HR teams to give certain competitive advantages—or ‘edges’—to high-need schools so they can better compete for and retain talent. While this document will focus on teacher retention, the leadership of the school is the key to retaining effective teachers. High-need schools experience significant principal turnover, and LEAs should also have strategies related to leader retention.

1 Pennsylvania Department of Education Student Enrollment report and Professional Staff reports, 2019.

2 Reform Support Network (2015). Promoting more equitable access to effective teachers: Problems and root causes. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/equitableaccessproblemsandrootcause.pdf>

3 Pennsylvania Department of Education Student Enrollment report and Professional Staff reports, 2019.

Key data

School characteristics are also associated with high turnover rates.⁴ HR should use key data on teacher and principal performance, including turnover data—which educators left the LEA and which moved to others schools within the LEA—to better understand patterns of educators movement and to further explore why educators leave schools.

Reflection Questions:

- *Does the LEA routinely analyze attrition and turnover data?*
- *Does the distribution of effective teachers (based on the Multiple measures used in PA’s educator effectiveness system) demonstrate that high-need students lack sufficient numbers of effective teachers?*
- *Does your LEA collect data about access to effective teachers? For example, LEAs can analyze the rates at which different student groups have teachers at different evaluation ratings, different PVAAS levels, etc.*

Define High-need Schools

Be sure your LEA has a shared understanding of which schools are considered the most “high need” within your LEA. A sample definition is: schools that face significant challenges based on data about: student outcomes; student characteristics and demographics; staff turnover and retention; and school leadership quality. LEAs can analyze these characteristics through tools such as assessment outcomes, PVAAS growth measures, Future Ready PA Index, etc.

Reflection Question:

- *How does your district define high-need schools?*

⁴ Reform Support Network (2015).

Effective LEA Policies and Practices

Based on the analysis and context of your district, determine the most impactful practices that will increase the retention of effective teachers in high-need schools. To retain effective teachers in high-need schools, LEAs should focus on a multi-pronged approach of ensuring a robust pipeline of candidates, intentional educator assignment practices, and support for retention of teachers in high-need schools. More specifically, the following practices have demonstrated improved retention of teachers.

1. Strategies must be differentiated and targeted depending the specific needs of the school

LEAs should promote strategic staffing initiatives by defining the high-need schools within the LEA.⁵ These schools should be known to all in the central office so that targeted services can be directed to the schools. HR should provide data on transfers, attrition and retention by type of school for principals and principal supervisors. Analyze this data by grade level, subject area, and school. HR teams can work with principals to identify retention strategies that fit effective educators in high-need schools.

Together with leaders and unions, the LEA should review teacher placement policies that are barriers to early hiring and retention, and also seniority policies around placement. For example, LEAs can designate specific high-need schools who would not receive any forced placements of displaced teachers—teachers who may in turn be more likely to leave the school when given the chance.

A number of tools that can assist districts in differentiating services to high-need schools that directly correlate to increasing the retention of effective teachers. By assessing current human capital policies and practices, LEAs will be able to give more of an advantage to high-need schools. The EDges in HC Assessment tool provides a structure and a step-by-step guide to assess policies and practices that could be prioritized and implemented to support high-need schools. LEAs can use the results of this assessment in coordination with the EDges in HC Strategies tool, which identifies practices that will increase the retention of highly effective teachers in high-need schools.

⁵ Reform Support Network (2015). Strategic options for States to improve placement and movement. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/equitableaccessstoeffectiveteachersstrategicoptions.pdf>

Reflection Questions:

- *Are there policies in your LEA that are barriers to effective teachers staying in high-need schools?*
- *Does your LEA routinely analyze transfer, attrition and retention data by school type and effectiveness of teachers (as determined by the Multiple measures used in PA’s educator effectiveness system)?*
- *Is there a differentiated approach to central office support for high-need schools regarding HR needs?*
- *Is there a process in the district to hold certain high-need schools harmless to forced placements?*

2. Effective leadership and teacher leadership opportunities are critical to retaining highly effective teachers

LEAs should place proven leaders with a track record of success in high-need schools. Increased support, resources and opportunities can help attract effective and mission-driven teachers to these schools.⁶ Such supports and resources could include greater autonomy, additional assistant principals, teacher leader positions, increased budgets for professional learning, and higher compensation.

High-need schools can provide differentiated roles and titles for highly effective teachers. LEAs should consider teacher leader career ladders (Link to Career Ladder Guide) for successful teachers to advance while staying in the classroom; these teachers would receive recognition and additional compensation. LEAs should also consider flexible staffing models. Some examples of these models can include the use of part-time assignments, reduced hours, and flexible schedules that allow teachers to be part-time in the classroom and take on coaching or other support positions for the LEA. Public Impact’s Opportunity Culture has almost 10 years of data suggesting that expanding the access of highly effective teachers to the students who need them—for example, through a teacher leadership role that enhances the performance of other teachers—is correlated with higher student achievement.⁷

A lauded program from the District of Columbia Public Schools, LIFT is a five-stage career ladder that provides successful teachers with opportunities to advance in classrooms while

⁶ Reform Support Network (2015). Strategic options for States to improve placement and movement. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/equitableaccess-to-effective-teachers-strategic-options.pdf>

⁷ Benjamin Backes, Michael Hansen (2018). Reaching Further and Learning More? Evaluating Public Impact’s Opportunity Culture Initiative. CALDER Working Paper No. 181

teachers can earn additional compensation and recognition. This program coordinates teacher leadership opportunities at the district to ensure that they are available to highly effective teachers in high-need schools. In 2017-18, the District of Columbia’s teachers were spread throughout the LIFT continuum: 15 percent were at the teacher level; 40 percent were established; 20 percent advanced; 15 percent distinguished; and 10 percent expert. Teacher retention from 2016-17 to 2017-18 was over 88 percent for effective teachers and 94 percent for highly effective teachers.

Build principals’ understanding of how much a supportive work environment helps retain effective teachers. *The Principal Bill of Rights in High Need Schools* is a tool that explains effective supports a central office can provide for leaders of high-need schools. HR teams should differentiate their support to the neediest students and schools. Another tool that can assist principals in building their capacity is Supporting Equity in Human Capital at the School Level. Additional scenarios that help principals understand their role in retaining teachers in their schools are provided in the tools *How Does an HR Team Give an “Edge” to High Needs Schools?* and *The Many Layers of Retention*.

Reflection Questions:

- *What teacher leader opportunities are available in your LEA?*
- *How does your LEA ensure that the most effective principals and leadership teams are leading high-need schools?*
- *Is there flexibility in your LEA to support innovative staffing models?*

3. Increase the pipeline of teachers to high-need schools

Expand the pipeline of candidates who are prepared to work in high-need schools. LEAs should recruit educator preparation program candidates specifically for high-need schools and provide them with the support the new teachers need to be successful. HR can offer early contracts to candidates based on successful fulfillment of the requirements of their education preparation programs. Additionally, signing bonuses as well as loan forgiveness for staying in the LEA and at high-need schools for at least three years can help retain effective new teachers.

Another strategy is to establish peer cohorts and affinity groups to support teachers and principals in high-need schools, in which groups network with and support each other.⁸ LEAs can create opportunities for teams of teachers to move to high-need schools

⁸ Aspen Institute, *Strategic Staffing for Successful Schools: Breaking the Cycle of Failure in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools* (2010)

together. These teams would agree to stay in the high-need schools for a period of time and receive additional stipends for this work.

Additionally, student teachers who have the opportunity to spend time in high-need schools and hone their instructional practice are more inclined to take positions in high-need schools and stay in high-need schools. Therefore, the placement of effective student teachers is critical, so they have a positive experience in a high-need school. Using information from the teacher evaluation process can be helpful in identifying cooperating teachers best equipped to provide an enhanced experience for a student teacher.

LEAs are utilizing innovative initiatives to support the students in high-need schools and often provide incentives for the best teachers to stay in these schools. One successful program has been from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS). Supported by the Belk Foundation, CMS partnered with Public Impact and Education Resources Strategies to redesign classroom staffing models that offer highly effective teachers the opportunities to advance in their careers without leaving the classroom. This program built capacity among school teams and provided opportunities for additional compensation. The program has been implemented in over thirty schools, has created a talent pool process, and has coincided with increased teacher retention. Another initiative in CMS was Project L.I.F.T. (Leadership and Investment for Transformation) which implemented new school models that included new teacher roles and increased pay for successfully implementing these roles.

Other successful strategies have been rolled out in the Denver Public Schools. Two incentives supported over 1,500 teachers and specialized teachers in 30 of their highest poverty schools. Denver has seen the gap in retention of effective and distinguished teachers narrow due to continued focus on providing financial incentives. Additionally, principal retention and strong school culture play a role in the retention of Denver's teachers.

Reflection Questions:

- *What is the teacher preparation pathway that provides your LEA with your most robust pipeline of effective educators?*
- *Does your LEA actively recruit effective student teachers? How does your LEA ensure that student teachers are matched with highly effective cooperating teachers?*
- *Have you established collaborative relationships with higher education programs and alternative certification programs?*

4. Effective mentoring programs for both novice teachers and experienced teachers who are new to high-need school play a crucial role in retaining teachers

Formal mentoring programs are another strategy to keep effective teachers in high-need schools—not only offering mentoring and induction supports, but also differentiating them for the needs of novice teachers in the LEA’s highest need schools. Additionally, be aware of the prior work experiences of experienced teachers who are new to the school; they may benefit from training or informal mentoring to better equip them to meet students’ needs in a higher need school.


Informal mentoring can also include support for principals and other leaders. The quality of an educator’s relationship with the school leader is a key factor in making plans to stay in teaching.⁹ Ensure that principals and leadership teams understand the importance of building these relationships. In particular, make certain that there is time for principals to reach out to novice teachers.

LEAs can use number of tools to bolster induction and mentoring of teachers in high-need schools. One tool, Top 10 Principal Human Capital Actions: Teacher Induction, Support and Retention lists the top 10 most important actions principals should take related to teacher induction, support and retention. These strategies can influence retention positively. Strong mentor programs provide individualized support as well as coordination from the central office around new teacher needs.

Reflection Questions:

- *How does the LEA determine the needs of novice teachers, and determine how to support their specific needs?*
- *How does the LEA ensure that novice teachers have highly effective mentors?*
- *Does the LEA provide differentiated support for new teachers assigned to high-need schools?*
- *How does the LEA prepare principals in high-need schools for their crucial role in teacher retention?*

⁹ Will, M. (2018). What Principals Can Do to Keep Good Teachers. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/10/17/what-principals-can-do-to-keep-good.html?print=1>



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DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:
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