



CAPSTONE: RESEARCH SUMMARY

Hutto Independent School District
July 2021

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INTRODUCTION

Across the 2020-21 school year, Hutto Independent School District (ISD), in collaboration with Hanover Research (Hanover), completed a series of projects to support its Vision 2025 strategic plan with a special focus on teacher retention. This work is being used by Hutto ISD to set goals, identify existing areas of strength, and prioritize areas for improvement related to its Vision 2025 goals.

Due to its geographic location, which is particularly competitive for hiring teachers, Hutto ISD prioritized several efforts to improve teacher recruitment and retention. The district sought to build a greater understanding of teacher attrition, to use data to make decisions, and to gather stakeholder feedback throughout the district. These priorities are particularly important as the district aims to increase visibility in the region, become a destination district for new teachers, and be a premier choice in education through innovation, leadership, and diversity.

This presentation provides an overview of the projects completed and synthesizes findings and key takeaway.

Hutto ISD Vision 2025

Goal Areas

1. Teaching and Learning
2. Academic Achievement
3. Safety and Healthy Environments
4. Human Resources
5. Communication, Community, and Parents
6. Financial Management
7. Facilities and Operations

Human Resources Goals

- ✓ Become a highly desired school district where all staff wish to live and work.
- ✓ Provide a top-rate employee relations culture that fosters a supportive environment for physical, mental, and emotional needs.

METHODOLOGIES

To support Hutto ISD's efforts to understand teacher attrition and improve teacher retention, the district partnered with Hanover to conduct a six-month mixed-methodology research project series.

October 2020

RESEARCH PROJECT SEQUENCE

May 2021

Quantitative Analysis Teacher Retention and Attrition

Hanover conducted a quantitative analysis of Hutto ISD's available teacher retention and attrition data.

In-Depth Interviews: Teacher Attrition

Hanover interviewed **seven former Hutto ISD teachers** that left the district between 2010-11 and 2019-20.

In-Depth Interviews: Teacher Retention

Hanover interviewed **13 Hutto ISD teachers** that plan to continue employment into the next year and have been with the district for five years or more.

Climate Survey

Survey administered online to **2,684 total respondents**, including parents, students, staff members, and community members.

Equity and Inclusion Diagnostic Survey

Survey administered online to **1,783 total respondents**, including parents, students, staff members, and community members.

Purpose

To identify any discernable retention and attrition patterns considering teacher's demographic characteristics, teaching credentials, and tenure.

To identify the main factors contributing to staff members' decision to leave the district.

To identify the main factors that contribute to staff members' decision to stay at the district.

To gather feedback from stakeholders, understand district- and school-level strengths, and identify areas for improvement.

To collect perspectives from district stakeholders about equity and inclusion at their school within the district.

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SECTION 1: KEY FINDINGS

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Most stakeholders generally agree that school staff and leaders are supportive, responsive, and caring.

Positive overall impressions of school and district leaders are reflected in survey results across multiple areas and stakeholders. For example, most parents and staff agree school leaders make decisions that support student learning, and most parents agree staff are responsive, communicate progress, and are welcoming. Similarly, most staff agree their supervisor or manager cares for them and supports their professional development.

School leadership is a critical factor that can either support or hinder teacher retention.

In in-depth interviews, many teachers attribute their longevity to supportive school leaders that make them feel valued and respected. Some teachers may also consider leaving the district over the loss of a high-quality leader. Conversely, former teachers often cite negative experiences with school leaders as a factor in their decision not to remain in their role.

TAKEAWAYS



Leadership quality emerged as a strong influence on staff retention.



Stakeholders identify several areas of relatively lower performance among leaders to prioritize. (See next slide)

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Notable areas for potential leadership improvement include:

- District-level leadership engagement and support, which is typically viewed as less positive compared to school-level leaders.
- Transparency in school- and district-level decision making.
- Support for staff mental health and well-being.
- Knowledge and understanding of stakeholder needs and two-way communication about these needs between leaders and staff and parents.
- School leader's ability to collaborate and build trusting and positive working relationships with staff.

TAKEAWAYS



School and district leaders may benefit from training and coaching to build their leadership, communication, and collaboration skills.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Parents generally feel welcomed and supported and are satisfied with district communications.

When surveyed, most parents indicated that staff members are friendly, responsive, and approachable. Parents also generally agree the district updates families on district decisions and effectively communicates with them in their preferred language and format.

Stakeholders also identify parent engagement as an area for further focus and expansion.

Less than half of parents indicated they are satisfied with the level of parent involvement at their school, and even fewer report that their school encourages families to visit their child's classroom. Stakeholders are also generally less aware of and engaged in decision-making processes.

TAKEAWAYS



There are opportunities to further reduce barriers to parent participation in school and district activities and decision-making.

TEACHER ENGAGEMENT

Teachers value positive relationships with school leaders and colleagues.

In-depth interviews reveal teachers who have stayed appreciate the support from both school leadership as teacher advocates and the collaborative environment among the teaching team.

However, teachers want improved engagement from leaders in understanding and addressing their concerns.

When surveyed, over half of teachers agree school administrators are in tune with their concerns. However, in-depth interviews with former Hutto ISD teachers revealed some teachers did not feel respected, heard, or supported by school leaders. Interviews with retained teachers also highlight some instances of micromanagement and unrealistic or restrictive expectations, suggesting room for improvement in engaging with teachers in two-way communication and decision making.

TAKEAWAYS



Ensure that school leaders gather teacher feedback and communicate a clear vision for changes and new initiatives that impact teachers.

INSTRUCTION/CURRICULUM



ACADEMICS AND RESOURCES

Most stakeholders are satisfied with resources to support student learning; however, some note potential inequities across school sites.

Survey results show high levels of agreement with both the instructional climate overall and access to resources, technology, materials, programs (including extra-curriculars and advanced courses) and academic supports. Fewer, though still a majority, agree resources are equally distributed across all schools in the district (59%).

Stakeholders highlight student mental health and well-being as an area for additional resources and supports.

Roughly half of surveyed middle and high school students believe their schools provide enough resources and support for their mental health and well-being.

TAKEAWAYS



Current stakeholders' perceptions regarding curricular offerings and resources are favorable but may not be equitable.



Middle and high school students may need expand mental health and well-being resources.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Students have lower perceptions of their own engagement and attitudes towards learning compared to staff and parents.

While parents and staff have positive perceptions of how students feel at schools, students generally report less positive experiences. For example, in the Equity Diagnostic Survey, only 44% of students agree they like school (compared to 73-78% of staff and parents agreeing that students like school). Similar trends are found in the Climate Survey, where 66-75% of staff agree students work hard, are prepared, are excited to learn, enjoy learning, and are motivated to learn, compared to 29-51% of students.

Student engagement may benefit from a greater focus on providing individualized and relevant instruction.

In the Climate Survey, about half of students agree teachers connect class lessons to life outside the classroom (51%). Relatedly, in the Equity Diagnostic Survey, 47% of students agree teachers adjust lessons to fit their learning style. About half of students also agree adults at their school understand their culture and background (53%) and understand their experience (42%).

TAKEAWAYS



There are opportunities to improve students' experiences and engagement at school.



Teachers may benefit from professional development that supports and prioritizes individualized approaches to instruction and student engagement.

TEACHER ATTRITION AND RETENTION

TEACHER ATTRITION AND RETENTION

As discussed previously, leadership is critical in a teacher's decision making around remaining in or leaving their position.

Several former teachers expressed frustration with the lack of interaction and engagement or poor relationships with school leadership and experienced negative repercussions when expressing their disagreements with principals. Retained teachers also raise concerns about school leadership increasing micromanagement and restrictive expectations. Teachers feel they cannot serve students needs if every teacher is expected to teach from the same curriculum.

Positive experiences with school leaders and school workplace climates overall are among the most important factors in keeping teachers in their current role. Teachers believe approachable, communicative, and empowering school leaders make for a positive teaching experience and lead to their continued retention.

TAKEAWAYS



Leadership training and development can be leveraged to ensure principals and school leaders have the necessary skills and characteristics to support retention efforts.



Retention of highly effective principals and school leaders may similarly support greater teacher retention overall.

TEACHER ATTRITION AND RETENTION

While teachers recognize the district's commitment to improvement, they are also concerned about increasing workload, particularly during COVID-19.

Retained teachers valued the districts' support during the pandemic and recognized efforts to making the district the best in the state. However, many teachers are frustrated with new mandates (e.g., adjusting to synchronous hybrid, calling failing students) and the extra work that school leaders have given.

Teachers also want to see school leadership supporting them in taking disciplinary actions when needed.

Several former teachers experienced difficulty in establishing ground rules for students, especially when school leaders do not support taking disciplinary action.

TAKEAWAYS



Teachers value the district's improvement efforts but require greater support for their own well-being and wellness to avoid burnout.



Student behavior and discipline is another factor in teacher retention.

TEACHER ATTRITION AND RETENTION

Teachers want more professional development opportunities and may especially benefit from training to provide instruction that supports greater diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The Climate Survey reveals around half of teachers believe their school provides enough quality professional development opportunities. Similarly, the Equity Diagnostic Survey shows half of the surveyed teachers believe their school supports culturally sustaining practices and pedagogies, provides opportunities for staff to collaborate on strategies for equitable instruction, and provides professional development on equity-related topics. Further, this survey also revealed that students rarely spend time discussing equity-related topics in class.

TAKEAWAYS



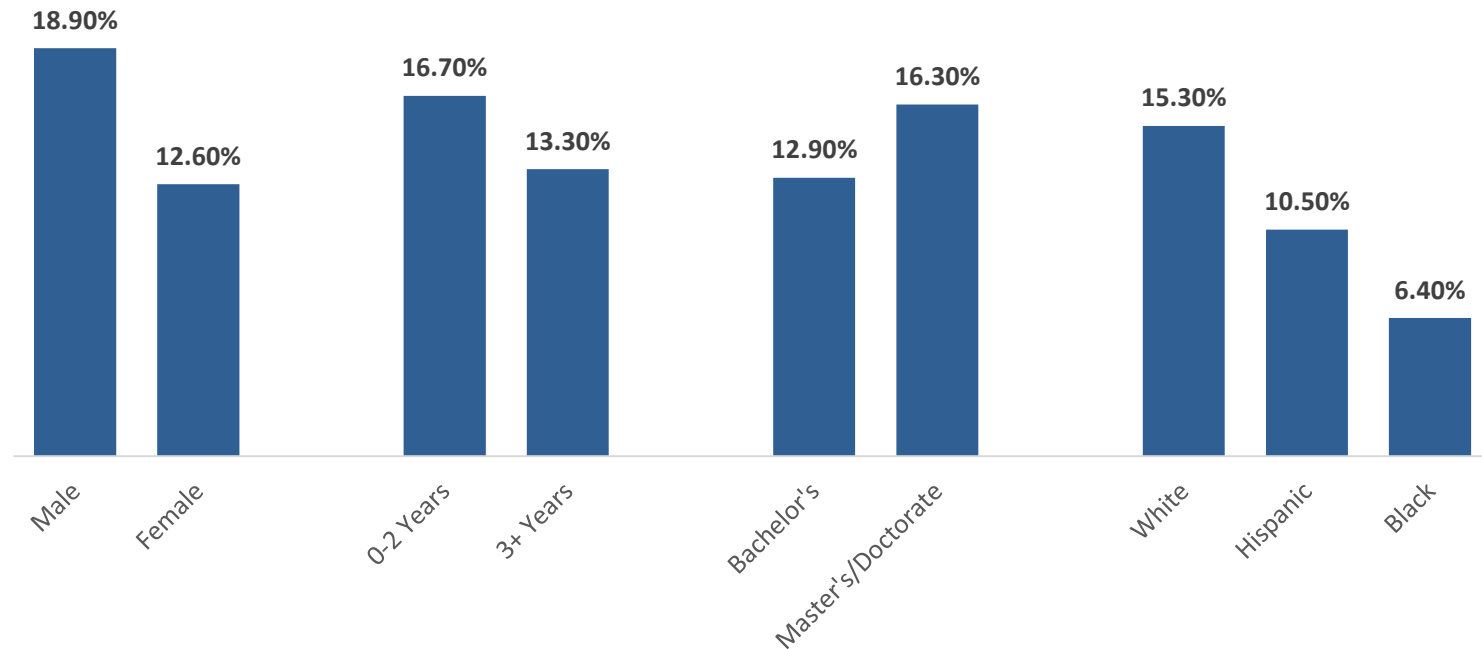
Expand professional development opportunities, considering teachers' input regarding offerings that best fit their needs.

CHARACTERISTICS OF DEPARTING TEACHERS

Teacher retention strategies may be targeted based on the probability that certain groups of teachers will or will not be retained.

Analysis of teacher attrition and retention data shows new teachers (with 0-2 years tenure), male teachers, white teachers, and teachers with master's degrees or higher are more likely to leave their positions.

Probability of Teacher Attrition by Group



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SECTION 2: RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings derived from the research studies presented in this report, Hanover suggests that Hutto ISD:



Develop leadership capacity at the district and school levels to encourage a positive, collaborative, effective, and supportive working environment and professional relationships. Training should focus on building leadership skills among both current and prospective school and district leaders to ensure a strong pipeline of high-quality leaders over time.



Ensure that teacher professional development is driven by teachers' stated needs and feedback. Consider conducting a professional development needs assessment to gather information directly from teachers on the types and formats of professional development that would be most beneficial. Based on the trends identified in this report, potential areas of need may include training around diversity, equity, and inclusion, experiential or real-world learning, and student engagement.



Review existing mental health and wellbeing supports for both students and staff to identify gaps and opportunities for expansion and improvement. Consider conducting an annual survey to monitor wellbeing and track use and outcomes from related programs.



Thank you.

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