

## K-3 Teacher Retention in the Early Literacy Initiative, 2015-2016 to 2017-2018

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### Key Findings:

- 39% of K-3 teachers in cohort 1 (began in 2015-16) schools taught in the same school and grade for the first three years of the early literacy initiative (2015-2016 to 2017-2018).
- 55% of teachers in cohort 1 schools continued to teach K-3 in any cohort 1 school.
- 4% of teachers in cohort 1 schools continued to teach K-3 in SDP after the first year of the early literacy initiative implementation, and moved to a school in cohort 2 or cohort 3.

### Why examine K-3 teacher retention in the early literacy initiative?

The School District of Philadelphia has invested in several initiatives to improve and support best practices in early literacy instruction. (For more information, see [Anchor Goal 2](#) in Action Plan 3.0: all students will read on grade level by age 8).

The primary early literacy initiative includes a weeklong Summer Literacy Institute professional development series along with job-embedded coaching for K-3 teachers. The goal of the initiative is to support teachers' implementation of the 120-minute literacy block.

The early literacy initiative was implemented in K-3 classrooms over the course of three years, with cohort 1 schools participating in the initiative for the first time in 2015-2016, cohort 2 schools in 2016-2017, and cohort 3 schools in 2017-2018. Thus, the maximum number of years that teachers in each school received coaching differs by cohort (Table 1). Coaching is continuing in the 2018-2019 school year for all schools and cohorts.

Teacher retention and teacher movement between schools or grade levels from year to year poses a particular challenge to the early literacy initiative. When teachers move to a new school or grade, they take with them the knowledge and skills they learned in the classroom and as a result of professional development and coaching. The new teachers who replace them may not have received as much coaching or may not have been coached at all. This turnover can make it difficult for schools to make sustained progress towards implementing the 120-minute literacy block. Failure to retain teachers can also have negative implications for schools trying to meeting the District's literacy outcome goals.

**Table 1: The early literacy initiative was implemented using a cohort approach**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Year Initiative Began</b>	<b>Number of Schools In Each Cohort</b>	<b>Maximum Years of Coaching Teachers Received by Cohort (as of fall 2018)</b>
<b>1</b>	2015-2016	40	3
<b>2</b>	2016-2017	53	2
<b>3</b>	2017-2018	56	1

This study examined K-3 teacher retention in cohort 1 and 2 schools to examine the extent to which teacher movement across grades, schools, and cohorts affected the implementation of the early literacy initiative.

This brief addresses the following research question:

- 1) **What percentage of K-3 teachers remained in the same cohort, school, and/or grade from 2015-2016 through 2017-2018?**

### **How did we measure teacher retention?**

Because early literacy instruction is different in grades K-3 and was implemented using a cohort model, ORE analyzed teacher retention at three levels: cohort,<sup>1</sup> school, and grade.

First, we examined **within cohort retention**. If a teacher was “retained” in his or her cohort, that means he or she continued to teach K-3 at a single school or multiple schools within the same cohort. Thus, there are two criteria for a teacher to be included in the within cohort analysis: first, that he or she taught within the K-3 grade span for their entire participation in the early literacy initiative, and second, that they remained in a single cohort for their entire participation in the early literacy initiative. If a teacher taught at more than one school within the same cohort, they are still considered retained in this analysis. However, if a teacher no longer teaches in K-3 grade band, they are not considered retained, no matter the school or cohort. In addition to examining cohort 1 retention between each year of the initiative, ORE also calculated the “overall” retention rate across all three years of the initiative (that is, what percent of teachers were retained from 2015-2016 to 2017-2018).

Next, we examined **school and grade retention**. Because the early literacy initiative provides training to K-3 teachers only, we defined school retention as teachers who were retained in a single school AND continued to teach in the K-3 grade band. Grade retention considers the specific grade a teacher taught each year. For example, if a teacher taught Kindergarten at School A in year 1 and first grade at School A in year 2, we consider this teacher retained at the school but not in the grade. If the teacher taught Kindergarten at School A in year 1 and Kindergarten at School B in year 2, we

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<sup>1</sup> A cohort is comprised of K-3 teachers at a group of schools that received the early literacy intervention in a specific year. See Table 1.

consider this teacher retained in the grade but not at the school. Finally, we looked to see how often teachers were retained in their school AND their specific grade, not just the K-3 grade band.

## What did we learn?

### Within Cohort Retention

#### Cohort 1

After year 1 of the initiative, 71% of the 517 K-3 teachers in cohort 1 schools were retained in their cohort, meaning they continued to teach K-3 in one of the 40 cohort 1 schools in 2016-2017. Of the K-3 teachers in cohort 1 schools who were not retained in a cohort 1 school after the first year, about 6% were retained in the K-3 grade-span, but moved to a cohort 2 or 3 school (one of the 109 schools that would begin implementation in later years). The rest of the teachers in cohort 1 schools that were not retained (23%) either taught a grade other than K-3 anywhere in the District, or left the District.

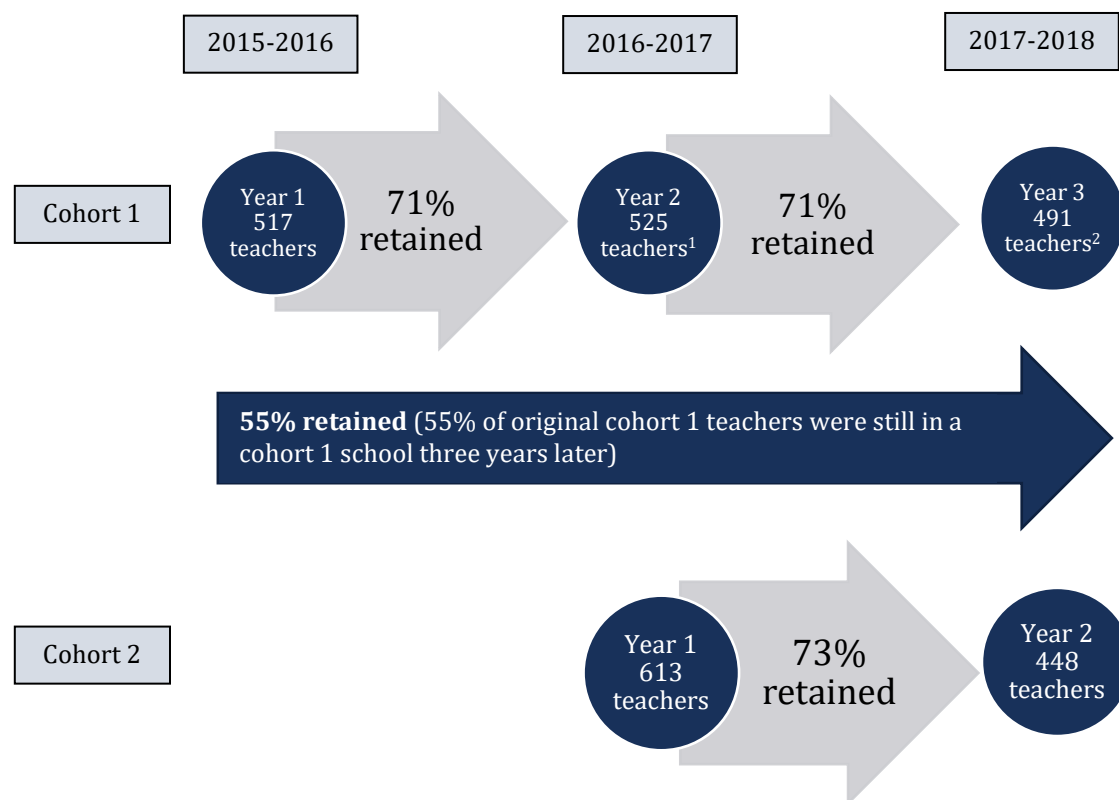
After year 2 of the initiative, 71% of the 525 K-3 teachers in cohort 1 schools were retained in the cohort the following year (2017-2018). Of the 29% of teachers not retained, 4% moved to a cohort 2 or 3 school and stayed in the K-3 grade band. The remaining 25% either taught a grade other than K-3 anywhere in the District, or left the District.

After three years of the initiative, about half (55%) of K-3 teachers in cohort 1 schools were retained in a cohort 1 school (Figure 1). This means that 55% of the teachers teaching K-3 in 2015-2016 in a cohort 1 school also taught K-3 in a cohort 1 school in 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.

#### Cohort 2

After a year of implementation, 73% of the 613 K-3 teachers in a cohort 2 school in 2016-2017 were retained in a cohort 2 school the following year (2017-2018). Of the teachers not retained in the cohort, 4% moved to teach K-3 in a cohort 1 or cohort 3 school and 23% taught a grade other than K-3 anywhere in the District, or left the District (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. 55% of the K-3 teachers that started in cohort 1 were still teaching in cohort 1 after the third year of the early literacy initiative**



<sup>1</sup>Of these 525, 367 (71%) were from year 1.

<sup>2</sup>Of these 491, 372 (71%) were from year 2.

## School and Grade Retention

Next, we looked specifically at within-grade, within-school, and within-grade-and-school retention.

### Cohort 1 School Retention

Of the 517 K-3 teachers who taught in a cohort 1 school in 2015-2016, 68% were retained in the same school in 2016-2017 (Figure 2). Approximately the same percentage of cohort 1 teachers (69%) were retained in the same school between 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.

Looking across three years (2015-2016 to 2017-2018), the average school retention rate for cohort 1 schools was 51%, meaning that, on average, cohort 1 schools retained about half of their K-3 teachers over the first three years of the early literacy initiative. Thus, 49% of K-3 teachers who began in a cohort 1 school in 2015-2016 were no longer a K-3 teacher in that same school in 2017-2018. This means that they stayed at the school and moved out of the K-3 grade band or left the school.

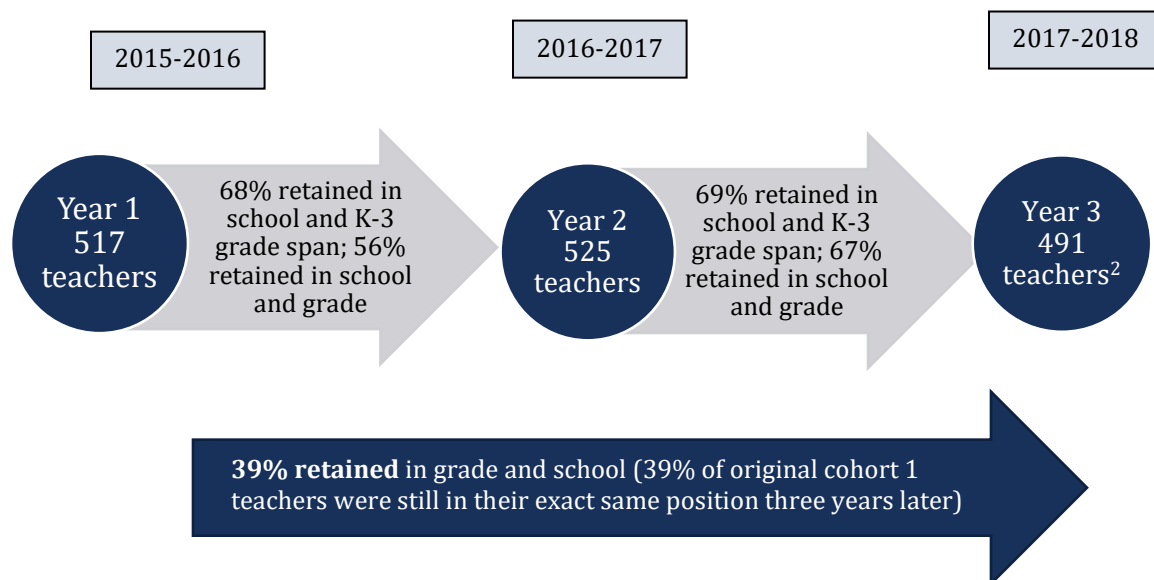
### Cohort 1 Grade Retention

On average, 60% of teachers in cohort 1 schools were retained in the same grade from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017, though not necessarily in the same school. Between 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, 62% of teachers were retained in the same grade. Across the three years, 46% of cohort 1 teachers were retained in their same grade.

### Cohort 1 Grade and School Retention

Of the 517 teachers who taught in a cohort 1 school in 2015-2016, 56% were retained in the same grade and the same school between 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. From 2016-2017 to 2017-2018, 57% of cohort 1 teachers remained in the same grade and the same school. Looking across three years (2015-2016 to 2017-2018), 39% of cohort 1 teachers remained in the same grade and the same school. This means that of the 517 K-3 teachers in cohort 1, 39% were still teaching at the same school in the same grade from year 1 to year 3. In other words, 39% of cohort 1 teachers had the exact same teaching position in 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018

**Figure 2: Thirty-nine percent of K-3 teachers in cohort 1 schools taught the same grade in the same school each year from 2015-2016 to 2017-2018**



### Cohort 2 School Retention

For cohort 2, the average school retention rate from year 1 (2016-2017) to year 2 (2017-2018) was 73%, which is five percentage points higher than the school retention rate for year 1 to year 2 for cohort 1. This means that of the 613 K-3 teachers in cohort 2 schools, 448 taught within the K-3 grade band at the same school in both 2017-2018 and 2016-2017. The remaining 27% of teachers either taught a grade outside of K-3 or left their 2016-2017 school.

#### Cohort 2 Grade and School Retention

When looking at both school and grade, 61% of the 613 teachers in cohort 2 schools taught in the same school *and* grade in both 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. In other words, 61% of teachers in cohort 2 schools had the exact same teaching position in 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.

#### **What does this mean for the early literacy initiative?**

This analysis shows that 39% of K-3 teachers in cohort 1 schools taught in the same school and grade for the first three years of the early literacy initiative implementation. In other words, 39% of teachers in cohort 1 schools had the opportunity to attend the summer institute and receive three full years of coaching. When teachers who transferred to other cohort 1 schools are included, a total of 55% of K-3 teachers in cohort 1 schools remained in the K-3 grade band and also in a cohort 1 school.

Increasing within-cohort and within-grade retention along with providing additional supports to K-3 teachers who did not begin the initiative with the other teachers in their building will be important for future implementation of the early literacy initiative.