



UPBEAT

Tackling Teacher Retention with a Multi-Faceted, Whole-Person Approach in Jefferson County Public Schools

An Upbeat Report

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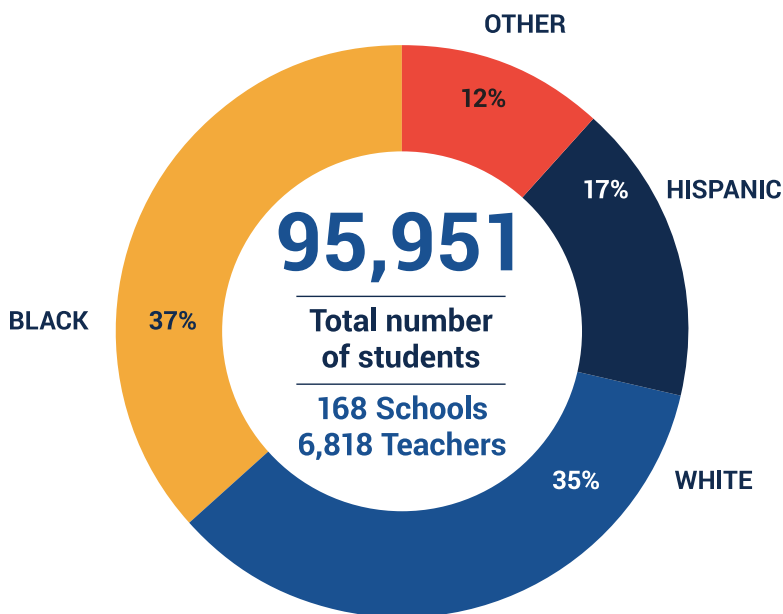
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Tackling Teacher Retention with a Multi-Faceted, Whole-Person Approach in Jefferson County Public Schools

Just prior to the Covid pandemic, the challenge of retaining teachers in Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS), serving the greater Louisville, Kentucky metropolitan area, emerged as a critical concern in the face of declining enrollment in teacher preparation programs nationwide. In response, JCPS created the Office of Teacher Retention and asked experienced district leaders Dr. Aimee Green-Webb and Dr. Marco Munoz to identify the root causes of teacher attrition and implement a multi-faceted approach focusing on teacher engagement and satisfaction. This executive summary outlines the strategies employed, challenges faced, and the significant impact achieved through the implementation of Upbeat, a research-based improvement process that integrates survey diagnosis, analysis, and coaching support to improve teacher retention.

Table 1: JCPS At a Glance¹



**66.6% Qualify for Free and/or Reduced Priced Meal;
9% English Language Learners**

Implementing Upbeat, Promising Results:

As a pilot, Dr. Green-Webb and Dr. Munoz implemented Upbeat in 18 of JCPS's lowest performing schools with the highest teacher attrition just as the Covid pandemic hit. Despite being fully remote, the initial Upbeat Improvement Cycle in the 18 pilot schools showed promising results; teacher retention was up an impressive 12.5%.² As Dr. Munoz explained, "Upbeat gave us a mechanism that gives teacher voice for real." JCPS then scaled Upbeat to more than double the number of schools and then a year later, in 2022-2023, Upbeat was implemented in all 165 schools. From the launch of the pilot to district-wide scale-up over the next three years, teacher retention in JCPS increased steadily. The 2022-2023 school year saw a district-wide teacher retention rate decrease due largely to resignations, but it then bounced back to

nearly 95.0% in 2023-2024. Perhaps even more impressive was that a 2023 Upbeat survey of teachers found an overwhelming majority were satisfied with their careers at JCPS. This contrasted sharply with national data on teacher job satisfaction that showed that 79% of teachers were dissatisfied with the overall conditions of teaching and 74% would not recommend the profession to a prospective new teacher.³

¹ <https://www.jefferson.kyschools.us/school-performance-data>

² <https://www.jefferson.kyschools.us/departments/communications/monday-memo/jcps-tackles-teacher-retention-multi-faceted-whole-person>

³ https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2022/de-14326_aft_member_survey.pdf

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Table 2: JCPS Teacher Retention Compared to National Average⁴

Key Insights and Strategies:

Through the implementation of Upbeat, JCPS principals gained valuable insights into the factors influencing teacher engagement and retention. Four key strategies emerged:

1. Shift from Data Point to Discussion Point:

Through the first two Upbeat improvement cycles in JCPS, a significant proportion of teachers consistently reported principals at their schools didn't allow them appropriate discretion in the classroom. This puzzled principals because they trusted their teachers' professional expertise. In sharing the Upbeat data with their schools, principals learned quickly that teachers were responding more to district-mandated changes when answering the questions. Principals then utilized Upbeat data to foster discussions on teacher autonomy and decision-making, empowering teachers and addressing their concerns.

2. Understand Generational Differences of Wellbeing:

JCPS central office administrators and principals noticed clear differences in feelings of belonging and wellbeing across generations, most clearly with younger teachers new to the profession. The Upbeat improvement cycles helped JCPS identify trends in how generational and career-phases impact teacher engagement. Principals could then work with teachers to implement strategies that improved belonging and wellbeing across different teacher generations.

3. Make Teacher Appreciation Matter:

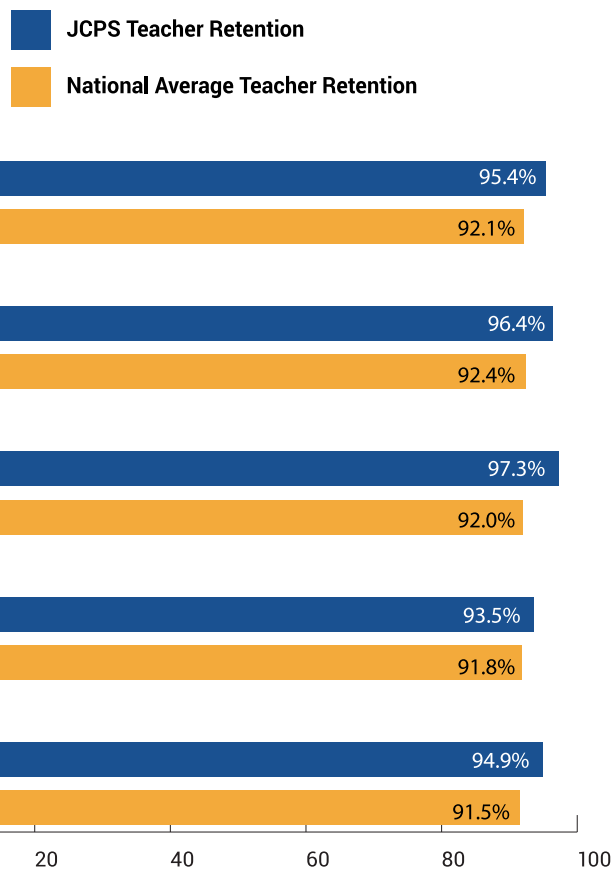
Over the past several years, JCPS implemented multiple efforts to show teachers appreciation with a goal of improving retention. Principals used the Upbeat survey to get feedback on and increase teachers' feelings of appreciation.

4. Retain Teachers of Color as Priority:

In the 2023-2024 school year, JCPS had the highest percentage of teachers of color ever in its history at 17%. Although the district has emphasized years of efforts to attract and retain teachers of color, the proportion is far from reflecting the demographics of JCPS where two-thirds are children of color. Principals used Upbeat to better understand their efforts to recruit and retain a diverse teacher workforce. The questions on diversity were used to open up conversations about belonging and wellbeing for teachers of color in the district.

Conclusion:

JCPS leaders emphasized the importance of continuous improvement, leveraging Upbeat data to identify areas for growth and expansion. The collaboration between JCPS leadership and Upbeat has yielded significant improvements in teacher retention and satisfaction. By focusing on data-driven discussions, understanding generational differences, showing appreciation, and prioritizing diversity, JCPS has created a more supportive and inclusive environment for its teachers.



⁴ <https://nces.ed.gov/pubns2024/2024039SummaryM.pdf>; <https://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/4773-teacher-turnover-paper.pdf>



CASE STUDY

**Tackling Teacher Retention
with a Multi-Faceted,
Whole-Person Approach in
Jefferson County Public Schools**

Tackling Teacher Retention with a Multi-Faceted, Whole-Person Approach in Jefferson County Public Schools, Geoff Marietta, Ed.D

Focus on Teacher Retention

In the fall of 2019, Dr. Aimee Green-Webb strolled through the large convention hall filled with hundreds of vendors at a national conference for education human resource professionals. She and her colleague, Dr. Marco Munoz, had been tasked with leading the newly formed Office of Teacher Retention in Jefferson County Public Schools serving the greater Louisville, Kentucky metropolitan area. The Office had been formed out of urgent concern about the declining number of students majoring in education and enrolling in teacher preparation programs.¹ The pool of new teacher candidates walking through the door at Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) was shrinking. It was now paramount to support and retain the teachers currently in JCPS, and the two wondered if there was any solution that could help them with their challenge. Little could they have known what the next few years would bring, trying to tackle teacher retention during and after a global pandemic that would arrive in Kentucky in just a few short months.

But right now, Dr. Green-Webb, then the Executive Administrator of Personnel, and Dr. Munoz, Assistant Director of Employee Retention, were searching for a tool that would help them identify and take action on the main drivers of teacher retention in the 165 schools they served. Dr. Munoz approached the role with the fundamental belief that teachers' experiences in schools were a central influence on their career decision to stay or leave the profession. A native of Central America, he had arrived in Louisville on a Fulbright Scholarship in the mid 1990s, only to stay and work in several different roles, first in the district's research department, then as the first director of low-performing (turnaround) schools, and now as the founding director of the Office of Teacher Retention. Dr. Munoz reflected, "We were starting from scratch. Think about it, even today if you look at books on educational leadership, there are no chapters on teacher retention. The only thing we knew then was that the pipeline of new teachers was declining fast and teacher retention was getting worse." Indeed, the U.S. Department of Education's Title II Report, which provides comprehensive counts of individuals enrolled and admitted to teacher preparation programs, showed worrisome data. In Kentucky, the number of people in teacher preparation programs had fallen sharply from over 11,000 in 2013 to just 4,500 in 2017.²

Dr. Green-Webb, who would later be appointed Chief Human Resource Officer in 2021, had a similar perspective. She had deep experience in the district, and valued the diversity and unique challenges JCPS brought as a large, urban school system in a primarily rural state. As a former director of the district's minority teacher recruitment project and a district-run alternative certification program, Dr. Green-Webb also knew firsthand the complexity of recruiting, onboarding, and retaining teachers. Up until 2019, JCPS used mostly passive teacher recruitment tactics, such as posting on job boards or advertising at local colleges. Because it offered one of the most competitive salary schedules in the region, JCPS rarely lost teachers to neighboring districts. But, in 2018-2019 JCPS endured negative public media attention about student and teacher safety; also, the teacher retirement system had been chronically underfunded and had become an issue in state political races. Dr. Green-Webb explained

1 Kraft, M.A., & Lyon, M.A. The rise and fall of the teaching profession: Prestige, interest, preparation, and satisfaction over the last half century, *EdWorkingPaper*

2 <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx>

the context leading up to the pandemic, “Our ability to recruit was damaged and the pipeline of new teachers just wasn’t there. Because of these challenges, we had done a lot of work looking at why we were losing people. We examined neighboring districts and the teachers moving into administrative positions in our own district. We started to focus on creative solutions for recruiting and retaining teachers.”

At the vendor hall, it was Dr. Green-Webb who first came across Upbeat and was captivated by Upbeat’s software tools focused on teacher job satisfaction and retention. The state had a teacher engagement survey, but Green-Webb felt the results were too broad and arrived too late to make any actionable decisions. Upbeat’s research-based approach to identifying factors that have the most impact on teacher retention impressed her. Dr. Green-Webb told Dr. Munoz about Upbeat so they both could assess the tool’s ability to improve teacher retention at JCPS.

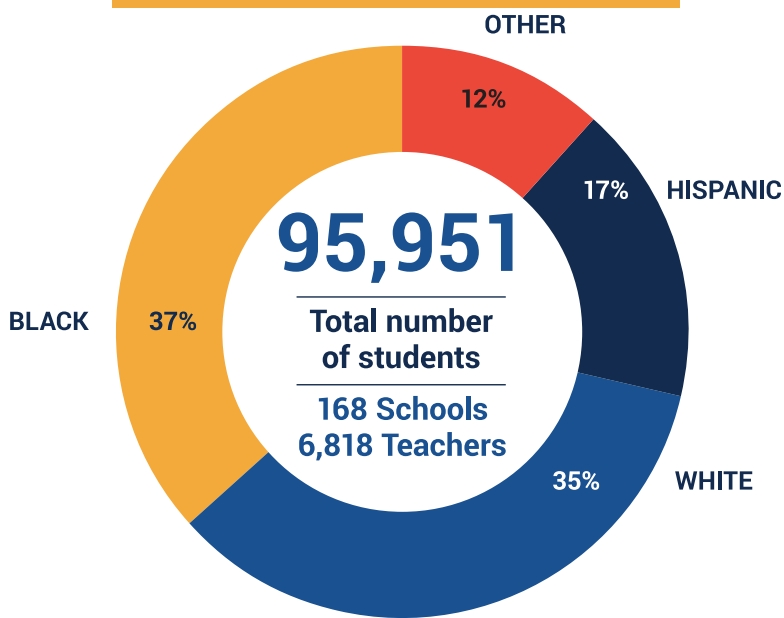
Setting the Context

Mention the state of Kentucky and one often thinks of rolling bluegrass hills, horses, and bourbon. But it is also home to one of the largest—30th in the nation—and most diverse school systems in the United States. Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) serves nearly 100,000 students, more than two-thirds of whom qualify for free-or-reduced priced meals. Fifty-eight percent are students of color and nine percent are English language learners, which is an increase of 121% since 2018. There are 139 different languages spoken in the homes of JCPS students, with the most common being Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, Somali, and other African languages. In terms of staffing, JCPS employs more than 16,000 employees, most of whom are represented by five different unions including the Jefferson County Teachers Association, Service Employees International Union, and the Jefferson County Association of Educational Support Personnel.

A Plan for Intervention and Improvement: Partnering with Upbeat

After spending time to understand Upbeat’s approach, Drs. Green-Webb and Munoz moved quickly to implement the tool in 18 of JCPS’s lowest performing “Accelerated

Table 1: JCPS At a Glance³



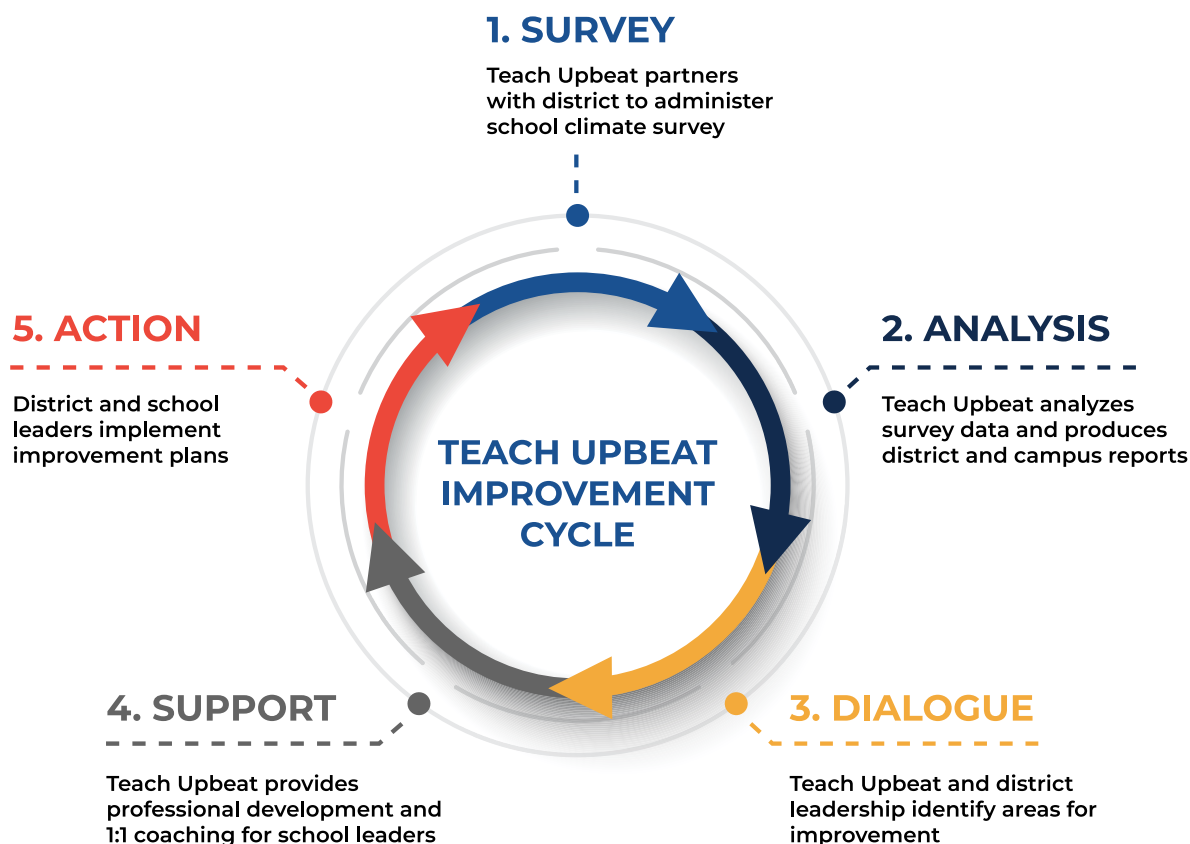
**66.6% Qualify for Free and/or Reduced Priced Meal;
 9% English Language Learners**

3 <https://www.jefferson.kyschools.us/school-performance-data>

Improvement Schools”, or Title I schools, with the highest teacher attrition. They both knew the research demonstrating that working conditions mattered for teacher engagement and retention; they also understood that studies consistently found teachers had the largest school-based impact on students’ academic success.⁴ Improving student performance became possible with teachers who were more engaged and enjoyed their jobs. As Dr. Munoz summarized, “Talent management precedes instructional leadership.”⁵ Upbeat’s Improvement Cycle process also aligned with Dr. Munoz’s adherence to improvement science. Throughout his career, he always asked three questions when trying to address a challenge:

1. What is the specific problem I am trying to solve?
2. What change might I introduce and why?
3. How will I know whether the change is actually an improvement?

Figure 1: Teach Upbeat Improvement Cycle



4 Kraft, M.A., Simon, N.S., & Lyon, M.A. (2021). Sustaining a sense of success: The protective role of teacher working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 14(4), 727-769; Kraft, M.A., Marinell, W.H. & Yee, D*. (2016). School organizational contexts, teacher turnover, and student achievement: Evidence from panel data. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(5), 1411-1499; Johnson, S.M., Kraft, M.A., & Papay, J.P. (2012). How context matters in high-need schools: The effects of teachers’ working conditions on their professional satisfaction and their students’ achievement. *Teachers College Record*, 114(10), 1-39.

5 USHCA

In the winter of 2020, Drs. Green-Webb and Munoz worked with Upbeat to launch the first improvement cycle. Upbeat began by administering teacher surveys in the 18 pilot schools to establish a baseline understanding of teacher engagement and satisfaction. During the week of March 9-13, 2020 Upbeat leadership coaches met in-person one-on-one with principals to analyze the baseline data and create action plans. Then, on the afternoon of March 13, the Governor of Kentucky announced the closing of all public K-12 schools in the state for at least two weeks due to the Covid pandemic. JCPS would not reopen for in-person learning until January 24, 2022.

Signs of Success, Scaling Upbeat

The disruptions caused by the pandemic wreaked havoc on JCPS as it did on all education systems. The sudden shift to remote learning, heightened stress levels, and concerns about health and safety exacerbated existing challenges in retaining educators. Fortunately, for JCPS, it had launched the Upbeat pilot just in time to intervene and improve teacher retention. With the support of the leadership coaches, principals began to have more productive and transparent conversations with teachers in the district's most vulnerable schools about challenges, needs, and ideas for support. As Dr. Munoz explained, "It was turning data into information. In the first year, we built a new type of leadership that would embrace seeing teachers as people first and then as employees. Upbeat gave us a mechanism to actually incorporate teacher voice." Dr. Green-Webb also emphasized the importance of having Upbeat be dually implemented from the start by the academic and human resources departments in JCPS, "From the very beginning, we made sure the Chief of Schools was involved. That person is responsible for the supervision and development of principals and instructional leadership. It has to be a partnership, a collaboration across the divisions. This has led to a broader use of data across the district, giving us a more comprehensive picture."

Despite being fully remote, the initial Upbeat Improvement Cycle in the 18 pilot schools showed promising results; teacher retention was up an impressive 12.5%.⁶ After the promising results of the first pilot year, Drs. Green-Webb and Munoz decided to scale Upbeat to more than double the number of schools (44 schools), adding so-called "accountability" or A1 schools to the original pilot schools. Then a year later, in 2022-2023, they were implemented in all 165 schools. Dr. Munoz explained, "We could see it in the outcome data. Quite honestly, I thought we would go from 18 to 44 to 88. But we were seeing such an impact. It was almost like a miracle, everything was just working. It was not fair to delay it to all schools."

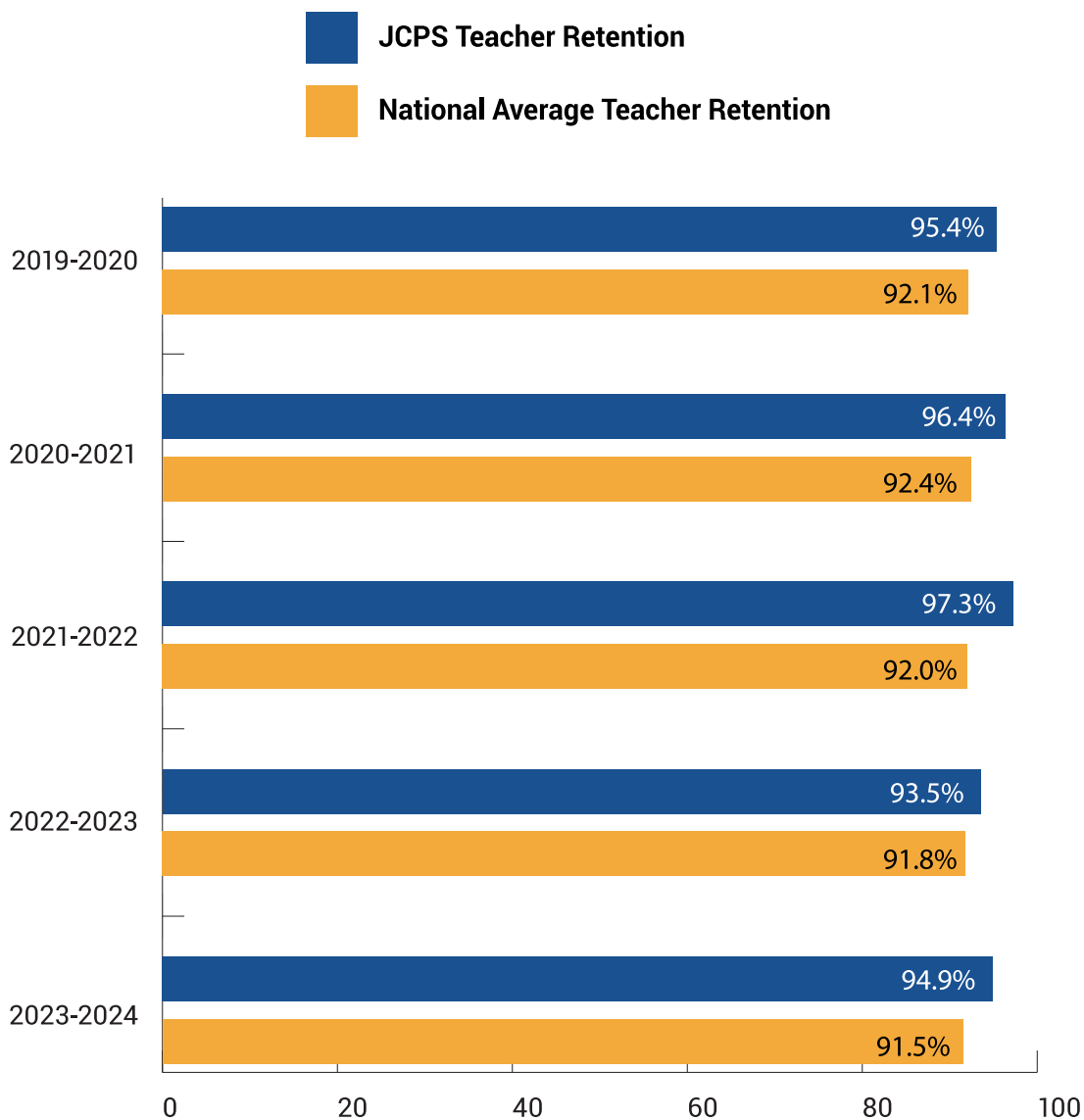
From the launch of the pilot to district-wide scale-up over the next three years, teacher retention in JCPS increased steadily. The 2022-2023 school year saw a district-wide teacher retention rate decrease due largely to resignations, but it then bounced back to nearly 95.0% in 2023-2024. Perhaps even more impressive was that a 2023 Upbeat survey of teachers found an overwhelming majority were satisfied with their careers at JCPS. The survey also showed gains in nine areas, including school safety, appreciation, and teacher voice and leadership.⁷ This contrasted sharply with national data on teacher job satisfaction. For

6 <https://www.jefferson.kyschools.us/departments/communications/monday-memo/jcps-tackles-teacher-retention-multi-faceted-whole-person>

7 <https://www.jefferson.kyschools.us/departments/communications/monday-memo/jcps-teacher-retention-bounces-back>

example, a recent American Federation of Teachers survey showed that 79% of teachers were dissatisfied with the overall conditions of teaching and 74% would not recommend the profession to a prospective new teacher.⁸

Table 2: JCPS Teacher Retention Compared to National Average⁹



8 https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2022/de-14326_aft_member_survey.pdf

9 <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2024/2024039SummaryM.pdf>; <https://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/4773-teacher-turnover-paper.pdf>

Now, nearly two years since reopening schools after the pandemic, all JCPS schools were in at least their second improvement cycle with the pilot schools in their fourth. To learn more about how JCPS used Upbeat to improve teacher retention districtwide, we interviewed six principals and two leadership coaches to understand what Drs. Green-Webb and Munoz call the “critical few” or high-impact factors that matter the most for teacher engagement.¹⁰ What emerged were four key takeaways about the impact of Upbeat in JCPS:

- + Shift from Data Point to Discussion Point
- + Understand Generational Differences of Wellbeing
- + Make Teacher Appreciation Matter
- + Retain Teachers of Color as a Priority

Shift from Data Point to Discussion Point

One of the most important ways principals saw the Upbeat improvement cycle impact teacher engagement and retention was somewhat unexpected. Principals believed they were giving teachers voice in decision-making and autonomy with their pedagogy, but the Upbeat survey suggested otherwise. Numerous studies show that teacher participation in school governance and influence over decision-making processes were pivotal factors affecting teacher voice and leadership, which is a key factor in teacher retention.¹¹ Simply put, schools where teachers reported involvement in decision-making tended to exhibit greater staffing stability.¹² Nowhere was this more apparent than in decisions about what and how teachers teach. Teachers look forward to utilizing their expertise to shape both their curriculum design and teaching approaches.¹³ Indeed, turnover rates tend to increase when teachers lack autonomy in making instructional decisions.¹⁴

Through the first two Upbeat improvement cycles in JCPS, a significant proportion (25%-31%) of teachers consistently reported that the principals at their schools didn't view them as experts or allow them appropriate discretion in the classroom. This puzzled principals because they trusted their teachers' professional expertise, especially when it came to content knowledge and pedagogy. In sharing the Upbeat data with their schools, principals learned quickly that teachers were responding more to district-mandated changes to standards-based curricula that principals had little autonomy in allowing teachers to adapt in the classroom.

10 American Association of School Personnel Administrators, Perspective, 2020-2021, Creating the Conditions for Improving Teacher Retention: Lessons Learned in a Large Urban District, Dr. Marco Munoz & Dr. Aimee Green-Webb

11 Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Johnson, 2019; Spillane, 2012; Supovitz, D'Auria, & Spillane, 2019

12 Allensworth et al., 2009; Simon et al., 2019

13 Johnson, 2019

14 Johnson et al. 2004

At Zachary Taylor Elementary, Principal Analese Cravens experienced this firsthand at her diverse school where over 28% of students are multilingual learners and 20% are new to the country. When the district adopted a new literacy curriculum for schools like hers for the 2023-2024 school year, Cravens saw teachers report a nearly 20% decrease in autonomy. But, the survey opened up a discussion with teachers. Explained Cravens, “Teacher autonomy and choosing curriculum was low. But the district adopted a new literacy curriculum, so there actually was little autonomy. It allowed us to have a good conversation.” Interestingly, most teachers (83%) still reported that Cravens saw them as experts and reported high-levels of self-efficacy (94%).

In situations like this one, the survey allows principals to shift the survey data to a discussion point that empowers teacher voice and enables principals to take action. Dr. Theresa West, an Upbeat leadership coach, has helped numerous principals respond to teacher autonomy issues that rise up in an improvement cycle. She even developed a teacher voice matrix that includes a list of dozens of decisions that impact schools and who makes those decisions—teachers, teacher/admin shared, building admin, district, and state. West explained that when principals show the matrix, many teachers are surprised by who or what entity makes decisions, “It gives teachers an opportunity to see how they are involved in policy. Many teachers, especially new teachers, don’t know how policies that impact their daily instruction are made. For principals, it is about acknowledging the data and taking action. It’s not about scores going up; success means I am addressing this.” To Dr. Munoz, the survey alone gives teachers an opportunity to express their voice and desire to be involved in decisions, “These data are not the ownership of the principal. It is for the teachers; it is owned by the teachers.”

Understand Generational Differences of Wellbeing

The Upbeat improvement cycles have also helped JCPS identify trends in how generational and career-phases impact teacher engagement, specifically perceptions of belonging and wellbeing. These factors look at how teachers feel their school supports mental health and if they feel like they belong at their school. JCPS central office administrators and principals have noticed striking differences in feelings of belonging and wellbeing across generations, most clearly with younger teachers new to the profession. As Dr. Munoz explained, “We are trying to move to a generational strength-based approach. There is a disconnect between GenX, Millennials, and GenZ. How can we close that gap, so we have a better understanding?” Leadership coach West emphasized, “There are clear generational differences. We need to remind people that the age peers of all these teachers have different expectations, especially with belonging and wellbeing. Principals have a lot of influence on these items.” West gave one example about how Millennials and GenZ teachers seemed to value belonging and self-care more than older generations. She explained: “For older generations, it was just do your job and do what you were told. Younger generations of teachers put more emphasis on work-life balance.”

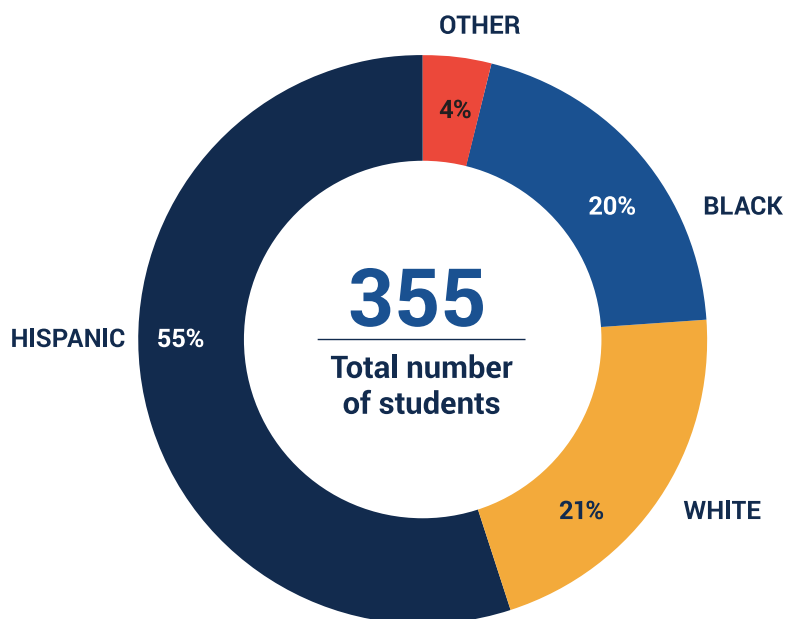
Ramon Wales was in his fourth year as principal at Minors Lane Elementary, a unique school community in a heavy industrial area adjacent to the Louisville airport. It was one of the few JCPS schools where most of the students (57%) were from non-English speaking families. Also, over half of the students came from one large mobile home park. A product of JCPS himself, Wales has seen how generational differences in his teachers have impacted

instruction. “Teachers are different than they have been in the past,” Wales explained “our emotional wellbeing, support, and trust have taken a hit.” To address these issues raised in the survey, Wales examined several questions focused on teacher wellbeing, specifically “The principal at my school looks out for the wellbeing of teachers,” “My school is a place that supports teachers’ mental wellbeing,” and “I am able to successfully manage the stress of my job.”

Wales and his administrative team then conducted empathy interviews with teachers that were followed up with specific actions to provide emotional support to teachers. Wales described the process: “We asked teachers directly, why do you feel like you’re not being supported? Let me show you what you received, what else do you need? Then our admin team just started a process of checking in with teachers. We didn’t ask about work, we asked about personal things, we didn’t treat them like a robot.” Wales also started highlighting teachers with a “proud practice” and gave them more opportunities to voice their opinion. The initial efforts looked to be paying off. Retention at Minors Lane increased by 14 percentage points to 81.5% in the 2023-2024 school year. In the Upbeat survey, Student Engagement was also up eight percentage points to 91%.

At Atkinson Elementary, Principal Arivia Parks had the challenge of working with a mix of newer classroom teachers and a group of experienced teachers. With 394 students, 66% who are African American, the school serves an impoverished neighborhood in the West end of Louisville known as Portland. Parks is another product of JCPS and in her second year as principal confronting real challenges attracting and keeping educators at her school, “Retaining teachers has definitely been difficult. There are challenges connecting with students with different backgrounds. Our teacher demographics tend to trend towards younger less experienced teachers.” In her first year as principal in 2022, Parks dealt with a tumultuous culture with a mix of newer classroom teachers and a group of disgruntled content specialist teachers. She worked directly with the Upbeat leadership coach to identify three focused strengths and three areas of improvement. As a result, Parks created a “climate and culture committee” that helped identify and implement strategies to improve teachers’ wellbeing. They also created the “Eagles Nest” professional development program for new teachers, which was named after the school’s mascot. Parks explained the process: “I was

Table 3: Minors Lane Elementary At a Glance¹⁵



**82.1% Qualify for Free and/or Reduced Priced Meal;
 57% English Language Learners**

15 <https://www.jefferson.kyschools.us/school-performance-data>

elated to have a sounding board with the leadership coach. We took the top three grow and top three glow areas, and then created our climate and culture committee. We planned staff outings, family engagement activities, bosses day, office staff day, and potlucks. I learned a lot about myself.” The efforts paid off for Parks when teacher retention went up from 64.9% in 2022-2023 to 86.1% in 2023-2024.

Make Teacher Appreciation Matter

Over the past several years, Drs. Green-Webb and Munoz have implemented multiple efforts to promote authentic approaches to teacher appreciation in JCPS. According to them, “Teacher appreciation is a hallmark of a healthy school climate.”¹⁶ They have implemented interventions as simple as having district leaders send out emails of appreciation to a district-wide book reading of the *5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace* to push differentiated supports for teachers. Of course, the research is clear that recognizing teachers for good work improves job satisfaction and retention.¹⁷ Principals point to a number of different ways they have used the Upbeat survey to increase teachers’ feelings of appreciation.

At Thomas Jefferson Middle School, Principal Joshua Bourgeois had a hypothesis about how honoring teachers’ time and providing more flexibility would lead to greater feelings of appreciation, and ultimately increased retention. Bourgeois was the leader of a unique middle school in JCPS with an enrollment of 900 students, of whom nearly half are multilingual learners and more than 15% in special education. This required a lot of unique approaches and intentional systems to ensure teachers would not be overwhelmed. Looking at Upbeat data and working with his leadership coach, Bourgeois focused on one of the biggest constraints teachers face—time—and how that translated to feeling appreciated.

He explained how the American educational system is unique in the number of hours teachers are expected to provide direct instruction to their students, and how that contributes to burnout and attrition: “If you look at the American school system, we ask teachers to spend a lot more hours teaching than internationally. We tell teachers, you have one planning period. Coming back from the pandemic, teachers had an experience teaching in a whole new way, where time was so different.” So Bourgeois focused on giving teachers more of what they always wanted—time. He used flexible staffing so a rotating teacher could always be ready in the hallway to step in if someone needed to make a call, take a break, or just simply use the bathroom, essentially mimicking the office environment. Bourgeois was also able to create a schedule where teachers had an extra planning period, a move that made teachers feel much more appreciated as professionals. Since making the changes, work life balance went up nearly 30% for teachers and retention in the 2023-2024 school year was nearly 90%.

Similarly, Analese Cravens at Zachary Taylor Elementary also used teacher appreciation as a leverage point to improve her Upbeat survey results. For example, 100% of teachers reported they felt supported in Instructional Leadership, 94% in Self-Efficacy, and 88% in Teacher Voice/Leadership. Cravens explained, “Last year more teachers felt overwhelmed, there was a lot of stress, and internal conflict on minor things.” She took the simple step of paying for

16 American Association of School Personnel Administrators, Perspective, 2020-2021, Creating the Conditions for Improving Teacher Retention: Lessons Learned in a Large Urban District, Dr. Marco Munoz & Dr. Aimee Green-Webb

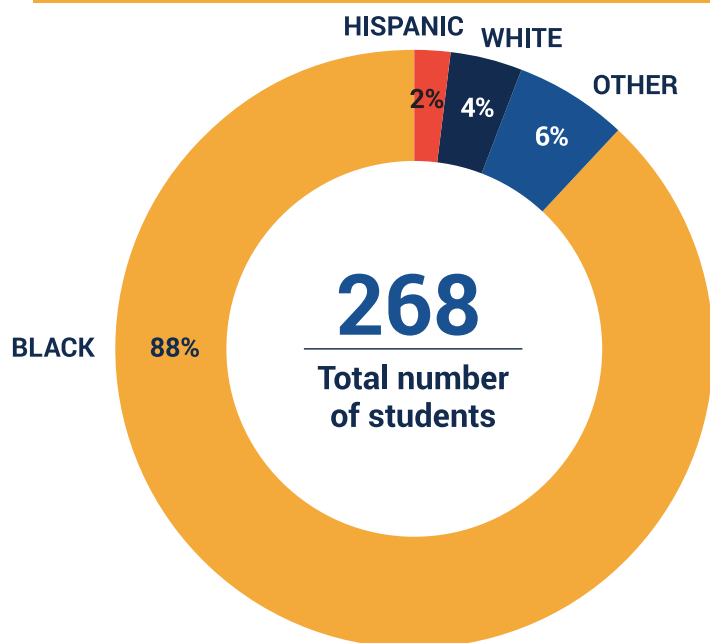
17 Brun & Dugas, 2008; Gonzalez, 1995

a monthly lunch for all teachers as a thank you. In the 2023-2024 year, Cravens recruited a church to sponsor teachers' birthdays and provide them a small appreciation gift. She also spotlighted teachers in the parent newsletter and on school bulletin boards.

Retain Teachers of Color as a Priority

In the 2023-2024 school year, JCPS had the highest percentage of teachers of color ever in its history at 17%. Although the district has invested years of efforts to attract and retain teachers of color, this proportion is far from reflecting the demographics of JCPS where two-thirds of students are children of color. This mismatch sometimes leads to negative feelings of diversity, equity, and inclusion for teachers of color. Dr. Munoz explains, "What is it that we do? Latino teachers having to translate, black teachers having to discipline. Just because I'm black or just because I'm Latino, doesn't mean I become the spokesperson." Indeed, in a 2022 Upbeat survey analysis of Black JCPS teachers found that Diversity was the lowest rated domain at 61%.¹⁸ This section encompasses questions such as "Teachers at my school are racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse" and "My school retains teachers from diverse backgrounds." To Drs. Green-Webb and Munoz these results represent a continued need to recruit and retain teachers of color: "This is an agenda for targeted improvements in the next quinquennial in JCPS. We know that data without actions will not help us achieve our goal of improving the satisfaction of our Black teachers." Fortunately, JCPS has a few exemplary principals who have been successful in improving diversity, equity, and inclusion in their schools.

Table 4: Byck Elementary At a Glance¹⁹



**92.5% Qualify for Free and/or Reduced Priced Meal;
 14% English Language Learners**

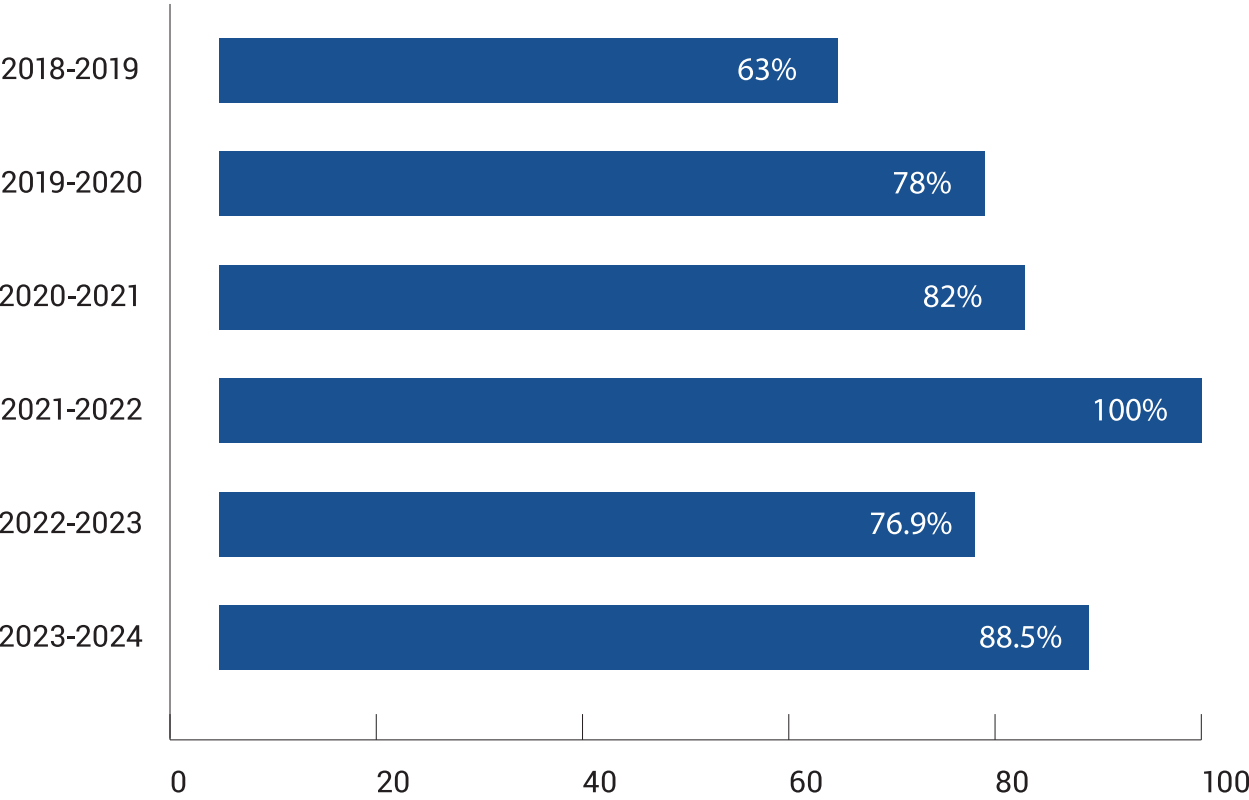
18 American Association of School Personnel Administrators, Perspective, November 2022-January 2023, Creating the Conditions for Improving Teacher Retention: Lessons Learned in a Large Urban District, Dr. Marco Munoz

19 <https://www.jefferson.kyschools.us/school-performance-data>

Principal Carla Kolodey has led a remarkable turnaround of Byck Elementary School over the past seven years. When appointed by Superintendent Dr. Marty Pollio in 2017, Kolodey was Byck’s third principal in the prior six months. A persistently poor performing school, Byck had numerous challenges including chronic staffing vacancies, the highest teacher attrition rate in the district, and pervasive student behavior problems.

Kolodey initially focused heavily on teacher recruitment. Being from the community Byck served, Kolodey leveraged a lot of personal connections to fill vacancies. Retention gradually improved as the teachers in the school more closely reflected students in the classroom. Kolodey also took the unique approach of using a behavior coach for teachers, not students. The goal was to improve teachers’ self-efficacy, “It was all about getting teachers the skillsets they needed. The behaviors weren’t really student problems, it was more issues with how teachers responded. The coaching made teachers more confident.” When the Upbeat partnership began in 2020, Kolodey integrated the survey and leadership coaching with the recruitment efforts and behavior coaching.

Table 5: Byck Elementary Retention Data



Like other principals, Kolodey used the data to look directly at wellbeing and self-care, and how to improve those domains. She also explored the diversity questions with all teachers: “Just having a conversation about that diversity question, it is helpful to not just use survey results, but to have conversation about it. Only as beneficial with what you make of it.

The staff won't benefit unless you take data and use it for conversations. It is important to actually follow up on the survey, to establish trust." Kolodey has achieved impressive results with Upbeat survey results, some of the highest in the district: Parent-Teacher Communication: 99%; Parent-Teacher Trust: 99%; Self-Efficacy: 100%; Work Life Balance 93% up 50% since 2021; Diversity 94% up 22% since 2020.

Toetta Taul, a third-year principal at Iroquois High School also emphasized diversity and equity in hiring and retaining teachers. With nearly 1,200 students from 40 different countries and a large proportion of new teachers, Iroquois High had challenges matching its teachers' backgrounds with those of the students. After having conversations with teachers and staff about how to recruit and retain a diverse staff, Taul implemented specific questions about equity in all interviews. She explained, "Our leadership team is diverse and hiring questions really focus on equity, not just for teachers, but also security, clerical. We want to know 'How will you ensure an equitable environment for all students?' It is a need and something we must have on our campus." The recruitment and interview process also ensured that candidates aligned with the school's mission, which emphasized parent engagement and was developed jointly with teachers, staff, and leadership. Taul described the process: "Our vision is that we will advocate for every student, promote teacher leadership and retention, and welcome all parent and community involvement. So that is always at the forefront of everything we do." Similar to Kolodey, Taul's efforts saw an increase in teacher retention, which increased by over 12 percentage points to 83.8% over the past year.

Continuous Improvement

To Drs. Green-Webb and Munoz, a fundamental prerequisite to improved student learning is high teacher engagement and retention. As Dr. Munoz said, “Teacher engagement is not a byproduct of student achievement. It is what drives student achievement.” They and JCPS principals use Upbeat to identify the factors that most drive teacher engagement and assess where teachers are relative to the district, other similar schools, and past performance. Cathy David, an Upbeat leadership coach summarized, “The survey is really about climate. When you are improving school safety, trust, instructional leadership, and colleagues’ belief in themselves you are improving the overall climate. You can feel it when you walk in and teachers are happy to be there and students are happy to be there.”

From an overall strategy perspective, JCPS leaders emphasized the importance of continuous improvement, leveraging Upbeat data to identify areas of strength and growth. As the district continues its journey of improvement, the Upbeat program remains a vital tool in achieving its goals of educational excellence and equity. Dr. Munoz summarized: “What’s the key for the success in turning around schools? The one thing that I can tell you for sure is that if we don’t keep teachers, we are not building the social capital that we need. We need to go deeper to the root of the problem.” For Munoz, Upbeat helped JCPS find roots to the problem of teacher retention and implement a process based on improvement science to address those problems. For example, rather than waiting until a teacher leaves and performing an exit interview, JCPS most recently implemented annual “Stay Interviews” as a proactive strategy to build positive relationships with teachers. In this respect, Munoz emphasized that JCPS’s work was always about continuous improvement: “And again, of course, there’s lots of room for growth. I don’t want to leave you with the idea that we have figured it out because that would be false. And we’re just putting a lot of heart into the little that we can do, you know, because there are some pieces that are beyond our control. So we are focusing on what is in our locus of control.”

About Upbeat

Upbeat is a leading education research and consulting company solely focused on supporting and retaining teachers. We believe that teacher retention is essential to student achievement, and orient all of our work toward keeping great teachers in the classroom so that students can thrive. K-12 district leaders across the country use our research-backed survey instrument and robust data dashboard to assess the climate and culture of individual schools and the district as a whole. Principals trust Upbeat's experienced leadership coaches to partner with them, review the data and identify concrete steps to better engage and retain teachers at their schools.

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