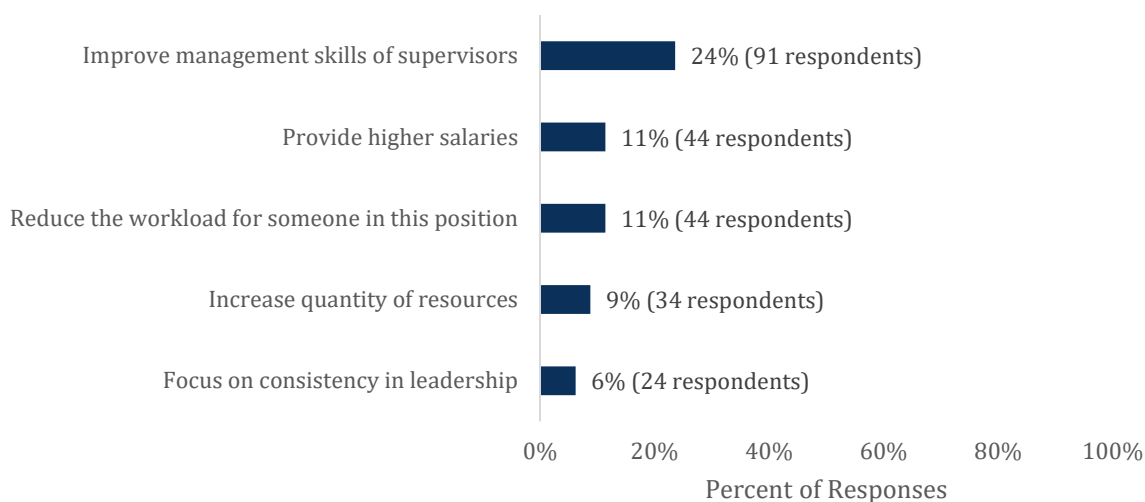


Figure 6. Respondents' most-selected top action to improve employee retention, n= 386



Source: Survey item: “Please choose the top 3 things the District should implement to retain employees.” Results are based on responses from 386 SDP employees. Data from Employee Exit Survey Responses (August 2017- April 2021).

What themes emerged from teachers’ and school-based instructional staff’s open-ended comments about their decision to resign?

The 386 respondents included in the analytic sample left a total of 597 replies to open-ended questions asking for additional feedback, reasons for their departure, and what SDP should do to improve retention⁹. While some comments provided additional information about the reasons outside of SDP’s control for why teachers left, we focused on understanding the experiences of those who responded to the survey and noted they left due to reasons within SDP’s control. The following themes and comments represent the perspectives of a selection of respondents who left SDP from August 2017 to April 2021 and are therefore not representative of the experiences of the over 1,600 teachers who left SDP over this time period.

Common themes emerged across the open-ended responses, including negative relationships and experiences with school leaders, negative workplace culture, feeling overwhelmed by the workload and negative student behaviors, and a lack of opportunities for professional growth. Example responses are provided for each.

Negative relationships and experiences with school leaders.

Teachers and school-based instructional staff left 96 open-ended comments explaining how negative relationships with principals and school leaders led to their resignation. Two respondents, specifically described their school leadership and administration as “unethical” and “hostile.” Many

⁹ All quotes are presented as written from the Employee Exit Survey and any errors are original.

respondents specifically referred to the principal, school leader, or administration as a main source for feeling mistreated, unsupported, or unappreciated. Examples included:

- “Administration did not value me or respect me as a colleague and a professional.”
- “My principal spoke to staff and myself in a way that made me feel like I was constantly doing something wrong, even when I would do a task properly. She has yelled at staff and makes people feel that she is not someone they can come to for help. She pushed people around and makes it very clear who her favorites are and who she does not like. ... She has created a climate in the building that does not allow for the teachers to be leaders in their own classroom.”
- “My principal has only done two informals and wrote things that were not true. From one day to the next, you don't know how she will act. She is causing me extreme anxiety due to the lack of consistency as a leader.”
- “The main reason I am leaving is my administration. They made me feel inadequate as a teacher, that I was being bullied, and that I had no place in their school. Instead of helping me to improve, I was constantly told I wasn't good enough.”
- “It was unfortunate that because my administration was not good at managing adults and working as a part of a team that I felt I could not stay at my school.”
- “This district is going to continue to lose highly qualified, passionate teachers if leadership does not improve.”

Negative workplace culture.

Respondents left 128 comments about how negative school culture, often set by school leaders, contributed to their departure. One respondent commented, “The culture between administrators and teachers is very demoralizing. We are treated poorly and I feel as though they looked down on me and did not help me grow as a teacher in the way I wanted to grow.”

Three respondents commented on teachers needing more respect from District leadership. One respondent said, “Treat teachers as respected, valued professional employees with respect and sincere dignity.” One respondent commented, “Treating teachers as respected professionals goes a long way. Employee feedback should happen privately and not in staff meetings or gatherings.”

Other examples included:

- “The district takes for granted their employees and their families. I shouldn't have been surprised. Having worked in a school that dealt with an asbestos crisis, I saw first hand the lack of concern that our district officials had for staff and students.”

Five respondents directly stated that if they felt supported and respected in their position they would have continued working for SDP. One respondent wrote, “If the administrators had respected me as a professional and as an individual...I would have been happy to have completed my workload and continued to the end of the school year.”

One respondent commented, “If I felt appreciated, supported, understood, and received criticism in a constructive matter I would have stayed because I really feel like I made a difference for Philadelphia students.” Similar comments included:

- “I also think that leaders should be required to have regular communication and leadership trainings as well as being held accountable for how they interact with teachers. If we are already serving a challenging population, leadership disrespecting teachers only makes it easy for students to model that behavior. There should be policy set in place to navigate away from that. All staff need skills to build a solid team with respect so that our children can observe and learn from that.”

Feeling overwhelmed by the workload and negative student behaviors.

Teachers and school-based instructional staff left 171 open-ended comment to highlight the impact of unmanageable workloads and negative student behaviors. Eleven respondents specifically commented that teachers need more “instructional supports staff,” and five respondents specifically expressed the need for “smaller class sizes.” Two respondents commented that teacher’s concerns should not be ignored, noting that a “culture of trust” should be established and teachers should be “believe[d] when they [teachers] say the environment is hostile.” Ten respondents commented that all members of the school community students, teachers, and administration should feel safe and welcome in each school. One respondent commented, “Recognize that the climate of a school is the biggest contribution to student learning. If teachers and students feel unsafe, no learning will take place. It is not the teacher's sole responsibility to maintain the climate of the school.”

Respondents commented on the impact that student behaviors and a lack of resources to manage them had on teachers’ decision to leave. Examples included:

- “Take care of your teachers. There is an extremely large workload and unrealistic expectations for teachers That is why there is a large amount of stress and teacher turnover.”
- “SDP should figure out a plan to help principals and admin to better deal with student behavior and improving school culture.”
- “Kids run the school.”
- “I feel there is not enough staff to ensure my safety or that of the students, I am mentally and physical drained from the job and I am beginning to see physical side effects- migraines, lack of sleep, poor immune system.”
- “The lack of resources provided by the district is becoming unmanageable. There is not adequate staff to meet student needs. There is not adequate materials to meet student needs. There also seems to be no desire to actually fix these problems. On top of terrible leadership and school supervisors there is no way the district can be a sustainable place to work.”

One respondent wrote, “Recognize that the climate of a school is the biggest contribution to student learning. If teachers and students feel unsafe, no learning will take place. It is not the teacher's sole responsibility to maintain the climate of the school.”

A lack of opportunities for professional growth.

Teachers and school-based instructional staff left 23 open-ended comments to highlight the lack of professional growth opportunities provided to teachers. Seventeen respondents commented on the need for more resources and professional development. One respondent commented, “SDP could have been more consistent with my development as a new teacher who is trying to build the necessary skills to be an effective educator.” Another respondent suggested, “Offer more training at the start on lesson plans, small group instruction, unpacking standards, standard/task alignment, and classroom management.” Two respondents suggested specific professional development on behavior management:

- “As a first year teacher, I felt that I did not get much support from my school or my district. My school lacked consistent administrative presence and involvement, and most teachers were so overworked that they couldn't spare much time to mentor or train me. “
- “Support the teachers in professional development and with student behavior. There was no consistent manner in which students were disciplined.”

Two respondents added that they wanted to see more opportunities for former teachers to move into school administration positions:

- “There needs to be more involved in hiring a principal than just being in the district for a long time. Principals should also have experience teaching in the same grade level, atmosphere in order to be effective leaders.”
- “The leadership in my school did not have any experience teaching at all let alone in the school district. I would like to see more teachers from SDP rise up into leadership roles instead of being passed over for principals from charter schools.”

Conclusion

The Employee Exit Survey collected over 1,100 responses between August 2017 and April 2021. Of those responses, 386 were teachers and school-based instructional staff who resigned from their position. Over half (56%) of those who resigned were white, female teachers or staff and 16% were Black/African American, female teachers or staff. One fourth (23%) resigned before the school year concluded. Of 386 teachers and school-based staff who resigned from their position and completed the employee exit survey, 57% (n=204) stated they left for reasons related to, or within the control of, the School District of Philadelphia.

Half of the 204 teachers and instructional staff who resigned for reasons within SDP's control indicated that emotional/physical safety concerns and leadership and management style of their supervisor were their primary reasons for leaving (51% and 48%, respectively). When asked to rank their reasons for resigning, 40% of respondents who left for reasons within SDP's control ranked leadership and management style of their supervisor as the primary reason. Moreover, 54% of the 386 teachers and school-based instructional staff who resigned for any reason suggested improving management skills of supervisors as the primary action SDP should implement to

increase teacher retention. In the open-ended comments section, respondents specifically addressed feeling mistreated and unsupported by their school administration.

