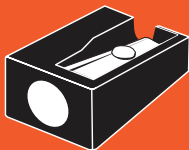
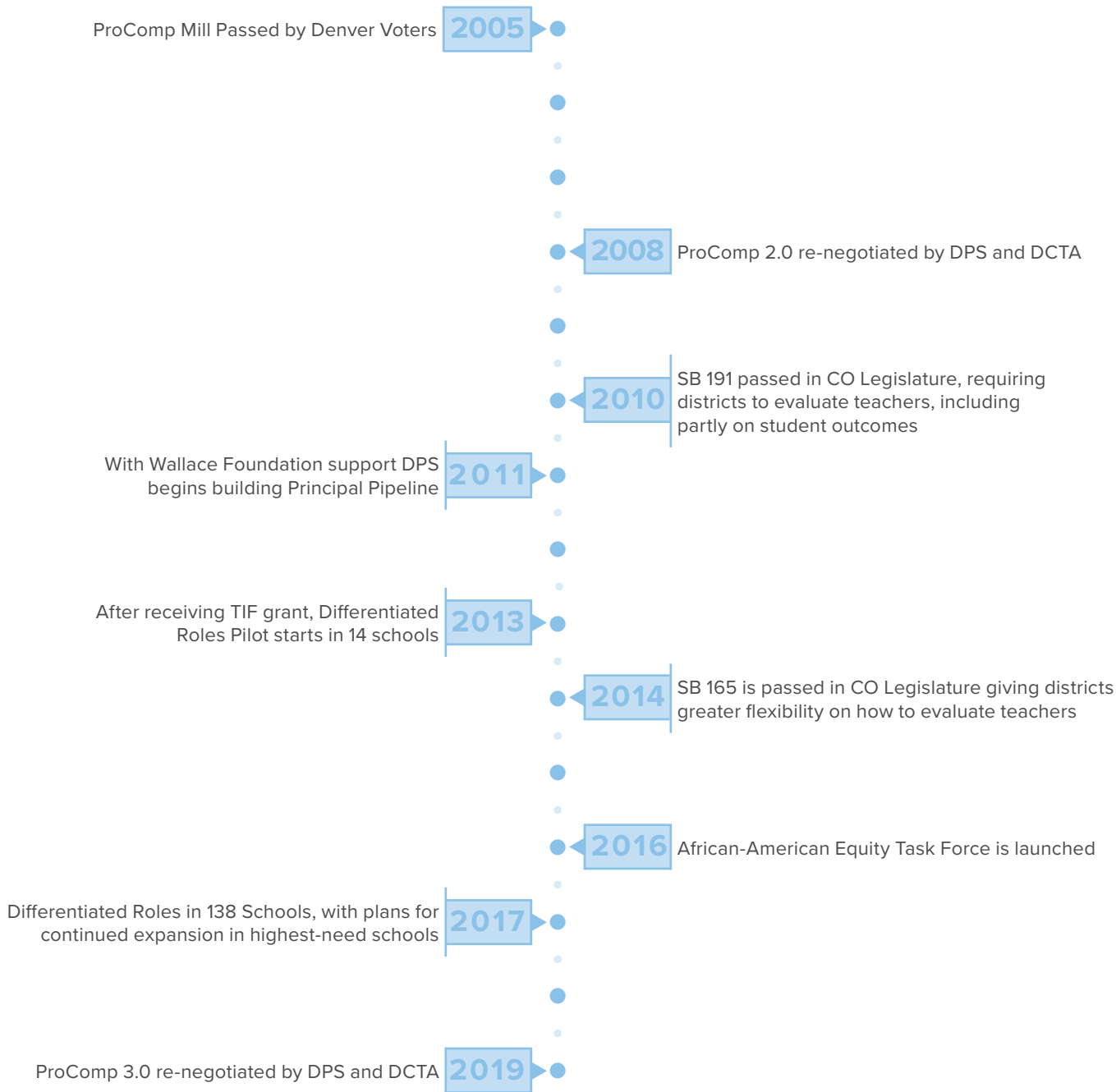


# Denver's Next Journey: INVESTING IN TEACHERS



**A+**  
**Colorado**  
SHARPENING  
PUBLIC  
EDUCATION



## Denver's Next Journey: Investing in Teachers

*This is the fifth of a multi-part series of briefs that analyze some of Denver's big bets across the last decade to improve education for all students. For more content visit [apluscolorado.org/denvers-next-journey](https://apluscolorado.org/denvers-next-journey).*

### The National Stage

Teachers are the single most important in-school factor that impacts students' learning and experience.<sup>1</sup> National research has shown that beyond improving students' learning outcomes in school, a highly effective teacher improves the probability that a student will attend a high-quality college and increases their lifetime earnings.<sup>2</sup>

Recent national polling shows that a majority of the public supports higher pay for teachers, and for teachers to strike to receive better work conditions.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the same polling shows that most teachers don't feel valued by their schools and districts. One of the biggest issues cited by teachers across the country is low pay.<sup>4</sup> 20% of teachers who leave the profession say it is due to low pay.<sup>5</sup> Nationally, 18% of teachers work a second job; in Colorado it is 22%.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, as the director for the National Conference of State Legislatures' Education department writes: "factoring for inflation, the average teacher salary is down 4 percent from 2008-09."<sup>7</sup>

It is in this context of national dialogue and a ballooning local cost of living that Denver teachers went on strike in spring 2019.<sup>8</sup> After teachers returned to the classroom with an average projected raise of 15%, big questions remain. Why is it so difficult to pay and support teachers well, especially when their importance in the classroom is

so clear? Part of the issue relates to stagnant education spending overall. In Colorado, education spending has failed to keep up with inflation since the Great Recession.<sup>9</sup>

It's amidst this context of stagnant wage growth and education spending and teachers feeling undervalued, that Denver Public Schools has implemented several new initiatives over the past decade to try to address teacher pay and supports. Denver is often heralded as a national leader in adopting new policy ideas. It is also clear that to this day many educators and administrators still feel unsupported at their work.<sup>10</sup> From a systematic perspective it is problematic that after a decade of initiatives and new policy ideas we still don't have a great sense of the cost-effectiveness or impact of many of the strategies as a whole.

This brief provides an overview of some of the key ideas that have been implemented over the past decade, and raises questions about how to begin judging whether or not these initiatives have been effective. This brief explores Denver's large investments and supports in the chronological order in which the district pursued them. We look at investments in compensation, evaluation, differentiated roles and pipeline investments, and a focus on recruiting and retaining teachers of color; these themes, while deeply interconnected, have also gained traction in the district in broadly that order.

## History of Denver's Teachers

The past decade in Denver Public Schools (DPS) has seen major changes in school accountability systems, turnaround strategies, and school choice mechanisms. The goal of all of these investments has been to make sure that schools are places where students can succeed. These systems are all for naught if the district cannot better attract, retain, and support the most important school-based input in students' education: educators. Those that spend their days with students have the largest and most direct impact on their education. To improve student outcomes, including reduced absenteeism and suspension rates, and higher graduation rates, the district must ensure that high-quality, culturally competent, and passionate educators are in classrooms.<sup>11</sup>

The past decade in DPS has resulted in changes in compensation structures, teacher evaluations, diversity initiatives, and new support systems. These investments in educators often happened simultaneously, teacher pay structures changing while evaluation models changed, making it difficult to isolate the impact of one intervention from another. As we see throughout, part of the challenge of judging efficacy is disagreement over the objective of an initiative. There are some data that support the conclusion that the district has improved at supporting teachers: such as more teachers and principals of color and improved retention, over time. However, with a strike in the last year, and other polling and survey data, there's also ample evidence that teachers are not feeling supported or satisfied.

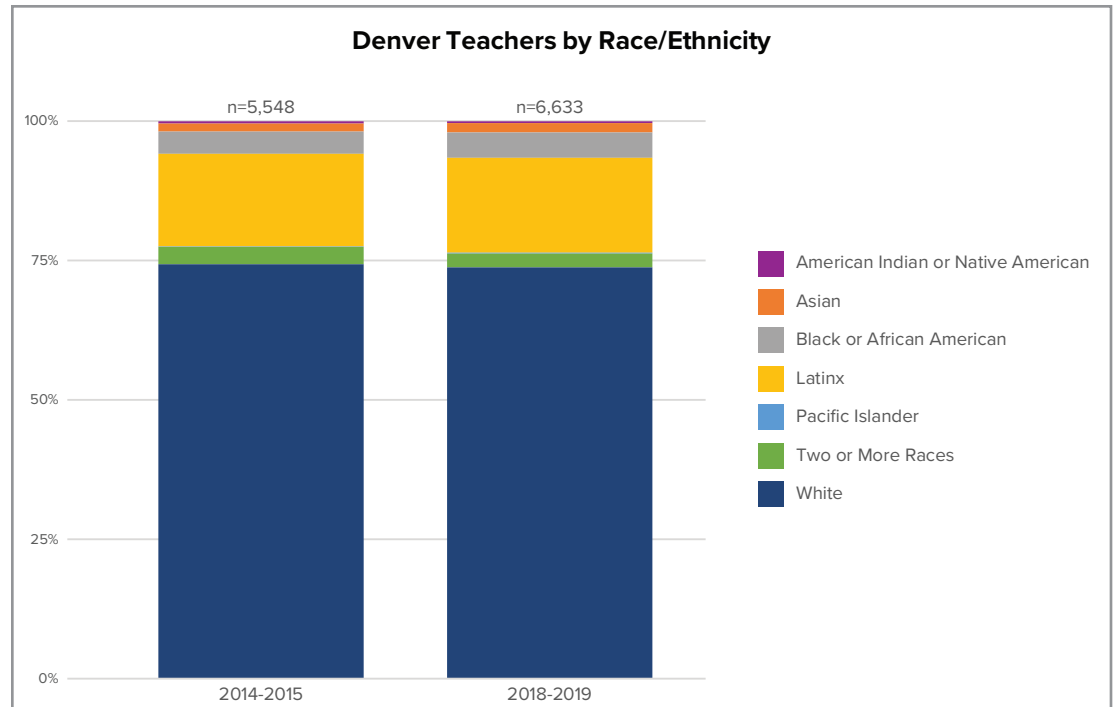
DPS conducts annual teacher perception surveys called CollaboRATE. A+ Colorado requested recent survey data on whether teachers felt supported and engaged. DPS shared certain data points with us from other surveys and internal data, and is cited accordingly when used in this brief. DPS had validity concerns with the 2018-19 results of CollaboRATE due to the teacher strike and did not share full disaggregated results with us. 2016 results, which are the most recently available data that is reported by the district, shows 61% of teachers felt valued at DPS, while 84% of teachers enjoyed their work.<sup>12</sup>

DPS also sees higher than average turnover rates compared to the rest of the state. There are challenges with this data. It only shows whether teachers were retained in schools within the district; it does not show whether teachers were retained within the school in which they spent the last year teaching. We know that stability in the teaching force is important both at the school-level and district-level, but the way in which the data are reported prevents us from identifying which schools are most likely to see their teachers turnover, and prevents us from drawing conclusions about teacher turnover in different school governance models like traditional district-run schools, innovation schools or charter schools.<sup>13</sup>

Regardless, with higher than average turnover rates, which we know are much higher at some schools and lower at others, paired with low salaries, a predominantly white workforce in a school district where 76% of students are students of color, DPS still has important work left to do.

**Just the Facts:**

*Most Denver teachers are white, the second largest group of Denver teachers identify as Latinx or Hispanic and third African-American or black.*



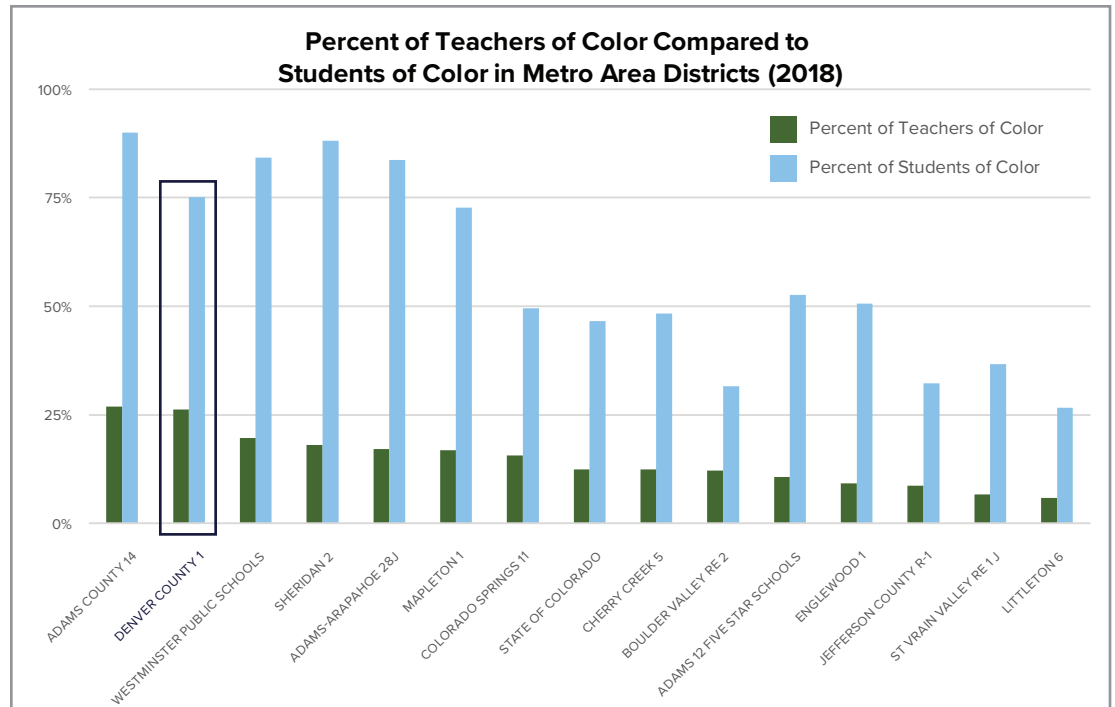
“I believe educators of color, if given the opportunity, will step up and lead. They are sometimes so bogged down in the everyday work of high pressure classrooms combined with being the emotional support to students of color that it’s hard to step out and dream about the “what if” of school leadership, school founding, or program founding. However, we’ve found that once we can give them the time, tools, resources, and access to build something that feels true to them, and is co-created with students, they can unleash their potential and become relentless in working to shift the learning environments for students.”

*Christine DeLeon, Founder and CEO of Moonshot edVentures*



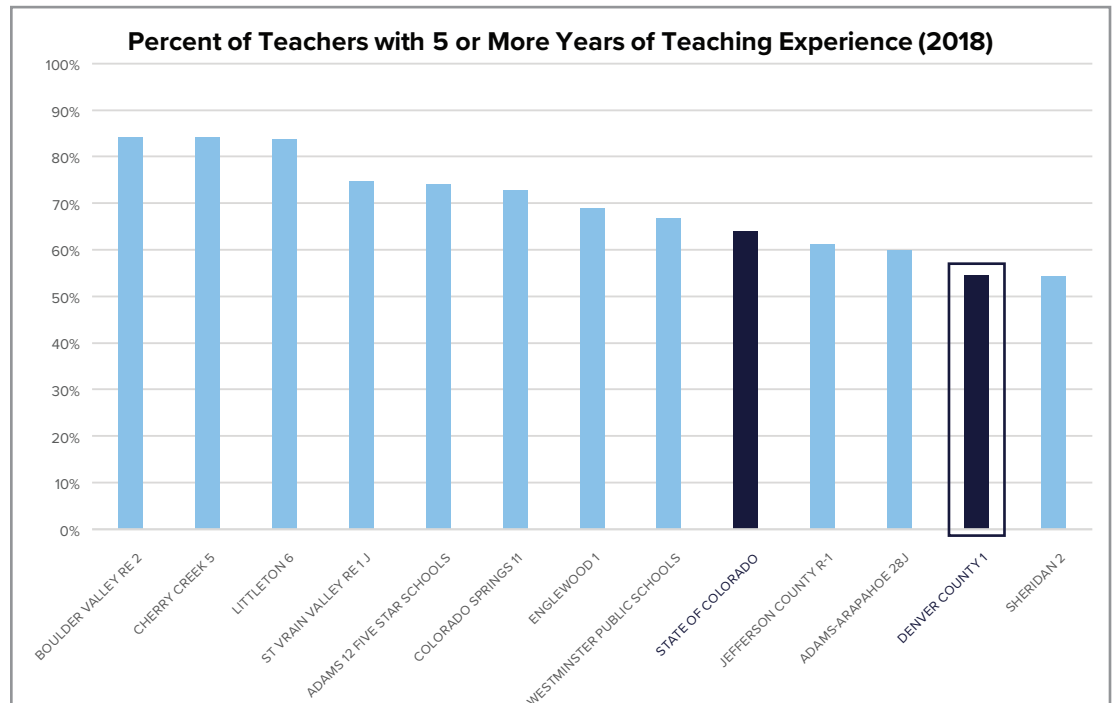
**Just the Facts:**

Among the metro area districts, Denver has the second-highest ratio of teachers of color to students of color. For every 100 students of color in Denver Public Schools there are 35 teachers of color. Boulder Valley RE 2, who serve relatively few students of color overall, has the highest ratio with 38 teachers of color for every 100 students of color.



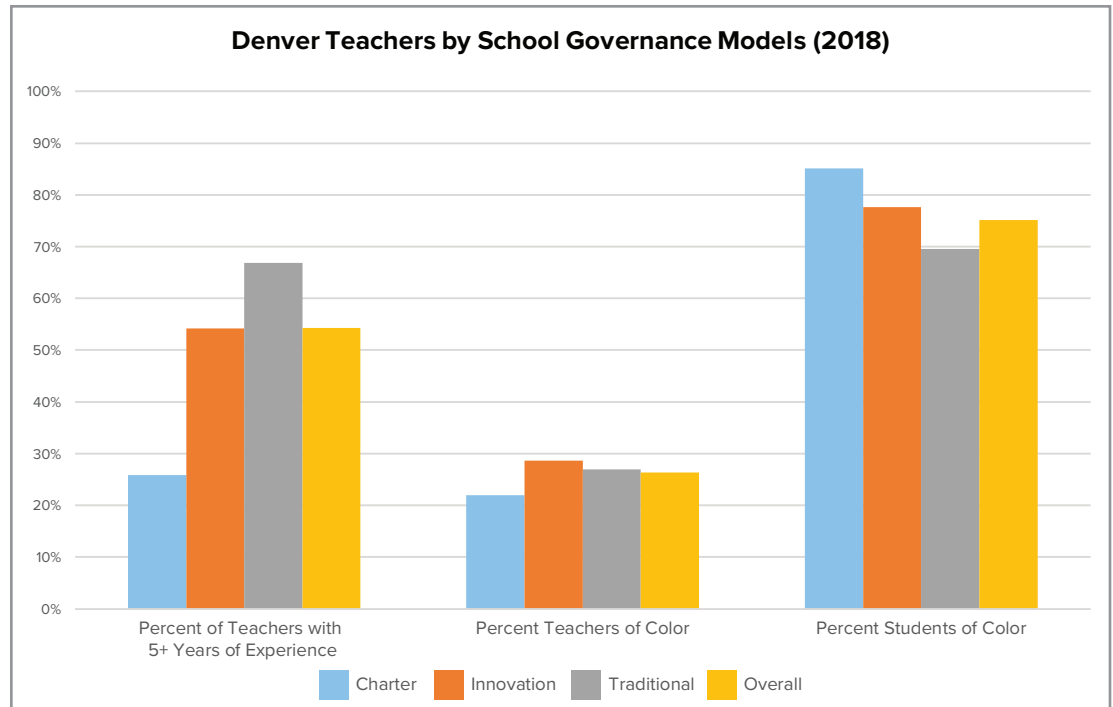
**Just the Facts:**

Denver Public Schools has a smaller percentage of teachers with 5-years or more of experience compared to the average Colorado district.

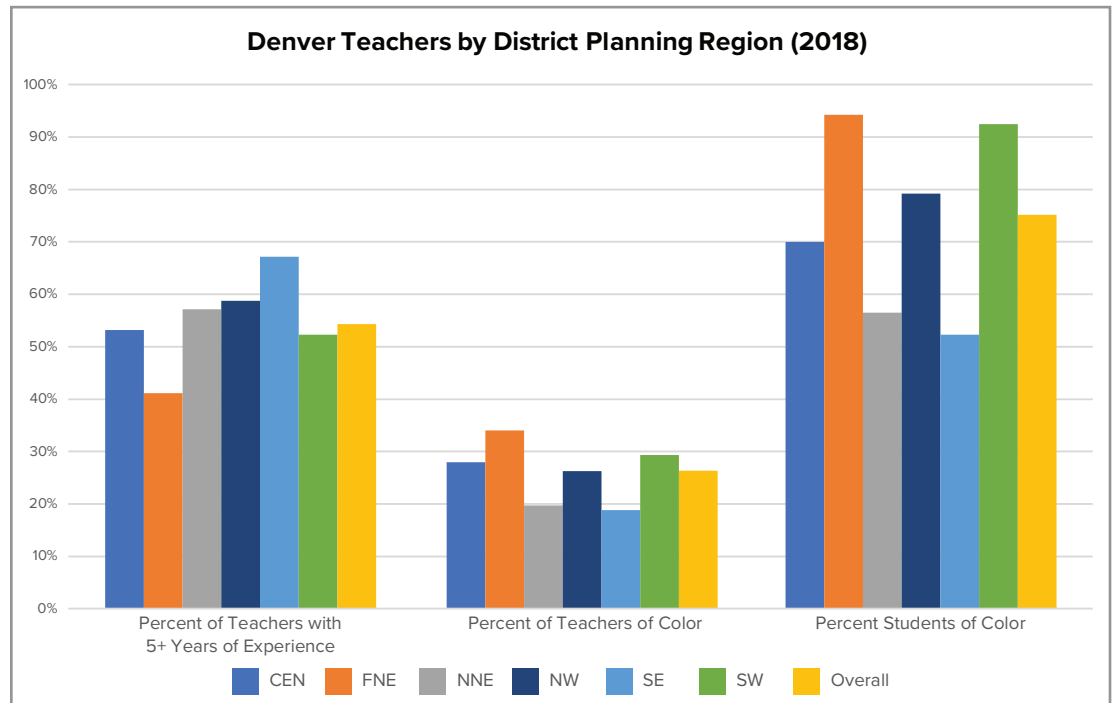


**Just the Facts:**

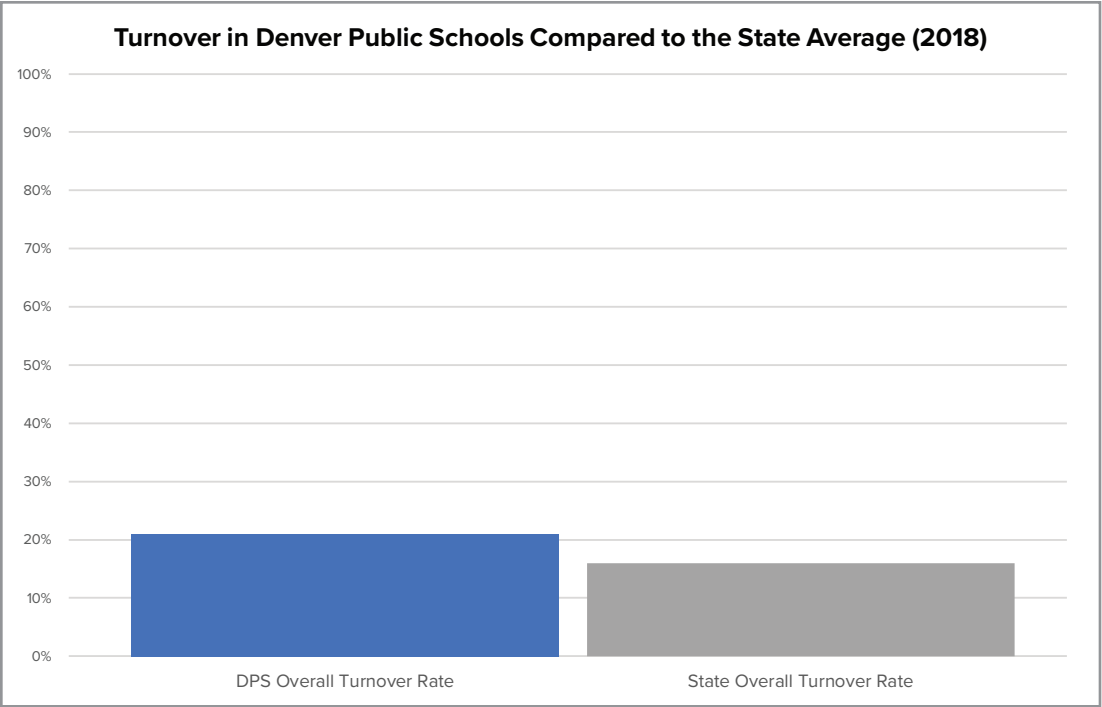
*Traditional schools have the highest percentage of teachers with 5+ years of experience among different school governance types. Innovation schools have the highest percentage of teachers of color among different school types.*

**Just the Facts:**

*The Southeast planning region has the highest percentage of teachers with 5 years or more of teaching experience. The Far Northeast planning region has the highest percentage of teachers of color.<sup>14</sup>*



**Just the Facts:**  
*Denver Public Schools total staff turnover rates are a few percentage points higher than the state average.*





## Denver's Major Initiatives

### Teacher Pay and Compensation

The most widely discussed of Denver's initiatives around educators, both locally and nationally, has been the ProComp teacher compensation model. Most recently the subject of a teacher strike in February 2019, ProComp came about through a mill levy approved by Denver voters in 2005 and has gone through multiple iterations since.<sup>15</sup> The mill levy states that \$25 million will be raised each year, by an additional property tax, adjusted for inflation, exclusively to pay teachers. The ballot language specifies both performance and market pay incentives as possible uses for the mill levy.

#### Incentives Defined

*Market Incentive:* These are pay incentives that try to compensate teachers for the opportunity cost they incur by teaching at a school or in a position where they may make less than if they elected to teach elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> This may be because teachers in hard-to-staff or hard-to-fill positions have greater job opportunities because they have specific skills that are as relevant in the higher-paying private sector as teaching, or in schools that tend to have a more difficult time recruiting and retaining teachers. The goal of these types of incentives is to increase teacher retention by paying closer to the “market price” for those skills or by encouraging teachers to work at specific schools.

*Performance Incentive:* These pay incentives reward teachers for high-quality teaching. These are linked to the estimated value that is added by having a high-quality teacher in the classroom and reward effective teachers. The goal of these types of incentives is to improve the quality of teachers in the system by incentivizing the best teachers to stay in the classroom.

### Pro Comp

The first iteration of ProComp implemented after the 2005 mill levy was passed was based on a pilot program that began in 1999.<sup>17</sup> ProComp was jointly designed by DPS and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) at the time. This first version of ProComp granted “base-salary increases” for student outcomes, like high student growth, or for teacher actions and outcomes, such as professional development through trainings or meeting pre-defined objectives.<sup>18</sup> These base-salary increases were limited in 2008 when teachers were given a cap on the number of years they could continue receiving base-salary increases. This base-salary increase limit was paired with additional incentives for teachers working in the most challenging schools. Teachers received additional performance-based incentives including when their students test scores exceeded district expectations, or when they worked in high growth and top performing schools.<sup>19</sup> These changes became known as ProComp 2.0.

In 2019, ProComp was up for renegotiation. Following an agreement in 2017 between DPS and DCTA that outlined working conditions, supports, and other issues, the two parties returned to the negotiation table to specifically focus on teacher pay.<sup>20</sup> After over a decade of ProComp, teachers felt frustrated with salaries that fell short of allowing them to reside in the district where they taught, for starters. Within a national context of teacher strikes over low pay that never returned to pre-recession levels, February 2019 saw the first teacher strike in Denver in 25 years, lasting three days.

Disagreements between DPS and DCTA at the negotiation table were characterized as both philosophical and financial.<sup>21</sup> While DCTA wanted to greatly reduce market incentives, feeling that the evidence for their efficacy was negligible and that the money would be better spent in base salary raises for teachers.<sup>22</sup> DPS insisted on their importance for retaining teachers and argued for larger market incentives. Ultimately, market incentives were retained and DCTA and DPS agreed that a joint evaluation on the impact of larger incentives for teachers in the districts’ highest priority schools on teacher retention be conducted to help determine whether the incentive remains in future teacher pay agreements.<sup>23</sup> Beyond salary and incentive amounts, the final agreement also covers tuition reimbursement guidelines and stipulates ways that educators covered by the agreement can move up the salary schedule.<sup>24</sup>

ProComp Proposals Pre and Post-Strike<sup>25</sup>

	ProComp 2.0 Practice	Initial DPS Proposal	Initial DCTA Proposal	ProComp 3.0 Agreement
<b>Investment in Teacher Salaries</b>	<b>Total:</b> \$436m <b>Base pay:</b> \$318m <b>One-time bonuses:</b> \$23m	<b>Total:</b> \$460m <b>Base pay:</b> \$338m in 2019-20; +\$3m in 2020-21 COLA: guaranteed 2 years <b>One-time bonuses:</b> \$20m	<b>Total:</b> \$465m <b>Base pay:</b> \$351m <b>One-time bonuses:</b> \$14m	Final allocations pending fall adjustments to 2019-20 school budgets.
		<b>The Disagreement:</b> The difference in overall allocation was ~\$5.5m. Yet to combine both structures as proposed, their differing compensation streams would push the gap wider: if DPS' higher incentives for Title I schools and highest priority incentives were retained, and more was invested in base salaries per the DCTA proposal, the difference was ~\$12m.		
<b>How Teachers get Raises</b>	Annual salary increases determined by cost of living increases, completing professional development, meeting student learning objectives, and/or getting an advanced degree.	Salary increases determined annually by satisfactory evaluations ("steps"), and cost of living increases. There are 30 steps.  Larger salary increases determined by additional education credentials, licensing or certification, or 10 years of service. There are 6 lanes.	Annual salary increases granted each year ("steps") and cost of living increases. There are 20 steps, after which teachers may receive longevity increases each additional 5 years.  Larger salary increases determined by additional education credentials, and professional development units ("lanes"). There are 8 lanes.	Annual salary increases granted for satisfactory evaluations ("approaching" or above). There are 20 steps.  Larger salary increases determined by 10 years of service, advanced licensing, and additional education credentials including professional development units (PDUs). There are 7 lanes.
		<b>The Disagreement:</b> Different numbers of steps and lanes had implications for how often and for how much teachers would get raises. The most robust conversations were around what merited larger salary raises ("lane" movement).		
<b>Bonuses</b>	<b>Up to:</b> \$11,476 <b>On average:</b> \$4,292  A range of bonuses are distributed for teaching in a hard-to-staff position, teaching in a "hard-to-serve" or high priority school, having students with particularly high growth, and/or teaching in a school with particularly high academic growth and improved achievement.	<b>Up to:</b> \$8,250  Teachers may earn up to 3 additional bonuses for \$2,500 each: teaching in a Title I school, teaching in a hard-to-staff position, teaching in a high priority school. Additionally, teachers can earn \$750 for teaching in a "Distinguished school" Tuition reimbursement offered up to \$6,000.	<b>Up to:</b> \$5,250  Teachers may earn \$1,750 for teaching in a Title I school, \$1,000 for teaching in a "Distinguished school" (agreed upon by DCTA and DPS), and \$2,500 for teaching in a hard-to-staff position. Tuition reimbursement offered up to \$8,000.	<b>Up to:</b> \$7,750  Teachers may earn \$750 for teaching in a distinguished school, \$2,000 teaching in a hard-to-staff position, \$2,000 for teaching in a Title I school, \$3,000 for teaching in a high priority school. Tuition reimbursement offered up to \$6,000.
		<b>The Disagreement:</b> There was little alignment around the value of a large incentive focused on Denver's "highest priority schools," schools facing the highest turnover and often serving the highest proportions of low-income students.		

## Who Represents Denver's Educators?

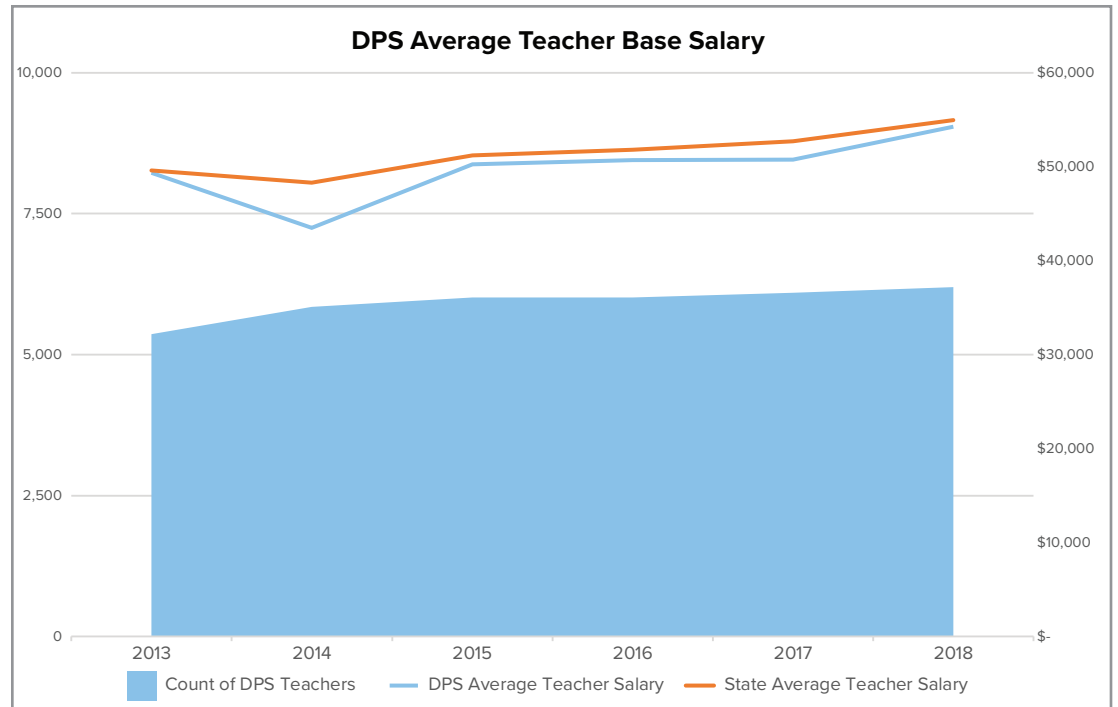
**Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA)** is Denver's teacher union. Their membership is made up of approximately 4,000 teachers and special service providers, although precise membership numbers are not public.<sup>26</sup> DCTA represents its members, however all district teachers, including non-union member teachers, are covered by the collective bargaining agreement. Teachers in innovation schools are covered by parts of the collective bargaining agreement but vote to waive out of certain requirements. For example, the collective bargaining agreement limits the number of hours teachers can work per week at 40 hours; some innovation schools with extended days may waive that requirement.

**Teachers in charter schools** are not represented by DCTA because those schools are not governed by the district.<sup>27</sup> These teachers are therefore *not* covered by ProComp or the collective bargaining agreement. Charter schools set up their own salary schedules and evaluation processes.

**Paraprofessionals** support classroom teachers. Paraprofessionals are not covered by the collective bargaining agreement and are therefore subject to different rules, regulations, and pay guidelines.<sup>28</sup> In Denver, paraprofessionals are represented by the Denver Federation for Paraprofessionals for bargaining purposes.<sup>29</sup> Historically DPS has been unable to meet the demand for paraprofessionals, historically beginning each year with multiple vacancies. Further, the turnover rates for paraprofessionals is high, at 35%.<sup>30</sup>

**Just the Facts:**

Denver's educator force grew by 16% over the past several years from 5,787 total educators (including principals and assistant principals) to 6,692 total educators. During this same time Denver's student population grew by 10%. Teacher and principal salaries have roughly followed state averages over this time period.<sup>31</sup>



Average salary data collected by the state captures base salary, but excludes pay in the form of one-time bonuses from ProComp. The district projects that per the new agreement signed in spring of 2019, returning teachers will see an average 15% raise in their base pay.

“Extreme reform lead to a 20% teacher turnover rate in Denver. Over the last 10 years, we have rewarded our most effective teachers with the most experience by inadvertently encouraging them to go to higher performing schools, while leaving a vacuum in the most highly impacted schools. We believe the new iteration of ProComp will correct injustice to our students.”

*Robert Gould, DCTA Vice President: Acting President of DCTA;  
and Amber Wilson, Senior Team Lead in DPS, and DCTA Secretary*

### **Does ProComp work?**

Initially, Denver's teacher pay system was widely considered a national model for a pay-for-performance system.<sup>32</sup> In part, this was because it was jointly created by the district and the teachers' union, a rare partnership. The current contention over ProComp, locally and at-large, underscores how challenging it is to truly evaluate how effective a program is, especially when it has multiple goals.

Is ProComp's primary goal increasing teacher retention? Improving equitable student outcomes? Improving teacher quality by incentivizing professional development? Or is it to pay teachers a professional and competitive wage? ProComp has been evaluated, several times, however the many different goals *and* inconclusive or small effect sizes lead to, at-best, a mixed bag of results by which to judge ProComp's effectiveness. Some research, for example, points to increased teacher retention and teacher effectiveness due to ProComp, however, these results vary by school.<sup>33,34</sup> While we have some evidence to help begin to judge ProComp, the key question is, what are the district's priorities for a teacher compensation system? Those priorities will determine whether or not ProComp is the best tool for the job.

## Teacher Evaluation

Along with teacher pay, teacher evaluation has been one of the most high-profile initiatives around Denver's educators over the past decade. At the highest level, the goal of teacher evaluations is to increase teacher effectiveness. In theory, this is accomplished through frequent feedback loops to teachers that provide opportunities for reflection and clear examples of what quality teaching looks like.<sup>35</sup> TNTP published *Perspectives of Irreplaceable Teachers: What America's Best Teachers Think About Teaching*.<sup>36</sup> The report is a qualitative survey of teachers across the country. While the number of respondents is limited, the survey is a useful way of seeing, at a high-level, how teachers think about teaching in the United States. Notably, advice from or observation of their colleagues were cited as two of the top three most helpful ways for teachers to improve the quality of their teaching.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, insufficient time planning or collaborating with teachers was one of the biggest barriers to effective teaching cited by those surveyed.<sup>38</sup> All of this, nationally, suggests that an evaluation system based in conversation with colleagues could be a key way to better support teachers.

In Colorado, Senate Bill 191 (SB 191) was passed during the 2010 legislative session. The bill provided the framework for teacher evaluation systems in Colorado, requiring that districts create their own evaluation system or follow the state's evaluation system. If districts decided to make their own evaluation system there were a series of guidelines that had to be adhered to, in order to ensure that teacher evaluations were informed by data and were supportive for educators.<sup>39</sup> SB 191 also created mutual consent, which stipulated that teachers and school principals both had to agree to their school placements, as opposed to the practice of forced placements by a district central office into a school.<sup>40</sup>

SB 191 was passed after a contentious floor debate, including concerns over expanded testing and whether adequate funding would be provided to effectively implement all of the requirements in the bill.<sup>41</sup> SB 191 remains contentious, with some still wanting a smaller portion of a teacher's score to be tied to student academic growth (currently this makes up 50% of a teacher's score per SB 191), or better alignment to supports.<sup>42</sup>

Statewide, some are further dissatisfied because the rating system seems to do a poor job at differentiating which teachers are truly doing exceptional work in classrooms.<sup>43</sup> According to the most recent data, 94% of Colorado's educators were rated effective.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps part of the issue is that there remains a staggering lack of consistent evidence in academia that decidedly shows whether or not student scores should be tied to teacher evaluations.<sup>45</sup> This is another area, akin to ProComp, where consensus on the goal of teacher evaluations is a key first step to evaluating the efficacy of SB 191 at meeting those objectives. These broader themes, balancing evaluation with support, appear in DPS' own evaluation system.



## Who does SB 191 and LEAP apply to?

SB 191 applies to all Colorado educators. This includes special service professionals (SSPs\*), school nurses, psychologists, paraprofessionals, teachers and principals.<sup>46</sup> SSPs are evaluated on slightly different criteria which are aligned to their role and professional quality standards. Districts have flexibility in deciding which measures to use and how to weigh these measures when accounting for student outcomes based on an SSPs role.<sup>47</sup> This outcomes component still comprises 50% of an SSPs evaluation.<sup>48</sup>

Charter schools may request waivers to SB 191, as is the case with some other state statutes. Charter schools that waive SB 191 must still outline to the state in their contracts and applications how they will evaluate their educators, however it does not have to be in the same way that is stipulated by the State Evaluation Model.<sup>49</sup>

LEAP only applies to educators in Denver's district-run schools, this includes innovation schools but does not include charter schools. SB 191 still applies to charter schools in Denver.

*\*School service providers (SSPs) support teachers and students in areas that involve student physical, emotional, and social health and well-being. They include but are not limited to audiologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school counselors, school nurses, school orientation and mobility specialists, school psychologists, school social workers and speech and language pathologists.*

DPS' teacher evaluation system is called Leading Effective Academic Practice (LEAP). It first began with a pilot in 16 schools in 2011. Over time it has expanded district-wide and has evolved since its inception as new legislation (SB 14-165) gave local districts more flexibility over how much student growth is weighed in teacher evaluations.<sup>50</sup>

At least 50% of a teacher's score comes from student growth, as mandated by SB 191. The student growth portion of the score is a combination of the school's overall SPF rating in addition to students' learning objectives and student academic growth depending on data availability. The remainder of a teacher's score comes from student perception surveys (10%), classroom observations (30%) and other observational data from outside of the classroom—a broad category referred to as “professionalism” which makes up the final 10% of a teacher's score.<sup>51</sup>

In earlier iterations of ProComp teachers received small base-building bonuses of \$400 for an “approaching” rating or above on LEAP, or if their students met defined Student Learning Objectives.<sup>52</sup> With the 2019 version of ProComp, receiving a rating of “approaching” or above on LEAP scores leads to a base-salary increase by moving up a “step”.<sup>53</sup> However, LEAP isn't only associated with incentives and supports for improvement. Teachers with multiple poor LEAP ratings may be put on probationary status which can ultimately lead to dismissal. LEAP ratings and data are used to inform decisions about teacher contract renewals.<sup>54</sup> The consequences of LEAP ratings makes an accurate and just LEAP rating system a priority.

## Does LEAP tell us what we need to know?

LEAP is one of the ways the district makes sense of their workforce and their effectiveness. However, LEAP is also meant as a key way for teachers to be able to improve their practice through feedback. In order to evaluate LEAP's effectiveness, data on both of these goals is needed.

One of LEAP's goals is to facilitate teacher improvement. We know that of all teachers that receive a LEAP rating, 77% remain at the rating the subsequent year, while 15% receive a higher rating.<sup>55</sup> The district is also encouraged that teachers with high LEAP ratings are retained at higher rates than teachers with low LEAP ratings. In the district's annual Coaching and Leadership survey in 2018, as shown in a board document, 67% of surveyed teachers in DPS run-schools (out of a survey that included over 2,000, or 54% of all teachers) perceived LEAP positively.<sup>56</sup> Respondents of the survey were similar to the overall teaching population save for novice teachers who were overrepresented in the survey.<sup>57</sup> Yet it remains difficult

to assess how LEAP is perceived given the full survey is not made public.

LEAP appears to be providing teachers with more differentiated feedback and ratings than the statewide average, with 87% of DPS teachers receiving an effective rating or higher in LEAP. However, there is still the question whether or not these teachers who are rated effective still receive the support they need to improve their practice. As many teachers have cited feeling unsupported, it's critical that an evaluation system rooted in the notion of continuous improvement has the capacity to identify and connect educators in need with the best support possible. This suggests that there is still room for improvement in LEAP. In particular, it's important to be able to identify whether LEAP is actually leading to improved teaching and having the desired outcome of improving student learning. One of the programs that DPS has implemented to try and connect evaluations with supports has been Teacher Leadership and Collaboration (TLC).

"If a teacher is only receiving feedback in the form of an evaluation, then that's not helping provide them with constructive feedback and an environment where they feel like they can be creative, try new things in pursuit of student achievement, and reflect and refine their practice. I think that there are negative consequences of teacher ratings when teachers and coaches/evaluators are at odds or disagreement. I think that when ratings are an accurate representation of a teacher and student outcomes then they're incredibly helpful. We all want the best educators in front of students so when LEAP is used to help coach and develop the best teachers then it's in service of providing students with the best teachers."

*Carly, Senior Team Lead in Science in Denver Public Schools*

## Supports and Advancement

### **Educator Pipelines and Differentiated Roles**

Compensation (including benefits) is one component of what makes a given field attractive. Another critical component is the opportunities for advancement and professional development (PD) that are made available to an employee.<sup>58</sup> DPS has implemented a few structures for advancement and PD, such as Teacher Leadership and Collaboration (TLC). The aim of any such program must ultimately be to increase retention of quality teachers, and create a more effective educator force. Teacher Leadership and Collaboration, formerly referred to as Differentiated Roles, is one structure that DPS has created with the goal of keeping the most talented teachers in classrooms, while still providing leadership roles and opportunities. Another core goal of TLC has, similar to other investments around evaluation, has been to improve the quality and frequency of coaching for all teachers, and has distributed some of that burden from school administrators.

One criticism raised against teacher pipelines is that often, the only pathway for advancement for talented teachers, is into administrative roles, simultaneously taking talented teachers out of classrooms and placing them into a new position that may not be aligned with their interests and skills. TLC aims to keep effective teachers in classrooms, while still giving teachers the opportunity to coach and support other teachers on their instruction as a “Team Lead.”<sup>59</sup> However, an additional responsibility bestowed upon team leads is to also evaluate teachers. These dual

responsibilities are one of the most unique components of TLC.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, team leads are paid a stipend for their time.<sup>61</sup> DPS’ attempt to address some of the biggest barriers named by teachers of insufficient planning time, and making an evaluative role into one still needs an external evaluation, especially as it expands to the rest of the district and continues to be a primary district strategy to address teacher effectiveness and support.

The best insight we have into the effectiveness of TLC is through CollaboRATE, a survey administered by DPS that gauges how teachers feel about school leaders. While the whole survey isn’t public, 86% of teachers say that working with team leads helped improve their teaching practice.<sup>62</sup> While TLC is well-perceived according to survey results, it is also an incredibly expensive program.<sup>63</sup> The 2018-2019 school year had 1,210 teacher leaders across DPS in one of five distinct roles.<sup>64</sup> Many of these educators receive stipends, but no release time to fulfill their responsibilities. 492 of these teachers received release time, and were not working full time in the classroom, so DPS has to hire additional educators to cover for this out-of-classroom time.<sup>65</sup> This cost may well be worth it if the learning gains are significant. According to DPS’ analysis, teachers supported by a Team Lead demonstrate higher growth than teachers who are not supported by a team lead.<sup>66</sup> However, a thorough cost-benefit analysis of TLC is a key next step, as DPS finds the best way to support teachers and improve student outcomes.

### Principal Pipelines

TLC is a key strategy explored by the district to help support teachers. Principal pipelines, another initiative started with grant support, began in 2011 as a way to support the professional development of principals.<sup>67</sup> As a new RAND study finds, principal pipelines are a cost-effective and easily scalable solution to improving student outcomes.<sup>68</sup> Principal pipelines have statistically significant positive effects on English Language Arts and Math achievement for students, as well as principal retention.<sup>69</sup>

DPS built out its principal pipeline with funding support from the Wallace Foundation. This allowed DPS to develop 176 aspiring and high-potential leaders for school leadership roles.<sup>70</sup> While RAND's analysis finds that principal pipelines improve student achievement, DPS specifically cites an increase in retention, with 70% of pipeline participants still at DPS.<sup>71</sup> Between these two components, principal pipelines and TLC, DPS has invested a significant amount of resources in teacher and principal professional development and training. Given the size of these investments, evaluation and public survey data on how teachers and principals feel about these programs and opportunities for improvement is a critical next step.

### Professional Development

Integral to the ProComp's "pay for performance" theory of action is the notion that more experienced teachers will lead to better student outcomes and therefore deserve higher compensation. Professional development is another area where the research is mixed; it tends to be costly, and the most effective professional development tends to focus on deep curricular learning and lesson-planning.<sup>72</sup> One way that ProComp incentivizes professional development is by offering tuition reimbursements. Teachers can also move up "lanes" on the pay schedule by gaining credits. These credits can be through college or graduate coursework or through professional development units (PDUs). PDUs are akin to an independent study and can be provided either by the district or by third-parties.<sup>73</sup> The criteria for PDUs are described in the ProComp agreement negotiated between DPS and DCTA.

"As a sixth-year STL, distributive leadership has deeply influenced me to stay in the profession, both in terms of being able to develop as a leader while staying in the classroom—public education's biggest challenge—and in terms of the financial benefit, which, without the STL role, is something I could only have experienced by becoming an administrator."

*Alison, English and Concurrent Enrollment educator and Senior Team Lead over English, DPS*

### Diversity and Retention

The value of having teachers of color, in particular for students of color, has been well-documented; teachers of color increase the likelihood that students will graduate high school, improve test scores and attendance, and reduce suspension rates.<sup>74</sup> As a district that publicly states addressing equity gaps is a high priority, attracting, retaining, and supporting teachers and leaders of color needs to be a key strategy. Yet this has been a relatively recent articulated focus of the district. According to a memo submitted to the DPS Board of Education, the district is hiring teachers of color at higher rates than white teachers, however, there are still more white applicants than applicants of color.<sup>75</sup> As of April 2018, 27% of teachers, 24% of team leads, and 39% of principals were non-white.<sup>76</sup> This suggests that DPS needs to make greater efforts in attracting applicants of color, in particular, because the retention rates for teachers of color is already fairly high, at 86%.<sup>77</sup>

DPS has undertaken a number of initiatives focused on diversifying the teaching workforce. Grow-your-own programs are longer time-horizon bets. EdConnect, where DPS supports current students on a career pathway toward teaching, enrolled 170 students in 2018, 97% of whom were students of color.<sup>78</sup> DPS is also supporting paraprofessionals to become teachers through both traditional and alternative licensure pathways by providing tuition reimbursement.<sup>79</sup>

One initiative that focused on teacher diversity and retention, co-sponsored by DPS, the Denver Mayor's office, and local foundations, was the Make Your Mark Campaign. Its goal was to prioritize the recruitment and retention of diverse educators.<sup>80</sup> Understanding the ways in which this current effort has been more or less successful in improving diversity and

retention in Denver is key. The need to better support educators of color is clear; the ability of the district, city, and civic sector to do so is less so.

Another central part of the issue is that across the country education systems are supporting fewer students of color to graduate high school and college, compared to white students.<sup>81</sup> When you look at only college graduates, graduates across races go into teaching at similar rates. However, a much smaller percentage of black and Latinx students attend and complete college, narrowing the supply of potential teachers early on.

Beyond teacher pipeline issues and hiring practices, teachers of color within the district experience other distinct challenges. These broadly fall under the bucket of institutional racism, and impact students, families, and educators alike. Dr. Sharon Bailey's seminal report on the experiences of African-American educators in DPS, showed that many black educators feel isolated, unrepresented, and unfairly evaluated.<sup>82</sup> This includes lack of opportunities for advancement, and representation in leadership positions. In response to the report, DPS launched the African-American Equity Task Force which is tasked with creating recommendations to close the opportunity gap.<sup>83</sup> Fortunately, there are concrete steps the district can make to improve attracting, retaining, and supporting teachers of color. The report, for starters, suggests that recruitment teams themselves need to be more diverse. It also suggests increasing the district's investment in culturally responsive education. In addition, this report has shown there is a need to better understand how investments and supports explored in this report impact teachers; it is imperative that the district specifically learn how these initiatives have been perceived by and impact teachers color in teachers.

## Looking to the Past, Present, and Future

The past decade has seen bold investments in educator supports around compensation, evaluation, and pipelines. Denver was on the forefront of many of these strategies, and has often been held up as a national model. Yet, locally these investments have not gone over as smoothly—epitomized most recently by a teacher strike. With an understanding of some of the myriad initiatives DPS has implemented, we are left with many critical questions, chief amongst those: what's worked, and what policies and practices are missing and preventing teachers from being supported?

Specifically, as Denver refines and defines its strategies to support teachers, it is imperative to understand the district's past investments. Compensation, evaluation, professional development and other supports are often talked about discretely. Yet they are inherently connected, and understanding how these systems interact in both intended and unintended ways is critical. As Denver enters its next journey, it must grapple with what has and has not worked in support of teachers, and how that has translated into support for students.

## Essential Questions for Denver's Next Journey

- Which of DPS' many initiatives around educators have actually worked to improve teacher effectiveness? How can DPS ensure that teachers are feeling supported?
- What has been the impact of different investments by district and the city on teachers and other staff of color? How will the district, city, and community come together to attract, support, and retain a diverse and qualified teaching force that reflects its students?
- How will the district ensure that it has buy-in from its educators to bring along educators as it continues to implement new programs and changes? How will the district ensure that it is responsive to and actively soliciting educator voice as it implements further changes?
- How will the district support human capital development, in particular to support teacher's impact on eliminating disparities between groups of students in terms of academic outcomes and learning experiences?
- What are the goals and objectives for the many different programs DPS has implemented over the past decade targeted at educators? How will the district evaluate, moving forward, whether its goals are being met?



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### **ABOUT A+ COLORADO**

The mission of A+ Colorado is to sharpen public education by building public will and advocating for the changes necessary to dramatically increase student achievement in schools and districts in Colorado. We are an independent, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) organization working to bring the power of data and research to challenge ourselves, educators and policymakers to rethink public education.