

UC Irvine Educator Equity Report Research Brief

Building a Diverse Workforce for All Students: Oregon Educator Recruitment and Retention over Time and across Contexts

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Key Findings

- Coming out of the pandemic, teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and other staff experienced record high turnover rates between the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years, marking a significant departure from previous trends and suggesting that schools are facing unique post-pandemic challenges.
- Although teachers generally have the lowest turnover rates among all employee groups in Oregon public schools, this masks significant variations. Special education teachers, teachers of color, and novice teachers all exhibit higher turnover rates than their counterparts.
- Over the past decade, Oregon has more than doubled the proportion of first-year teachers identifying as people of color, reaching 20.6% in 2023. However, these new teachers are often placed in schools with few experienced colleagues, high staff turnover, and student populations that potentially need more support – factors that likely contribute to high turnover rates in this group.
- Most teachers who leave Oregon public schools are unemployed or earn less than they did before leaving, though about one-third of novice teachers who leave and are employed earn substantially more money by four-years later.

Overview

No state in the country has a teacher workforce that closely matches the racial and ethnic diversity of its students, with discrepancies ranging from 1.5 times as many students of color as teachers of color in Texas to 8 times as many in North Dakota. Progress in diversifying the teacher workforce has been slow over the past several decades, prompting states nationwide to pursue [various strategies](#) to recruit and retain teachers of color.

This report provides context for Oregon’s efforts to diversify its teacher workforce over the past 15 years³. It does so through four primary contributions. First, it analyzes teacher turnover relative to turnover among all other staff, highlighting how teaching needs and goals are part of a broader staff ecosystem. Second, it examines the qualifications and career paths of newly-entering teachers, exploring how these educators contribute to the state’s equity goals. Third, it places these analyses within a longitudinal perspective, highlighting changes and similarities across different economic periods, including the Great Recession, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the present. Finally, it examines the labor market outcomes for teachers who leave Oregon public schools, providing new insights into the factors that not only drive teachers out of the profession but also attract them to other fields.

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³ Data for this report were obtained from Oregon staff position files and student data files, as well as the Internal Revenue Service records.

Educator Turnover

A stable workforce that includes not only teachers but also administrators, paraprofessionals, and other support staff is essential for creating conditions that allow students to thrive and that support the success of all teachers, especially the teachers of color whom Oregon actively seeks to recruit. As such, we examine turnover patterns across these diverse educator groups over the past 15 years. Turnover comprises three categories based on year-to-year school assignments: (1) “Switched schools,” where educators moved to another school within the same district; (2) “Switched districts,” where educators relocated to a different district within the state; and (3) “Left workforce,” where educators exited the state public education system entirely.

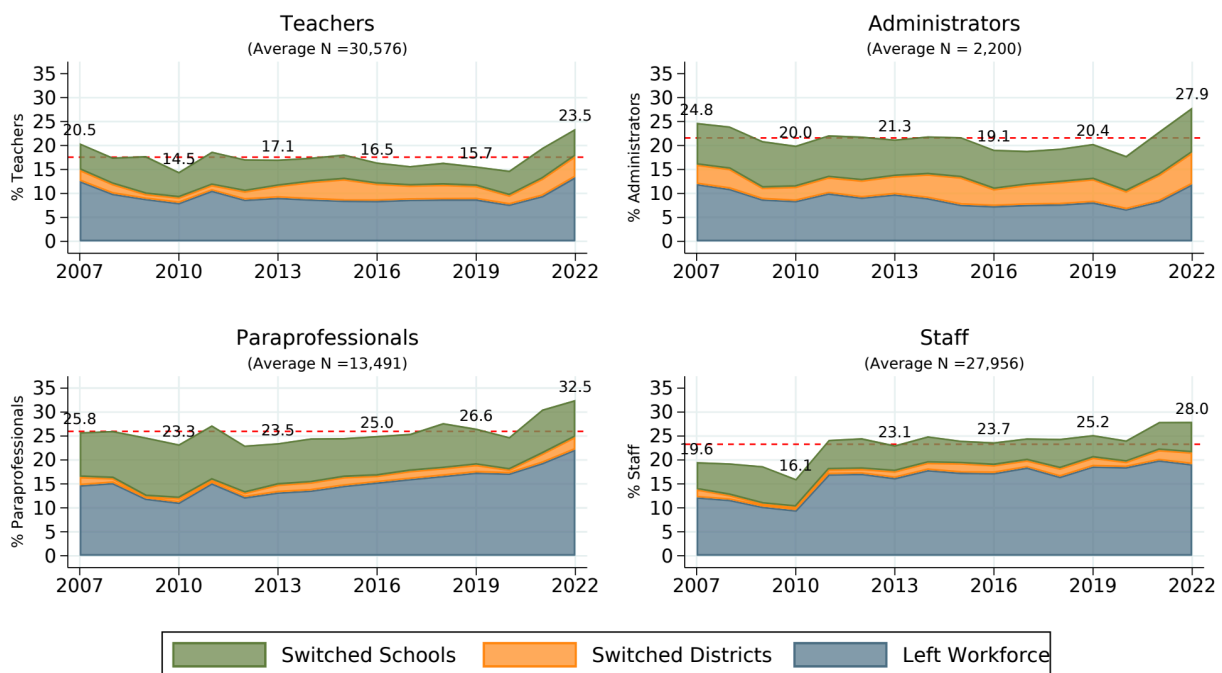


Figure 1. Educator Turnover in Oregon, 2006/07 - 2021/22

Note: Data from the ODE staff position file. The red horizontal line illustrates the average annual turnover rate. The average annual total numbers of employed educators for each group are shown in parentheses.

Longitudinal analysis of turnover across educator groups in the Oregon public school system reveals a consistent pattern. As shown in Figure 1, before the COVID-19 pandemic, turnover rates were relatively stable. Rates were relatively high in 2007 when the broader labor market was good, declined through the onset of the Great Recession and increased in 2011 when school budgets in the state [were strained](#). Even throughout the recessionary period turnover was within a range of a few percentage points. However, after a slight decrease in the 2019-20 school year, turnover for all groups surged significantly in the subsequent years. By the 2021-22 school year, turnover reached historic highs for all educators: 23.5% for teachers, 27.9% for administrators, 32.5% for paraprofessionals, and 28.0% for support staff. The turnover patterns throughout the pandemic period mirror trends observed in states like [Arkansas](#), [Massachusetts](#), [North Carolina](#), and [Washington](#).

Comparatively, teachers are the most stable group, with an average annual turnover rate of 17.6%. In contrast, administrators, paraprofessionals, and support staff show higher turnover rates: 21.6%, 26.0%, and 23.3%, respectively. Each group exhibits distinct turnover patterns: teachers and administrators more frequently switch schools or districts, while paraprofessionals and support staff are more likely to leave the system entirely. A detailed analysis reveals that within each category, educators serving in special education roles experience higher turnover rates compared to those in general education.

Among school teachers with at least half-time assignments, White teachers generally show the lowest turnover rates compared to teachers of color, though not consistently every year. The average annual turnover rate for White teachers is 16.6%, compared to 17.0% to 20.4% for teachers from other racial and ethnic groups. Turnover rates are highest among new teachers with zero years of experience, averaging 29.9% annually. Contrary to expectations but consistent with analysis from [other states](#), the surge in turnover during and after the COVID-19 pandemic is driven by mid-career teachers, rather than among entering teachers—who typically face higher turnover—or the most experienced teachers—who may have had more health-related concerns.

Entering Teachers and Their Working Environments

In order to diversify the educator workforce in Oregon, a key consideration for whether such efforts will be successful over the long term is the characteristics of who is being newly brought into the system. As such, we examine the patterns of individuals entering the teaching profession in Oregon from the 2007-08 to the 2022-23 school year. We also explore the characteristics of the schools that these new teachers are entering into and compare them to their more experienced colleagues in the state and by race/ethnicity.

On average about 1,300 teachers begin their careers in Oregon public schools each year. The number of entrants fluctuated dramatically over the past 15 years with only 500 teachers entering in 2010 and just under 2,000 teachers entering in the 2022 school year. The fluctuation in entrants is consistent with the economic conditions and subsequent budgetary pressures surrounding the Great Recession. New teacher hiring dropped by over half going into the 2010 school year and remained well below 1,000 each year until 2014 when budgets and hiring began to recover. Turnover patterns among entering teachers followed a similar pattern, reaching a peak of 41% in 2011, declining through the pre-pandemic period, and rising again to 34% in 2022.

Notably, throughout this period, Oregon has made substantial progress in diversifying the entering teacher workforce. From 2012 to 2022, the proportion of teachers of color among new entrants more than *doubled*, increasing from 9% to 21.4%. Despite a stagnation during the recession, progress resumed in 2014, with the diversity of entrants increasing each year, even throughout the pandemic. Compared to states like [Maryland](#), [Washington](#), and [Massachusetts](#), which have also established Grow-Your-Own initiatives and pursued strategies to diversify the workforce, Oregon has done as well as or better at increasing the racial/ethnic diversity of its entering teachers. Additionally, linguistic diversity has increased over time, with entrants having a native language other than English rising from 1.5% in 2015 to 6.7% in 2023.

To understand the experiences of these entering teachers and the factors that might contribute to their turnover, we report the average characteristics of the teachers and the schools that they work in, categorized by experience level, from entrants (0 years) to master teachers (over 20 years). As seen in Table 1, entering teachers are more than twice as likely to identify as people of color and more than three times as likely to report a native language other than English compared to their most experienced colleagues. For the characteristics of the schools teachers

work in, there is a clear gradient across nearly every reported factor, demonstrating that teachers across different experience levels tend to move towards certain types of schools over their careers. As teachers gain experience, the proportion of economically disadvantaged students, English learners, students of color, and students who are suspended or expelled in their school declines. In contrast, the proportion of gifted students and the average academic achievement of students in the school increases as teachers gain experience.

Table 1. Characteristics of Teachers and Their Schools by Experience Level (2008-2023)

	0 Entrant	1-5 Beginning	6-10 Developing	11-15 Mid-career	15-20 Veteran	20+ Master
Teacher characteristics						
% Female	71.6%	72.2%	71.6%	70.5%	69.0%	66.5%
% People of color	14.5%	11.6%	9.3%	8.5%	7.8%	6.3%
% Non-English native language	3.6%	2.3%	1.5%	1.4%	1.4%	1.0%
Age	28	32	37	42	47	54
% Has advanced degree	56.7%	71.2%	80.8%	79.1%	71.2%	59.6%
% Has license for position	97.5%	99.7%	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%
Salary (in 2022 dollars)	\$45,646	\$54,250	\$64,731	\$75,926	\$81,899	\$82,007
% 1-year turnover rate	29.4%	20.0%	15.7%	12.4%	11.4%	16.5%
School characteristics						
% Rural	11.8%	11.7%	10.3%	10.1%	10.6%	11.7%
% Four-day week	7.4%	6.7%	5.9%	5.5%	5.6%	6.4%
% Charter school	6.3%	5.8%	3.9%	2.8%	2.2%	2.2%
Student characteristics at school						
Enrollment	636	662	713	726	718	697
Student-teacher ratio	19.1	19.3	19.8	19.9	19.7	19.6
% Students of color	37.6%	37.1%	36.6%	36.1%	35.4%	34.2%
% Econ. disadvantaged	59.9%	57.6%	55.6%	54.4%	54.6%	53.8%
% Special education	14.6%	14.5%	14.3%	14.2%	14.3%	14.3%
% Ever English learner (EL)	24.1%	23.5%	23.4%	22.9%	22.2%	20.5%
% Gifted	5.8%	6.3%	6.9%	7.1%	7.2%	7.1%
% Ever suspended or expelled	6.2%	6.2%	6.1%	5.8%	5.9%	5.9%
Average achievement (SD)	-0.08	-0.05	-0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02
Staff characteristics at school						
% Had a new principal	25.7%	23.7%	23.0%	22.4%	22.6%	22.3%
% Teacher turnover rate at school	21.0%	17.4%	16.5%	15.9%	15.6%	15.6%
Average years teacher experience	10.9	11.2	12.0	12.6	13.0	13.6
% Novice teachers (<3 years)	23.0%	18.2%	13.8%	13.0%	12.9%	12.8%
% Experienced teachers (>10 years)	48.1%	48.9%	52.8%	58.5%	59.4%	59.9%
% Teachers of color at school	10.1%	9.7%	9.3%	9.1%	8.9%	8.3%
Number of total teachers across years	19,825	106,691	93,981	79,966	63,126	92,512

Note: Data from ODE staff position file combined with information from student data files. Only teachers with 0.5 or above FTE are included. Cells report the average of a specific characteristic for each experience level across 2008-2023. Academic achievement is the average standardized score from ELA and Math state tests, thus capturing only tested grades and subjects in a school. Data for achievement are missing for the 2020 and 2021 school years.

Similar experience-based patterns are observed in terms of the colleagues teachers have. Notably, entering teachers appear to be concentrated in schools with high levels of instability

(more teacher turnover and new principals) and more inexperienced colleagues (measured by number of years teaching). For example, there are twice as many novice teachers (23%) in the schools where entrants teach compared to the schools where master teachers work (13.8%). Thus, entering teachers are disproportionately placed into schools where students may most be in need of additional support but, at the same time, have fewer experienced colleagues who might serve as mentors. This picture is largely true for entrants of all racial/ethnic backgrounds, though it is somewhat more pronounced for Hispanic/Latine teachers. When we examine the factors that most predict turnover among teachers, student achievement, having a new principal, and the percent of novice colleagues—all of which tend to favor more experienced teachers—emerge as strong predictors. Together, these analyses suggest that while Oregon has successfully recruited more diverse teachers into the workforce, the school environments they are placed into may be contributing to their turnover, hampering the progress that can be realized in diversifying the teacher workforce.

Labor Market Outcomes of Leavers

For teachers, particularly novices, who leave Oregon public schools, understanding their career alternatives and labor market outcomes is crucial for developing support policies to retain these teachers and continually diversify the workforce. We analyze these patterns using data from ODE linked to IRS records at the U.S. Census Bureau. This analysis encompasses all teachers and novice teachers (those with 0-1 years of experience) employed between the 2006-07 and 2016-17 school years who subsequently left positions within Oregon public schools.

Among teachers who left during this period, only 62.7% remain employed one year after their departure, and nearly half are unemployed four years later, suggesting that many are moving to unemployment or retirement rather than securing new positions. A higher percentage of novice leavers, 88.5%, remain employed after their departure, though this number decreases to 83.8% four years post-exit. For all teacher leavers, approximately three-fourths of those employed continue working in the education sector, including private schools, public schools in other states, or education-adjacent firms like tutoring providers.

Many teachers face earnings losses in their first year after departure (69% of all leavers and 49% of novice leavers). Over a third experienced a decrease of \$20,000 or more. Earnings changes become more favorable four years after exit: over 48% of all leavers and 54% of novice leavers earn more than their final teaching salary. Fewer experience earnings losses, but it is still a substantial proportion (40% of all leavers and 29% of novice leavers). These results suggest bifurcated labor market outcomes for leavers. Many leave the labor market or accept low-wage, likely part-time, work. Conversely, some improve their earnings, often exceeding the increases they would have achieved with four more years in teaching. This is especially true for employed novice leavers, with over a third experiencing increases of \$15,000 or more.

Together, the findings suggest that most teachers are not being pulled into higher-paying jobs outside of the education sector. After leaving, many are unemployed or remain in education. While some new teachers experience substantial earnings gains, most do not. This suggests that perhaps even modest amounts of money could improve teacher retention. Additionally, addressing other aspects of the job like working conditions could also be important for retaining novice teachers and teachers of color in particular.