



**Data-Informed
K-12 Human
Capital Strategies**

CONTENT GUIDE:

Educator Retention

OCTOBER 2021

Retention comprises one aspect of the educator human capital system portrayed here. Local education agency (LEA) and school leaders can use this guide to learn more about:

- The desired outcomes and challenges of retention;
- Effective practices that LEAs can use in planning and improving retention of effective educators;
- LEA-facing resources to support this work;
- How to address likely challenges, constraints or other considerations when designing and implementing strategies for retention; and
- Examples from other LEAs that have implemented strategies to address this challenge.

Context

To address teacher shortages and fill open vacancies, LEAs often focus primarily on recruitment. Without a focus of retention too, this is simply filling a “leaky bucket.” LEAs must focus on building both recruitment and retention functions to maximize efforts to hire and keep teachers and leaders. However, simply retaining any teacher or leader is not enough; strategic retention takes into account teacher effectiveness (as determined by the multiple measures in PA’s educator effectiveness system), in order to retain top performers and exit low performers.

Strategic retention is critical as top educators produce stronger gains for students. Top teachers (as determined by value-added data) produce several additional months of learning per year among their students.¹ In addition, low performers don’t always opt out; in one study, most of the ineffective teachers had nine or more years of experience and planned to stay for another decade. While LEAs may be reluctant to exit low performers, LEAs having a 75 percent likelihood of replacing an ineffective teacher with a more effective one.² Turnover is particularly acute for new teachers, with about 30 percent leaving their original school or the profession entirely within five years.³ Moreover, turnover is expensive, with attrition costing nearly \$1–2 billion annually.⁴

Definitions⁵

strategic retention

The process by which a LEA retains top performers and exits low performers

retention

Rate at which employees remain/stay in the LEA (“Stayers”)

attrition

Rate at which employees leave (resignations, retirements, terminations, etc.) the LEA or teaching altogether (“Leavers”)

migration/movement within LEAs

Rate at which employees move to jobs in other schools/offices within the LEA (“Movers”)

turnover

Includes both attrition and migration

1 J. Cowad, D. Goldhaber, R. Theobald. (2017). Teacher Equity Gaps in Massachusetts. American Institutes for Research.; TNTP. (2012). The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America’s Urban Schools. Brooklyn: TNTP.

2 TNTP. (2012). The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America’s Urban Schools. Brooklyn: TNTP.

3 Institute of Education Sciences, 2015, Education Week, 2015.)

4 TNTP. (2012). The Irreplaceables.

5 Ingersoll, R. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: an organizational analysis. American Educational Research Journal, 38(3).

Key Roles

The school and the LEA share accountability for teacher retention (principal supervisors and HR share responsibility for principal retention). Below are responsibilities for each key role.

HR/TALENT TEAM (LEA)	PRINCIPALS (SCHOOL)	PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS (LEA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trains school leaders on retention • Provides data at the school level • Collects and analyzes system data for trends • Designs system strategies to address trends • Offers guidance and support to remove/non-renew low-performing teachers • Differentiates supports for high need schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses performance to identify who to retain • Keeps high performers: Holds stay conversations; celebrates successes; and develops individual retention strategies • Removes low performers: Documents and seeks support to remove/non-renew low performers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews all retention data for assigned schools, noting trends • Reviews transfer data among schools • Facilitates best practice sharing between schools • Provides input to HR on strategies

Key Questions & Metrics

In order to assess retention, we recommend you seek data to answer the following questions below. (For a basic primer on how to gather and analyze retention data, see the [Guide to Calculating Retention](#), which provides a clear way to calculate retention using performance and to understand new hire retention.)

1. Retention by Performance:

KEY QUESTIONS TO ANSWER:

- Do we keep the highest performers and exit the lowest performers?
- What differences in strategic retention exist by teacher subject, grade level, and experience?

METRICS TO USE:

- a. Percent of effective and highly effective teachers retained (as determined by the multiple measured in the PA educator effectiveness system)

- b. Number and percent of ineffective tenured teachers improved or exited
- c. Percent of probationary teachers non-renewed for low performance prior to being granted tenure

2. Equity:

KEY QUESTIONS TO ANSWER:

- What differences in strategic retention exist by schools' level of need?
- What percent of effective teachers (according to the multiple measures in PA's educator effectiveness system) in high need schools transfer out?
- What is our retention of teachers of color?

METRICS TO USE:

- a. Difference in retention of teachers at each rating level, in higher need schools versus other schools
- b. Percent of effective teacher transfers out of high need schools
- c. Percent of teachers of color retained by performance level compared with white teachers

3. Reasons for Turnover:

KEY QUESTIONS TO ANSWER:

- Why do our educators stay or leave?

METRICS TO USE:

- Use an [Educator Exit Survey](#) with those who have chosen to leave your LEA.
- Equally if not more important is using an [Educator Stay Survey](#) to **ask your current educators why they choose to stay** and what you can do to keep them.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- *Which data do you currently track and what do they show?*
- *Where are your strengths?*
- *Where are your gaps?*

Next steps after analysis

Once you have compiled your retention analysis, you can start to [Diagnose Your Biggest Retention Challenges](#) to prioritize your strategies and approaches. This tool will help to understand where you might want to focus your efforts for improvement.

Effective LEA Policies and Practices

First, you must understand retention in your particular context.

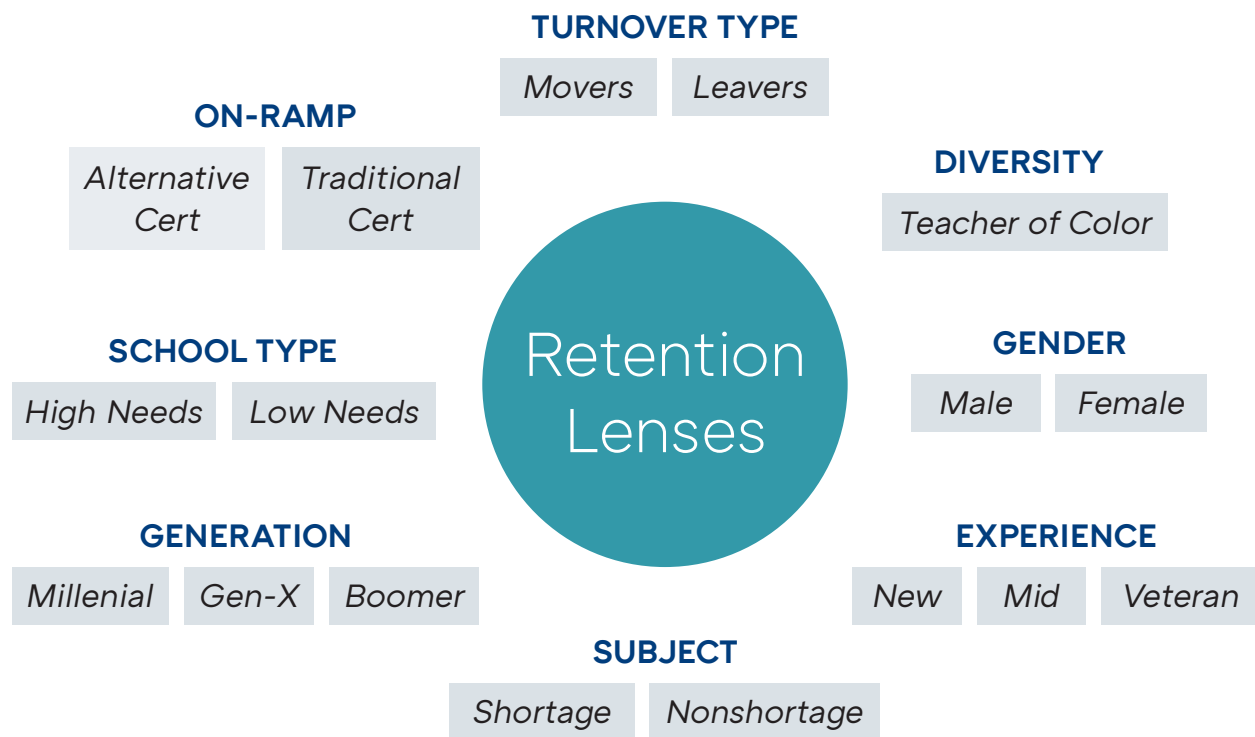
1. As noted above, calculate retention by performance, and then analyze specific subgroupings, such as teachers by subject, race/ethnicity, high vs. low need schools, and years of experience. See the [Guide to Calculating Retention](#) for an approach to calculating retention over time to understand trends and progress. However, the HR team analyzing data is not enough; retention data and reports must be shared with other key stakeholders, such as principals, principal supervisors, and LEA leadership. Within this analysis, HR should seek to understand those who left the LEA and movement across schools within the LEA. Teacher movement between schools (transfers and excessing/surplussing) is not a zero sum game and must be captured intentionally at the school level. For example, teachers migrating from higher need schools to lower need school contributes to a constant churn, particularly for those students who need effective teachers most. Analyzing movements within the LEA from school to school is an important first step to addressing inequities. For more information on equitable placement of educators, see the [Educator Placement Guide](#).

2. Understand that there is no one-size-fits-all retention strategy or solution; you will need to customize strategies based on individual or group needs. Each teacher or principal makes the decision to stay or leave a school or an LEA informed by their own personal background, experiences, values, and needs. Consequently, the elements—or lenses—that define a person and their teaching career provide important insight into how you might retain them. The [retention lenses](#) are one way to view educators’ background and experiences in order to understand what factors might influence their retention. Retention lenses can overlap. For example, you could be a male teacher of color, who teaches math, in a high need school, that came through an alternative certification route. Each of these lenses is important to review when considering how to create a retention plan for that individual teacher.

What are the various retention lenses to consider?

Teachers are multi-dimensional and, as such, multiple factors influence which are the best retention strategies for each individual. **Performance should always be the primary driver of who to retain and who to exit.**⁶ The lenses below provide some additional factors to consider to gain insight into how to keep highly effective teachers.

⁶ TNTP. (2012). *The Irreplaceables: Understanding the real retention crisis in America’s urban schools*. New York City, NY.



As teachers in shortage area subjects (such as math, science, special education, or ESL) are often harder to replace than in nonshortage areas, prioritize shortage area subject retention and retention of teachers in high need schools. Please see the briefs on [Shortage area subject retention](#) and [Retention in High Need Schools](#) for more details. For specific ideas on STEM subjects, see [Reboot: Redefining HR's Role in Supporting Great STEM Teaching](#).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- *What types of teachers are at particularly high risk to leave or move schools within your LEA?*
- *Which of these retention lenses will your LEA prioritize?*

3. Ask educators what keeps them—or what made them leave. To better understand what motivates the varied teachers and leaders in your LEA, engage them in a conversation to understand their needs and experiences. Use an [Educator Exit Survey](#) to reach out to those educators that your LEA lost, or an [Educator Stay Survey](#) to learn more about what encourages educators to stay in your LEA. The strategies that you ultimately

choose to invest in should be grounded in real data and conversations with educators. For additional thoughts, consider other ways to [Engage Teacher and Principal Voice](#). There are a multitude of ways to hear from your employees and this tool provides a clear understanding of what might work best based on your context.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- *What are you hearing from educators about reasons for staying or leaving?*
- *What are the top reasons you can address?*

Next, you will need to craft strategies to address your unique retention challenges and context, at both the LEA and school levels.

4. Design retention strategies. As noted earlier in the Key Roles section, the school and the LEA share responsibility for teacher retention. Therefore, retention strategies **should be designed at each level and should be driven by what you've heard and seen in the data** from teachers who stay and leave. With limited time and resources, prioritize those strategies that most closely address the reasons why individuals leave or stay. For a list of key strategies, see [Targeted Retention Strategies](#). Any retention strategy should directly link to the top two or three reasons why teachers are leaving, rather than creating a hodgepodge of strategies to address any and every reason.

For example, at the LEA level, common retention strategies include:

- **Enhancing mentoring/induction for new teachers.** New teacher turnover presents a particularly acute challenge. Mentoring and induction help reduce that attrition.⁷ For more information, see the [Induction Guide](#).



The [Southern Regional Education Board outlines key components of strong mentoring](#) and highlights exemplars from across the country.

⁷ (NCES, 2016).

- **Creating informal or formal [Teacher Leadership roles as a career pathway opportunity for highly effective teachers.](#)** Teachers may be looking for ways to grow and advance without serving in school or central leadership positions. For more information, see the [Career Ladder Guide](#).



[Teach Plus highlights various approaches to teacher leadership](#) across the country in this guide about retaining teachers. The guide shows different examples of how effective teachers can lead beyond their classrooms.

- **Celebrating teachers and leaders publicly.** Valuing educators and the work they do on a daily basis is a low cost way to show educators that their efforts are noticed and appreciated.



New York City hosts the [Big Apple Teacher awards](#) to celebrate teachers who inspire students, model great teaching, and enrich their school communities.

- **Reviewing and redesigning compensation.** While compensation is not often the primary driver of attrition,⁸ ensuring that pay is competitive is one aspect of encouraging teachers and leaders to remain in your LEA if pay is a main consideration for their departure.



Ten large districts redesigned their [compensation; learn their lessons here.](#)

- **Building intentional pipelines.** Rather than recruit from talent pools outside of the local area or region, who may be more apt to leave after a few years, building pipelines of talent from the local LEA's community increases retention. More than 60 percent of teachers teach within 15 miles of where they went to high school.⁹ For more detail, see [this brief on professional learning and career ladders for paraprofessionals.](#)

The HR team at the LEA level can also support school-level retention by **growing the capacity of principals to keep great teachers and exit low-performing teachers.** As the school leader has the greatest impact on whether teachers decide to stay or leave, HR plays a key role in growing their capacity to do this work by providing trainings, resources and

⁸ N.S. Simon and S. Moore Johnson, 2015. Teacher turnover in high-poverty schools: what we know and can do. Teachers College Record. 117(3): 1-36.; P.F. Burke, P.F., et al., 2013. Why do early career teachers choose to remain in the professional? The use of best-worst scaling to quantify factors. International Journal of Educational Research. 62: 259-268.

⁹ [Reininger, 2011.](#)

data that principals can use. Simple retention tips and ideas shared with principals can serve as an important reminder of the principal’s key role in this work. Some tips to share with principals include [Top 10 Principal Human Capital Actions—Teacher Induction, Support & Retention](#)—which focus on the key ways principals can support new teachers, grow the skills of current teachers, and be explicit and strategic about retention in their schools.

HR can also support principals in implementing the following school-level retention strategies:

- **Defining who to prioritize to keep and exit.** School leaders should not focus on retaining every teacher, but rather on keeping those that are most difficult to replace, as well as exiting those with the lowest performance. Principals, with support from HR, can use [School-level Retention Mapping](#)—a tool to determine teachers that schools want to retain and identify strategies to retain those teachers.
- **Holding stay conversations with high performers.** Simple conversations that let teachers know that you value them and want them to stay are a quick and low cost retention strategy. Celebrating select effective teachers with a recognition email is another option. See [Template: Teacher Recognition Email](#).
- **Documenting low performers.** Removing low performers can be especially challenging in certain LEAs, but it’s critical to ensure clear and direct communications detailing performance concerns. Principals can use template letters to streamline this process, such as [Sample Letters of Reprimand, Warning, or Concern: HR Labor Support for Principals](#). Where possible, principals can and should approve tenure selectively—or non-renew teachers approaching tenure—so that only effective teachers clear that bar.

QUICK HITS

No matter what the drivers of attrition are in your LEA, a few high leverage actions can be taken immediately:

- **Encourage principals** to identify top performers and hold a stay conversation with them
- **Provide principals** with their retention data and discuss how to maintain or improve retention
- **Recognize top teachers** publicly
- **Offer open contracts** to top teachers that resign, so they can return whenever they want

Note: It is important to hold principals accountable for improving retention of high performers; however, principals should be encouraged, not penalized, for taking action to promote, dismiss or non-renew a teacher. Be sure to capture and track intentionally the reasons for attrition (resignation, retirement, non-renewal, dismissal, etc.) at the school level.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- *Which strategies hold the most promise to address your particular retention challenges?*
- *At which level are they best executed?*
- *How do individual strategies work together to support retention?*
- *What actions can you take immediately?*
- *Which will provide the biggest impact based on your context?*

Finally, consider the LEA's own role in retention.

5. Ensure that the LEA's own policies and practices don't exacerbate turnover and movement unnecessarily. Often, late transfer windows for existing employees create turnover and vacancies well into the summer, and the process of force placing teachers into schools without mutual consent does not encourage a strong start to a teacher-school relationship. Where possible, LEAs should review their policies and practices and seek to minimize the late resignation process—one aspect of turnover and movement—so it does not negatively impact hiring for the coming year. For ideas, see [Improving the Teacher Resignation Process](#). LEAs should also review lockstep compensation—where all teachers are paid the same no matter where or what they teach—to determine whether different policies could encourage highly effective teachers to move to high need schools.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- *Which of our policies or practices might be unnecessarily exacerbating either movement or attrition?*
- *With whom will we need to work to address these issues?*

Considerations and Resources for Planning & Implementation

How to Start

- 1. Analyze retention data** to understand ongoing challenges and concerns related to retention.
- 2. Identify the top performers** you want to retain (and those low performers you want to exit).
 - a. Review evaluation results and trends at the region, school and individual levels.
 - b. Work with principals (for teachers) and principal supervisors (for principals) to identify top staff they can't afford to lose. This is especially helpful if evaluation results do not vary widely.
- 3. Conduct an [Exit Survey for effective teachers that leave](#) and an [Educator Stay Survey for those that remain](#)**, using multiple formats to solicit information and feedback. Identify any trends and share results with key stakeholders, like principals and principal supervisors.
- 4. Inventory all your current retention initiatives** and determine their impact/effectiveness. Now, consider where gaps exist based on what you heard from your exit and stay survey responses. For new ideas, see the [Targeted Retention Strategies](#) tool. Match new strategies to your gaps. Use an [Impact vs. Effort Tool](#) to map strategies to further prioritize which work to pursue.

For additional details on how to start, see the [Sample Retention Plan and Playbook](#).



Key Partners

Key partners for HR include principals, principal supervisors, performance management team, data personnel, and highly effective educators. The LEA leadership can consult these stakeholders in determining the effectiveness of existing retention efforts, designing new efforts, and implementing and communicating about new efforts.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- *With which partners do you have a particularly strong relationship?*
- *Where do you want to improve your relationship?*
- *Who else might be a partner to you?*

Organizing Your HR Team

Most HR teams do not have dedicated staff devoted to retention in the same way as recruitment. This becomes a challenge, because when no one is responsible, the work languishes, and lower retention means more work needed for recruitment. Designate someone on the team to shepherd this work.

At least once per year, HR team members should work with principals to identify and craft retention strategies for their highest performers.

Barriers to Proactively Address

Removing poor performers can be a challenge. Work with your legal team to develop a standard way to document poor performers that will assist in exiting the staff.

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Educator Retention

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