



Testimony on Teacher Retention in Washington, DC
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Good Morning Chairman Mendelson and Chairman Grosso. My name is Scott Goldstein, Founder and Executive Director of the DC teacher advocacy organization EmpowerEd. Thank you for inviting us to testify on the critical issue of teacher retention. There is no debate in the research- teacher turnover harms student achievement, school climate, and student relationships that are key to their long-term success. It's extremely costly and is a significant setback to schools undergoing improvement efforts. In fact, research has demonstrated that the difference between urban schools that are able to sustain success over time compared with urban schools that see uneven growth is whether the school has achieved staff stability and focused explicitly on adult culture. DC's teacher turnover rate is indisputably higher than comparable districts and that means it's a problem we must address. Instead of focusing on whether the problem exists, we should focus on well researched solutions for improvement.

First, I want to start by talking a bit about what we hear about teacher turnover vs. what we know, followed by our proposed solutions. First the basics. Based on a report commissioned by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education and The New Teachers Project, 30 % of DC teachers left their school from SY 2017-2018 to 2018-2019.¹ The State Board of Education meanwhile found that 26 % of teachers departed the charter sector from SY 2017-2018 to 2018-2019 while just 21 % left DC Public Schools.² New data released by DCPS however shows their turnover rate increasing again from SY 18-19 to 19-20 with 24 % leaving their school.³ What these numbers show is consistent with the State Board's findings that over the past five years, teacher turnover averages about 25 % annually in both sectors, though in recent years charter sector turnover has been higher while DCPS turnover decreases. These numbers compare to a typical urban district turnover rate of 16-19%.⁴ According to the State Board report, as a system, DCPS loses about 70% of its teachers in five years, compared to a 45% average at 16 urban districts reported in a recent study.

We have heard for years that teacher turnover is not a problem because we retain those educators we have rated as effective. In DCPS, it's true that we retain most educators rated effective or highly effective by IMPACT from year to year, but we still struggle to retain them in the 3 to 5 year range. In fact this year's State Board of Education report shows we have lost 1,985 effective and highly effective DCPS teachers in the last six years. We also know thanks to the new OSSE report on the teacher

¹<https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/DC%20Educator%20Workforce%20Report%2010.2019.pdf>

² <https://sboe.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/documents/2019-11-07-FINAL-Teacher%20Attrition%20Report%202019%20%28update%29.pdf>

³ https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/page_content/attachments/DCPS-Teacher-Retention-Data-SY2009-2010_SY2018-2019-Final.pdf

⁴ <https://sboe.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/documents/2019-11-07-FINAL-Teacher%20Attrition%20Report%202019%20%28update%29.pdf>

workforce that retention of even effective and highly effective educators in the charter sector is only 60 % annually. That's enormous turnover of effective teachers in that sector. This level of turnover is simply unacceptable. If Facebook, for example, had 25 % staff turnover and were testifying on Capitol Hill and said "well, we only lost our ineffective staff members", I think they'd be received by hardy laughter. That's because in other sectors it's assumed that turnover above 10-15 % is detrimental to growth. And that's true in education as well.

Second, we've heard that DC loses as many teachers as we do because we're a transient city. That too is false.⁵ When compared to all medium and large cities, DC is not in the top 10 nationwide for transience⁶ and is less transient than NY, Chicago and San Francisco, who have lower teacher turnover rates.

Third, we hear that we are beating the average for teachers of color- and that is absolutely true, and critical. But in recent years DC has also experienced the largest drop among Black teachers and the largest increase in White teachers of any US city.⁷ Because of the city's changing demographics and the decrease in the black student population, we still have closer to even representation with 67 % of our students identifying as Black or African-American and 58 % of students. On the other hand we know that our Latinx representation gap is a chasm- a deeply troubling status quo for our Latinx students. The OSSE report showed that in Ward 1- 58 % of students are Latinx and just 15 % of educators with similar numbers in Ward 4. EmpowerEd is focused specifically on closing this Latinx teacher representation gap.

Fourth, while salaries are not a major motivator in DCPS because they're strong enough not to be a big contributor to turnover, but we often hear that DCPS salaries are \$25,000 higher than the national average and among the highest in the country yet DCPS salaries are actually 21st among states when accounting for cost of living.⁸ We should be honest and account for cost of living- because that can prevent teachers from staying in the District. We also know that salaries in the charter sector are often much lower and present serious racial and gender pay equity concerns. 25 charter schools have starting salaries under \$40,000 (below the DC living wage) and 35 schools having average salaries below \$60,000 per the school's annual reports.⁹

We do know, both from data on DCPS exit surveys, the new OSSE report and years of testimony and discussion from DC teachers that the top reasons teachers leave have been consistent 1) dissatisfaction with school leadership 2) school culture focused more on accountability systems than collaboration and 3) lack of teacher leadership opportunities.¹⁰

So what should we do?

⁵ <https://moneywise.com/a/people-cant-flee-these-us-cities-fast-enough>

⁶ <https://smartasset.com/mortgage/the-most-transient-cities-in-america>

⁷ <http://www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/teacherdiversity>

⁸ <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/03/16/592221378/the-fight-over-teacher-salaries-a-look-at-the-numbers>

⁹ <https://dcpcsb.org/charter-school-annual-reports>

¹⁰ https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/DCPS%20Retention%20Deck_5.7.18_FINAL.pdf

First, let's ensure continuous data. OSSE should be legally required to produce a yearly report on teacher turnover in the district including by school percentages, long term trends and key demographic information. We strongly support the legislation advanced by the State Board of Education to be introduced by Chairman Mendelson to accomplish this aim. It's the bare minimum we should expect.

Second, we need a universal exit survey for both sectors that gives us continuous information on why teachers are leaving, information that should be made public.

Third, we need to move from evaluation systems to growth systems. Systems like IMPACT should be replaced with models similar to Peer Assistance and Review, models that promote collaboration to improve practice and instruction for kids rather than set us up for antagonism.

Fourth, we should work to implement differentiated and teacher-led professional development especially for mid-career and veteran teachers. EmpowerEd's teacher-led action group on teacher retention has just laid out a detailed roadmap for making changes to professional development in the District that will better retain educators. Professional development should be based on common teacher problems of practice, teachers need more time to observe their peers in action, to explore PD of interest to them with funding from the school or district.

Fifth, We must increase authentic teacher leadership roles at all schools that retain veteran educators by allowing them to take advantage of their expertise to help their school community- not only as instructional leaders.

Sixth, schools should evaluate and implement part-time and flexible scheduling models, especially to aid in the retention of educators who are new parents. There are schools that do this well and the staffing models can and do work.

Seventh, we need to create an environment that facilitates strong mentorship relationships- but we must do so carefully because research shows overly formalized mentoring program can actually harm teacher retention. EmpowerEd is currently experimenting with pilot mentor partnerships through one of our fellows at a DC charter school.

The Learning Policy Institute estimates the cost to an urban school system of losing each teacher is approximately \$20,000. **Using that figure, if DC could even reduce its turnover to the urban average, we would save \$40 million over five years.**

If we create environments of trust where teachers feel empowered, they learn from each other, they continuously grow and where they thrive- they will stay. We are dedicated to making this happen. EmpowerEd is currently working with a cohort of principals and teachers across both sectors to learn as a group how to build relational trust, better share leadership, and retain experienced educators. There is nothing pre-ordained about high turnover. We can fix this.