

**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
OVERSIGHT PUBLIC HEARING
on
“Teacher and Principal Retention”
on
Tuesday, October 29, 2024, 4:00 p.m.**

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Robert Henderson. I am here in my individual capacity as Ward 5 member of the State Board of Education, and I am not representing the views of the Board as a whole.

Over the past several years, I have tried to learn everything I can about how to improve student learning in DC. What I’ve learned so far is that there’s not any one single thing that we need to do, but many, and we need both the people to implement them and the policies and systems to equip and enable them to do so. One of the more helpful books I have discovered in this pursuit is Karin Chenoweth’s *Districts that Succeed*. In it, she highlights several essential factors for successful schools and districts, including the importance of stable and continuous leadership. Stability in school leaders and teachers who can commit to, learn, and faithfully implement programs, interventions, and positive school culture is not sufficient for student success, the quality and effectiveness of those efforts matter too, but it is nearly impossible for students to succeed without that stability.

In addition to stability, teachers need time, support, and security to plan, to grow, to do their jobs well, and for their jobs to be sustainable. That’s why I support, among other things:

- Citywide induction policies for early career teachers (first three years at minimum) including mentorship.
- Permanent substitutes.
- Continued funding for educator wellness (on four-year timelines) and flexible scheduling.
- Like other states, we should require all teachers to complete an exit survey, currently only DCPS teachers do.¹
- I hope that soon, the council can also address the DCPS evaluation system, which teachers in that sector have indicated as a significant driver of turnover, and disqualifyingly enough, produces racially disparate outcomes, or in other words is racist.
- We should also make every effort to ensure that required tasks and professional development are worth their time, and to do that we need to evaluate them and most of all solicit and incorporate teacher feedback on what is and what is not worth their time.
- Finally, we need to do more to support our teachers and leaders in schools with the greatest need. In her 2018 report on teacher attritions for the State Board, Mary Levy

¹ <https://www.k12dive.com/news/california-to-require-teacher-exit-survey-as-focus-on-retention-recruitmen/633493/>

found that schools with the highest percentages of at-risk students in both sectors tended to have the highest rates of teacher turnover.² In addition to encouraging student and educator instability, as Scott Goldstein noted earlier, our system concentrates high-need students. We should both try to deconcentrate need and allocate resources to equitably support higher-need schools- and we need to do that at a much greater scale. I will note that the DME's adequacy study recommended increasing the at-risk weight and adding a weight for "highest need students with disabilities."³ Imagine the difference for a teacher in a classroom with 15 of 20 students who need extra help and one in a classroom with 5 of 20 students who need extra help. The latter situation is much more manageable and sustainable for a teacher.

Thank you again for your attention to the issue of teacher and principal retention. I am happy to answer any questions.

Robert Henderson

Ward 5 Member, DC State Board of Education

² Mary Levy. 2018. *Teacher and Principal Turnover in Public Schools in the District of Columbia*. <https://sboe.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/publication/attachments/SBOE%20Teacher%20Turnover%20Report%20-%20FINAL.pdf>, p. 2.

³ <https://app.box.com/s/v2j675bdum1tkyu2efgmr1rz1edcpgbk>, p. 4.