

# WORKFORCE TURNOVER REPORT

*From Their Experiences*



# 2022

Data & Stories from 2021-2022

**HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT - JANUARY 2023**

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# Acknowledgements

**Firstly, I must express our deepest gratitude to those who were willing to share their stories with us.** In many cases, when an employee is exiting the system, is not a positive experience, nor are the experiences that preceded that decision. Thank you for your trust to hear your stories, and I hope we honored that trust in this report. Additionally, I'm grateful to the Human Resources team members, Alan Moore, Ishmael Miller, Michaela Raikes, Sarah Semroc and Cathy Kim. You created a values-driven plan, redesigned the tools; met with staff; reviewed the data; wrote, revised, rewrote, redesigned and edited this report; honoring the process and people. You made a commitment to understanding, to the dignities of our staff, and did so with personal humility and the expectation that this report serve as a transformative tool. **Thank you.**

The following questions were essential to our planning and execution - and serve as guiding ideas as we engaged through this process.

**Why have we prepared this report?** This report is the result of ongoing work in Human Resources to redesign our systems, processes, and relationships to data and data practices. The redesign of this report was a commitment to the idea that data and data stories are accessible to our community, provide accountability, and center people over numbers. The report was inspired by similar reports from organizations like Education Trust; who are leading the workforce research about retention of educators with a particular lens on educators of color.

**Who is this report designed for?** Our community. Students, staff, community members and partners, the School Board, school and department leaders, decision-makers, and those who do this work everyday.

**What do we hope this report will accomplish?** Accountability, dialogue and investment in our priorities to retain the staff we need to deliver on *Our Promise*. We highlight research, data, and national context where appropriate, to elevate the voices of our former staff. We name areas of opportunity (controllable factors) and context of note (uncontrollable factors) with the intention that it be actionable, for systems improvement, at all levels.

**What were our limitations and learnings?** This process has identified areas of growth for our team's data practices. Turnover is a static metric, but staff are hired and exit year-round. This creates challenges around 'when to pull the data', response rates/sample sizes and a consistent picture year-over-year. There is also a purposeful centering of school-based staff as the greatest levers to impact student learning. This does, however, leave blindspots in the data around the experience of operational staff, and central office staff including central office leadership. The team is interested in expanding this lens in future reports.

As our work continues, we are redefining our measures of success, to better understand our staff, our teams, our schools and our systems so that all staff can *grow, learn & thrive* in Highline and like our students, are known by name, strength and need.



Executive Director of Human Resources  
Workforce Planning & Development

# Executive Summary

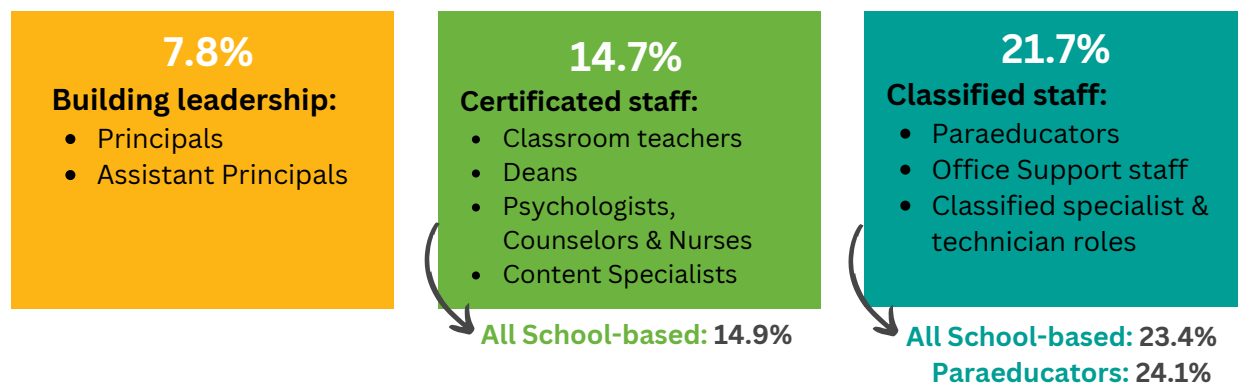
This report was created to describe and provide context to the 2021-2022 turnover rates; and to share the experiences presented by staff that exited our system, not to return for the 2022-2023 academic year.

**This Executive Summary highlights the key data points.**

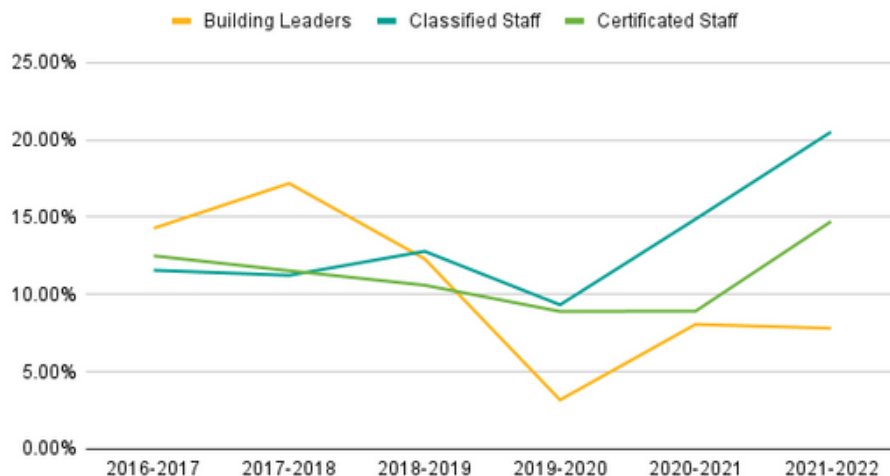
**17.4%**

*Overall Employee  
Turnover Rate  
2021-2022*

## Turnover Rates by Employee Group



### HPS Turnover by Employee Group 2016-17 to 2021-22



The chart above illustrates our district-wide turnover rates, as a trend line, over the past six years. We experienced below average turnover during academic years SY19-20 and SY20-21; contextualized by the global COVID-19 pandemic and school closures during quarantine. The rise represented in SY21-22 may be understood as a response to the lag in expected turnover the years prior, compounded by average annual turnover.

The result is an turnover rate **6 points above** the average of the five years prior.

Looking at the turnover rates by employee group, we see that our classified staff exceed our average turnover while our building leadership are retained at a far greater rate. Both serve as points of further inquiry; however the focus of the full report centers the experiences of teachers and classified staff as a jumping off point for system adjustment and retention efforts.

The full report invites conversation and opportunities for action. Below we've aligned key data points to our Strategic Plan Foundations, bringing the lens of our exiting staff.

**115** Survey Respondents  
**20** Targeted Exit Interviews

## Relationships

**67.5% of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander and Multiracial staff** said they would recommend Highline as a place to work.

## Support

**40% of Special Education staff** cited dissatisfaction with district leadership, supervision or workplace culture as the primary reason for leaving.

## Instruction

"I love that Highline is multicultural. I am proud of our work in bilingual/Dual Language and promoting world languages in our schools."

"Dual language teachers are set to the same expectations for curricular pacing guides with double the students and half the time."

Survey comments from two DL teachers

## Equity

From 0-15 years of experience, the single highest reason teachers left is **commute or relocation**.

The greatest loss of educators was in teachers with 4-6 years of service, identified in research as peak years for instructional practice.

# From Their Experiences

## Lessons and leverage points for continued strategy

Based on national research around teacher turnover and HPS turnover patterns, the following highlights serve as the greatest levers for continued strategies in workforce planning, development, and retention.

1

**Culturally affirming workplaces are highly important to staff;** including broader structures, resources and support for career growth opportunities. *This is especially important to staff of color.*

2

**For paraeducators, compensation is a primary driver of turnover;** relative to regional compensation in neighboring districts and competing industries.

3

**Special Education turnover is higher on average, than other positions.** Targeted strategies around workplace conditions, climate and culture are likely to have the greatest impact.

4

**Turnover in Dual Language has fluctuated over the last five years.** Anticipating program roll-up to secondary, post-pandemic workloads and risk of workforce burnout, more learning (and listening) in this area would be high-leverage and high-impact.

5

**All school types (elementary, middle, high, and choice) saw above average turnover rates.** Targeted approaches at the school level would likely be high-leverage and high impact for retention and strategic staffing practices.

6

**The loss of early career teachers may be preventable.** Systemic approaches in partnership with individualized support for teachers and leaders would be high-impact for student learning.

## Report Insight

This report aims to understand our school-based turnover data through the lens of our strategic plan goals, workforce strategies, and Highline-specific context. As a lesson learned: we plan to expand our outreach efforts and response rates, so that in future years, we may better reflect the voices and experiences of school system leaders and operational staff.



# Putting Our Opportunity Into Perspective



**Turnover is not inevitable.** If we understand and address the most impactful causes of dissatisfaction and burnout, we can prioritize efforts that retain our most valuable resource: the talented people who work to make good on *Our Promise to students* each and every day.

## National & Local Context

As the world enters a new phase of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the compounding stresses of the pandemic era and their effects on students and educators are showing across a wide range of indicators. Across the country, dramatic narratives and images of teacher dissatisfaction, burnout, and shortages have entered public dialogue. Polls suggest a wave of resignations, national guard members have been ordered to fill teacher vacancies, and we're seeing record-high salary increases and bonuses to incentivize teaching careers (Darling-Hammond, 2022).

While the many efforts of Highline employees have sustained *Our Promise* to students and families throughout the most challenging moments of the pandemic, our district also experienced turnover rates in many schools, bargaining units and positions not seen since the 2015-2016 school year or the recorded years prior.

At its core, the churn associated with teacher turnover affects student learning and school morale. Strategic staffing practices become a key solution as the least-experienced teachers tend to fill recently vacated positions, in favor of the most strategic placement for their growth, development, and student learning. Nationally, this inequity is found particularly in schools that serve students furthest from educational justice. These consequences spill over into the broader school community, placing stress on those teachers and leaders who remain (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Secondary to this is the fiscal impact to the district, and taxpayers, with some estimates

placing the cost of replacing one teacher at approximately \$20,000 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Nationally, educator shortages and turnover patterns vary across segments of the workforce. Representative surveys suggest that Special Education teachers, STEM teachers, teachers of color, and teachers hired under conditional or emergency certification are more likely to leave the profession than other teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In Highline, some of the most difficult staff to recruit and retain include these very groups and in recent years expand to include paraeducators, Dual Language teachers and school nurses.

As Highline works to engage in strategic staffing practices, the Human Resources strategy focuses on staffing as the main lever for school improvement. The department's work centers the charge from Board Policy 0010 (Equity Race & Identity) to build an anti-racist school system, as well as research-based principles that encourage teacher teams as a driver more impactful than individual vacancy-based hiring. Placed in the context shared here, the challenge is to move from simple data collection, to understanding and acting upon data for systems change.

**We are grateful to those who participated in our exit surveys and interviews, and their trust that in sharing their stories, Highline can and will work to learn and improve so that all employees can grow, learn & thrive in delivering on *Our Promise* that every student is known by name, strength and need, and graduates prepared for the future they choose.**

# Our Study Methods

During the 2021-22 school year, the Human Resources project management and data analyst team met with exiting staff, and reviewed turnover data over time **to better understand who leaves our district and why.**

Our approach to this work reflects a process designed with the commitment to understand. We centered the experiences of staff of color, beginning teachers, and those exiting from typically "hard to fill" program positions, such as Special Education and Dual Language.

There were two methods of engaging these staff. Firstly, all staff who submit resignations were sent an invitation to engage in a redesigned Exit Survey. Secondly, with targeted outreach aligned to our known "hard to fill" programs, staff were invited to participate in a conversational Exit Interview with a Human Resources team member.

Data included in this report is drawn from 115 exit survey responses, 20 targeted exit interviews and employee records from the 2016-17 thru 2021-22 school years.

**Exit Survey** questions were designed based on longitudinal data of self-reported "reasons for resignation" and were aligned to industry best practices and research. The survey allows staff to self-report "other" descriptions, and provides common themes including:

- **Employment match & fit** e.g. housing and commutes, wages and benefits, job stability, career mobility
- **Workplace culture & conditions** e.g. leadership/supervision, equity, support, autonomy and agency
- **Personal context** e.g. new opportunities, career advancement, health/family planning

**Exit Interview** questions invited candor to answer questions about initial feelings and rationale for accepting the offer of employment in Highline; experiences with onboarding, support, and professional learning; and various questions about perceptions of equity and the organizational commitment to equity.

## Report Insight

**Our response rate was 22%.** Of all exiting staff, about 1 of every 5 completed an exit survey or interview. While this is in alignment with research norms, it also means we should consider that the perspectives of the responsive staff may diverge from those who chose not to participate. This is an opportunity to design additional and more dynamic feedback loops to understand why staff leave, and why they stay.

**Our sample reflected the experiences we targeted.** This sample group is more experienced, includes an overrepresentation of staff of color, and overrepresents our certificated staff; compared to the total group of employees that left the district.

**Small subgroup sample sizes make generalized conclusions risky.** We have tried to summarize large group experiences or responses; however our sample sizes are still relatively small for system-level conclusions or next steps. For example, we recommend this report not result in whole group conclusions about the experiences of Special Education paraeducators. We invite instead that the experiences highlighted to be heard as that individual's story - *and valid as they are.*

**This report reflects dynamic social context.** The 2021-2022 report has an opportunity to glance backwards, provided by over 5 years of previous exit and turnover data. However, each school year also has local, regional, national and global context. Following the global pandemic and national lockdowns, SY2021-22 marked the return to in-person instruction amidst calls for increased social emotional supports for students and staff. It also included the continuation of the national workforce shortage, which is even greater in teaching professions, and unemployment rates hit record lows.



# Employee Turnover Over Time

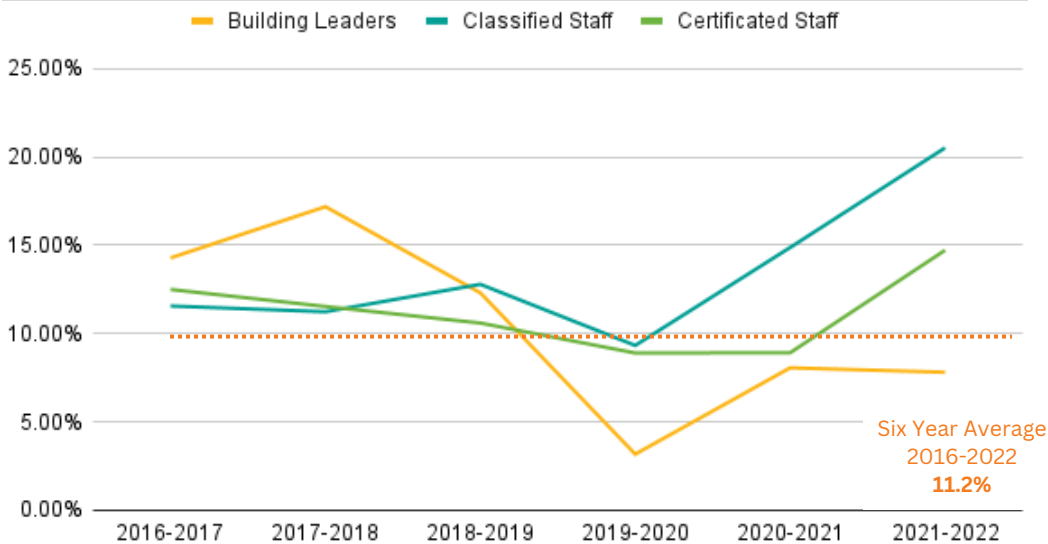
During the 2021-22 school year, employee turnover reached a new high across many segments of the Highline Public Schools workforce, compared to the previous five years.

The previous five-year average (SY15-16 thru SY20-21) resulted in an overall turnover average of 11.2%. With a "healthy" turnover rate considered to be 9%, Highline consistently experienced both healthy turnover and an opportunity for workforce development. By comparison, during the 2021-22 school year, the overall turnover rate was **17.4%**.

## What could explain this year's high turnover?

Research shows that teacher turnover rarely changes more than two percentage points from one year to the next (Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022). However, when unemployment rates are low, teacher turnover tends to be relatively high. In Highline, this increase in turnover rates is also following two years of uncharacteristically low turnover. While this may help to explain the swing in exits, this report is followed by Workforce Spotlights, to better highlight the personal context of exiting staff and present possible next steps to address the factors within our control.

**HPS Turnover by Employee Group**  
2016-2017 to 2021-2022



2021-2022 Turnover  
by Employee Group

**7.8%**

### Building leadership:

- Principals
- Assistant Principals

**14.7%**

### Certificated staff:

- Classroom teachers
- Certificated deans
- School psychologists
- Certificated specialists
- School counselors

**All School-based: 14.9%**

**21.7%**

### Classified staff:

- Paraeducators
- Office Support staff
- Classified specialists
- Classified technicians

**All School-based: 23.4%**  
**Paraeducators: 24.1%**

## Note on definitions!

**Overall turnover rate** is referring to the whole of the Highline workforce.

**HEA/Teacher turnover** is referring to all certificated positions, in buildings and central office, unless otherwise noted as specifically referring to classroom teachers, etc. This measure uses formulas outlined in the HEA collective bargaining agreement.

**Educators** is used when referring to school-based instructional staff; including both certificated (teachers, counselors etc.) and classified staff (paraeducators)

**Staff** is used when referring to instructional (e.g. teachers and paraeducators) as well as operational staff (e.g. custodians, office support teams, etc.)

**5 year vs. 6 year averages** are used throughout, and reflect either a distinction between the past five years and SY2021-22 or is inclusive of SY2021-22

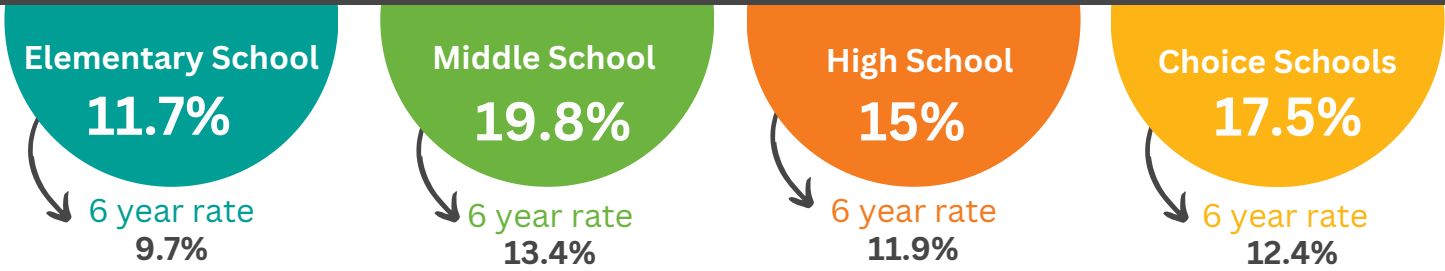
Where did we see the highest rates of teacher turnover?

Overall, HEA turnover during the 2021-22 school year was higher than all other years for which records are available. Highline's Human Resources team has been refining turnover data practices since the 2011-12 school year. With two exceptions, our overall turnover rates have remained relatively consistent, aligned to market research and regionally low. Prior to this year, the highest turnover rate recorded was the 2015-16 school year, which saw an overall turnover rate of fifteen percent.

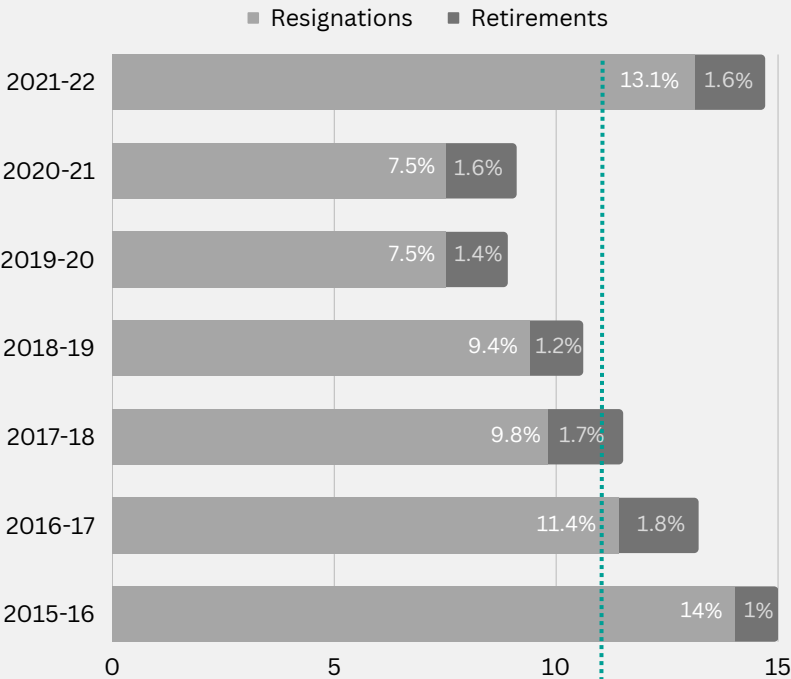
Among certificated employees (e.g. teachers, counselors, nurses, etc.), average turnover is highest in middle schools and lowest in elementary schools, but turnover rates vary substantially both within and between school types both this year and over time. While a few individual schools had turnover below their previous five-year average, on large, all schools were impacted by above-average turnover.

For some schools, this turnover was particularly high which presents new questions. By better understanding the unique community, context and instructional programs at those sites, we may also better understand what is impacting - and who may be impacted by - these numbers.

2021-2022 HEA Turnover Rates by School Type



HEA Turnover Over Time:  
Proportion of Resignations and Retirements



HEA Six Year Resignation  
Average 2016-2022

# 2022 Exit Survey: Key Insights

## Why did they go?

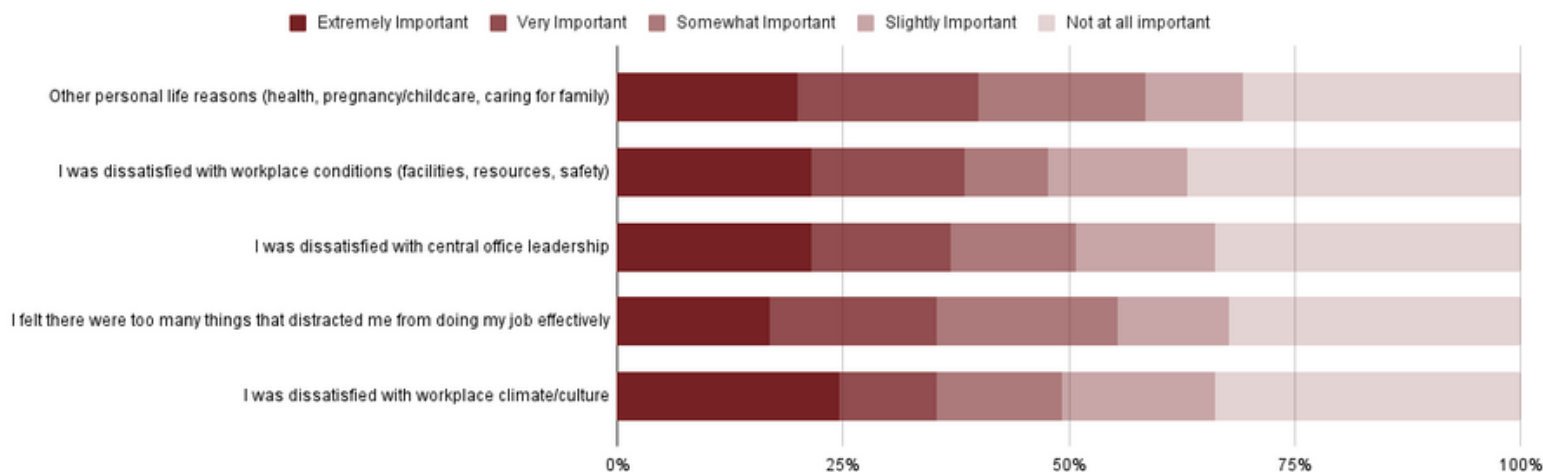
The 2021-2022 exit survey asked staff to rate how important 19 factors were to their decision to leave the district. It's clear, by looking at the graphic below, that Highline's certificated staff is consistent in their top five most important factors that contributed to their resignation.

The most frequently cited reason for leaving among **certificated** staff respondents was "other personal life reasons" (health, pregnancy/childcare, caring for family). This reason group was cited as *very or extremely important* for 40% of respondents. Generally this category represents uncontrollable workforce factors and in some cases can indicate workforce health as employees see opportunities and safety in making big life decisions.

Within controllable factors, certificated employees cited dissatisfaction as being an important part of the decision to leave. This includes dissatisfaction with workplace conditions (38%), central office leadership (37%), workplace climate/culture (35%) and feeling like there were too many workplace distractions (35%).

*Certificated Staff*

Top Five Factors Contributing to Resignation: Certificated Staff (n=65)



Research shows that teachers most commonly leave schools, districts and the profession because of dissatisfaction with accountability pressures, lack of administrative support, dissatisfaction with the teaching career and dissatisfaction with working conditions.

Carver-Thomas and Darling Hammond (2017)

## Workforce Data Practices

Workforce planning researchers suggest looking at **controllable factors** and **regrettable turnover**. By looking at these factors we can better identify opportunities for system intervention. Targeted strategies can be designed to limit our unplanned turnover, and manage the quality of educators we retain.

To truly curate a highly diverse, qualified staff, prepared to deliver on Our Promise, this data suggests that there may be opportunities to look closer at the everyday experience of our staff, and to understand overall and specific examples of dissatisfaction.

Research shows that the national paraeducator workforce is more racially diverse than the teacher workforce but paraeducators typically have far lower wages, fewer performance incentives, less professional development and fewer opportunities for professional advancement.

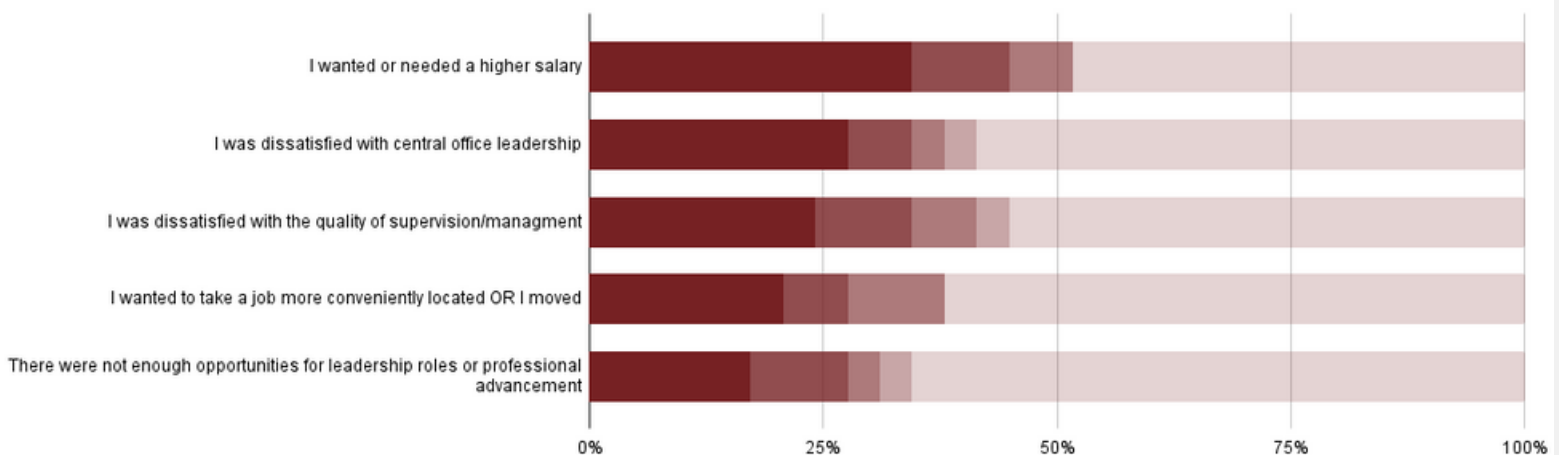
Bisht, et al. (2021)

## Classified Staff

**For classified staff, a different set of factors weigh most heavily on their decision to leave the district.** Classified staff represented in this year's report, included paraeducators, operations employees and office workers. For this group, the most frequently cited reason for leaving was compensation; rated as *very or extremely important* by 45% of respondents. The second most common factor was dissatisfaction in leadership (e.g. supervision, management and central office) with 34% of respondents citing this factor as *very or extremely important* in their decision.

Top Five Factors Contributing to Resignation: Classified Staff (n=29)

Extremely Important   Very Important   Somewhat Important   Slightly Important   Not at all important



Other frequently cited factors included both controllable and uncontrollable factors. In exploring convenience or the decision to move (28%), the district may have less control over external factors like regional housing or cost to commuters. However, these highlight the opportunity for workforce data and tracking to better understand where our staff live and work when considering attrition risk and recruitment efforts.

As a learning organization, perceptions of opportunities for leadership or professional advancement are within controllable factors. While various workplace dissatisfactions influence both certificated and classified staff, compensation and professional advancement were much more salient concerns for classified staff for which 27% cited growth opportunities in their top five most important factors.

*"I absolutely enjoyed working for Highline and especially the school I am at. If the salary was higher I would definitely retire from Highline."*

Exiting Special Education Paraeducator

**We asked exiting employees whether they experienced features of a healthy workplace culture.**

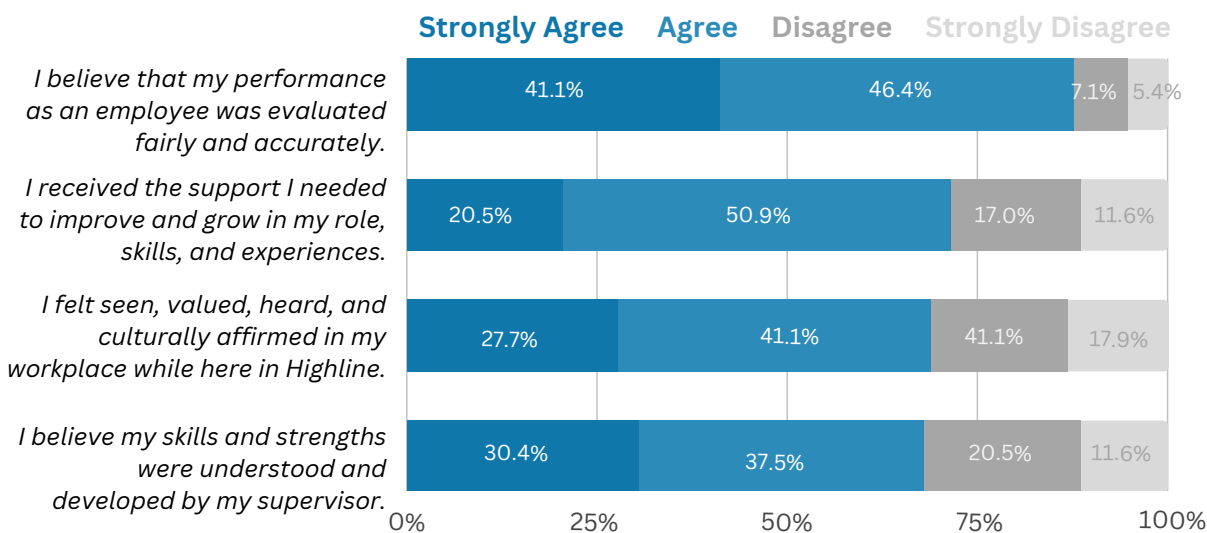
**This is what we learned.**

High-performing organizations retain talent by creating a healthy workplace culture where managers encourage employees to cultivate their professional strengths, adopt realistic performance expectations, and prioritize actionable feedback as an investment in growth.

Moss (2019), Buckingham and Goodall (2019)

Our exiting staff agree (87%) that their performance as an employee was evaluated fairly but fewer (71%) agree that they received the support they needed to grow professionally and fewer still (68%) believe their skills and strengths were understood and developed by their supervisor.

**As an extension of Our Promise, we want all staff to feel seen, heard, and valued, and feel culturally affirmed in their workplace.** Of this year's exiting staff, 68% reported that we delivered on that promise.



Research shows that teachers who feel supported by their supervisor are less likely to leave the profession.

Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond (2017)

**Where do we go from here?**

This report, to this point, has outlined the key findings for turnover overall. In adding the context of the research on educator turnover, and workforce data, the authors notice that the key conditions for staff retention are affirmed by our exiting staff as being present. This leads to the questions:

**What are we missing, and what can we do?**

**1** We need to look closer at the questions we're asking of our exiting staff in order to understand their unique needs, and to drill-down from the national research. For example, our exit survey asks questions that use language that may not be a shared definition. Experiences like "support", "dissatisfaction", "distracted", leave room for interpretation that may not be actionable for the system.

**2** We need to learn more about the specific experiences of our staff, to understand what we can do more of, or better. For example, our exit survey asks questions about overall access (e.g. support, resources, PD) and perception (e.g. quality, amount, etc.) but what does this look like when done well, or poorly?

In the remaining pages of this report, we dive into target staff profiles: *Workforce Spotlights*. These profiles are intended to better understand the unique experiences, needs, and perspectives of staff in key workgroups. This year's spotlights focus on hard-to-fill areas, and groups for whom our current retention strategies are designed.

# Workforce Spotlight:

## Staff of Color

SY2021-22

Turnover Rates:

Teachers of Color:

**15.4%**

All Staff of Color:

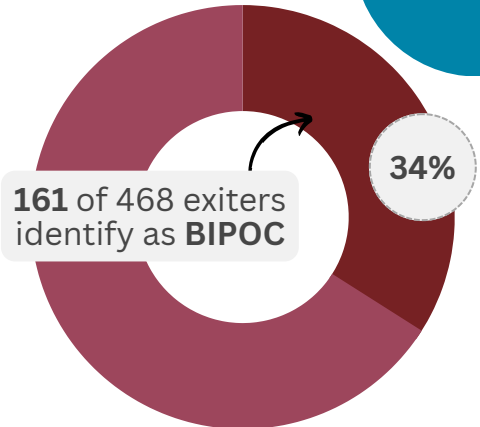
**18.6%**

### In this spotlight:

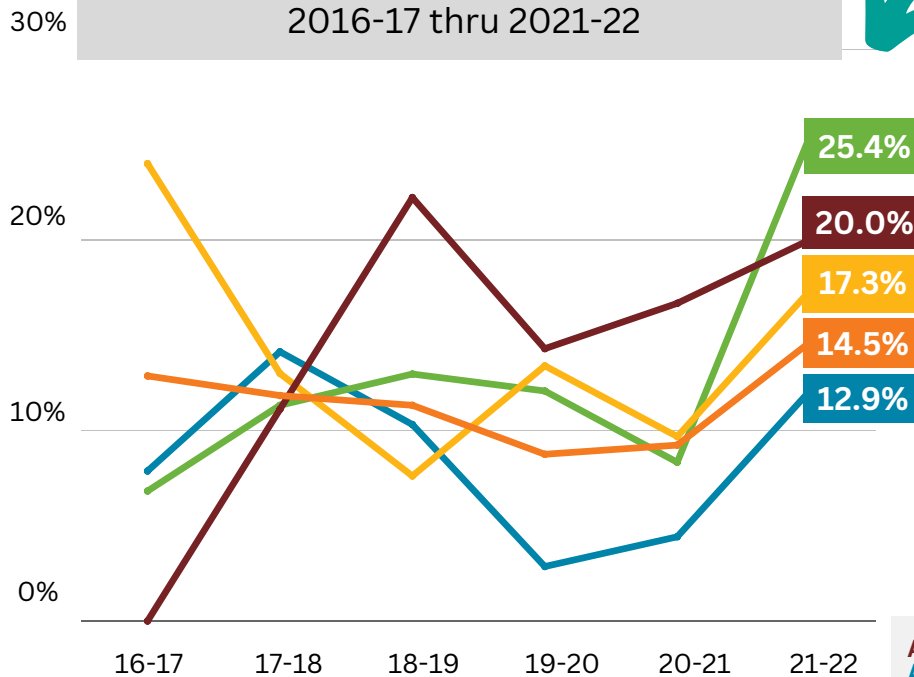
- What turnover patterns do we observe among educators of color?
- How do educators of color experience workplace culture and supervisor support?
- Why do educators of color leave?
- Where can we intervene?

Similar to national turnover rates, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx, and American Indian or Alaskan Native teachers left Highline at a higher rate, on average, than their White peers for SY2021-22. Notably, for Black or African American employees, the turnover rate **more than tripled** from SY2020-21 to SY2021-22.

Also, relative to SY2020-21, the 2022 turnover rate for Asian teachers was 2.7 times higher and for Hispanic teachers, it was 1.7 times higher.



**HEA Turnover by Race Year by Year**  
2016-17 thru 2021-22



### Data Highlight

The following HEA groups saw increased turnover rates from SY2020-21 to SY2021-22:

Black or African American teachers

more likely to leave  
**3x**

Hispanic or Latinx teachers

more likely to leave  
**2.7x**

Asian teachers

more likely to leave  
**1.7x**

American Indian or Alaskan Native  
Asian  
Black or African American  
Hispanic or Latinx  
White

Research on the experience of BIPOC educators has surfaced several challenges salient to HPS staff turnover. For example, Dixon, Griffen, & Teoh (2019) found BIPOC staff feel undervalued because they take on more than their fair share of responsibility but are not recognized or compensated for the work they do.

Dixon, Griffen, & Teoh (2019)



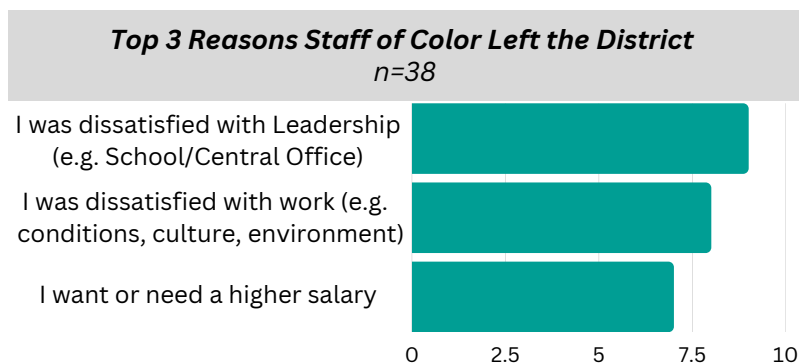
## We asked the Educators of Color to tell us about their experience.

This is what we learned.

### Why are these educators leaving?

The top three reasons that staff of color left was: dissatisfaction with school building and/or dissatisfied with work (e.g. conditions, culture, environment), and the pursuit of a higher salary. Analysis of exit survey comments demonstrates the reasons staff of color left Highline are closely related to the experience of not feeling properly supported, the perception that expectations are increasing, and feeling that leaders are not sufficiently communicating changes.

Are these perceptions unique to staff of color? Notably, these responses are **not** unique from the larger group of exiters. However, the experiences that cause dissatisfaction with work (e.g. conditions, culture, environment) are unique - and align to the body of research about retaining staff of color in education.



On why they resigned...

*"The lack of support from central office leadership paired with the increase in work demands, unsafe working conditions and no additional compensation."*

Exiting Multiracial Certificated Staff Member

*"I wanted to contribute to the growth of [our] anti-racist systems but every time I brought issues to my admin, I was told that others weren't ready... When I wanted to question, look deeper at our practices, instead we were told as a staff to focus on what we were doing well."*

Exiting Biracial Staff Member

Research shows that educators of color have a higher turnover rate because they experience an antagonistic work culture that leaves them feeling **unwelcome or invisible.**

Dixon, Griffen, & Teoh (2019)

**Limitations of this Spotlight** Workforce planning in Highline has in recent years focused efforts on maintaining a lens on racial diversity. This is in part, an effort to ensure that our language learning programs, and linguistic diversity of staff does not become a proxy for the racially, culturally and linguistically diverse workforce we strive for. In creating this report, our team hoped to also highlight the experiences of our LGBTQ+ staff, as an often invisible community that also experiences marginalization in the workplace. Unfortunately, our data systems and current data practices do not yet support our ability to provide those insights. **Our team is committed to understanding and removing these limitations.**

## We asked Staff of Color whether their supervisor understood and developed their strengths and skills & whether they felt culturally affirmed at work.

### This is what we learned.

**Approximately 73% agree or strongly agree that their supervisor understood and developed their skills.**

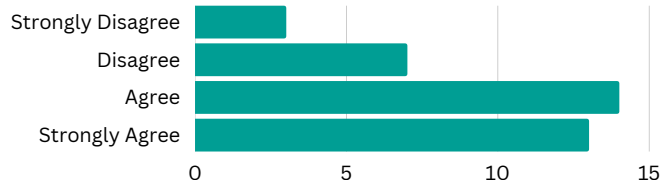
Qualitative feedback suggests supervisors helped grow their instructional skills forward in different ways, which they felt improved their practice.

Many affirmed that supervisors acknowledged their skills and provided chances to show their strengths. There were also counter-narratives from staff of color who did not feel like their skills were developed. Several staff stated they were rarely observed, were not provided constructive feedback or were asked to do "simple tasks".

Similarly, approximately 74% of staff of color agree or strongly agree that they feel culturally affirmed at work. These staff routinely described feeling that they worked in a friendly and supportive environment and perceived that they were treated well. However, some staff of color shared that they felt unwelcome, or invisible in their work environment. Responses like this were coded as

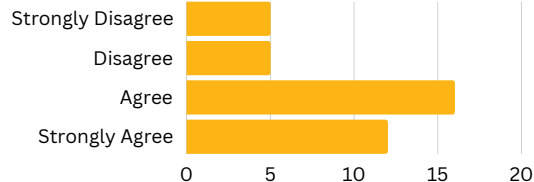
**"My supervisor understood my skills and developed me."**

n=38



**"I feel culturally affirmed at work."**

n=38



disagreement.

More may be understood about these different experiences by looking at the responses to the district's equity work. While some staff felt personally affirmed at work, they also noted that the systemic issue of equity in the district wasn't being addressed to the extent, or way, they'd hoped.

## Where can we intervene?

**Our teachers of color are reporting experiencing less opportunities for growth than their peers.**

We can intervene by investing in initiatives and opportunities that create a district-wide, culturally-affirming workplace for staff of color. By capturing teacher and teacher leader data, we can identify and dismantle systems that are excluding teachers of color from opportunities and invest in targeted structures, resources, and support to ensure access and success in career growth opportunities. This may mean protecting the availability of time, resources, and workplace conditions that give staff of color space to lead in value-driven work; and to do so *as a part of* their work so that our teachers of color can grow, learn and thrive in Highline.

The experience of these educators aligns with national research.

Read more at Education Trust: [If You Listen, We Will Stay](#) and [Through Our Eyes](#).

Research shows that one reason educators of color leave disproportionately, is because they feel like they are navigating unfavorable working conditions, which lack the support needed for them to grow as professionals.

Dixon, Griffen, & Teoh (2019)

On being evaluated...

*"I was evaluated effectively. After evaluations at my previous school, I always received follow-ups, both verbally and on paper."*

Exiting Black Staff Member

On supervision...

*"The moral of the story is that having a supervisor who understands your work makes all the difference."*

Exiting Latinx Staff Member

# Workforce Spotlight:

## Language Learning

### In this spotlight:

- What language learning turnover patterns do we observe?
- Why do language learning staff leave?
- Where can we intervene?

**In the 2021-2022 school year, Highline's instructional model included programming for multilingual learners at all levels:**

- Dual Language (DL) programming at select schools K-12
- English Language Learning (ELL) programming and support at all levels in all schools
- World Language (WL) programming at all secondary schools, including Heritage Language offerings.
  - Offerings vary by site, including courses offered in ASL, Chinese, French, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese

The **Dual Language** program was initiated in Highline in 2008 at the kindergarten level. In September 2021, our second comprehensive high school welcomed its first dual language cohort. This growth underscores the need for qualified Language Learning educators with secondary content knowledge. Approaching its 14th year of implementation, we are grounding our strategy for ongoing workforce development in the experiences of the educators in these programs.

### Limitations of this Spotlight

Only a small number of educators in this group replied to our exit survey or participated in our interviews. This gives us less confidence that these experiences are representative of all language learning staff. This spotlight instead aims to share key trends over time and specific experiences shared by those who exited this year. These experiences align with national research on educator turnover.

### Who Responded?

Twelve language learning educators participated in this study by completing an exit survey and/or exit interview. These include educators in WL, DL (partner language & English) and ELL programs as well as ELL and DL Specialists. Of these educators, 7 identified as persons of color, 10 were certificated educators and 2 were classified educators. They included every experience band, from early career through veteran educators.

## Strategic Connection

### Bilingual & Biliterate Goal

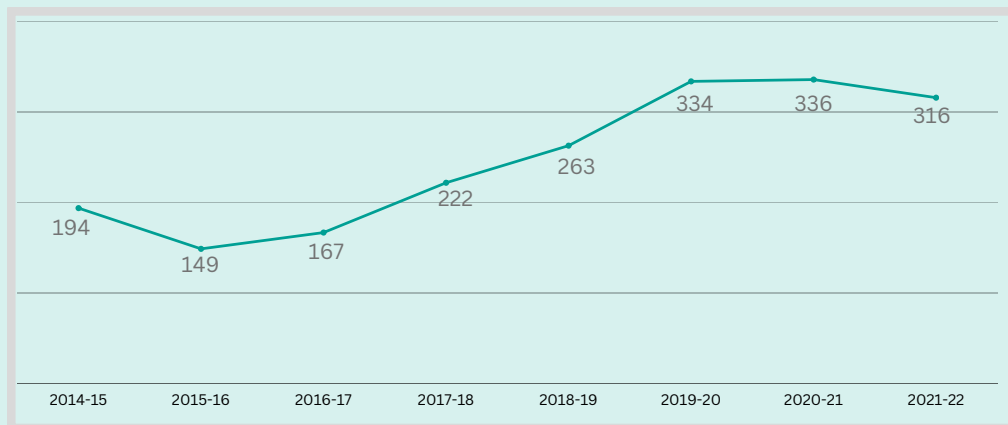
Students will graduate bilingual and biliterate.



#### Seal of Biliteracy:

Awarded to graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and listening in one or more world languages in addition to English.

Learn more about Highline's Dual Language programs [here](#).



Read our Online Annual Report, on our strategic plan goals [here](#).

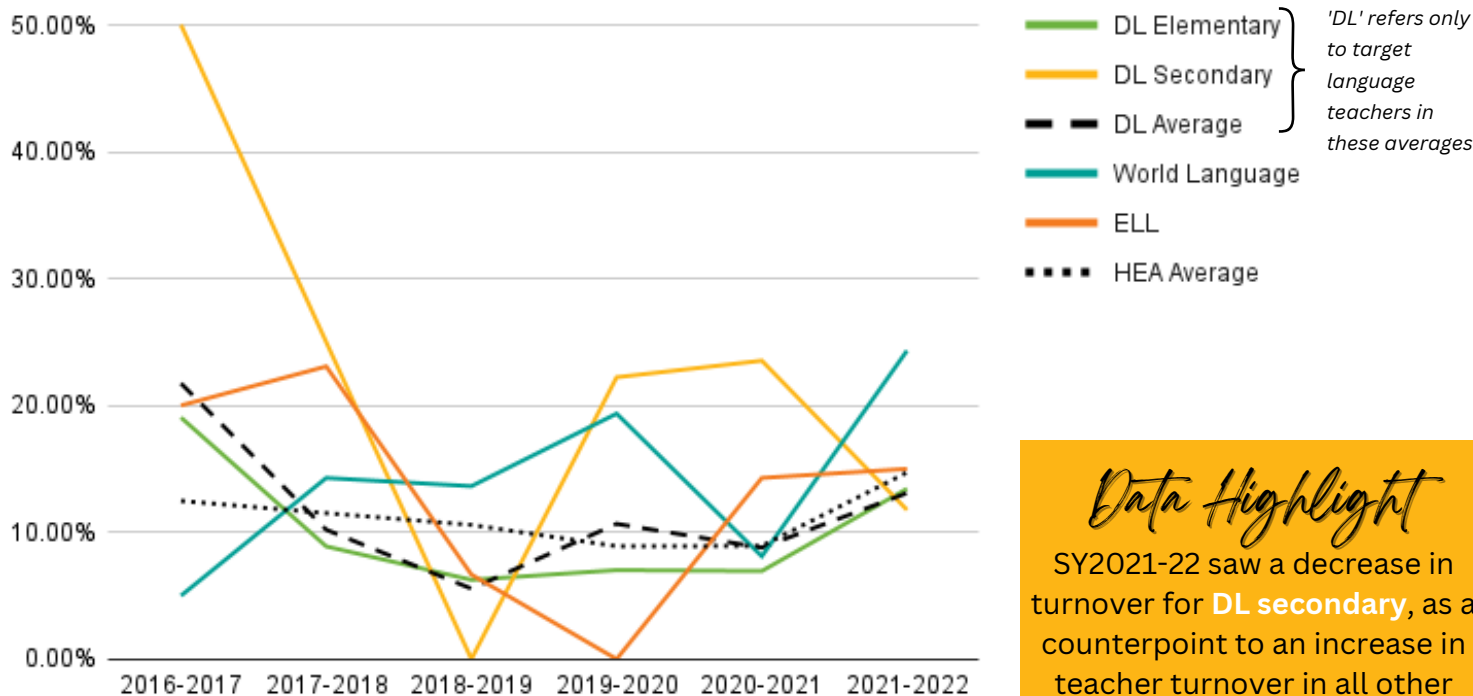
## What do we see in turnover rates across these programs?

Historically, the turnover rates across these programs have averaged at 12.2%. This is compared to a turnover rate of 11.2% as the overall turnover rate for certificated teachers in Highline. *This gap increased for 2021-2022, as language learning educator turnover averaged **16.4%**.*

Schools with  
Dual Language  
Programs

11

Language Learning Educator Turnover by Program



### Data Highlight

SY2021-22 saw a decrease in turnover for **DL secondary**, as a counterpoint to an increase in teacher turnover in all other Language Learning workgroups.

DL Elementary: 13.43%

**DL Secondary: 11.7%**

World Language: 24.34%

ELL Teacher: 15%

## Why are these educators leaving?

In looking closer at who left the district for the coming academic year, we can better understand the experience these educators are having in a growing program. While the sample size for this group is small (n=11), it's notable that the reasons stated for their exit did **not** align with that of their peer workgroups.

This misalignment suggests a need for targeted strategies unique to educators in Language Learning.

- **Job Dissatisfaction** 27% of respondents
- **Moving or Relocation** 27% of respondents
- **Retirement** 27% of respondents
- **Other Personal Reasons** 9% of respondents
- **Not Enough Opportunities for Career Growth** 9% of respondents

Within this group, it's also notable that all of those who responded as working in Dual Language settings came from elementary environments. Additionally, 3 exiting educators were working in secondary World Language assignments prior to their decision to leave Highline. Of the 8 responding educators, 6 identified as persons of color.



## Amy's story

Amy has worked in education for nearly 8 years, but is relatively new to Highline. As an Asian-American woman, and an experienced teacher, she has seen education change and was specifically excited about joining Highline three years ago. As she reflects on her time in the district, she's grateful for the opportunity to teach in a role that focuses on language learning as the Dual Language program was the key factor that drew her to Highline. But Amy also describes disappointment in feeling undervalued and under-supported. Amy is committed to the district Promise and wants to deliver everyday, but she didn't get the observations and feedback she felt she needed to adjust her practice to changing times - particularly the changes that came with the pandemic and the return. In her exit interview Amy describes feeling tokenized, and recalls specific microaggressions against her and others in her program. As a more veteran teacher, she was often asked to serve as a mentor to her colleagues, but felt this invisible work contributed to her burnout. She wanted to be able to support her peers but noted that the additional work Dual Language teachers have, undermines their opportunities for leadership development and she doesn't believe that asks are met with understanding about the day-to-day experience of her and her peers.

2,942

Students in Dual Language Programs

Students receive services as English Language Learners

29%

This vignette retells the true experiences of teachers who participated in our study through the lens of a fictional character.

Research shows that the following factors **support retention** of language learning teachers:

- Strong relationships with other language learning teachers, other teachers, administrators, parents, the broader community and external networks
- Confidence and self-efficacy in delivering the language learning curriculum
- Strong institutional support for language learning and perception of fair treatment
- Feeling valued, supported and respected

Mason (2017)

## Report Insights

The turnover rates at our Dual Language schools varied from our general education schools this year.

- Dual Elementary Schools' average turnover was +1.6% **higher** than their peer schools.
- DL Middle Schools' average turnover was -0.2% **lower** than their peer schools.
- DL High Schools' average turnover was -0.7% **lower**, than their peer schools.

## Where can we intervene?

Clear in that research, and in the study of this year's exit data, **our educators are asking for more, differentiated, support**; both in their professional growth and in creating workspaces where they feel seen, heard and valued. The experience of these educators aligns with national research like the Education Trust report, *If You Listen, We Will Stay* which may continue to serve as a guide for next steps.

For insight into what it may look like, in Highline, we can target strategies informed by this employee group. This includes continuing programs like Grow-Your-Own, formal and informal teacher leader development, and strategic, centralized interventions to support direct instruction are tangible next steps.

Additionally, as moving/relocation was repeatedly mentioned by respondents, targeted efforts to track where our workforce is commuting from, or that address the fluidity of housing in the region may provide insights about how turnover within this employee group specifically might be anticipated -- and countered.

Regionally, other districts are building or expanding in areas of Dual Language, which means an increased demand for teachers skilled in language acquisition. As community desire for expanded multilingual programs grows, and with acknowledgement that partnerships in teacher pipelines require time to be fruitful, retention will need to be a system-wide priority.

# Workforce Spotlight:

## Special Education

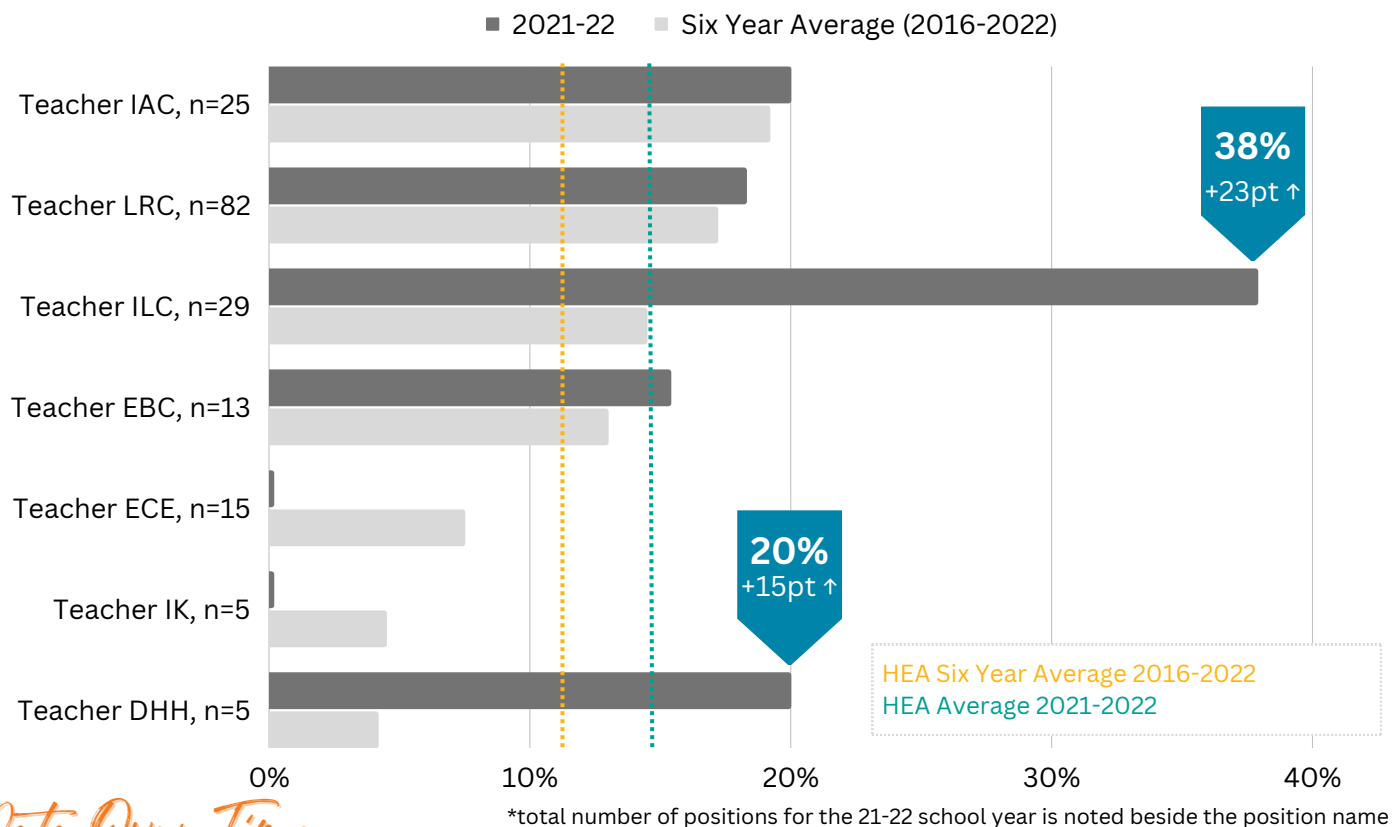
Average Turnover  
for all Special  
Education  
Teachers  
**16.2%**

### In this spotlight:

- What Special Education turnover patterns do we observe?
- Why do Special Education staff leave?
- Where can we intervene?

Highline Public Schools has a continuum of special program options to provide appropriate educational opportunities, designed to meet each student's unique learning needs.

Learn more about Highline's Special Education programs [here](#).



Data Over Time

Between the 2016-17 school year and the 2021-22 school years, average turnover rates for Special Education teachers and physical therapists in key programs outpaced average HEA turnover (11%, see the yellow line): Intensive Academic Center (IAC), Learning Resource Center (LRC), Adaptive PE, Integrated Learning Center (ILC), and Emotional Behavioral Center (EBC). During the 2021-22 school year, the average overall turnover rate for Special Education teachers (16%) was higher than the rate of turnover for all HEA staff (15%, see teal line). From a systems lens, turnover rates for some positions, including Psychologists and teachers in Adaptive PE, ILC, EBC, and Deaf & Hard of Hearing (DHH) programs more than doubled their 6-year averages.

**A critical area, furthering the gap in hard-to-fill positions is in Integrated Learning Center (ILC) programs where the turnover rate for 2021-2022 was nearly 38%.**

The data above also suggests a unique year for DHH (Deaf & Hard of Hearing) staff, as this group has historically trended below the workforce average, and for 2021-2022 found turnover well above that figure.



**We asked Special Education teachers and paraeducators to tell us about their experience.**

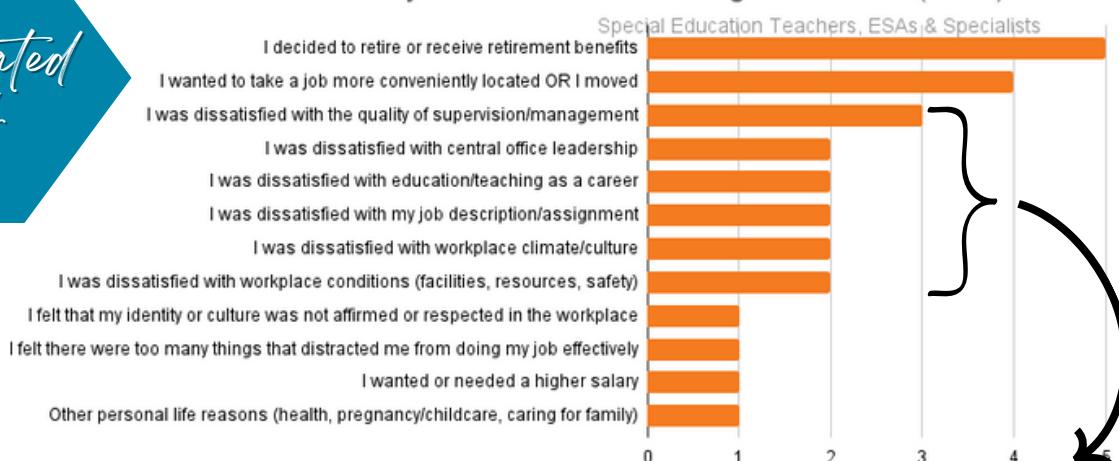
**This is what we learned.**

## Who responded?

Twenty-seven Special Education teachers or ESAs responded to an exit survey or participated in an interview - compared to 47 total who left the district this year. Nine Special Education paraeducators responded to an exit survey or participated in an interview compared to 65 total who exited.

*Certificated Staff*

What is the Primary Reason You are Leaving the District? (N=26)



**There were common factors that contributed to job dissatisfaction, as one opportunity to consider controllable factors for retention efforts.**

- unique demands of Special Education
- curriculum perceived as boring or irrelevant
- cumbersome procedures or paperwork
- perceived lack of administrative support
- lack of cross-departmental collaboration
- perceptions of safety and well-being during the COVID pandemic
- paraeducator vacancies as a compounding factor towards dissatisfaction

## Caitlyn's Story

Caitlyn is a thirty-five year old white woman and an ILC teacher at a comprehensive high school where she has worked for four years after transferring from another school. Caitlyn cares deeply about providing inclusive educational opportunities for students with special needs - a value that attracted her to Highline to begin with. In terms of supervision, Caitlyn's experience has been mixed - at one school she felt that her supervisor lacked any interest or involvement in Special Education but at her current school, she appreciates that there is an authentic effort to coordinate work across teams to create inclusive learning experiences. Even still, Caitlyn is feeling burnout: over the last two years she has frequently gone without paraeducator support and substitute coverage. She almost always works over lunch, and past contract hours to complete paperwork and to feel prepared for the next day. Ultimately, Caitlyn wants and needs a better balance.

*"I was understaffed for most of the year. Agency paras were provided but not enough to fill all vacant para positions. Because of this I have gone without planning periods or lunches and so have had to come early and stay late."*

**Exiting HPS Special Education teacher**

**This vignette retells the true experiences of teachers who participated in our study through the lens of a fictional character.**

## Research Insight

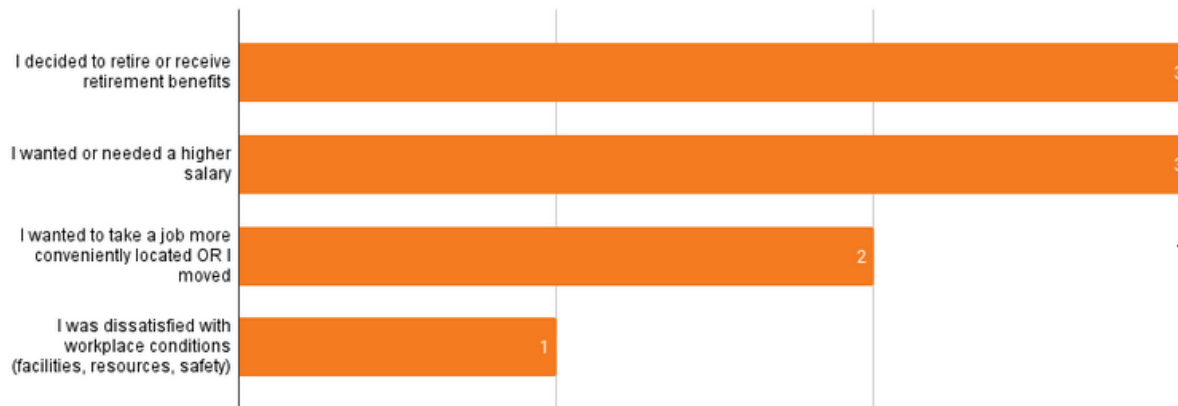
Special education workforce researchers have looked at the factors that increase the likelihood that teachers leave or feel professional dissatisfaction.

Billingsley & Bettini (2019)

### Key Factors:

- Perceive that their students have greater behavioral challenges
- Report having more complex caseloads
- Report having insufficient time for paperwork demands

### Special Education Paraeducators: What is the primary reason you are leaving Highline?



*Classified Staff*

For Special Education paraeducators, the most common "primary reasons" for leaving were retirement and compensation. The latter merits notation, despite the small sample size, as it aligns to area research as well as the realities of regional competitive salary analyses and the ongoing workforce shortage. In Highline, this feedback is also contextualized within a staffing framework as Highline allocates paraeducators at rates significantly beyond most neighboring districts. In further exploring reported dissatisfaction, paraeducators identified potential controllable factors for strategy and investment.

### These workplace dissatisfactions was described as:

- uninvolved or unhelpful administrators
- unrealized desire for professional growth
- concerns about working relationships with Special Education teachers

*"I got paid at least \$4 more [per hour] in a neighboring school district."*

Exiting HPS Special Education paraeducator

### Where can we intervene?

We may be able to increase certificated Special Education retention by investing in workplace conditions and resources, including consistent and adequate paraeducator support, that address the unique needs of Special Education teachers and the students they serve. **When Special Education teachers feel that they are able to spend more of their time providing quality instruction, they also feel more satisfied professionally.** Evidence from our study suggests that classified staff, including paraeducators, may be especially responsive to increased compensation. Special Education paraeducators may also benefit from additional mentorship and developmental opportunities. Continued investment in grow-your-own programs like Highline/Western Washington University's Special Education program, Woodring Inclusive Education Teaching Scholars (WIETS), could provide a pathway to growth for paraeducators and a source of Special Education teachers with the values, skills and experiences needed to thrive in Highline.

# Workforce Spotlight:

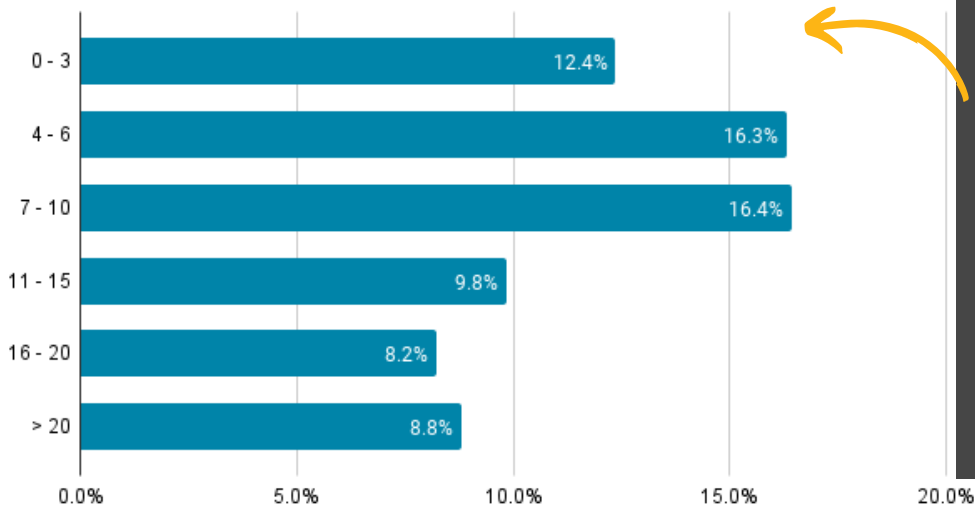
## Beginning Teachers

### In this spotlight:

- What teacher turnover patterns do we observe related to experience and longevity?
- Why do beginning teachers leave?
- Where can we intervene?

**HPS teachers receive targeted support and services throughout the career growth continuum** and the *induction and retention* of beginning teachers is a priority. Research shows that induction and mentoring programs are an effective way to increase beginning teacher effectiveness (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011). Highline's *Peer Mentor Program*, funded by the state BEST grant, supports HPS educators who are beginning their teaching careers or are new to Highline. Peer Mentors provide support in growing mentee's culturally responsive and instructional practices and building relationships with students through strong classroom management strategies. All Peer Mentors are trainers of Danielson (evaluation framework) to support teacher-led Professional Growth and Evaluation processes. Peer Mentors offer one-to-one mentoring, coaching and instructional planning support sessions, and facilitate professional development throughout the course of the school year including "just in time" topics generated by program participants. In 2021-2022, there were 106 beginning teachers that engaged in these support services.

2021-2022 Teacher Separation Rate by Years of Experience



Educator effectiveness increases rapidly during the first few years of teaching but experience confers increasing benefits to students and the school community throughout a teacher's career.

Podolsky et. al (2019)

12%

Beginning teachers - those who are in their first three years of teaching - experienced a 12% turnover rate during the 2021-2022 school year. This is slightly lower than the turnover rate for all HEA staff this year (excluding retirements). **Notably, 106 teachers (1-2 years of experience) participated in the Peer Mentor Program this year. The turnover rate was 11.3%, below the rate for beginning teachers overall.**

16.7%

During the 2021-2022 school year, teachers with 4-10 years of experience were most likely to separate from the district, with a 16.7% turnover rate.

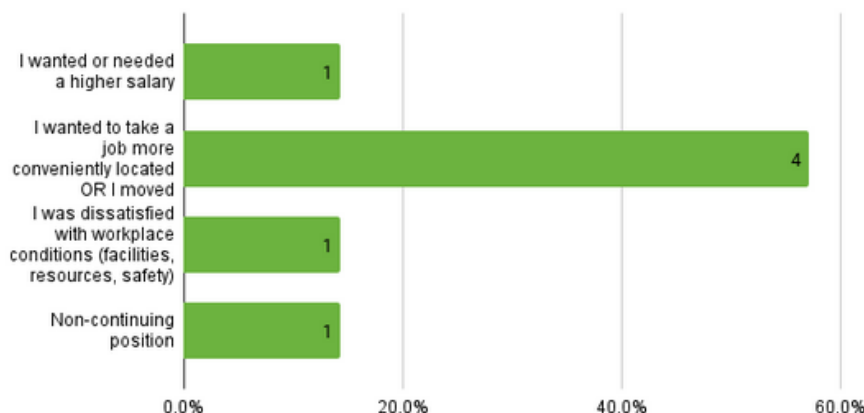
## We asked beginning teachers to tell us about their experience.

### This is what we learned.

#### Who responded?

Thirty-five beginning teachers left the district this year. Seven of those responded to an exit survey or participated in an exit interview. Four of those participants were teachers of color.

Beginning Teachers: What is the primary reason you are leaving Highline?



When beginning teachers experience supportive working conditions in their school site, they are more likely to experience professional success and satisfaction. These supportive working conditions include:

- Collegial interaction
- Opportunities for growth
- Appropriate assignments
- Adequate resources
- School-wide structures to support student learning

Johnson & Birkeland (2003)

### Alex's Story

Alex identifies as Chicano and started his career in education as a paraeducator. Through a colleague he heard about the WIETS program, which allowed him to get his teaching credential with an endorsement in Special Education. Alex chose to grow in Highline because he and his family grew up in the district, but now he commutes over an hour each way from a less expensive area. This contributes to the overwhelming feeling that he doesn't have enough time to meet his work obligations outside of instruction. Alex regrets that so much of Highline's professional learning supports and systems seem disconnected from his work. He appreciates Highline's commitment to equity but feels ignored or rejected when he points out the ways he sees our practices contributing to inequitable outcomes. Alex wishes he didn't have to leave because he feels a sense of loyalty to the district for investing in his growth and his principal who was warm, supportive and involved; but it's not enough.

*"There is a lack of counselors, therapists, and school wide systems. The students need much more support than the current staff is able to provide, and that is at no fault of the staff. The social/emotional demand I've experienced this year and the lack of resources to manage these things is the reason I'm leaving education."*

Exiting HPS beginning teacher

**This vignette retells the true experiences of teachers who participated in our study through the lens of a fictional character.**

### Where can we intervene?

The experiences of the educators who participated in our study, and program evaluation data, show that comprehensive induction activities like the Peer Mentor Program support beginning educator growth and retention. We can increase the impact of these activities by fostering culturally responsive mentorship, providing support that meets the differing needs of different positions, more strategic onboarding for all teachers who are new to the district, and honing in on data practices. Further, a collective effort must be made to ensure that beginning teachers experience collegial, well-resourced, supportive environments and appropriate teaching assignments where they can grow and thrive.

# *From Their Experiences*

## **Lessons and leverage points for continued strategy**

Based on national research around teacher turnover and HPS turnover patterns, the following highlights may serve as the greatest levers for continued strategies in workforce planning and development.

- 1 **Culturally affirming workplaces are highly important to staff;** including broader structures, resources and support for career growth opportunities. *This is especially important to staff of color.*
- 2 **For paraeducators, compensation is a primary driver of turnover;** relative to regional compensation in neighboring districts and competing industries.
- 3 **Special Education turnover is higher on average, than other positions.** Target strategies around workplace conditions, climate and culture for greatest impact.
- 4 **Turnover in Dual Language has fluctuated over the last five years.** Anticipating program roll-up to secondary, post-pandemic workloads and risk of workforce burnout, more learning (and listening) in this area would be high-leverage, high-impact.
- 5 **All school types (elementary, middle, high, and choice) saw above average turnover rates.** Targeted approaches at the school level would likely be high-leverage and high impact for retention and strategic staffing practices.
- 6 **The loss of early career teachers may be preventable.** Systemic approaches in partnership with individualized support for teachers and leaders would be high-impact for student learning.

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