

# A PARTIAL TURNAROUND FOR TURNOVER

## Recent Trends in Teacher, Principal, and Superintendent Turnover

*After peaking in 2023, the rate at which Wisconsin teachers transitioned out of their districts declined statewide but remained elevated. Principal and superintendent turnover has not stabilized, with a new swing upward in 2025. Some districts experience compounding instability, with above-average turnover across educator types. Alongside turnover, workforce diversity increased. Both trends merit tracking as they shape student experience and success.*

In the wake of COVID-19's peak and the turbulent inflation and labor market that followed, educators and school districts have sought to regain their footing. Previous Forum research has tracked data on school employees through this period, from [teacher pay to school bus driver shortages](#) to the use of [emergency licenses](#) to fill classroom positions.

One of the most important trends has been that of educator turnover – the rate at which teachers, principals, and superintendents either switch jobs or leave their profession entirely. Our [2022 review of educator leadership turnover](#) found that, at that time, principals and superintendents were staying put more than policy analysts expected; our [2023 review of teacher turnover](#) found that teachers had largely done the same until 2022 and 2023, when they moved and left districts in droves.

Our latest analysis of educator turnover data through 2025 continues tracking this issue, which has immediate impacts on the environment in which students learn, educators work, and school districts plan and budget. While some level of turnover is to be expected and may even be beneficial, too much churn destabilizes schools, discourages staff and students, harms student outcomes, and costs districts valuable resources.

Overall, we find that, after principals and superintendents joined teachers in making 2023 a peak year for turnover, all three educator groups saw lower turnover rates in 2024. For teachers, the rate continued to drop in 2025, though it remained above normal levels. For principals and superintendents, the rates ticked back up. The combined impact for some

### Methodology and Terminology

WPF analyzed turnover using the DPI Public All Staff Report, which includes staffing information for all traditional public and charter schools. This file is compiled using data reported by districts from the third Friday of September and therefore represents a point-in-time snapshot. We defined “teacher” as any individual holding at least one of these positions in the file: Department Head, Teacher in Charge, or Teacher. Principals and superintendents were designated as such in the file.

For analysis of overall turnover, we excluded districts that closed or merged during the time period studied (2009 to 2025) and entities other than school districts (e.g., independent charter schools, Cooperative Educational Service Agencies, etc.). For our analyses of “moves,” “leaves,” and educator demographics, these entities were included. (District-authorized charters were included in all analyses within their authorizing districts.) Similarly, our analysis of overall turnover included educators serving in multiple districts, but they were excluded from our analyses of moves, leaves, and educator demographics. As a result, the sum of “moves” and “leaves” may not always add up to overall turnover numbers cited.

We defined “turnover” as any instance in which an individual appears in the DPI dataset for one year at a given district and does not appear in the same role (as teacher, principal, or superintendent) in that same district for the next year. The turnover may have happened during the summer or school year. Turnovers are listed by the school year in which they took effect – e.g., a teacher who transitioned in between the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years will be captured in the 2010 data. (We use 2010 to denote the 2009-10 school year.) Student enrollment and demographic data and locale codes used to characterize districts are from 2025. Educator demographic data are from 2025 or the most recent year in which they appear in the dataset. These annual updates may cause small discrepancies with previous WPF analyses.

districts has left them scrambling to preserve stability for staff and students, with some of the state’s most vulnerable student populations most at risk.

### TEACHER TURNOVER SLOWS BUT REMAINS HIGH

On average from 2010 (the first year of transitions in our dataset) through 2025, 11.7% annually of the state’s teacher workforce either moved from one school district to another or left teaching in Wisconsin public schools altogether.

Our [previous research](#) highlighted 2023 as a record year for teacher turnover, with 15.8% of teachers statewide no longer teaching in their 2022 district of record. In the two years since that peak, teacher turnover has declined but remains high. In 2024, 14.0% of teachers turned over, and 12.9% turned over in 2025. On the one hand, these numbers encouragingly show turnover dropping by more than one percentage point in each year; on the other hand, over the 16 years of turnover studied, 2024’s rate was second only to 2023’s, and the rate in 2025 was fourth highest after the 13.0% in 2012 (see Figure 1).

Distinguishing between “moves” and “leaves” provides a closer look at teacher activity in these most recent years. A turnover is classified as a “move” if a teacher shifts from teaching in one Wisconsin school district to teaching in another. A “leave” represents a teacher no longer being listed as such in the statewide public data

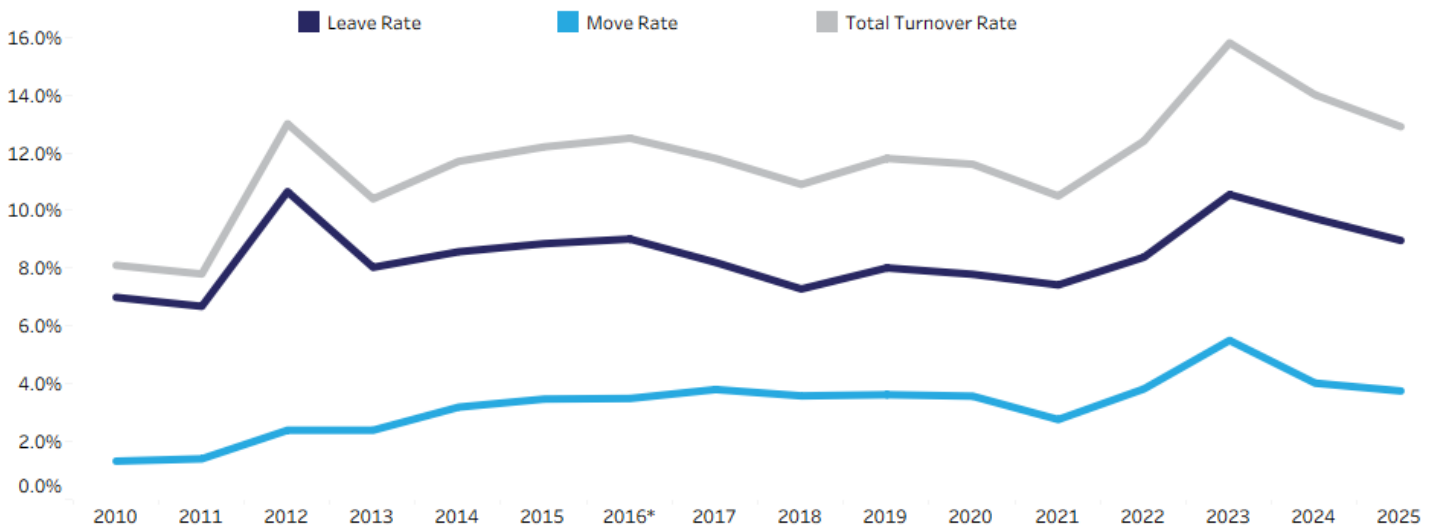
set. That could be because the teacher is no longer an educator at all, although a leave could also mean a shift into a non-teaching role in a public school, to a teaching job in a private school, or a move to another state.

Leaves always outnumbered moves in the dataset, with at least twice as many leaves as moves in nearly every year. The 2023 peak was driven not only by near-record leaves, however, but also by record moves. In that year, the leave rate reached 10.5%, behind only 2012’s 10.6%. The move rate reached 5.5% in 2023, outstripping the previous high of 3.8% in 2022.

Both leaves and moves declined in 2024 and 2025, contributing to the overall decrease in turnover. The drop was precipitous for moves in 2024, with 27.4% fewer moves in 2024 than in 2023. This rate leveled off somewhat in 2025, with 7.2% fewer moves in 2025 than 2024. The rate of decline was steadier for leaves, with 8.5% fewer leaves in 2024 than in 2023 and 8.3% fewer leaves in 2025 than 2024. Even with these declines, however, the 2025 move rate of 3.8% was still the fifth highest in the dataset, as was the 2025 leave rate of 9.0%.

In summary, while overall turnover, moves, and leaves are all down from their 2023 highs, rates remain elevated. A number of factors may have contributed to the decline without erasing the overall challenge. The stress and disruptions of the pandemic have lessened, the unemployment rate has ticked modestly upward, inflation has cooled, some districts made large

**Figure 1: Teacher Turnover Declines Following Post-Pandemic Spike**  
Statewide average rates of teachers turning over, moving, and leaving from their districts



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, WPF analysis of public school districts. \*Note: 2016 leaves are likely overstated due to an apparent reporting error of MPS staffing data. The sum of the move rate and leave rate may not equal the overall turnover rate due to methodological differences in the rate calculations.



compensation increases that others could not match, and the federal pandemic relief aid has expired – all factors dampening the competition between districts and within the broader workforce. The wave of Baby Boomer retirements may also have already crested, as the oldest in that generation are now 79 years old (compared to the youngest, who are 61 years old as of 2025). Finally, longstanding concerns about the educator pipeline had spurred a number of programs designed to increase the quality and quantity of teachers, some of which may now be bearing fruit for both recruitment and retention.

Few comparative national figures exist to compare Wisconsin's turnover experience to other states, with [federal data on teacher turnover](#) only updated through 2022 as of publication. One of the more recent estimates, from the research nonprofit [RAND Corporation](#), reviewed survey results on retirements and resignations (a modestly different definition of "turnover" than ours) through 2025, while education news nonprofit The 74 published a separate [directional analysis of 2025 data from six states](#) (not including Wisconsin). Both showed turnover decreasing in the two most recent years of data, and both affirmed that turnover nationally, as in Wisconsin, appears to have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

### Turnover Declines Shared Across District Types

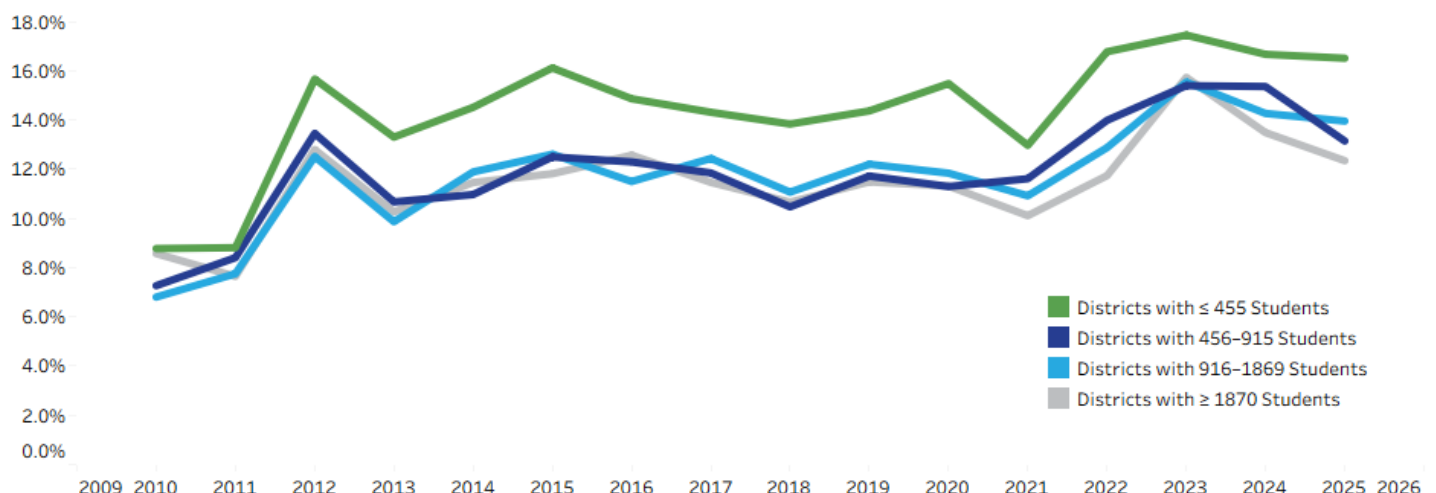
Overall turnover declined on average in 2024 and 2025 across all district types examined, regardless of the

number of students served, student racial and ethnic demographics, students' economic status, or district locale (that is, city, suburban, town, or rural, as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics, or NCES). The degree of decline varied between district types, however.

Perhaps most strikingly, the average turnover rate at the smallest districts barely budged, dropping by less than a percentage point (0.9 points) from its 2023 high to 16.5% in 2025. These are districts serving 455 students or fewer, of which there are 105 in the state, making up approximately one quarter of districts statewide. (Independent charter schools are not included in this portion of the analysis; see the Methodology box on page 1 for more details.) In contrast, mid-sized and large districts saw more meaningful declines in overall turnover from 2023 to 2025, ranging from a 1.6 -point drop for the second-largest districts down to 14.0%, to a 3.4-point drop for the largest districts down to 12.3% (see Figure 2).

These most recent years continue the smallest districts' particular struggle with turnover: In every year in the dataset, they experienced the highest average turnover rate out of the size groupings. In 2024 and 2025, as in previous years, this was driven in large part by these districts suffering the highest move rates of any district type (6.0% in 2024 and 5.3% in 2025). The smallest districts have also tended to have higher-than-average leave rates, which was exacerbated in 2025, when they were one of only two district types to *increase* their

**Figure 2: Teacher Turnover Remains Highest in Districts with Fewest Students**  
Average rate of teachers turning over from their districts, by student enrollment



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, WPF analysis of public school districts. Each district size bin contains approximately one-quarter of Wisconsin school districts.



average leave rate from 2024, up 1.1 points to 10.4%. (The other district type was those serving less than 10% students of color, where the leave rate increased by 0.2 points in 2025.)

One might guess that the difficulties of the smallest districts would also be reflected in turnover rates for rural districts, especially since the vast majority (88.6%) of the smallest districts are located in rural areas. Instead, average turnover in rural districts – along with every other locale – declined steadily in both 2024 and 2025, as did turnover in town districts, with 2025 finding them at 13.4% and 13.2%, respectively. Stubbornly high rates of turnover therefore appear to be a unique problem for the smallest districts. Possible reasons include compensation challenges, personal or professional isolation, and more limited opportunities for growth or partnerships.

Average turnover in city and suburb districts dropped sharply in 2024 from their 2023 highs before decreasing more modestly in 2025 to 12.7% and 12.5%, respectively. Removing Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) – the largest school district in the state with an outsized impact on the dataset – shows city districts instead faring similarly to town and rural districts in 2025 at 13.3% turnover. (Note that NCES changed 60 districts' locale designations in between our previous 2023 analysis and this one; all data cited in this report use the 2025 codes.) For more on MPS and its recent turnover decreases, see the next section.

When grouped by the economic status of their students, districts serving the highest concentration of low-income students (with a majority classified as economically disadvantaged) and districts serving the lowest concentration (with less than 25% of students classified as economically disadvantaged) both saw steep drop-offs in turnover from 2023 to 2024 that then leveled off in 2025. Districts serving a population of 25% to 50% economically disadvantaged students experienced somewhat the inverse decrease, with a gradual decline in 2024 that accelerated in 2025.

The picture changes somewhat for districts with a majority low-income student population when MPS is removed. While the other districts serving over 50% economically disadvantaged students still saw a marked decline from 2023 to 2024, from 17.1% to 14.9%, their average turnover rate actually *increased*

from 2024 to 2025, up to 15.3% – an anomaly among all district types examined.

As has been the case in every year of the dataset, districts serving a majority low-income student population (including MPS) continued to have the highest average teacher turnover: 14.7% in 2024 and 14.2% in 2025. Districts with the smallest concentration of low-income students continued logging the lowest average teacher turnover: 12.0% in both 2024 and 2025.

Finally, and somewhat surprisingly, average turnover between district types based on the share of students of color served converged in 2025, with less than a percentage point separating the rates for the highest turnover districts (13.3%, at those serving less than 10% students of color) and the lowest turnover districts (12.6%, at those serving between 10% and 25% students of color) in that year. That is the smallest gap on record for a divide that once yawned as wide as 4.6 percentage points and even in 2023 had reached back up to 3.5 points.

Turnover declines at districts serving majority students of color played a large role in this convergence. In the 2023 peak, these districts experienced the most turnover compared to their peers (17.9%) but then also saw turnover improve the most between 2023 and 2025 – by 4.7 percentage points, down to 13.2%, marking only the third year in the dataset in which they did not have the highest turnover compared to peers.

Again, major turnover decreases at Milwaukee Public Schools drove much of this 2023 to 2025 decline for districts serving majority students of color. Still, even without MPS, districts serving predominantly students of color saw precipitous drops in turnover rates in 2024 before leveling off at 14.3% in 2025. Sizable wage increases or opportunities afforded by the federal pandemic relief aid may have played a role. [Madison Metropolitan School District](#) (MMSD), for one, has cited increased pay (both across the board and targeted to certain positions), professional growth opportunities, and better district administrative processes in its success diminishing teacher vacancies – a separate but related issue to teacher turnover.

#### Greater Stability at Milwaukee Public Schools

The state's largest district, MPS serves a high needs student population and faces competition for both





students and teachers from surrounding school districts and robust charter and private choice options. These factors and others have historically left MPS with above-average levels of teacher turnover.

The district's fortunes may be changing, however: After reaching a 19.5% turnover rate in 2023, teacher turnover plummeted. By 2025, it was down to 10.5% – only the second time in the dataset that MPS logged lower turnover than the statewide average (the first being 2022).

Improvements in both the district's move rate and leave rate contributed to this drop. MPS' move rate dropped from its 2023 high of 2.8% to 1.3% by 2025, its lowest level since 2010 (see Figure 3). This decline stands out even more when compared to the statewide average. Before 2022, the MPS move rate was typically lower than the state's average in each year but by no more than 1.6 percentage points. Starting in 2022, MPS' move rate was better than the statewide average by over two points, including a 2.5-point difference in 2025. MPS therefore improved its move rate not only relative to itself but also compared to the state.

In contrast to its move rate, MPS has historically logged relatively high leave rates. In fact, in every year studied, its leave rate was above the statewide average. By 2025, however, the MPS leave rate was within 0.1 percentage point of the statewide average (9.1%, compared to 9.0%), by far the closest the two have ever been in the dataset. Such progress is all the more

notable given how high the MPS leave rate was in 2023: 16.2%, compared to the state's 10.5%.

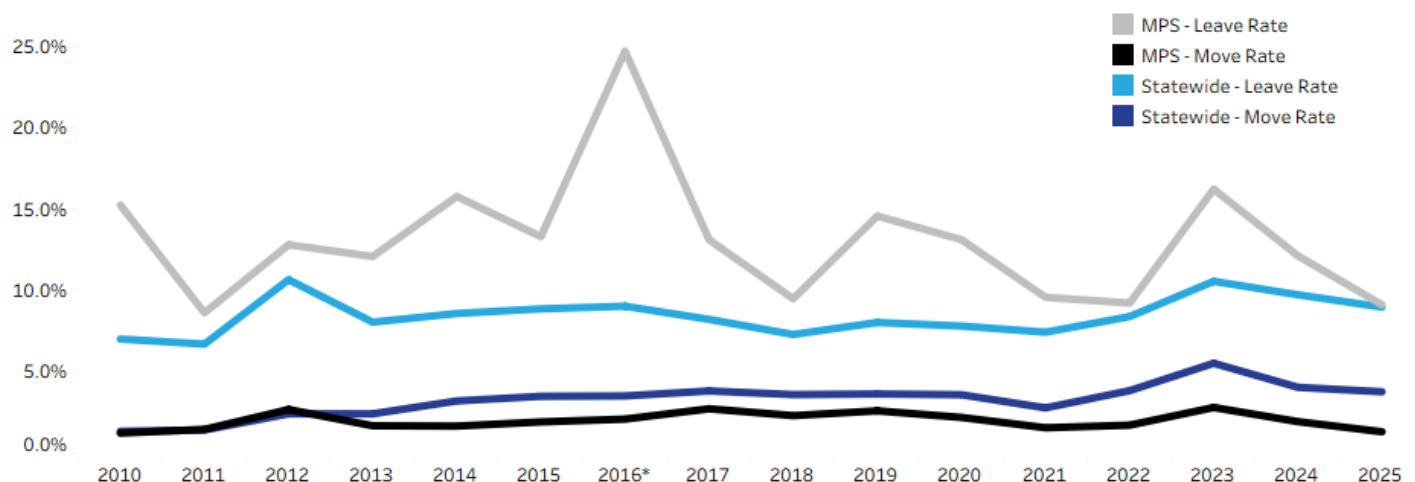
The reduced move and leave rates are a victory for the district, which has faced significant upper leadership turnover, a high volume of teacher vacancies, continued challenges with student achievement, negative press related to financial and student health issues, and heightened scrutiny as a result of all of the above. (For more on these issues, see our most recent MPS [budget briefs](#) and our two-part series on [Milwaukee education](#).) Indeed, one might have expected those factors to lead to teacher turnover remaining relatively high, especially going into 2025.

Instead, MPS in 2025 enjoyed one of its most stable teaching workforces in recent memory. Teacher pay likely played a leading role; the district aggressively increased base wages for 2024 and 2025 by 8.0% and 4.1%, respectively, in response to rapid inflation and the tight labor market. Teachers may also have felt buoyed by the successful 2024 MPS referendum, although it passed more narrowly than the district's 2020 referendum. It could also be that the 2023 spike in turnover reflected a mass exodus of those teachers who were already most at risk of departing, leaving behind a workforce more disposed to stay put in the first place.

Time will tell whether the lowered move and leave rates remain in place. Despite the successful referenda, teaching and learning conditions at MPS remain challenging. On the one hand, the district's new

**Figure 3: Milwaukee Outpaces Statewide Teacher Turnover Decline**

Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) versus statewide average rate of teachers moving and leaving from their districts



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, WPF analysis of public school districts. \*Note: 2016 leaves are likely overstated due to an apparent reporting error of MPS staffing data.



leadership may be able to harness its current relative workforce stability to improve those conditions and make gains for students. On the other hand, the district's finances will make it difficult to sustain its recent pace of salary increases, which might affect teacher turnover going forward.

### EDUCATOR LEADER TURNOVER STILL VOLATILE

When the Forum [last reviewed](#) turnover data for principals and superintendents, leaves and moves for both sets of educational leaders had decreased in 2021. For principals, the decline down to its lowest level in the years studied (11.4% in 2021) followed an increase in overall turnover from 2018 through 2020, the first back-to-back increases after years of decline coming off of 2012's turnover high of 19.7%. (Here, "principal turnover" refers to principals moving or leaving from their *district* of record. This aligns our approach with our teacher and superintendent analysis, but differs somewhat from our 2022 report, which analyzed principal turnover by *school*.)

Superintendent turnover had also previously trended downward before a sharp increase in 2020 up to 17.7% and then a return down to 13.6% in 2021. (Note that superintendent turnover rates are inherently volatile due to the small sample size of the dataset.) With the COVID-19 pandemic first affecting turnovers going into 2021, we wondered whether the 2021 dip for principals and superintendents would continue in future years or if

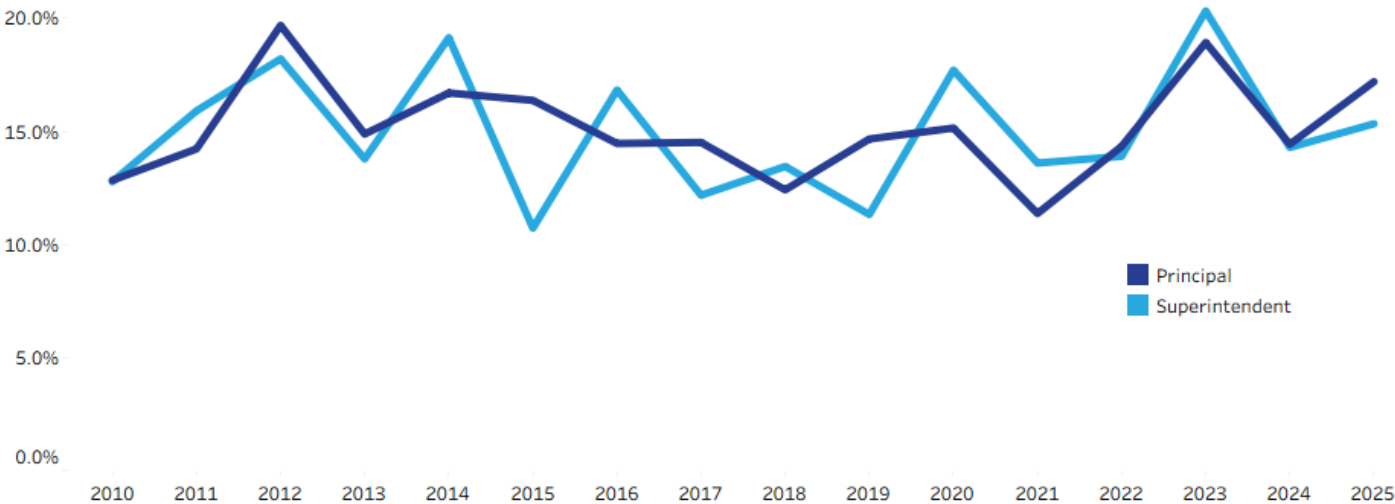
2021 would mark the calm before a storm of upcoming churn.

The latest data show that turnover did in fact rise for both principals and superintendents from 2021 to 2023 (see Figure 4). Superintendent turnover hit its highest level in the years studied, reaching 20.3% in 2023. That represents a fifth of Wisconsin's top local education leaders switching or leaving their jobs in a single year. Principals were close behind, with 18.9% turning over in 2023, their second-highest rate after 2012. These high overall turnover numbers were made up of both high leave rates and high move rates, meaning that 2023 saw many superintendents and principals shifting between districts *and* many leaving their positions altogether.

Turnover for both principals and superintendents dropped down in 2024 to below-average levels: 14.4% for principals in 2024, compared to 15.1% over the full time period studied, and 14.3% for superintendents in 2024, compared to 15.0% over the full time period studied.

Although these turnover rates are higher than those for teachers, the overall 2021 to 2024 trajectory for education leaders tracked the arc of teacher turnover: increasing substantially from 2021 to 2023 and then dropping down in 2024. This is not surprising, since the labor market forces likely behind the 2023 spike in moves and leaves for teachers would have applied to principals and superintendents as well: high demand for

**Figure 4: Leadership Turnover Remains Elevated Following Post-Pandemic Spike**  
Statewide average rates of principals and superintendents turning over from their districts



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, WPF analysis of public school districts.



employees across the board caused by historically low rates of unemployment, relatively high retirement rates, and high inflation prompting moves to jobs with higher wages. Accumulated stress from the pandemic, with its health, political, and logistical challenges, may also have played a role for leaders as well as teachers.

In 2025, however, teacher turnover continued dropping – but principal and superintendent turnover rates both ticked back up, to 17.2% and 15.3%, respectively. The culprit was not education leaders moving between districts, as the move rate for both principals and superintendents continued going down in 2025. Rather, leaves jumped back up, with the share of principals and superintendents leaving their position entirely hitting their third-highest point over the 16 years of transitions studied (15.3% for principals, 14.4% for superintendents).

As a result, while teacher turnover appears to be stabilizing somewhat, turnovers – especially leave rates – for education leaders remain elevated and somewhat unpredictable as of 2025. Retirements from the large and aging Baby Boomer population may explain some of the distinction between teachers and leaders, since the pool of individuals in more senior roles is also typically an older pool. National analysts have also [hypothesized](#) that, at least for superintendents, the strains of the job have increased dramatically in recent years and are also driving turnover. On the other hand, a [recent national superintendent survey](#) found that their job stress had decreased from 2023 to 2025, especially for leaders of small districts (although those same leaders also registered a decrease in their “positive feelings about their jobs”).

Compared to the limited national data available through 2025, Wisconsin’s educator leader story largely aligns with the rest of the country. The [Superintendent Research Project](#) tracks superintendents working at the nation’s 500 largest school districts (including MPS and MMSD). They reported that superintendent turnover amongst this subset of districts jumped up post-pandemic, with 2025 as a high point at 23%. Meanwhile, [The Superintendent Lab](#) found that, nationally, superintendent resignations, retirements, and firings or non-renewals all decreased in 2024 before ticking back up in 2025. In The Superintendent Lab’s dataset, Wisconsin’s 2025 superintendent turnover rate appears on par with the national average.

For principals, the [RAND estimates](#) showed national retirements and resignations dropping steeply in 2024 and marginally in 2025 to land at a level still above pre-pandemic norms. Wisconsin shared in the 2024 decrease but then saw an increase in 2025 – a notable though not dramatic departure from the national picture, as both datasets indicate that the initial drop-offs in 2024 did not carry into the following year.

### Shared Vulnerability to Teacher and Leader Turnover

The small sample size of principals and superintendents makes it difficult to offer precise insights into leadership turnover at different types of districts on a year-over-year basis. On average over the 16 years of transitions studied, however, the data show that the same district types struggling with teacher turnover also struggle with principal and superintendent turnover.

Specifically, districts serving a majority low-income student population, the smallest districts, city districts, and districts serving majority students of color had the highest turnover rates compared to the peers for not only teachers but also principals and superintendents (see Figure 5 on following page). The rates were very similar for districts with over 50% economically disadvantaged students and for districts with over 50% student of color: on average over the time period studied, over 13% of teachers and nearly 17% of principals and superintendents turned over in both district types. That is compared to the state averages of 11.7% for teacher turnover, 15.1% for principal turnover, and 15.0% for superintendent turnover.

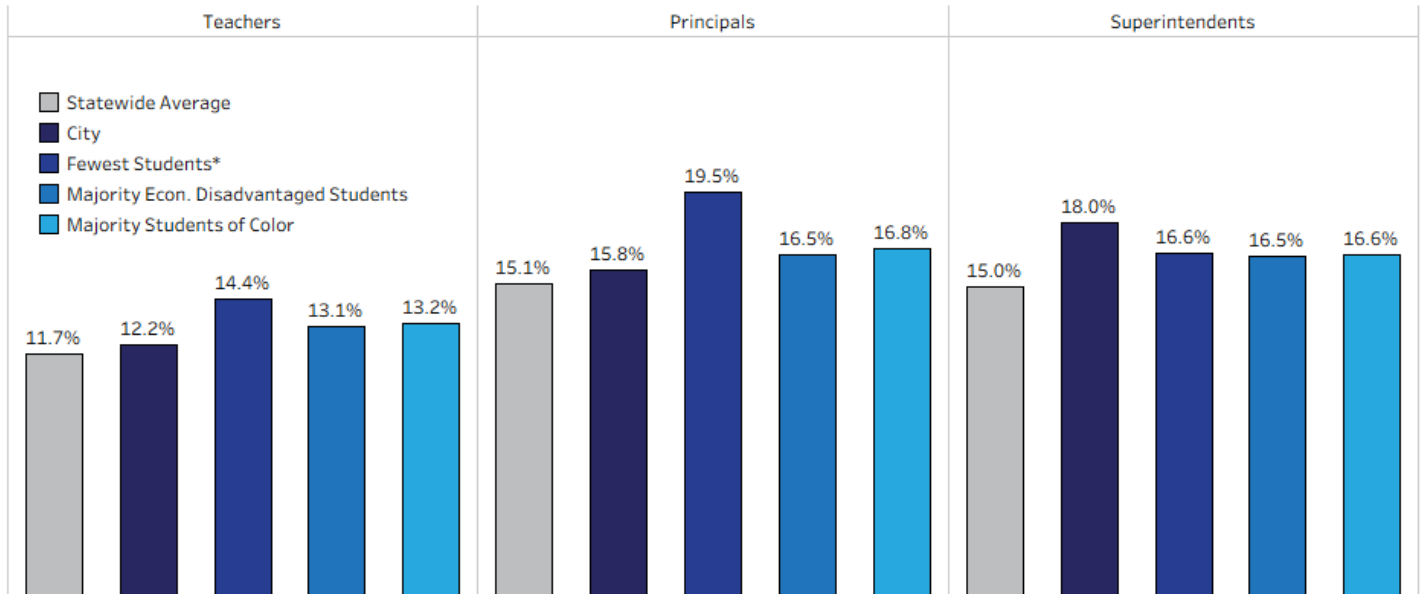
The smallest districts, highlighted previously, claimed not only the highest average teacher turnover of any district type studied (14.4%) but also the highest principal turnover of any district type (19.5%). In addition, there was a large gap between the average principal and superintendent turnover rates at these districts and those with the lowest average rates out of the district size bins (the second-largest districts, with 14.6% turnover for principals and 13.3% for superintendents). The smallest districts thus experienced particularly high turnover and were particularly worse positioned to retain education leaders than their peers.

City districts were in a similar predicament with regard to their top administrators: They had the highest average superintendent turnover rate of any district



**Figure 5: Some District Types Face Both High Leader Turnover and Teacher Turnover**

Average rate of educators turning over from their districts, 2010-2025



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, National Center for Education Statistics, WPF analysis of public school districts. \*Note: Districts with 455 students or fewer, comprising approximately one quarter of Wisconsin school districts.

type over the years studied (18.0%) and the widest gap between their average superintendent turnover rate and that of the locale with the lowest rate (suburban districts, at 13.2%). That is on top of above-average turnover for principals and teachers.

It is discouraging but not surprising that districts experiencing high teacher turnover would also be vulnerable to frequent leadership turnover. The destabilizing consequences of both can be mutually reinforcing, with teacher departures undermining leaders' efforts to implement reforms or maintain consistency, and leaders' departures potentially shaking teachers' faith in their districts. Caught in the midst are students, especially those arriving at school with already unstable home lives.

### SOME SHIFTS IN EDUCATOR DEMOGRAPHICS

Our final analysis examined the cumulative effects of entries and exits on the demographic makeup of the teacher, principal, and superintendent workforce, beginning with gender. Nationally and in Wisconsin, the vast majority of teachers are female, but their share of the public school workforce diminishes at each successive level of leadership – from teachers to principals and from principals to superintendents – with implications for the opportunities available to women and the educators available to children.

In 2025, three-quarters (74.9%) of teachers in Wisconsin identified as female. This percentage has remained virtually unchanged since 2019 and is similar to the national average of 77.1% for preschool through secondary school teachers according to the most recent [Current Population Survey](#) from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

While far fewer principals are women, the share of female school leaders rose for 12 years straight, from 42.5% in 2012 up to 51.4% in 2023. As of 2022, women comprised the majority of principals in the state for the first years on record. The national average crossed this threshold as early as 2008 and stood at 56% in 2021, the most recent year available from [NCES](#).

The trajectory for female superintendents has been less straightforward. From 2009 to 2016, the share of women in the top school leadership role rose in every year, from 16.6% to 27.3%. Progress has since largely stalled, although in 2025, the percentage of female superintendents ticked up to 28.0% of the total. Federal data are not available to provide a definitive national comparison, but Wisconsin appears to be similar to the 2025 national average as estimated by the [School Superintendents Association](#) and [The Superintendent Lab](#).





While there may not be a magic number for the proportion of men or women in any given role, the overrepresentation of women amongst teachers and their underrepresentation amongst education leaders may be some cause for concern. Some research on lagging educational outcomes for boys has [hypothesized](#) that male students would benefit from more male teachers. Meanwhile, a leadership workforce that is not reflective of its teachers is likely missing out on available talent and may contribute to turnover out of the profession, if teachers do not see upward career mobility available to them.

A similar dilemma exists with regard to educator race and ethnicity, beginning with the teaching workforce, which is not reflective of the state's student body or overall state population: In 2025, 92.9% of Wisconsin public school teachers were white (see Figure 6), compared to 65.8% of Wisconsin public school students and (as of the [2024 American Community Survey](#)) 79.6% of Wisconsin residents. Nationally, 81.5% of preschool through secondary school teachers were white in the most recent BLS data from 2024, although it is worth noting that Wisconsin is home to a greater percentage of white residents than the country as a whole. The state's share of teachers of color has increased since 2009, but only by 2.4 percentage points, compared to a 10.7-point increase in the share of students of color over the same time period and a 7.5-point increase in the share of Wisconsin residents of color from 2010 to 2024.

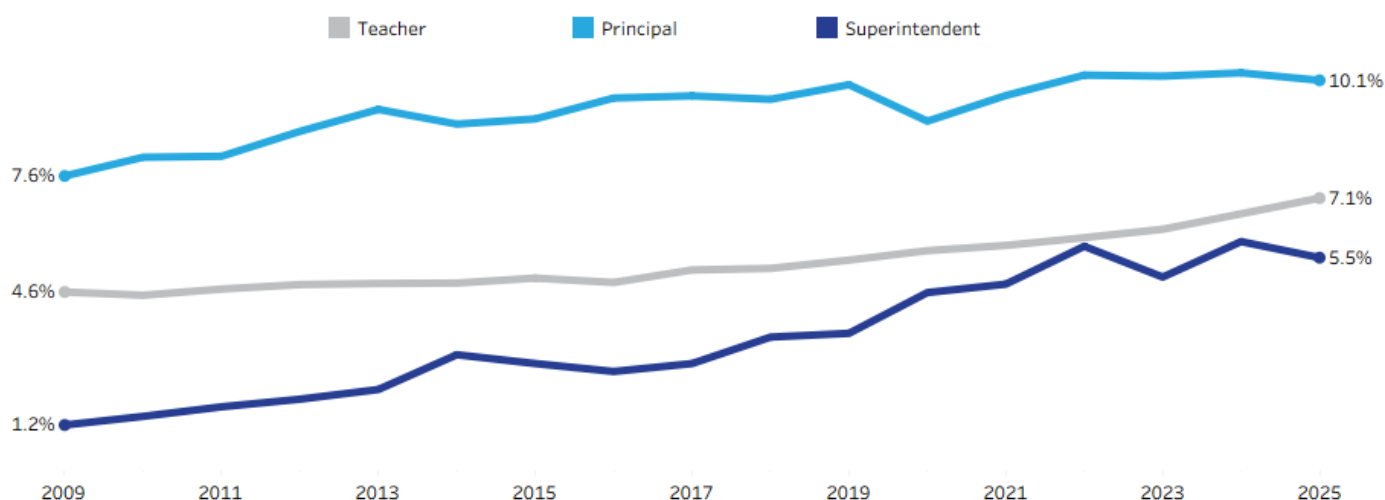
The share of principals of color rose by a similar amount (2.5 percentage points), but they started with greater representation in 2009: 7.6%, growing to 10.1% in 2025. It is meaningful for a tenth of the principal workforce to be composed of individuals of color, for both the students seeing them in leadership positions and for teachers hoping to advance in school leadership. These numbers still fall short of reflecting the state's student body or the national average, which was 23.0% in 2021, but come closer to mirroring Wisconsin's resident population.

Our 2020 report, "[A Teacher Who Looks Like Me](#)," summarized the benefits for students taught by teachers of color, and our [follow-up 2021 report](#) cited school leaders of color as a factor in the successful recruitment and retention of teachers of color.

Meanwhile, in 2009 there were just five superintendents of color in the state, making up 1.2% of the total. That share grew to 5.9% in 2024 before ticking down to 5.5% in 2025. As with gender data, national breakdowns are not available, but the School Superintendents Association estimates that 13.1% of superintendents nationally are individuals of color – although, again, the nation as a whole is less white than Wisconsin.

The slow racial diversification of the teacher, principal, and superintendent workforce is likely primarily due to the state's overall changing demographics, in addition to some intentional efforts to increase representation.

**Figure 6: Educator Workforce Continues to Gradually Diversify**  
Percentage of Wisconsin workforce comprising individuals of color



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, WPF analysis of public school districts.



Turnover plays a role as well, as moves and leaves open up positions for new people to claim.

At least for teachers of color, however, turnover rates have been higher than for their white peers: 15.8% for teachers of color on average from 2010 through 2025, compared to 11.5% for white teachers. (Disaggregated sample sizes were generally too small for principals and superintendents to draw definitive conclusions about disparities in turnover rates.) Going into 2025, 16.7% of teachers of color and 12.4% of white teachers did not return to teach in their home districts. If districts are to take full advantage of the opportunity to diversify represented by turnover, therefore, they will need to not only recruit but also better retain educators of color.

### HOW MUCH CHURN AHEAD?

It is too early to tell whether the recent declines in teacher turnover indicate that the profession is on a path back toward pre-pandemic levels, or if schools are facing a new, elevated norm. Principal and superintendent turnover is even more difficult to predict, with the last two years seeing below-average turnover followed by well-above-average turnover. Current uncertainty regarding interest rates, inflation, and the labor market adds to these question marks, as does a political climate that has emphasized local control and parents' rights, potentially increasing pressure on educators, and cut some federally funded education programs – for example, a [teacher training program through the University of Wisconsin – Madison](#) that would have placed new special education teachers within MPS.

Amid these unknowns, districts may ground their workforce projections and plans in some persistent trends. The latest data confirm that leaves, rather than moves, are the main source of instability for teachers, principals, and superintendents. While some leaves may be the result of individuals taking different roles within the public school system or going to teach or lead in private schools or another state, most districts can be primarily concerned with losing educators to retirement or to other careers altogether.

Retirements are an inevitable phenomenon; districts may be able to delay them but cannot stop them altogether. Leaves to other professions are more within districts' locus of control. They most typically will be able to stem those losses through improving working

conditions: offering meaningful mentorship and training, valuing educators' input, and pairing high expectations with a supportive professional environment.

Compensation also appears to have played a recent critical role in reducing turnover. Further wage increases may be a difficult proposition for many districts, however, if their revenue sources do not increase proportionately or if they cannot identify other expenditures to cut. The [most recent state budget](#) authorized school districts statewide to spend approximately \$760 million more in core funding over two years, all of which would need to be raised on a statewide basis through increased property taxes. The state budget also allocated nearly \$560 million of new special education funding. School districts have expressed doubts about whether these investments are enough to keep up with inflation and fund their core expenses, including staff wages. Compensation is likely to remain a key element of talent recruitment and retention strategies but may need to be paired with other less cost-intensive approaches.

Also affecting school district financing is the fact that [public school student enrollment](#) has declined for 11 years straight. The state's funding formula ties school financing to the number of students served, so districts may see their total revenues decrease even if per pupil revenues remain steady or increase. Enrollment declines should eventually mean that districts need fewer staff positions, but the two variables are not linearly related: With students spread out across classrooms and grade levels, it can take years for a district to effectively right-size its staffing. Still, projecting enrollment declines now can help a district not only budget appropriately but also determine how to manage its turnover, whether by planning not to fill vacancies or reallocating staff resources.

Finally, any statewide efforts to stem turnover or otherwise address educator workforce issues should consider the disproportionate impact of turnover on certain communities: the state's smallest districts, districts serving a majority of low-income students or students of color, city districts, and teachers of color. By targeting solutions, policies can avoid exacerbating existing disparities and work to ensure a stable workforce for the benefit of all students.

