

**POLICY BRIEF**

# **Human Capital in Michigan's Partnership Schools and Other Low-Performing Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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November 2021

**EPIC**

**Education Policy  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to acknowledge Samantha Cullum and Meg Turner for their technical and research support for this brief. We are also indebted to our colleagues at the Michigan Department of Education, the Center for Educational Performance and Information, and Michigan Data Hubs for their valuable partnership in this research, in particular Ann Green, Kate Boswell Gallagher, Leah Breen, Dan LaDue, William Pearson, Gloria Chapman, Tom Howell, Michael McGoarty, Roderick Bernosky, Heather Handley, Zohre Salehezadeh, and Don Dailey. Finally, we thank Michelle Huhn for her work in formatting the text and graphics and Bridgette Redman for her copy-editing.

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By: Aliyah McIlwain and Erica Harbatkin

## INTRODUCTION

Schools and districts across the country are reporting substantial COVID-19-induced teacher shortages, leading to unfilled teaching positions in the 2021-22 academic year.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere are concerns about teacher shortages more salient than in the nation's lowest performing schools and districts, which have historically grappled with challenges recruiting and retaining effective teachers.<sup>2</sup> In particular, teacher shortages are a critical concern for turnaround schools and districts that were working to improve operations and student performance prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. A stable, highly effective teacher workforce is an essential ingredient to successful school turnaround, and high rates of teacher turnover can detract from improvement efforts by creating school-level instability, diminishing the efficacy of curricular and professional development programs, weakening educator collaboration, reducing the effectiveness of the school's teacher workforce, undermining curricular continuity, and ultimately suppressing the effects of turnaround.<sup>3</sup>

In Michigan, the state's lowest performing schools and districts are supported under the Partnership Model of School and District Turnaround. Michigan began implementing the Partnership Model in its first cohort of schools in 2017-18 and began serving a second cohort in 2018-19. In total, 123 schools across 35 districts have been identified for Partnership. Over time, 25 schools and nine districts have exited Partnership for various reasons, leaving 98 schools and 26 districts operating under Partnership Agreements. These educational entities—designated Partnership schools and districts—have higher rates of poverty than others throughout the state and are

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home to a disproportionate share of the state’s historically underrepresented students.<sup>4</sup> Prior to the pandemic, Partnership schools and districts were making some achievement gains, and Partnership leaders and educators identified their focus on human capital as a key factor in the intervention’s successes.<sup>5</sup>

This policy brief examines teacher turnover and recruitment in Michigan’s Partnership schools and districts and other low-performing schools in the state during the COVID-19 pandemic. We show that:

1. Partnership and other low-performing schools consistently experience higher turnover than the rest of the state.
2. School and district turnover in Partnership and other low-performing schools dipped after the 2019-20 school year.
3. Although school and district turnover decreased, the share of teachers in Partnership schools leaving Michigan public education was higher than pre-reform years—though these increases began prior to the pandemic.
4. Black and early career teachers—especially those in Partnership and other low-performing schools—are leaving the profession at a higher rate than their peers.
5. More than 8 in 10 teachers in Partnership districts reported plans to stay in their schools in the 2021-22 school year—an increase from the prior school year.
6. As in pre-pandemic years, factors related to school culture, climate, and leadership were important for recruitment and retention, while workload and pay contributed to teacher decisions to leave.
7. Teacher reports of job satisfaction in Partnership districts climbed during the 2020-21 school year as teachers reported feeling supported by their administrations.

## SAMPLE AND DATA

Table 1 shows the data sources, outcomes of interest, relevant dates of data collection, sample size of teachers or principals, and the subgroup of Michigan educators for which we have each measure.

As we show in Table 1, we draw from administrative data on all teachers in Michigan provided by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and the Center for Education Performance and Information (CEPI) as well as data from Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) surveys of teachers and principals in Partnership districts. In the administrative data, we examine teacher exits over time separately for teachers in Partnership schools, teachers in schools that were similarly low performing in each’s cohort’s identification year,<sup>6</sup> and all other schools in the state. Throughout this brief, we characterize the similarly low-performing schools as “other low performing” and we characterize non-low-performing schools (i.e., those that are not Partnership schools or in the other low-performing group) as “all other schools.” Because we administered surveys to educators in Partnership and non-Partnership schools in Partnership districts, our survey analyses examine responses across all educators in Partnership districts and compare teachers in Partnership and non-Partnership schools within those districts.

TABLE 1. Data Sources					
Data	Outcomes of Interest	Source	Year	Sample Size	Subgroups
Educator administrative records	Mobility out of school and district  Exit from teaching profession	Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI)	2013-14 through fall 2020	Full panel: 626,238 teacher-year observations	Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 treatment schools, schools that were low performing in the Cohort 1 and 2 identification years, all other schools in the state
Teacher surveys	Perceptions and experiences in Partnership schools and districts	EPIC-developed survey	Fall 2018  Fall 2019  Spring 2021	Fall 2018: 2,718 participants (38.3% response rate)  Fall 2019: 3,224 participants (49.2% response rate)  Spring 2021: 2,342 participants (38.5% response rate)	Partnership schools and non-Partnership schools in Partnership districts
Principal surveys	Perceptions and experiences in Partnership schools and districts	EPIC-developed survey	Fall 2018  Fall 2019  Spring 2021	Fall 2018: 81 participants (28.6% response rate)  Fall 2019: 88 participants (37.8% response rate)  Spring 2021: 116 participants (46.6% response rate)	Partnership schools and non-Partnership schools in Partnership districts

## METHODS

### Administrative Data

We conduct descriptive analyses examining teacher mobility outcomes—exiting the school, district, and profession, respectively—in the time period from 2013-14 through 2019-20 (i.e., before and after Partnership implementation). To do so, we compare teacher mobility in Partnership schools, other low-performing schools, and all other schools in the state.

Teachers can take a number of different pathways out of their positions—they can leave their school, their district, or Michigan public schools. These pathways are necessarily nested within one another; those who leave their districts also leave their schools, and those who leave Michigan public education also leave their districts and schools.<sup>7</sup> Each of the possible pathways out has relevance to school improvement efforts under the Partnership Model. **Exiting a school** can disrupt ongoing improvement efforts because an unstable teacher workforce can hinder progress, collaboration, and student learning. **Exiting a district** is relevant to the Partnership Model in particular because Partnership is a district-level intervention. To the extent that Partnership improves district-level systems and processes, it may have the effect of retaining more talent within the district as teachers seek out a positive working environment. **Exiting Michigan public schools** can reduce overall teacher supply, already a challenge for high-needs schools like those in Partnership.

The pandemic may influence these three exit pathways differently. For example, teachers may be less inclined to move to a new school or district during a pandemic, but more inclined to leave teaching entirely due to health concerns. On the other hand, teachers may be more likely to move schools or districts in pursuit of more favorable teaching conditions during a pandemic, or less likely to exit teaching entirely if the pandemic amplified financial stressors.

There have been concerns that retirement-eligible teachers, more experienced teachers, female teachers, and teachers of color may have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and therefore been more likely to exit teaching.<sup>8</sup> Thus, we look separately at exit rates for teachers based on experience level, retirement eligibility,<sup>9</sup> gender, and race. Race and ethnicity subgroups include White and Black.<sup>10</sup> Gender subgroups are female and male. Experience level subgroups include 0-3 years, 4-15 years, and 16 or more years of teaching experience.<sup>11</sup> Because we do not find evidence of differential exits by retirement eligibility or gender, we focus in this brief on differences by race and experience level. To examine these patterns, we compare differences in rates of exit from the profession from the identification year for a given cohort to the 2018-19 and 2019-20 years for Partnership, other low-performing schools, and all other schools by race and experience level.

### Survey Data

We focus survey analyses for this brief on a subset of questions about teachers' intended employment plans, factors contributing to those plans, job satisfaction, and factors that principals believe influenced recruitment and hiring. Table 2 provides details about each survey item and the analyses of each item.<sup>12</sup>

**TABLE 2. Summary of Survey Items and Analyses**

Survey Question	Response Options	Analysis
<b>Which of the following best describes your plan for next school year?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue teaching in this school <sup>a</sup></li> <li>Serve in a different position next year, but in this same school <sup>a</sup></li> <li>Continue teaching in my district, but in a different school</li> <li>Leave this district next year to work in a different district or charter network</li> <li>Leave next year to pursue a job not in education <sup>b</sup></li> <li>Retire <sup>b</sup></li> </ul>	Share of teachers in Partnership and non-Partnership schools in Partnership districts in 2020-21 reporting plans to stay in their school, leave their school, leave their district, or leave the profession
<b>To what extent does each of the following factor into your plans [for next year]</b>  <i>Scale: Not a factor, minor, moderate, major, a primary factor</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership</li> <li>Culture and climate among teachers and staff</li> <li>Workload</li> <li>Commute</li> <li>Pay</li> <li>The types of students with whom I work</li> <li>My school or district's accountability designation</li> <li>The adequacy of the COVID-19-related safety precautions being implemented in my school</li> <li>The way the school or district administration has treated teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic</li> <li>The impact of COVID-19 on my or my family's health or well-being</li> </ul>	Share of teachers in Partnership and non-Partnership schools in Partnership districts in 2020-21 indicating that each factor was a major or primary factor in their decision
<b>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</b>  <i>Scale: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither, agree, strongly agree</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am satisfied with my job</li> <li>I am satisfied with my salary</li> <li>I feel supported by my school and district administration during the COVID-19 pandemic</li> </ul>	Share of teachers in Partnership and non-Partnership schools in Partnership districts indicating they agreed or strongly agreed with each statement, in each of three years from 2018-19, 2019-20, and 2020-21.
<b>To what extent do the following factors affect your ability to recruit and hire teachers in your school?</b>  <i>Scale: Very negatively impacts, somewhat negatively, does not, somewhat positively, very positively impacts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher salaries</li> <li>Ability to offer professional development/support</li> <li>School climate and culture</li> <li>Student academic performance</li> <li>Student discipline</li> <li>Student attendance</li> <li>Student family background</li> <li>Socioeconomic status of the community</li> <li>School or district geographic location</li> <li>School or district Partnership status</li> <li>Hiring competition from nearby districts</li> <li>Hiring competition from nearby PSA/charter</li> <li>Health concerns related to COVID-19</li> </ul>	Mean teacher response in Partnership and non-Partnership schools in Partnership districts in 2020-21 on five-point scale where 1 indicates very negative impact and 5 very positive impact

<sup>a</sup> In the analysis shown, we combined these two items into "Same school" for simplification purposes.

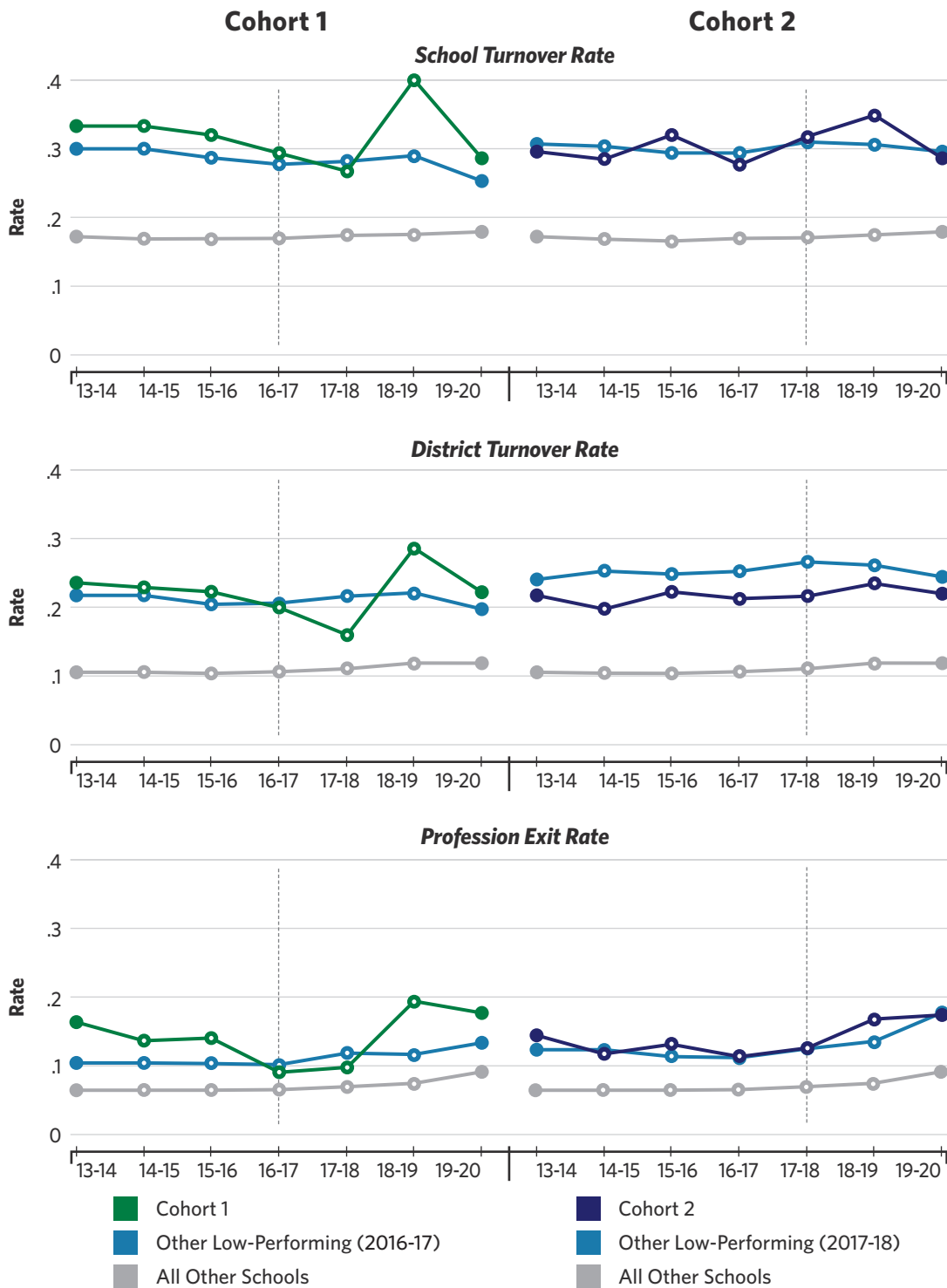
<sup>b</sup> In the analysis shown, we combined these two items into "Leave education or retire" for simplification purposes.

## FINDINGS

### Finding 1: Teacher Turnover is Consistently Higher in Partnership and Other Low-Performing Schools than in the Rest of the State

Figure 1 illustrates teacher turnover over time, with Cohort 1 in Panel A and Cohort 2 in Panel B. Each panel provides the school exit rate in the top row, followed by district exit, and profession exit in the third row. We show each rate over time for teachers in a given cohort, similarly low-performing schools to that cohort, and all other public schools in Michigan.

FIGURE 1. Teacher Turnover Over Time



NOTE: Markers depict average turnover rates by year and group. Dashed vertical lines denote Partnership identification year for each cohort. Pathways are nested, so school district turnovers include school turnovers and leavers include school and district turnovers.



The top two lines on each graph—denoting turnover rates for each Partnership cohort and other schools that were similarly low performing in the cohort's identification year—on each panel show that teachers in Partnership and similarly low-performing schools have consistently higher turnover than other schools in the state. The school turnover rate is consistently about 30% in Partnership and other low-performing schools—about twice as high as in other schools throughout the state. The district turnover rate is steadily over 20% for Partnership and other low-performing schools and closer to 10% in other schools across the state. Finally, the 10% leaver rate in low-performing schools is about 25% higher than the state rates, while the leaver rate in Partnership is nearly two times as high as the state rate. These findings follow patterns found in other high-poverty, high-underrepresented-minority, and low-performing schools across the country.<sup>13</sup>

## Finding 2: After Increasing in 2018-19, School and District Turnover Dipped Back to Pre-Reform Levels in Partnership Schools in 2019-20

The first two rows of Figure 1 above show that prior to Partnership implementation (marked by the grey vertical line), teachers in Cohort 1 schools left their schools and districts at slightly higher rates than teachers in similarly low-performing schools. Teachers in Cohort 2 schools left their schools at similar rates and left their districts at slightly higher rates than teachers in similarly low-performing schools. Both school and district turnover increased in 2018-19, the second year of reform for Cohort 1 and the first for Cohort 2. School and district turnover then dropped back down to pre-reform levels during the pandemic, in 2019-20. These decreases in school and district turnover may have been a response to the pandemic or a natural regression after an unusually high turnover year. In the [Year Three Report](#), we provide some qualitative evidence for the former hypothesis, suggesting the pandemic may have played a role in the lower rates of school and district turnover in Partnership schools. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced new considerations into teachers' employment decisions—the shift to online instruction, resource constraints, and loss of childcare among others. As yet, it is unclear if teachers continued to stay in their Partnership schools and districts during the second pandemic summer, and whether they will continue to do so post-pandemic; district leaderships' efforts to support teachers during the pandemic may sway more teachers to stay in their position and other teachers may decide to wait out the pandemic before making decisions.<sup>14</sup>

## Finding 3: The Share of Teachers Leaving Michigan Public Education Has Been Elevated in Partnership and Other Low-Performing Schools for the Last Two Years

As discussed in Finding 1, all types of teacher turnover in Partnership and other low-performing schools are consistently higher than in the rest of the state. The third row of Figure 1 shows that in each of the two years since 2018-19, the share of Partnership school teachers exiting the profession has been considerably higher than in prior years. In Cohort 1 schools, teacher exit rates were about 8 percentage points higher than in the identification year, while exit rates in schools that were similarly low performing in Cohort 1's identification year were about 4

percentage points higher. In both Cohort 2 and schools that were similarly low performing in the Cohort 2 identification year, exit rates were about 5 percentage points higher than exit rates in 2017-18. In other schools throughout the state, exit rates increased by about 2 percentage points in 2019-20 but not in the year prior.

This finding suggests that the pandemic may have induced teacher exits but it is not clear from these patterns whether increases in Partnership schools were driven by the pandemic or other factors. However, it is evident that rates of exit from the profession after the pandemic 2019-20 school year were extraordinarily high in low-performing schools both inside and outside of Partnership—highlighting the potential for teacher pipeline challenges moving forward. Specifically, about 17-18% of teachers in Cohort 1 and 2 Partnership schools left Michigan public education in 2019-20. Teachers in schools that were similarly low performing in the Cohort 1 and 2 identification years had a 14% and 18 % exit rate, respectively. By comparison, in other schools throughout the state, approximately 9% of teachers exited—an uptick from prior years but nowhere near as pronounced as in Partnership and other low-performing schools.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Finding 4: Black and Early Career Teachers—Especially Those in Partnership and Other Low-Performing Schools—Were More Likely to Exit the Profession in 2019-20**

Figures 2 and 3 summarize the change since the identification year in rates of exiting the profession in Partnership (with Cohort 1 in the left panel and Cohort 2 in the right), other low-performing, and all other schools by race and experience level, respectively. Figure 2 provides these differences separately for Black and White teachers in each group of schools, while Figure 3 provides differences for teachers with 0-3 years of experience, 4-15 years, and 16+ years. In each figure, the rectangular markers denote exit rates for a given group in the identification year (2016-17 for Cohort 1 and 2017-18 for Cohort 2), the triangular markers denote exit rates in 2019-20, and the length of the line connecting the two represents the percentage point change. Because we subtract exit rates in the identification year from those in 2019-20, upward arrows denote higher exit rates in 2019-20 for a given group.

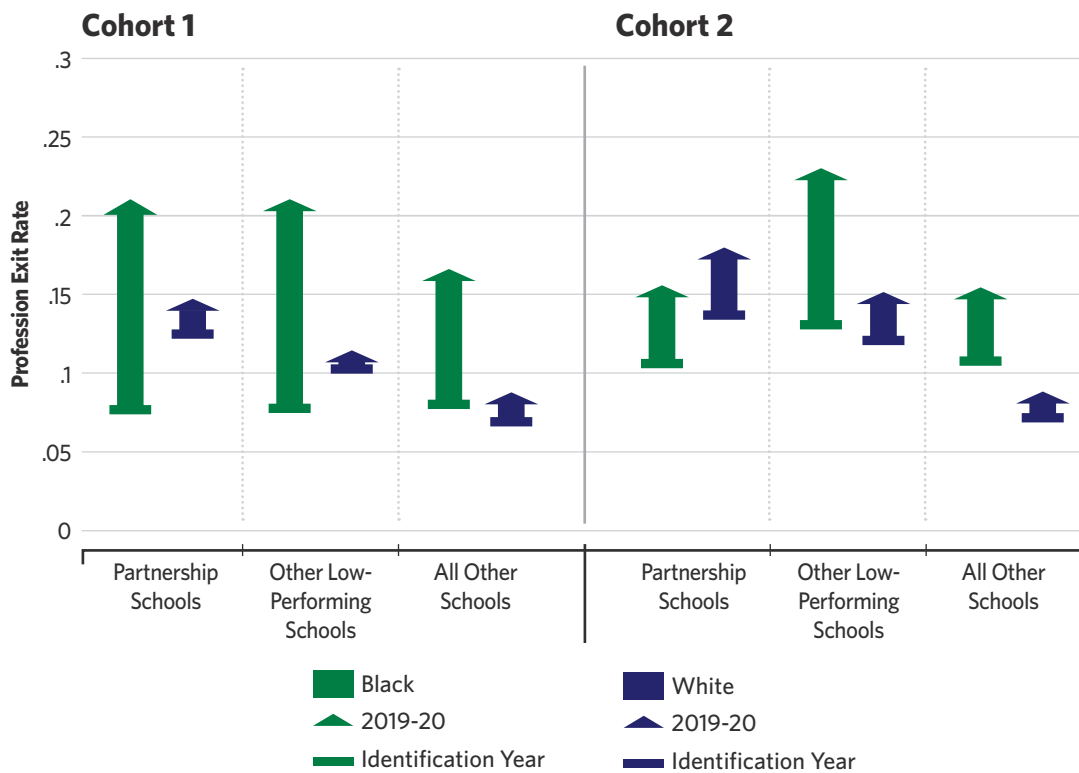
Figure 2 shows that across most groups, the exit rate increased more for Black than White teachers.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, the left panel shows that Black teachers in both Cohort 1 and similarly low-performing schools left the profession at rates that were 14 percentage points higher than they were in the year of identification. These increases were especially large compared with increases among White teachers, whose exit rates increased by less than 3 percentage points. Other schools throughout the state followed similar patterns, though increases were smaller in magnitude. While we do not show 2018-19 here, the increases in 2019-20 are substantially larger than they were in 2018-19—especially among Black teachers.

The right panel shows that Cohort 2 schools fared better at keeping Black teachers in the profession—though exits still increased. In particular, both Black and White teacher exits increased by approximately 5 percentage points in 2019-20 from the Cohort 2 identification year. While not shown here, exit rates were only slightly lower in 2018-19 for each group of Cohort 2 teachers, and increased among Black teachers only slightly more than among White teachers. Meanwhile,

teachers in schools that were similarly low performing in Cohort 2's identification year follow similar patterns to the Cohort 1 and other low-performing schools.

While increases in exits were less disparate among Cohort 2 teachers, together, these findings highlight a serious concern given a substantial body of evidence that students of color—and Black students, in particular—benefit from teachers of color both in the short and longer term.<sup>17</sup>

**FIGURE 2. Change in Profession Exits in 2019-20 by Race**

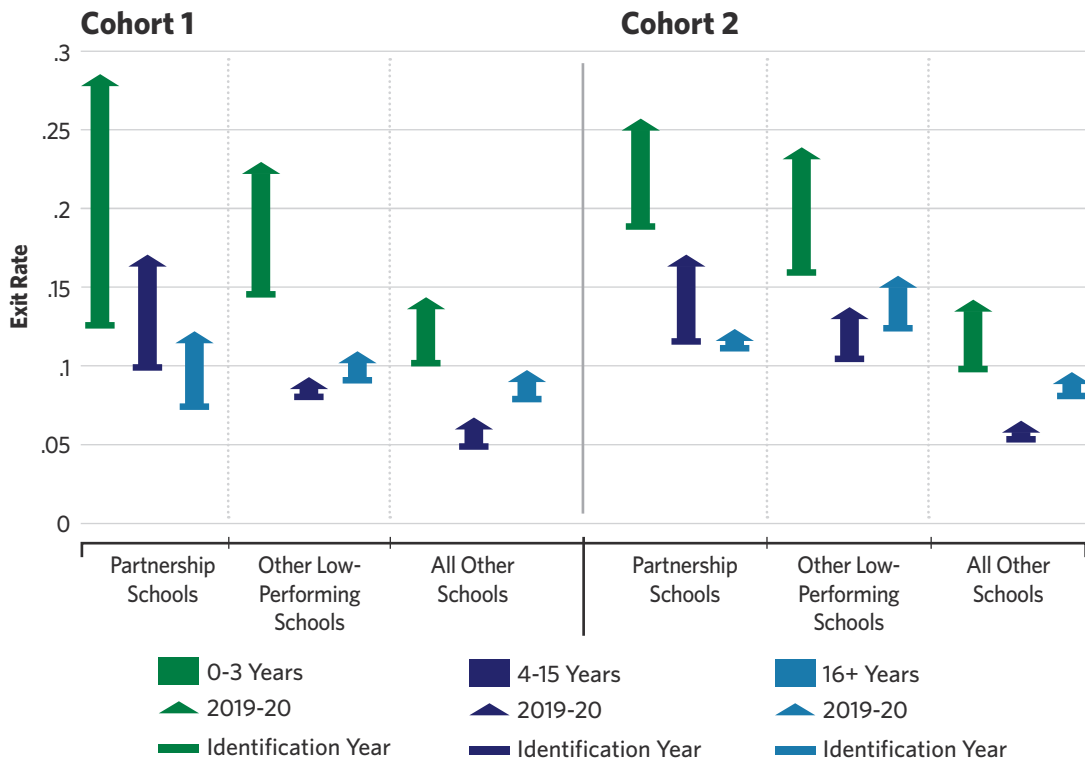


*Note: Length of lines connecting lower rectangular and upper triangular markers represents change in rate of exit from the profession in 2019-20 from each cohort's year of identification by race. Tops of triangles mark the 2019-20 exit rate, while lower rectangles denote the exit rate in the identification year (2016-17 for Cohort 1 and 2017-18 for Cohort 2).*

Figure 3 shows that novice teachers (those with three or fewer years of experience) left the profession at higher rates than more experienced teachers across all subgroups of schools. This was true both before the pandemic and during the 2019-20 school year. Increases were especially pronounced in Cohort 1, where early career teacher exit rates were nearly 16 percentage points higher in 2019-20 than in the year of identification. These high rates of departure among novice teachers both leading up to and during the pandemic are concerning because low-performing schools rely disproportionately on novice teachers due to high turnover.<sup>18</sup>

While there have been concerns that retirement-eligible teachers would disproportionately exit the profession due to the pandemic, we did not find differences in changes in exit rates by retirement-eligibility in our sample. We also did not find that women were more likely to leave the profession in 2019-20 than their male counterparts.<sup>19</sup>

FIGURE 3. Change in Profession Exits by Teaching Experience



Note: Length of lines connecting lower rectangular and upper triangular markers represents change in rate of exit from the profession in 2019-20 from each cohort's year of identification by experience level. Tops of triangles mark the 2019-20 exit rate, while lower rectangles denote the exit rate in the identification year.

### Finding 5: More Teachers in Partnership Districts Reported Plans to Stay in their Positions in 2020-21 than in 2019-20

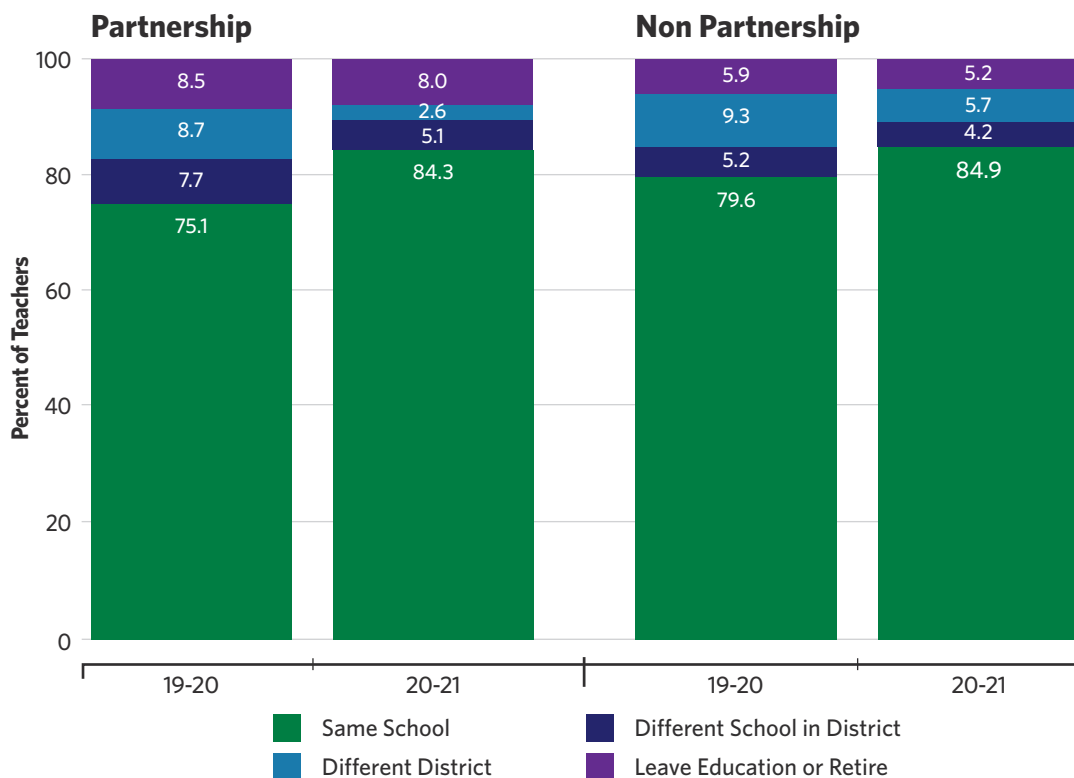
While there is evidence from national survey data that more teachers were considering career changes in response to the pandemic,<sup>20</sup> teachers in Partnership schools and districts largely reported plans to stay in their positions in the 2021-22 school year. Although we do not yet have the data to examine whether these teachers stayed or left, their expressed plans provide some insight into teacher retention patterns in Partnership districts. Figure 4 summarizes these responses by Partnership school status and highlights that the vast majority of teachers in Partnership districts—both Partnership and non-Partnership schools—conveyed plans to stay in their current school.

In Partnership schools, teachers' reported plans to remain in their schools increased from 72% in 2019-20 to 82% in 2020-21. In non-Partnership schools within Partnership districts, the increase was slightly less steep—from 77% in 2019-20 to 84% in 2020-21. At the same time, the share of teachers in both Partnership and non-Partnership schools reporting plans to leave education for another field decreased from 2019-20 to 2020-21.

These findings are somewhat in contrast to national evidence in which a growing share of teachers reported that they were considering leaving the profession, though the national survey with this finding asked about the next five years while the Partnership survey asked only about the next school year. To that end, these patterns may signify meaningful progress in Partnership schools

and districts, or it may be the case that teachers in Partnership districts are delaying career decisions until after the pandemic.<sup>21</sup>

**FIGURE 4. Teacher-Reported Plans for 2021-22 School Year**



*Note: Educators were asked, "Which of the following best describes your plans for the next school year? Response options were "continue teaching in this school," "serve in a different position next year, but in the same school," "continue teaching in my district, but in a different school," "leave this district next year to work in a different district or charter network," "leave next school year to pursue a job not in education," and "retire." In graph, "Same school" combines the first two response options. "Leave education or retire" combines the last two response options. Percentages provide the share of teachers reporting each plan.*

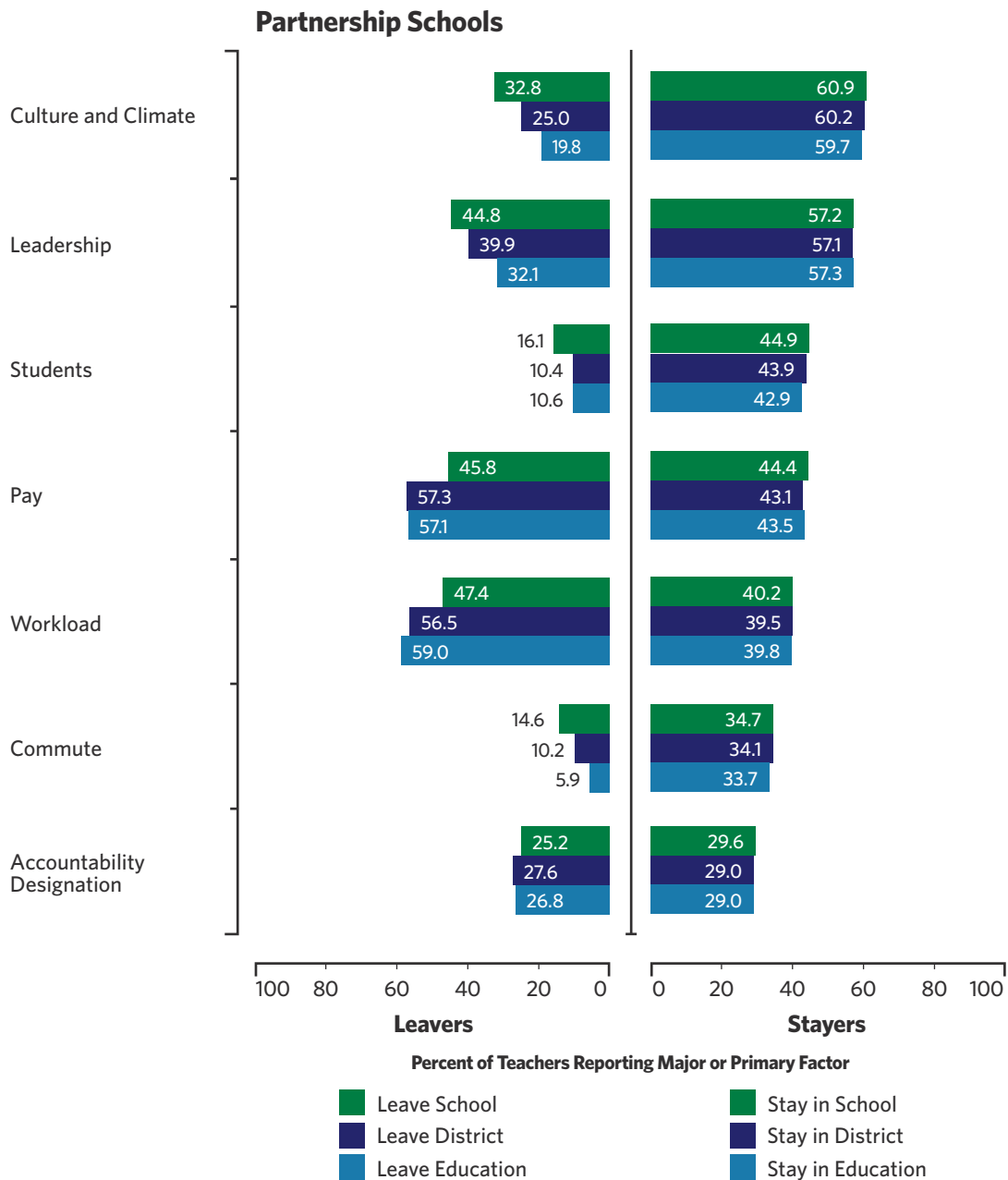
### Finding 6: As in Pre-Pandemic Years, Educators Continued to Report that Culture, Climate, and Leadership Were Important Factors in Their Decisions to Stay, While Workload and Pay Contributed to Decisions to Leave

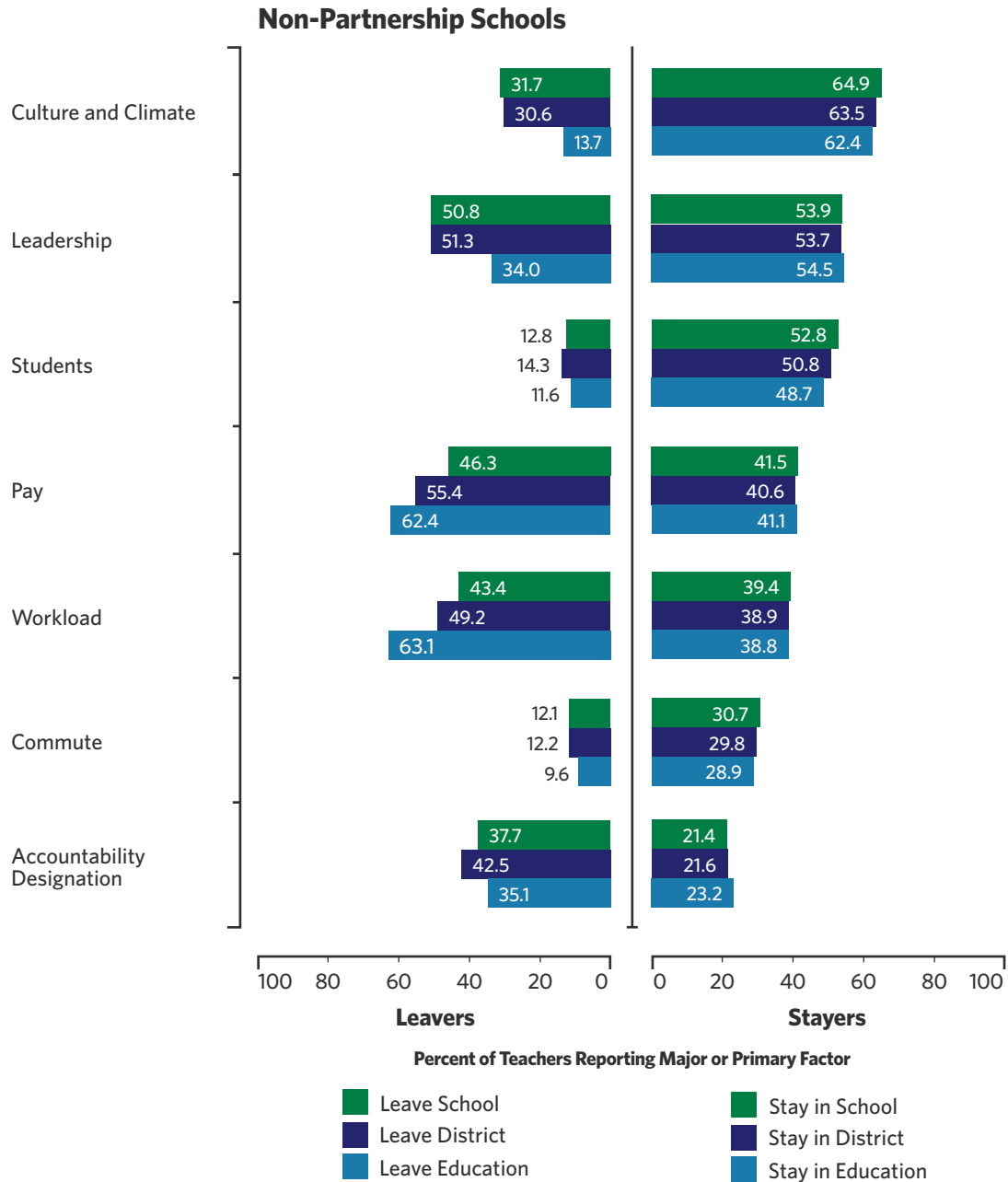
There are a host of factors that may contribute to teachers' decisions to stay in or leave their schools, districts, or the profession in a typical school year. Evidence from other states suggests that teachers in low-performing schools are especially concerned with factors related to administrative support (e.g., school and district leadership), disciplinary enforcement, safety, and salary in their considerations about whether to remain in their schools.<sup>22</sup> To better understand which of these factors matter for Partnership district teachers, we asked them what aspects of their jobs contributed to their plans for the following year. Figure 5 illustrates responses separately for teachers' plans for staying in their school, in their district, and in education. We show Partnership school teachers' responses in the top panel and non-Partnership school teachers' responses in the bottom panel. In each panel, responses

from teachers reporting plans to *stay* in their school, district, and education are on the right, while responses from teachers reporting plans to *leave* are on the left.

The top two sets of bars on the right side of each panel show that culture and climate and school leadership were the top factors in teachers' decisions to stay in their school, district, and Michigan public education. These findings are similar to teacher reports in prior years, and responses to each item are relatively similar across teacher's planned pathways (i.e., teachers planning to leave their schools reported similar factors to teachers planning to leave their districts and to teachers planning to leave education).

**FIGURE 5. Factors Contributing to Teacher Plans for the 2021-22 School Year**





*Note: Teachers were asked the extent to which each item factored into their plans to leave or stay in the 2021-22 school year. Response options were “not a factor,” “a minor factor,” “a moderate factor,” “a major factor,” or “a primary factor.” Percentages represent the weighted share of respondents reporting the item was a “major” or “primary factor.” Items are sorted by frequency for stayers in Partnership schools.*

The left sides of the panels in Figure 5 show that the most salient factors for teachers choosing to leave were workload and pay. These were consistent across all three planned pathways out, though they were most pronounced for teachers planning to leave the profession entirely. The next most common responses were leadership, culture and climate, and accountability designation, which were most pronounced for teachers planning to leave their schools and districts. The least salient factors were students and commute (by comparison, intended stayers ranked their students among the top three factors).

More teachers in Partnership schools than non-Partnership schools ranked workload as a major or primary factor in their decisions to leave their school or district. This difference may stem from the possibility that teaching in a Partnership school comes with greater responsibilities due to turnaround efforts. On the other hand, fewer teachers in Partnership than in non-Partnership schools ranked school leadership as a major or primary factor in their decisions to leave. This finding aligns with our discussion of school leadership in Section Nine of the Year Three Report, where we show that over the course of the intervention, teachers in Partnership schools rate their principals as more effective than teachers in non-Partnership schools. If Partnership school teachers perceive their leaders to be more effective, it is unsurprising that they are less likely to leave their schools and more likely to stay due to school leadership.

Importantly, it is clear that teachers who leave their schools, districts, and education do not see themselves as leaving their students, but rather a system they perceive to have low pay, heavy workload, and in some cases an ineffective or unsupportive school leader. This finding suggests that disproportionately high teacher turnover is not a foregone conclusion in the lowest performing schools. Instead, programs and policies designed to improve teacher working conditions have the potential to reduce turnover.

The variation in the importance of factors across planned pathways out points to potential strategies that state, district, and school leaders can leverage to retain teachers. Specifically, school- and district-level factors such as leadership and culture and climate matter more to teachers planning to leave their schools and districts than teachers planning to leave education. On the other hand, pay and workload, which are structural features of the job matter more to teachers planning to leave the teaching profession. By focusing on interventions intended to improve school culture, climate, and leadership, educational leaders may be able to improve teacher retention. Such interventions are likely a quicker and lighter lift than making changes to more structural features of schooling such as teacher pay—an important but more complex factor for teacher recruitment and retention.

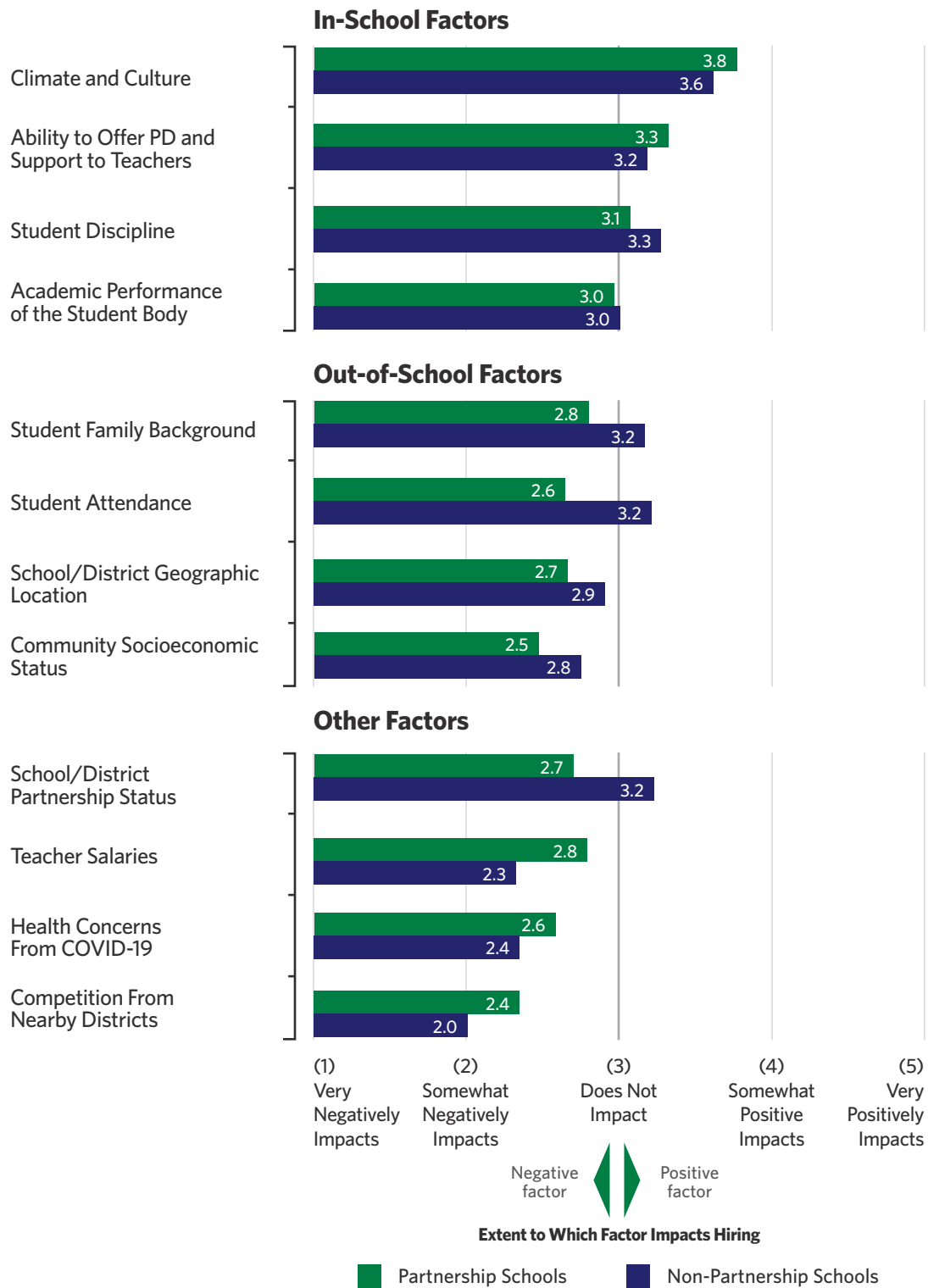
In addition to impacting teacher retention, several factors related to school characteristics as well as community context can impede school leaders' ability to recruit effective teachers into their school. These factors may be especially salient in the lowest performing schools. To better understand the factors contributing to hiring challenges, we asked principals whether a variety of factors contributed positively or negatively to their teacher recruitment efforts.

Figure 6 shows principal responses in Partnership districts separately for Partnership and non-Partnership principals. Because responses of 1 and 2 represent a negative impact and responses of 4 and 5 represent a positive impact, bars that cross the midpoint reflect factors that principals felt positively impacted their ability to recruit and hire teachers, bars that stop at the midpoint reflect factors that principals did not believe impacted their ability to hire, and bars to the left of the midpoint reflect factors that principals believe negatively impacted their ability to hire.

There are three main takeaways from Figure 6. First, principals believed that factors internal to the school—similar to the malleable factors described above—largely played a positive to neutral role in their ability to recruit teachers. While not shown here, Partnership school principals perceived that these factors became more positive over each of the three survey years, pointing to the possibility that the Partnership Model's efforts at improving school systems and processes have bolstered teacher working conditions.<sup>23</sup> However, it is also possible that some of these factors were less negative in 2019-20 in particular due to remote schooling.



**FIGURE 6. Principal Perceptions of Factors Contributing to Teacher Recruitment**



Note: Principals were asked to rate the extent to which each factor impacted hiring. Response options were 1 "very negatively impacts," 2 "somewhat negatively impacts," 3 "does not impact," 4 "somewhat positively impacts," and 5 "very positively impacts." Bars represent weighted mean response across all principal respondents in Partnership districts. Bars are sorted within category in order of positive to negative impact.

Second, Partnership school principals perceived that out-of-school factors, including student family background, student attendance, school/district geographic location, and community socioeconomic status, more negatively impacted hiring than did non-Partnership school principals in Partnership districts. This finding highlights that external challenges to recruitment may be especially salient in the very lowest performing schools—even more than in other schools in their districts.

Third, across both Partnership and non-Partnership schools in Partnership districts, principals perceived that less malleable factors such as accountability designation, teacher salaries, health concerns from COVID-19, and competition from nearby districts, negatively impacted their ability to recruit.

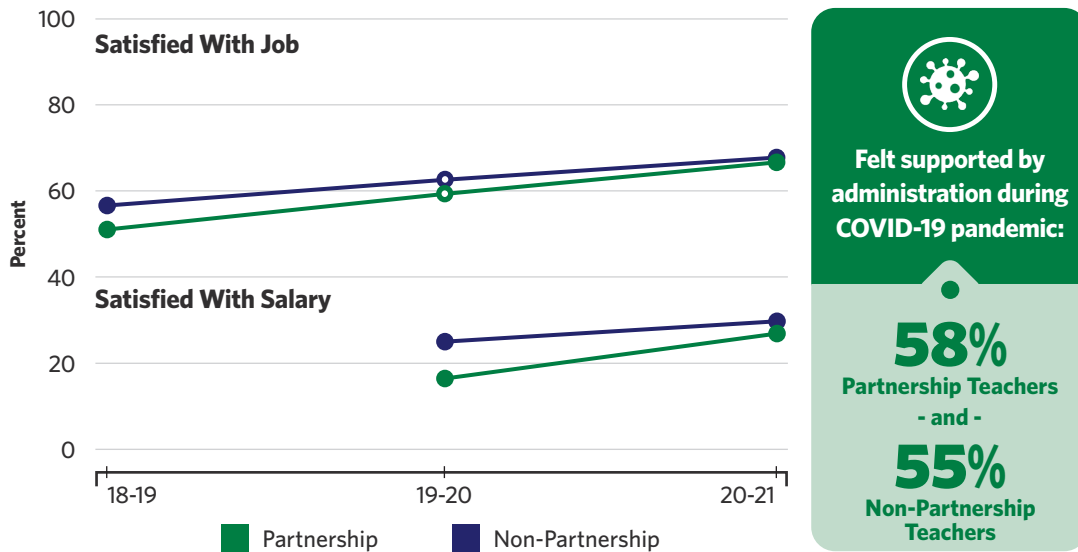
Together, these findings suggest that there are malleable school factors, such as school climate, culture, teacher supports, and student discipline, that can both motivate teachers to stay in their schools and positively influence teacher recruitment. However, more structural features of schools and external factors such as socioeconomics, salaries, and health concerns may contribute to teacher turnover and exacerbate hiring challenges in the lowest performing schools. Aside from health concerns, these factors are consistently relevant to teacher recruitment and retention in low-performing schools, regardless of the state of the pandemic.

## Finding 7: Teacher Reports of Job Satisfaction Continued to Climb as Many Teachers Said They Felt Supported by Their Administration During COVID-19

Employees who are satisfied with their jobs may be more inclined to stay. We asked teachers to indicate the extent to which they were satisfied with their job, salary, and support from their administration. Figure 7 shows that teacher-reported job and salary satisfaction in Partnership districts increased over each of the last three years. In 2018-19, the first year of the survey, 51% of Partnership school teachers and 57% of non-Partnership school teachers reported that they were satisfied with their jobs. Job satisfaction among Partnership school teachers increased at a faster rate than among non-Partnership school teachers, converging in 2020-21 with about two-thirds of teachers reporting they were satisfied with their jobs. Fewer teachers reported that they were satisfied by their salaries. This divide between reported job and salary satisfaction was starkest among Partnership school teachers in 2019-20, when they were about one-quarter as likely to report salary satisfaction than job satisfaction.

The finding that job satisfaction climbed is somewhat counter to the national narrative that teachers throughout the country have been unhappy with their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic. We consider three possible reasons for this perhaps unexpected finding. First, Section Three of the Year Three Report shows that Partnership districts were largely operating under remote instruction in 2020-21, especially at the point when the survey was administered. It is possible that educators in these districts were satisfied with the modality options offered by their districts and were less likely to feel unsafe than those required to teach in person or overly burdened by attempts to teach in a hybrid format. Second, it is possible that educators were “grading on a curve” in the 2020-21 school year; that is, concerns shaping educator perceptions in prior years may have felt less salient during the pandemic. Third, Figure 7 also shows that a majority of teachers felt supported by their administration during the pandemic—they may have reported higher job satisfaction because they felt supported.

FIGURE 7. Teacher Reports of Job and Salary Satisfaction Over Time



Note: Teachers were asked to rate their agreement with statements that they were satisfied with their job, satisfied with their district, and felt supported by administration during the COVID-19 pandemic. Percentages represent weighted share of teachers and principals, respectively, who responded that they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement. Question about satisfaction asked only in 2019-20 and 2020-21. Question about support from administration during COVID-19 asked only in 2020-21.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings in this brief highlight the ways in which the pandemic may have shifted teacher turnover patterns as well as factors contributing to turnover and recruitment in Partnership schools and districts. In this final section, we provide a set of policy implications for recruiting and retaining teachers in Partnership and other low-performing schools.

### There Need to be Increased Efforts to Recruit and Retain Teachers—and Especially Black Teachers—in Lower Performing Schools and Districts

Our findings underscore that the COVID-19 pandemic may exacerbate existing teacher shortages in Partnership and other low-performing schools. Partnership school teachers continue to leave the profession at higher rates than teachers in other schools throughout the state. These exits are concentrated among Black and novice teachers—even more in 2019-20 than in pre-reform years. Disproportionate increases in Black teacher exit are concerning due to the short- and longer-term benefits of a diverse teacher workforce, and are particularly troubling in Partnership districts, where the far majority of the student population is Black.

Importantly, while Black teacher exits increased during the study period, and especially during the pandemic, the *share* of Black teachers in Partnership schools and districts has remained relatively steady because schools are recruiting new Black teachers to fill vacancies. To that end, these findings suggest that Partnership schools and districts would benefit from focusing efforts on *retention* of Black teachers in addition to recruitment in order to not only replace teachers they lose but also to build a robust workforce of diverse, experienced teachers.

The disproportionate loss of early career teachers highlights additional personnel challenges with which low-performing schools must grapple. Low-performing schools like those receiving supports as part of Michigan’s Partnership Model rely heavily on early career teachers. Continued retention challenges combined with a reduction in future supply as older teachers retire will lead to a severely reduced teacher supply. A shrinking applicant pool—along with the potential for a shrinking pipeline—would burden already challenging recruitment conditions in the lowest performing schools. These low-performing schools are already under-resourced with high teacher turnover. Districts—supported by the state—will need to make specific efforts to support and retain novice teachers.

## District Leadership Will Need to Focus on Supports to Maintain and Boost Morale as the Pandemic Wanes

During the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, Partnership district leaders made extraordinary efforts to build positive culture and climate in their schools. Teachers and principals, in turn, largely reported that they felt supported by their administration during the pandemic. However, these efforts occurred within the unique context of largely remote schooling during the first year and a half of the pandemic. Teachers will need different supports as they return to in-person learning. School and district leaders should continue to bolster the culture and climate in their schools and districts in order to support and retain teachers and help them support their students as they adjust to a return to the physical classroom—especially as staff shortages make the 2021-22 school year particularly difficult. As such, leadership may need to adjust and augment—not remove—the support they have been providing.<sup>24</sup>

## Administrators Should Renew Focus on Typical Challenges to Hiring and Retention

Principals reported that several typical hiring challenges—such as academic performance and student discipline—were not as salient to their ability to recruit during the pandemic as they were in prior years. This shift makes sense due to the reduction of in-person student-teacher interaction and the pronounced academic challenges during this time period across all types of schools—not just the lowest performing schools. It is not surprising that factors such as discipline and school climate were less salient while educators were largely teaching virtually. As students and teachers return to in-person learning, Partnership leaders will need to renew their focus on school climate, culture, and discipline to improve teacher working conditions and support hiring and retention in the lowest performing schools.

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6. For more detail on how we selected these comparison groups, please see Section 2 of the Year Three Partnership Report at <https://epicedpolicy.org/partnership-turnaround-year-three-report/>.
7. Because our measure for exiting teaching is based on whether a teacher is still employed in the following school year, we do not know if a teacher has left Michigan education permanently, taken leave, taken a break from teaching, or left the data for some other reason.
8. It may be the case that retirement-eligible or more experienced teachers were more likely to leave teaching during the pandemic because they were older and therefore more vulnerable, or they had other paid (e.g., retirement) options. In addition, women disproportionately took on new childcare responsibilities when schools shifted to remote learning, and therefore may have exited at higher rates. Black and Hispanic teachers may have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and may have had to exit teaching as a result.
9. We classify a teacher as retirement eligible if they have 30 or more years of experience or are at least 60 years old with 10 or more years of experience.
10. We exclude Hispanic or Latino/a/x (of any race category), and other non-White from our analysis due to insufficient sample size.
11. We calculate years of experience as the number of years since the teacher's earliest hire date observed in any district since 2011.
12. In all analyses, we weight teacher and principal survey responses separately by year using sampling and nonresponse weights. We calculate the sampling weight using the school-level coverage of our sampling frame and calculate the nonresponse weight as the inverse probability of response within school (for teachers) or district (for principals). We do so based on demographic characteristics (race/ethnicity, gender) for both teachers and principals, certification type (i.e., elementary, secondary) for teachers, and Partnership identification round for principals.

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14. In Section 9 of the Year Three Partnership Report, available at <https://epicedpolicy.org/partnership-turnaround-year-three-report/>, we provide a quote from a Partnership district leader suggesting this may be the case. We also provide some teacher quotes to this effect.
15. We present causal estimates accounting for teacher and school characteristics in Section Nine of the [Year Three Partnership Report](#).
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## CREDITS

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