



# Staffing Schools in Providence: Tracking Key Metrics

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Challenges in teacher staffing continue to persist in America's public schools, with districts across the country reporting more vacant positions than in previous years.<sup>1</sup> Nationally, teacher turnover appears to be increasing, while the supply of teachers has declined. On a recent University of Rhode Island survey, one third of Rhode Islanders say that teacher staffing is the most pressing issue facing local K-12 schools, by far the most common challenge.<sup>2</sup>






Here, we look at detailed data on applications, hiring, and retention to update our annual snapshot of teacher staffing in Providence. We again find cause for optimism and for concern. Unlike in other districts, Providence has seen a large increase in the number of applicants – there were twice as many applicants in 2023-24 as in 2019-20. And, applicants are more diverse than ever before. Teacher turnover remains below levels of other urban districts. However, turnover continues to increase steadily and applications remain relatively low. While start-of-year teacher vacancies have remained relatively stable, they continue to be high, as 111 teaching positions were not filled at the start of the 2023-24 school year.

*The Annenberg Institute's Rhode Island education research initiatives bring together local education leaders and researchers to solve pressing educational challenges, with a specific focus on student engagement and teacher learning. Drawing on the complementary expertise and earned trust of partners, these initiatives seek to improve Rhode Island student and school experiences through stronger use of data and evidence while producing research that has impact on a national scale.*

# KEY METRICS




## Recruitment and Hiring

- The teacher applicant pool has grown substantially over the past five years. While this is partially due to the increase in postings, there has also been an increase in the number of applications per posting in the past year – in 2023-24, there were 6 external applications per posting, up from 5 in 2022-23.
- Because of internal moves and other Human Resources changes, the district posts many more positions than it needs to fill.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly the case during the last two hiring seasons, when all jobs are posted externally but some are filled by internal candidates. Given this, we also look at unique applicants per exit. These numbers are similar to pre-pandemic levels despite the increase in exits.
- The number of start of year vacancies was 111, high but on par with numbers in the past three years.

Metric	One Year Change	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
External Applicants		748	609	451	477	378
External Postings	—	410	433	277	221	216
Applications per Posting		5.9	4.5	6.5	9.4	6.1
Applicants per Posting		1.8	1.4	1.6	2.2	1.8
Applicants per Exit		3.7	3.4	2.7	3.3	3.7
Start-of-Year Vacancies		111	109	112	75	94







## Retention

- While teacher retention remains higher than other urban districts in the country, it has continued to decrease steadily, from 94% in 2019-20 to 87% in 2023-24.
- During the pandemic, retirements spiked. Since then, the increase in teacher turnover has been driven by an increase in resignations. Twice as many teachers resigned in 2022-23 compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Metric	One Year Change	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
Retention Rate		87%	88%	90%	91%	94%
Number of Resignations		172	146	128	96	81
Number of Retirements		29	35	39	48	22

## Diversity

- This year’s applicants are the district’s most diverse pool to date. More than one third of applicants are teachers of color. Some of this growth comes from a tripling this year in the number of international applicants, 80% of whom identify as people of color.
- Despite the diverse applicant pool, applicants of color make up just a quarter of new hires.
- The teacher workforce continues to diversify at a slow pace, with the share of teachers of color increasing by just 0.3 percentage points in the past year.
- School leadership is diversifying at a faster pace. More than a third of principals and assistant principals are leaders of color. Now, nearly two-thirds of schools have at least one leader of color, compared to half in 2019-20. This trend has largely been driven by an increase in the number of assistant principals in the district.

Metric	One Year Change	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
Percent of External Applicants of Color		36.2%	29.6%	24.2%	20.4%	22.5%
Percent of External Hires of Color		24.5%	23.7%	21.6%	31.3%	19.6%
Percent of New Teachers of Color <sup>4</sup>		26.3%	29.2%	25.9%	29.9%	25.0%
Percent of Teachers of Color		22.4%	22.1%	20.9%	20.7%	19.8%
Percent of Leaders of Color		36.1%	35.4%	34.5%	32.6%	31.0%
Percent of Schools With at Least One Leader of Color		64.9%	62.2%	56.8%	52.6%	48.6%

### About the Data

*Our analysis uses teacher employment data from the Providence Public School District. In this data, we define teachers as traditional classroom teachers – that is, positions with a class of students assigned to them – and differentiate them from other instructional positions. Because we focus when possible on classroom teachers, our analyses differ somewhat from other public reporting that often highlights all employees in the teacher collective bargaining unit. Our data is as of September 12, 2023. Teachers who were hired or resigned after mid-September are not reflected in our analysis.*

# OPPORTUNITIES

*Tracking consistent metrics over time provides valuable information about trends and patterns in teacher staffing in Providence over the past five years. We complement these metrics with six data-driven insights that can inform staffing decisions in the district.*

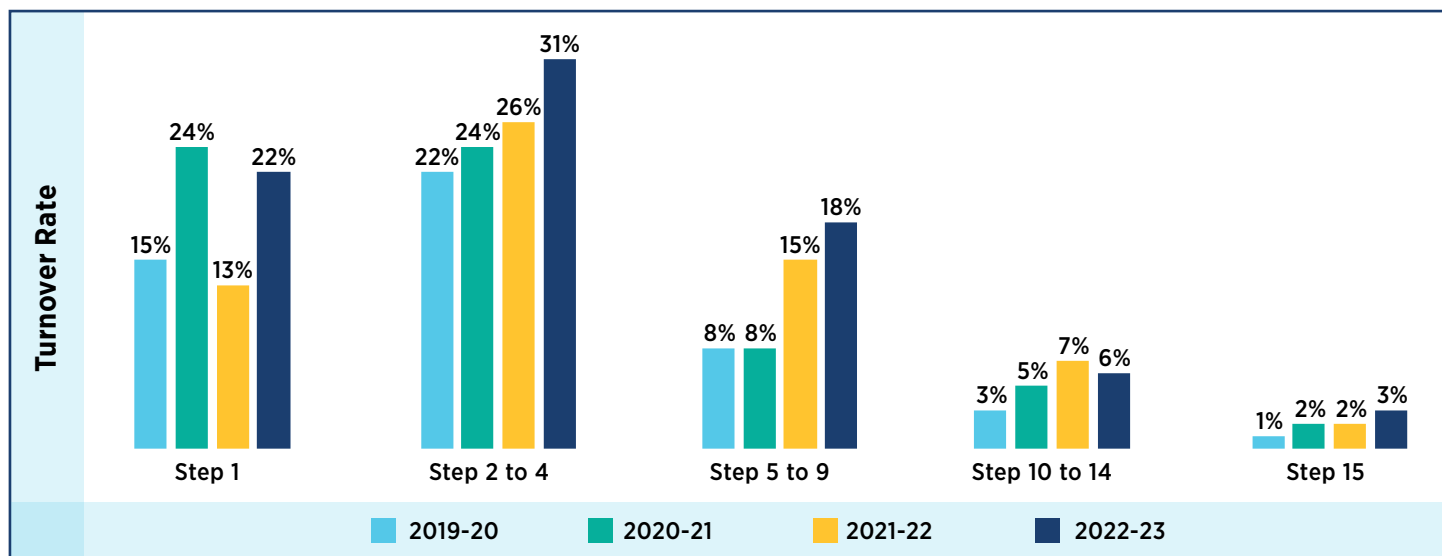
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Retention rates are particularly low for novice and early career teachers. The district should strengthen retention efforts for these groups, and particularly new hires.

Some of the increase in teacher turnover over the past five years is structural. PPSD now has more early career teachers. And, early career teachers – like novice employees in other professions – are more likely to leave than more veteran teachers. Post-pandemic, 70% of all new hires had less than five years of experience. This has shifted the composition of the workforce. In 2018-19, novice and early career teachers represented just 13% of the workforce. In 2023-24, they made up nearly 20% of the workforce. As the district has hired more new teachers over the past several years, then, retention has naturally decreased. We find that approximately 12% of the increase in turnover is driven by this change in composition and another 8% appears to reflect the increase in hard-to-staff positions.

It is largely the increase in turnover rates within experience bands that is driving the increase in overall turnover in the district. As seen in Figure 1, the district has seen rising turnover rates for teachers at all career stages. Late-career teachers have experienced the smallest increases, but two-thirds of all teachers are on step 10 or higher so even small increases translate to noticeably more teachers leaving. More alarmingly, this increase is particularly large for early- and mid-career teachers. Last year, for example, nearly one third of teachers with 2 to 4 years of experience left the district. These patterns suggest an important focus on early career teachers.

**Figure 1. Turnover by Teacher Experience, 2019-20 to 2022-23**



New hires are also a particularly turnover-prone group of teachers. Over the past five years, about one-third of all new hires came with teaching experience outside of the district. Among these more experienced teachers, though, new hires are approximately 10 percentage points more likely to leave than existing teachers with the same level of experience, even if we compare teachers in the same school and subject. This speaks to a potential need to revisit district induction efforts and provide additional support for new hires across levels of experience.

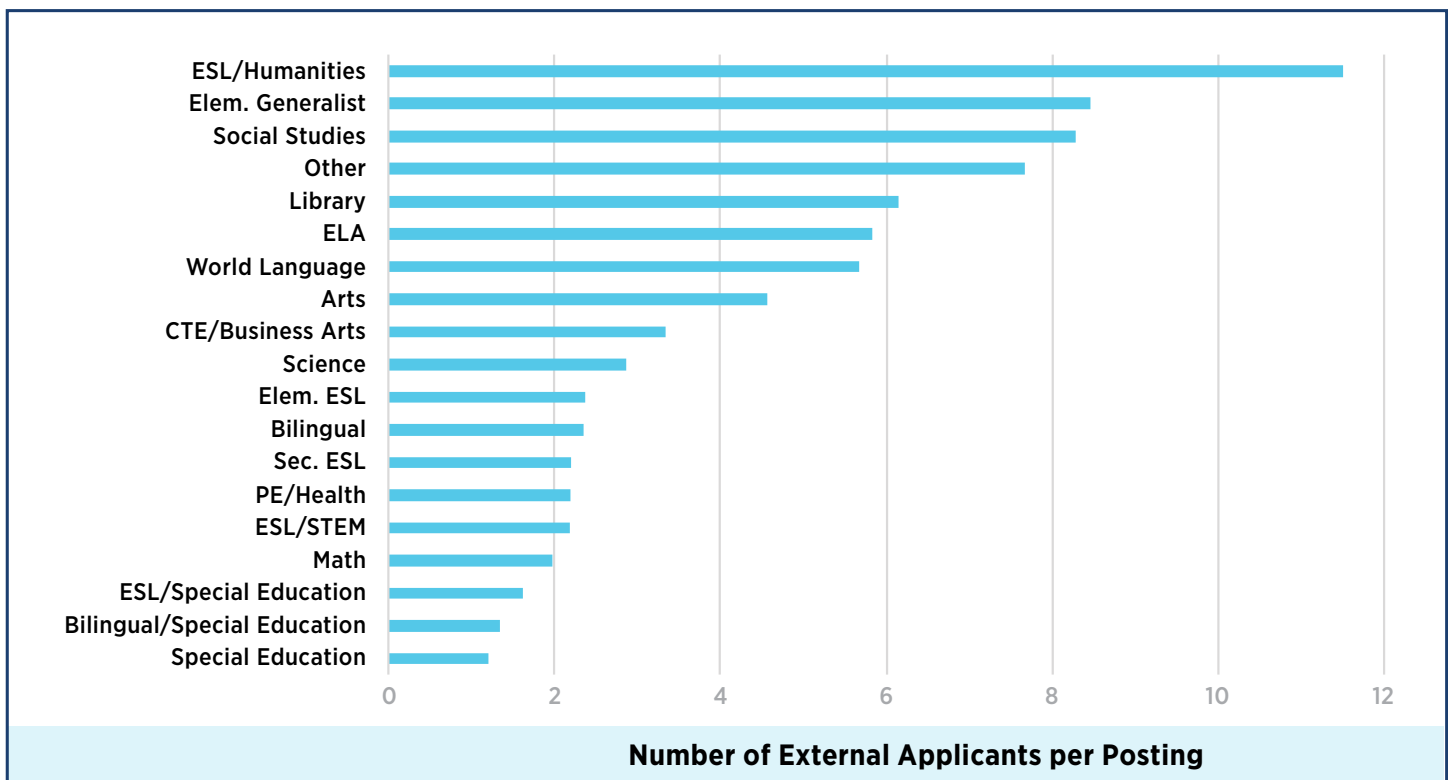
## 2

The application pool remains relatively thin. Expanding partnerships and recruitment efforts with local educator preparation programs (EPPs), particularly in hard-to-staff subject areas, is a promising approach.

Over the past five years, the district has made substantial strides in growing its applicant pool. In particular, while we do not have complete data on applicants' past teaching histories, we do see that 60% of applicants come from Rhode Island. Of these, the majority have more than one year of teaching experience. In other words, 252 Rhode Island residents with teaching experience applied to teaching positions in Providence this year and close to half of these applicants are coming from other districts in the state. Another 50 experienced teachers who live in Massachusetts and Connecticut also applied. Thus, Providence appears to be attracting experienced teachers interested in working in the district.

Nonetheless, the applicant pool remains relatively thin, particularly for high-need subject areas. As seen in Figure 2, the district receives less than 2 applicants per posting in many hard-to-staff subject areas such as special education, ESL/special education, and bilingual/ESL positions. This challenge is not unique to Providence and has been consistent over time.

**Figure 2. External Applicants by Subject, 2023-24 Hiring Season**



Despite the increases in the number of applicants, staffing challenges persist because relatively few are in the hardest-to-staff subject areas. Here, the district could strengthen its partnerships with local educator preparation programs (EPPs) to establish a supply of new teachers into the district in high-need areas. While many RI teachers apply to teach in Providence, just 54 applicants (or 7% of the total) were recent graduates from RI EPPs. In a survey of graduating teacher candidates from RI EPPs, less than half of respondents indicated that their first choice was to teach in a RI traditional public school district. And, even fewer preferred to teach in Providence.

### 3

**More than half of teachers in the applicant pool have at least 3 years of teaching experience, providing opportunities to cultivate these candidates and hire more experienced teachers.**

The district's new application provides our first look at the (self-reported) teaching background of teaching applicants. More than half of the applicant pool has at least 3 years of teaching experience. However, only 40% of new hires start on a salary step 3 or higher. While our applicant data has very little information about the quality of candidates, this mismatch does suggest some potential opportunity to cultivate and hire candidates with more experience. We know that the majority of these applicants are applying to high need positions (60%), but they tend to apply earlier in the hiring season and are active for a shorter period of time than non-experienced applicants, suggesting that the district needs to act quickly to hire them.

Experienced candidates can be potentially valuable hires for several reasons. First, we know that experience matters and teachers improve their instructional practice over time. We also know that more experienced teachers stay at much higher rates than early career teachers. As described above, experienced new hires turn over at higher rates than experienced teachers in the district. But, experienced new hires turn over at much lower rates than less experienced new hires. Post-pandemic, 17% of more experienced new hires leave the district each year, on average, compared to 35% of early career new hires.

### 4

**PPSD's marketing campaign drew interest but few applicants, suggesting opportunities to engage with applicants throughout the application process.**

In addition to hiring incentives, PPSD launched a marketing campaign last year to attract candidates to the district. This campaign generated over 2,000 leads, as individuals signed up to receive more information about teaching in the district. However, just 6% of these leads applied to positions in the district. District recruiters also provided screening calls to 108 leads (or 5% of leads). Leads who received a screening call were three times more likely to apply, suggesting that efforts to engage with potential applicants could lead to a larger pool.

Efforts to engage applicants are important throughout the hiring process, and supporting applicants throughout the application process could also be generative. The average applicant remains active for 2.5 weeks, meaning that they tend to start and stop applying for positions in the district in the same month. And, while most positions are posted in March, some do occur later in the hiring season when most applicants have stopped applying. As such, actively reaching out to engage applicants, especially qualified ones, after they have applied could result in more and better matches between applicants and vacancies.

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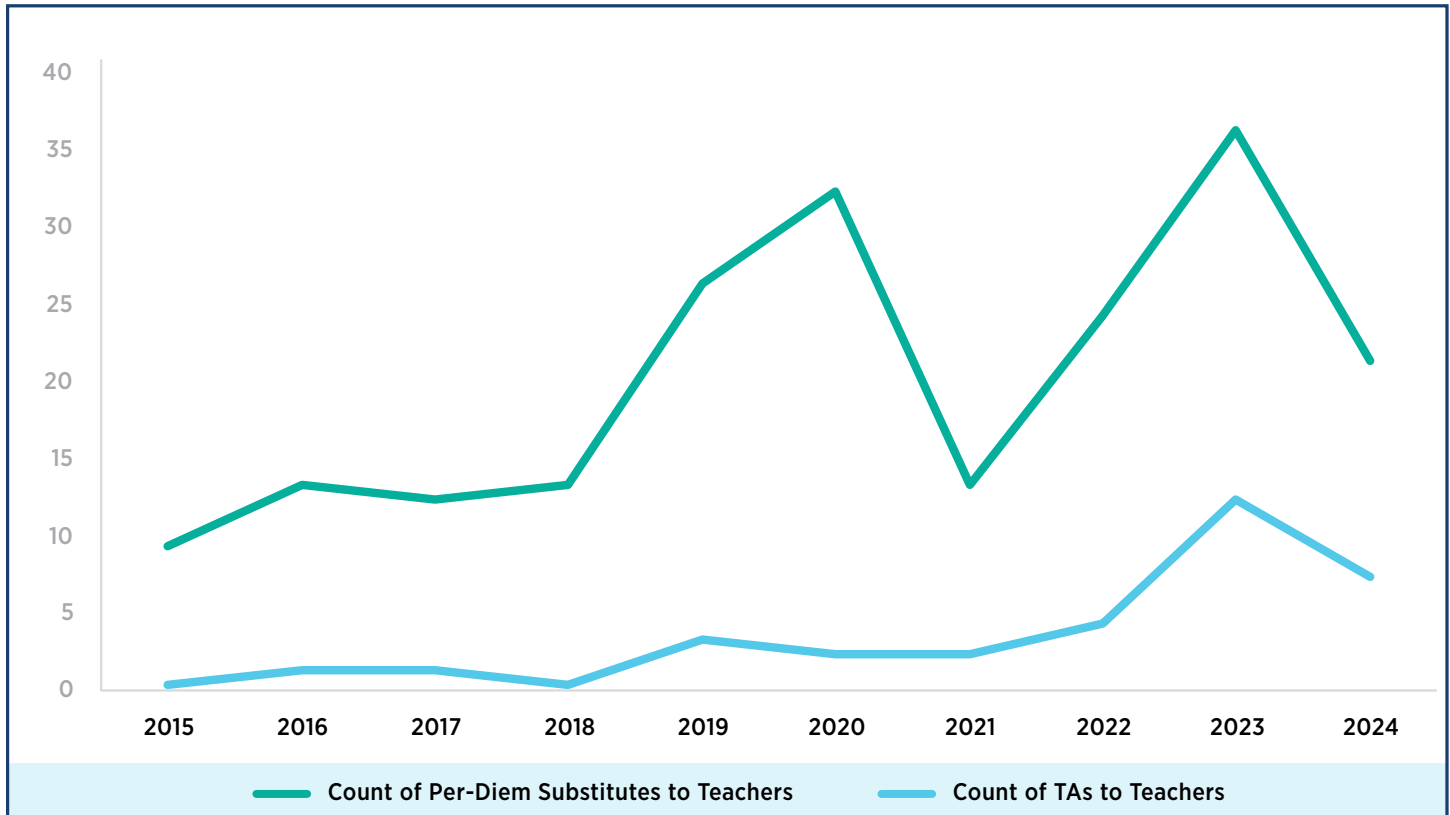
New hires who have worked in PPSD are more diverse and have higher retention rates, pointing to the importance of continuing to build prospective teacher pipelines for existing PPSD staff.

In the past years, an increasing number of per-diem substitute teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) have transitioned into full-time classroom teaching roles, as seen in Figure 3. For the 2023-24 school year, roughly a third of new hires previously worked in the district as a TA or per-diem substitute teacher. In particular, the district’s efforts to create a more robust pathway from TA to classroom teacher yielded 7 new classroom teacher hires this year.

These efforts are important for two reasons. While we do not have good measures of instructional quality in the district, we do know that, compared to other new hires, these teachers tend to be more racially diverse and are more likely to stay in the district. In particular, 73% of TAs who have become teachers identify as teachers of color. And, over the past five years, new hires who had been per-diem substitutes or TAs had higher rates of retention in the district (83%) than other new hires (78%). This is particularly true for TAs, all of whom stayed in the district after transitioning to classroom teaching roles.

PPSD has already taken steps to solidify this growing pathway by launching an RFP for a Grow Your Own Teacher Apprenticeship Program. Through this program, the district hopes to provide an opportunity for talented employees to complete a no-cost, district sponsored program in a high needs certification area while they remain employed full time within PPSD. They are specifically targeting TAs for this opportunity.

Figure 3. Number of Teachers Transitioning from Per-Diem Substitute or TA Roles



As we have reported in previous briefs, start-of-year vacancies tend to arise for two main reasons. First, some positions (including bilingual/ESL, special education, science, and mathematics) are quite hard to fill given the local shortage of qualified teachers in these areas. Second, districts struggle to fill positions that are posted over the summer as many applicants have already secured positions. While the limited pool of teachers in hard-to-staff subjects is a national challenge, late postings are more readily affected by district policy and practice.

Here, Providence has made real strides in the past five years, moving overall posting windows earlier. In 2023-24, 57% of positions were posted in March, compared to 41% before the pandemic. Nearly all positions posted before June were filled unless they were in hard-to-staff subjects.

However, openings happen throughout the spring and summer for a variety of reasons. Teachers apply to other PPSD teaching positions or move to administrative or coaching positions within the district. In addition, teachers continue to resign. One of every three start-of-year vacancies were posted after June.

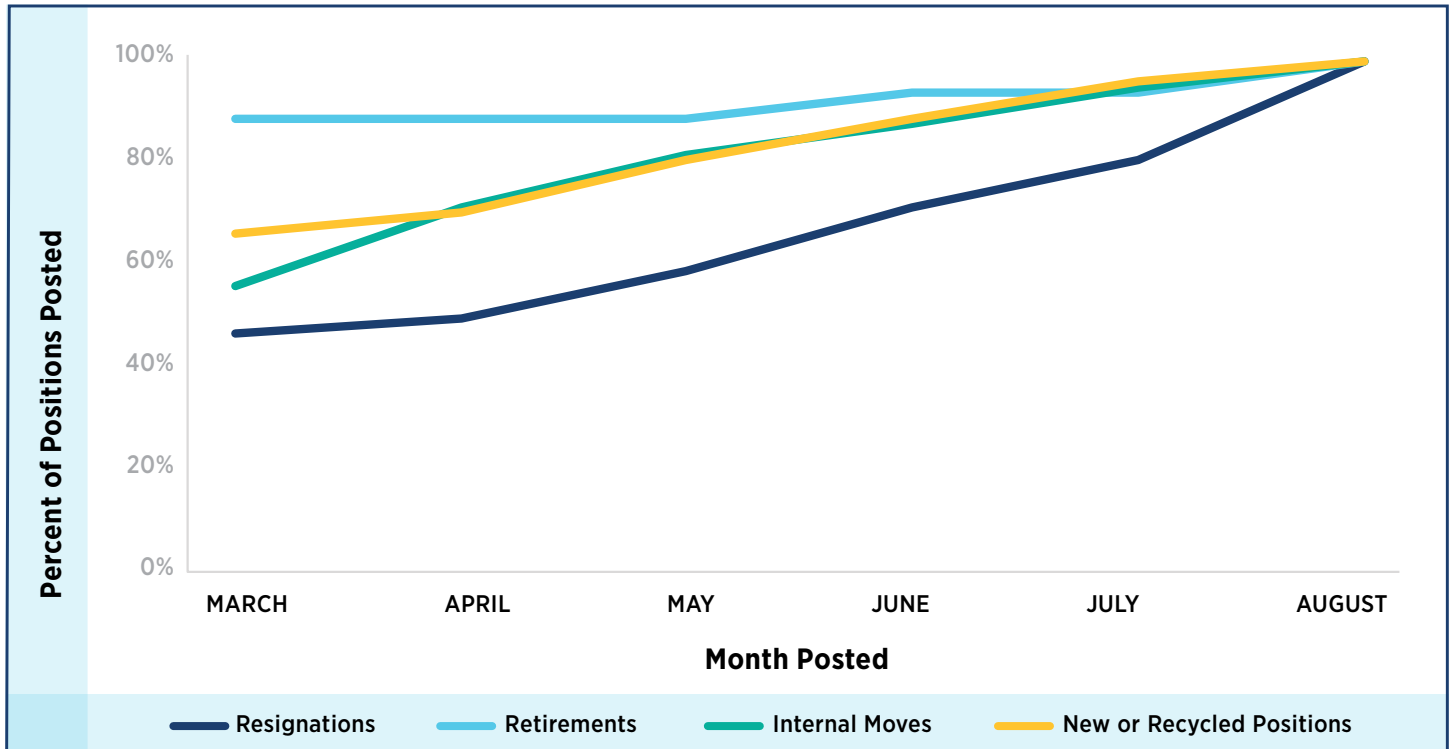
In Figure 4 we show when positions are posted by the cause of the opening. District policies that incentivize early notice of retirement mean that very few teachers retire during the summer. Indeed, 90% of retirements are known early and the positions were posted in March. However, late resignations are much more common. Less than half of position openings caused by resignations were posted in March. And, some resignations come quite late. This year, 62 teachers resigned after July 1, when schools were actively counting on them returning.

While these late resignations are a particular cause for concern and efforts to improve the professional environment in schools could support more teachers in staying, the district may not have much control over the timing of these resignations. We recently surveyed teachers who exited the district after July. Only a third of these teachers knew prior to the summer that they did not want to return. Of the teachers who did know, many were waiting to secure a job elsewhere. Late hiring timelines in other districts are likely contributing to this trend.



Given both of these realities, the district could consider expanding the number of early contracts they offer in anticipation of these vacancies. Early contract positions receive more than double the number of applicants per posting than postings during the regular hiring season, making it a promising strategy. The district could better capitalize on this more robust applicant pool and offer more early contracts. However, only 50% of candidates who receive an early contract end up taking a teaching position in the district. The district would simultaneously need to improve the experience of early contract candidates by connecting them to principals sooner, giving principals the ability to directly offer early contracts, or clearly communicating what the placement process does and does not entail.

**Figure 4. Share of Posted Positions by Month and Cause**



Teacher staffing is a growing challenge in PPSD in the wake of the pandemic. In order to ensure that every classroom is filled with an effective teacher, the district will need to continue to strengthen both recruitment and retention efforts. In this brief, we have highlighted data-driven opportunities that build on existing strategies, particularly around recruitment practices, and have identified where targeted retention efforts could be most beneficial.

Of course, these opportunities all require resources. As PPSD and districts across the state are facing funding shortages driven by enrollment declines and the end of stimulus dollars, it is more important than ever to ensure that limited resources are being leveraged in the highest impact ways. When it comes to teacher staffing, this means that the district needs to attend to more than just positions filled.

Staffing all classrooms is critical. And, metrics like the number of applicants, the number of vacancies, or the number of resignations are helpful. But, they cannot be the only focus. Instead, the district (and the state as a whole) needs to continue to invest in ensuring that classrooms are staffed with educators who can support the learning and development of all students. This means using scarce resources to recruit and retain a highly effective and increasingly diverse workforce and creating the conditions in schools that allow all teachers to succeed. While our analysis captures some of these dimensions, it does not address questions of teacher effectiveness or teacher voice. Both are important in creating and implementing staffing strategies that will lead to improvements in our schools.

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1 Nguyen, Tuan D., Chanh B. Lam, and Paul Bruno. (2022). Is there a national teacher shortage? A systematic examination of reports of teacher shortages in the United States. (EdWorkingPaper: 22-631). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/76eq-hj32>

2 University of Rhode Island Harrington School of Communication and Media. (2023). The Rhode Island Survey Initiative: Rhode Island Survey Results 2023. Retrieved from [https://web.uri.edu/harrington/wp-content/uploads/sites/2164/RI-Survey\\_Results\\_2023-1.pdf](https://web.uri.edu/harrington/wp-content/uploads/sites/2164/RI-Survey_Results_2023-1.pdf)

3 For example, if the district posts a position that is filled by an existing PPSD teacher, the district needs to post two positions: the position the teacher moved into and the position the teacher moved out of. In this case, only one external hire is needed.

4 New teachers of color includes both external hires of color as well as employees moving from non-teaching roles to teaching roles such as TAs or per diem subs.