

Teacher Turnover in the United States

Patterns, Factors, and Policy Approaches

FACT SHEET

Why does teacher turnover matter for students, schools, and budgets?

Teacher turnover, defined as teachers moving schools or leaving the profession from one school year to the next, has remained persistently high for more than two decades. The rate of teacher turnover in the United States exceeds that of other [high-performing education systems](#), and turnover contributes to ongoing teacher shortages and reinforces inequities in access to [educational opportunities](#).

When high turnover occurs alongside declining numbers of teachers entering the profession, schools face staffing challenges that can leave remaining teachers overworked and with [reduced time for planning](#). Schools may respond by hiring underprepared or uncertified teachers, [increasing class sizes, or cutting course offerings](#). These strategies can diminish instructional quality, limit students' access to qualified educators, lead to staff instability, and [negatively impact student learning](#).

Teacher turnover also carries high financial costs. [Replacing a teacher](#) costs an estimated \$25,000 in large districts and \$12,000 in small districts on average (in 2024 dollars), diverting resources from investments that could better support students and educators. Because many key drivers of turnover are systemic and can be addressed through policy, reducing turnover represents both an educational improvement strategy and a cost-saving opportunity.

How prevalent is teacher turnover, and who is most affected?

Nearly 1 in 7 (15.1%) public school teachers moved schools (8.0%) or left the profession (7.1%) between the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years. Most turnover (74%) was voluntary and for reasons other than retirement. Turnover was not evenly distributed across the workforce, and rates varied by:

- **Teacher certification.** Turnover was higher among teachers who were not fully certified (20.1%) than among fully certified teachers (14.7%). Among teachers with 1–3 years of experience, not fully certified teachers left at rates about 40% higher than fully certified teachers (24% vs. 17%).
- **Subject taught.** Turnover was higher than average for teachers in high-need subject areas, including English as a Second Language or bilingual education (19.0%), foreign languages (18.3%), career and technical education (17.5%), and special education (16.4%).
- **School type.** Turnover rates were higher in primary (15.9%) and middle schools (15.7%) than in high schools or schools that combine grade levels (14.1% and 12.6%, respectively); in city schools (17.7%) than in rural (14.5%), suburban (13.9%), or town (13.7%) schools; and in charter schools (17.8%) than in traditional public schools (14.9%).
- **School composition.** Turnover rates were 35%–37% higher in schools serving larger concentrations of students of color and those from low-income backgrounds than in schools with the smallest concentrations.
- **Teacher race and ethnicity.** Teachers of color had higher turnover rates than White teachers (16.6% vs. 14.7%), with Black teachers moving schools or leaving the profession at rates that were more than 20% higher than White teachers (18.1% vs. 14.7%). These disparities reflect, in part, the concentration of teachers of color in schools with fewer resources and more challenging working conditions, [among others](#).

What factors are most strongly associated with teacher turnover?

After accounting for teacher and school characteristics, three factors are most strongly associated with turnover:

- **Compensation:** Higher pay is linked to higher retention. On average, with every \$1,000 increase in salary (adjusted for cost of living), the probability of turnover decreased by about 0.34 percentage points.
- **School leadership:** Teachers who report having more effective and supportive leadership are significantly more likely to stay in their schools. Turnover rates were cut in half when comparing teachers who reported low versus high levels of leadership effectiveness and supports (18.7% vs. 9.0%).
- **Job and workplace satisfaction:** Teachers with high job and workplace satisfaction were significantly less likely to leave their schools than teachers with low satisfaction (8.0% vs. 22.0%).

These findings underscore the association between teacher turnover and compensation and working conditions.

What policy approaches can reduce teacher turnover?

Teacher turnover is a complex challenge with no single solution. A multifaceted policy approach at the federal, state, and local levels is needed to create conditions that support a strong, stable, and diverse teacher workforce.

How can compensation policies strengthen teacher retention?

- Ensure that teachers' salaries and total compensation are competitive with those of other professions that require similar levels of education. On average, [teachers earn about 26% less](#) than similarly educated workers in the United States.
- Expand access to [loan forgiveness](#) and service scholarship programs to reduce teachers' financial burden and support both entry into and retention in the profession.
- Provide [compensation increases for teachers](#) in high-need subjects or schools, those with advanced credentials (e.g., National Board certification), and those who serve as mentors or in other leadership roles.

How can school leadership be improved through policy?

- Support access to principal preparation programs that develop strong instructional leadership skills.
- Leverage licensure requirements and program approval standards to ensure that preparation programs incorporate research-based practices for effective leader development.
- Invest in high-quality coaching and mentoring that reinforce the foundations built during preparation.

How can teachers' working conditions and job satisfaction be improved through policy?

- Provide teachers with access to ongoing professional learning and the support they need to continuously develop their professional capacities.
- Pursue redesigning schools and allocate dedicated time during the school day for teacher collaboration.
- Increase teachers' autonomy and their involvement in school decision-making.

How can policy address turnover among high-need teachers and schools?

- Strengthen preparation and early-career supports, including access to high-quality, high-retention preservice preparation programs (such as [teacher residencies](#)) and high-quality mentoring and induction opportunities.
- Incentivize and underwrite the cost of earning high-need, advanced credentials, particularly in high-shortage areas such as special education.
- Revise state funding formulas to ensure equitable and adequate funding and resources that support competitive salaries and working conditions, especially for schools serving students with greater needs.

Learn more

Access the [Teacher Turnover in the United States](#) report for more information.