

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Understanding Teacher Retention at Teacher-Powered Schools

By Daniel Marks, with Lars Esdal

Teachers are leaving the classroom. Two decades of steady attrition has cost students and schools. Now, post-pandemic and burned out, more teachers plan to leave the profession than at any other time in recent history.

The factors driving teachers from schools are predictable: poor working conditions, coupled with scant autonomy for teachers to improve them.

Teacher-powered schools—collaboratively designed and run by teams of teachers in partnership with the students, families, and communities they serve—elevate the role of teachers by design.

We wanted to know: What is retention like at teacher-powered schools? Could **teacher-powered** be an answer to the question of how to keep talented teachers?

METHODS

We surveyed 45 teacher-powered schools about their school and student characteristics, size, and the number of teachers who left each school for any reason in the past five years. We conducted interviews with educators from respondent schools—focusing on their perceptions of school culture, teacher wellbeing, and any factors they tie to teacher dissatisfaction at their school.

FINDINGS

1. Fewer teachers leave teacher-powered schools than they do schools nationwide.

9.2% of teachers left teacher-powered schools in the past five years—compared to a national benchmark of **16% who left public schools** since 2000.

Teacher-powered schools were not immune to post-pandemic trends: Departures jumped in 2021-22, but we predict the rise to fall well short of national averages once data is released.

2. At teacher-powered schools, student poverty rates are **not** linked with teacher turnover.



Family income is highly predictive of teacher turnover at a school. Studies consistently find that teachers leave schools at a higher rate the more students there are receiving free and reduced-price lunch.

Encouragingly, **teacher-powered schools buck this trend.**

3. Retention is high because teachers feel passionately about the student-centered missions of their teacher-powered schools.



Educators at teacher-powered schools believe their schools are uniquely great places for students and educators. And they credit the autonomy and empowerment of being teacher-powered for levels of passion, enthusiasm, and attachment they've never known elsewhere.

A mission-oriented, student-centered focus is key to staff retention—and to “good turnover”: Teachers who don't identify with a school's philosophy leave quickly, making room for a more appropriate teacher to take their place.

The work is meaningful, but hard. Educators find joy in their opportunities for professional creativity and problem-solving, and their flexibility to experiment with new approaches. It isn't *more* work, but rather *different* work, and the reward of maximally and consequentially serving their students is worth it.

CONCLUSION

We need a larger study to further test our hypothesis and learn more about the factors that set teacher-powered schools apart. But there are encouraging signs—early proof that teacher-powered schools belong in any discourse on how to keep talented teachers.

FULL REPORT: teacherpowered.org/retention