

Evaluating Continued Learnings and Success of the Philadelphia Affinity Group Network

Project Conducted by Research for Action

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Introduction and Background

Teach Plus PA has continued to engage with Research for Action (RFA) as a partner to provide evaluation of its affinity group program, the Philadelphia Affinity Group Network (PAGN). This report builds upon RFA's foundational, 2024-25 evaluation and shares continued learnings and successes of the PAGN by focusing on the retention, mobility, and experiences of PAGN participants and facilitators ("PAGN educators") and provides recommendations for future evaluation of the program.

Key findings presented in this report include:

1. For the 2024-25 school year's cohort, the PAGN has attracted participants and facilitators that are largely representative of the county's educators of color overall.
2. The educator retention rate for 2024-25 PAGN educators increased since the prior year.
3. The educator retention rate for 2024-25 PAGN participants and facilitators was higher than the retention rate of all educators in Philadelphia County and of the matching group.
4. PAGN educators showed higher rates of mobility, meaning they moved to a new school or new position, than their counterparts.
5. Overall, PAGN educators expressed satisfaction with their PAGN experience.
6. Participant feedback and continued data suggest the PAGN has potential to improve retention of educators of color in Philadelphia's public-school systems.

The Importance of Educator Diversity and Role of Affinity Groups

Research continues to underscore the benefit of educator diversity, including boosting the academic achievement and graduation rates of students of color, supporting culturally responsive teaching, as well as improving students' sense of belonging and experience in schools.¹ Existing research has also documented, however, that Black and other teachers of color cite systemic and interpersonal racism, lack of support, isolation, and lack of resources among the reasons they leave the profession.²

¹ Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). *Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/559.310>; Griffin, A., and Tackie, H. (2016).

² DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., & Gunby, N. W., Jr. (2016). Racial microaggressions in the workplace: A critical race analysis of the experiences of African American educators. *Urban Education*, 51(4), 390-414. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916628610>;

Kohli, R. (2018). Behind School Doors: The Impact of Hostile Racial Climates on Urban Teachers of Color. *Urban Education*, 53(3), 307-333. [doi:10.1177/0042085916636653](https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916636653); *Through our eyes: Perspectives and reflections from Black teachers*. Education Trust. <https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/ThroughOurEyes.pdf>; Parks, S., Cabral, L., Burgess, K., Eddins, M. & Robinson, A. (2023). Small but mighty: Lessons from Black Teachers' Experiences in Allegheny. Research for Action. <https://www.researchforaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/small-but-mighty-fin-november-2023.pdf>

Racial affinity group spaces have been elevated as one strategy to improve the retention of teachers of color.³ A racial affinity group is defined by Great Schools Partnership as “a group of people sharing a common race who gather with the intention of finding connection, support, and inspiration.”⁴ While research on affinity spaces in education is still emerging, early findings from the field indicate that affinity groups can create welcoming environments and a culture of inclusion, improve the well-being of educators by reducing stress and improving self-esteem, support professional learning, and increase cultural awareness, among other benefits.⁵

In the Philadelphia area, leaders and advocates are engaging in efforts to diversify the teacher workforce, including the efforts being led by the Philadelphia Citywide Talent Coalition⁶ to recruit, retain, and develop high-quality teachers of color. The PAGN is another Philadelphia initiative with similar goals and a special emphasis on the leadership development of teachers of color.

About the PAGN

The PAGN seeks to cultivate authentic, inclusive, intersectional spaces to support educators of color. These affirming and supportive spaces, rooted in an asset-based understanding of diversity, support educators in navigating and improving their school environments. Participants are connected to a larger network to build alliances and address systemic issues. The PAGN is open to educators currently working in Philadelphia district and charter schools.

The network started with 21 affinity groups across the city in 2023-24 and expanded in 2024-25, serving over 300 educators since the initial launch. Each affinity group is facilitated by a teacher leader who participates in monthly professional learning, receives coaching support from a Teach Plus leadership coach, and joins a community of practice with fellow facilitators. Together, these supports equip teacher leaders to design their affinity group, recruit members, and lead monthly affinity group meetings.

Evaluation Approach

During RFA’s first evaluation of the PAGN, we supported Teach Plus PA leaders in identifying measures of success for the program. ***Educator retention for Philadelphia County*** was identified as the primary metric of success for PAGN educator participants. The ***educator retention rate*** for the PAGN is defined as “*the percentage of PAGN educators (participants and facilitators) who continue to work in a Philadelphia County public school the following year.*”⁷ In addition to the educator retention rate, Teach Plus PA also considered positive feedback on participant and facilitator experiences in the PAGN and the likelihood of returning to the network as additional measures of success.

³ Pour-Khorshid, F. (2018) Cultivating sacred spaces: a racial affinity group approach to support critical educators of color, *Teaching Education*, 29:4, 318-329. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2018.1512092>

⁴ Great Schools Partnership. (2020). *Racial affinity groups: Guide for school leaders*. <https://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Racial-Affinity-Groups-Guide-for-School-Leaders-Final.pdf>

⁵ Hughes, D. (n.d.). *The proven impact of affinity spaces*. Race, Research & Policy Portal of the Institutional Antiracism and Accountability Project. <https://rrapp.spia.princeton.edu/how-to-guide/the-proven-impact-of-affinity-spaces/>

⁶ For more information on the Philadelphia Citywide Talent Coalition, visit <https://elevate215.org/philadelphia-citywide-talent-coalition/>.

⁷ An educator can work in any position or school within Philadelphia County public schools the following year to be considered retained.

Research Questions

RFA and Teach Plus PA identified the following questions to guide continued evaluation activities and better understand the retention and experiences of PAGN educators who participated in the network in the 2024-25 school year:

1. What was the educator retention rate for PAGN educators between the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years, as measured by the October 2024 and October 2025 snapshots reported by PDE?
 - a. How did the educator retention rate for PAGN educators compare to retention rates for Philadelphia educators who did not participate?
 - b. How did the October 2024 to October 2025 educator retention rate for PAGN educators compare to the same metric from the prior year?
2. What were the mobility patterns for PAGN educators between the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years, as measured by the October 2024 and October 2025 snapshots reported by PDE?
 - a. How did the mobility patterns for PAGN educators compare to Philadelphia educators who did not participate?
3. What benefits do PAGN educators report through their participation in the network?
4. Do participants and facilitators anticipate staying in the teaching profession long term? Which factors impact participants' and facilitators' plans to stay in the teaching profession long term?
5. Do affinity group participants and facilitators plan on staying involved in the affinity groups moving forward? Why or why not?

RFA's team collected and analyzed data through the following evaluation activities to answer the research questions and build foundational knowledge on the early successes of the PAGN:

1. Descriptive data analysis of key characteristics of PAGN participants and facilitators:

RFA received a list of individuals who took part in the PAGN as either a participant or facilitator in the 2024-25 school year from Teach Plus PA. RFA then identified the individuals in the Professional Personnel Individual Staff Report⁸ publicly available from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) for the 2024-25 school year. Of the 265 affinity group participants and facilitators in Teach Plus's shared participant data, 224 (84.5%) were identified in the PDE dataset. PAGN participating educators who held

⁸ Pennsylvania Department of Education. (n.d.). *Professional and support personnel*. Retrieved September 24, 2026, from <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/data-and-reporting/school-staff/professional-and-support-personnel>

positions in Camden, New Jersey or in positions that PDE does not provide individual data on, such as paraprofessionals, were not included in the sample. RFA conducted descriptive analysis of educator characteristics for those involved in the PAGN in 2024-25 including race and ethnicity⁹, position held, tenure in education, and place/school of employment.

2. **Educator retention analysis of PAGN participants and facilitators:** RFA calculated the educator retention rate of PAGN participants and facilitators by comparing the Professional Personnel Individual Staff Reports from PDE for the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years. In the datasets, each educator is assigned a unique “PublicID” or “random number generated to distinguish between different individuals and link records pertaining to the same individual.” RFA tracked whether the individuals who participated in the PAGN in 2024-25 were still working in Philadelphia County’s public schools in 2025-26 using these unique, individual identifiers. The Professional Personnel Individual Staff Report from PDE is a snapshot taken in October of each school year. Thus, the retention rate for this analysis describes the teachers who continued to work in Philadelphia’s public schools the following October. RFA was also able to conduct analyses to compare PAGN retention rates to other Philadelphia educators overall and similar teachers using Propensity Score Matching (a statistical method used to create a group more comparable to PAGN participants based on individual and job characteristics).
3. **Educator mobility analysis of PAGN participants and facilitators:** As a part of the descriptive analysis, RFA also examined “mobility patterns” among educators who remained in Philadelphia County to understand how PAGN and non-PAGN educators shifted schools, Local Education Agency (LEAs), and positions. Like the retention analysis, RFA tracked whether individual educators had changes to their positions using their “PPID” in the Professional Personnel Individual Staff Reports from PDE from the 2024-25 to the 2025-26 school year. Mobility patterns explored within Philadelphia County include moving to a new school, a new LEA, a new role or position at the same school, and a new role or position at a new school. Additionally, the mobility analysis looked at the frequency in which teachers left Philadelphia County to continue as an educator elsewhere in Pennsylvania or left the educator workforce entirely.
4. **Focus groups with PAGN participants and facilitators who took part in the network in the 2025-26 school year:** Fourteen individuals involved in the PAGN participated in focus groups as part of this evaluation. More specifically, 11 PAGN participants and three PAGN facilitators engaged in 5 focus groups organized by participation type (participants or facilitators) and shared details about their experiences as educators in Philadelphia, involvement in the PAGN, and plans to remain in the field of education. RFA analyzed the data collected during these focus groups to contextualize the quantitative retention analysis and provide additional insights on program successes and areas for improvement.
5. **Biannual participant survey results from PAGN administered surveys:** RFA also reviewed summary data related to predictive retention measures and program satisfaction from the PAGN’s middle of year (MOY) and end of year (EOY) surveys administered to PAGN

⁹ Local Education Agencies (LEAs) including the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) and the county’s charter schools submit this data to PDE for each school year. Race and ethnicity categories may be assigned for a given educator by the LEA if an educator does not self-identify or disclosure this information to the LEA.

participants in 2025-2026 by Teach Plus PA. Relevant takeaways from the surveys are presented alongside focus group findings.

Additional details on RFA's evaluation methodology can be found in Appendix A-B.

Key Findings

Characteristics of PAGN Participants and Facilitators

RFA's descriptive data analysis compared 2024-25 PAGN educators to other educators from all race and ethnicity backgrounds, unless otherwise noted, in Philadelphia County public schools who were not involved in the PAGN ("non-PAGN educators"). Overall, PAGN educators largely mirror the characteristics of non-PAGN educators but have some notable differences. More specifically, this analysis revealed:

1. **The share of PAGN educators working at the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) was higher than the share of non-PAGN educators working at the district.** Of the 224 PAGN educators identified in the PDE data, 82.1% worked at SDP and 17.9% at charter schools — compared to 65.3% and 34.7%, respectively, among non-PAGN educators. This is also a notable shift from the composition of the prior year's affinity groups (2023-24), when a smaller percentage (68.7%) of PAGN educators worked at SDP compared to the 2024-25 affinity groups (82.1%).
2. **Non-PAGN educators hold a wider range of job positions and assignments within their LEAs and schools, but most PAGN and non-PAGN educator jobs are categorized as classroom teachers.** 68.3% of PAGN educators and 69.9% of non-PAGN educators were categorized as classroom teachers in 2024-25. Across both groups, there was an increase from the previous year in the percentage of educators classified as "other" position. There were no PAGN educators with jobs categorized as School Administrator, Chief School Administrator, or Other Supervisory Coordinator in 2024-25.
3. **PAGN educators have slightly lower average number of years of experience, lower degree attainment, and lower average salaries than non-PAGN educators.** The average years in education is 11.5 for PAGN educators compared to 12.1 for non-PAGN educators, which is a modest difference. PAGN educators are about half as likely to hold a Master's degree (7.1% vs. 14.4%) and earn a lower average salary (\$80,516 vs. \$84,752). These differences may partly reflect PAGN's focus on classroom teachers and educator support roles. Since PAGN does not include administrators, who tend to have more experience, higher degree attainment, and higher pay, their absence from the PAGN group likely pulls its averages down across all three measures.
4. **When comparing only the educators of color within each group, PAGN and non-PAGN educators are similarly distributed across racial/ethnic categories.** Because PAGN is designed to support educators of color, it's expected that PAGN educators' overall racial/ethnic makeup differs from that of all non-PAGN educators, who include white educators. Table 1 details these breakdowns for both groups excluding white educators.

Table 1. Race and ethnicity for PAGN and non-PAGN educators of color as reported by PDE for the 2024-25 school year.

Race or Ethnicity	PAGN Educators of Color (N = 220 ¹⁰)	Non-PAGN Educators of Color (N = 6,341)
Black or African American	74.1%	69.7%
Hispanic	10.0%	13.4%
Asian	8.6%	6.6%
Multi-Racial	6.8%	9.5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.5%	0.6%

Early Measures of Retention for PAGN Educators

As the findings of the descriptive and model-based analyses in this section will show, PAGN participation continues to be associated with an increased likelihood of educator retention.

1. Retention rates were higher for PAGN educators

The descriptive analysis compares the unadjusted retention rates of PAGN educators to all non-PAGN educators and to a matched sample of non-PAGN educators. Table 2 shows the retention rates for all groups. As mentioned, 94.2% of PAGN educators were retained, compared to 90.4% of all non-PAGN educators. Among the matched sample of non-PAGN educators (N = 224), 89.7% were retained from 2024-25 to 2025-26. PAGN educators had higher retention rates than non-PAGN educators overall, and higher rates still than non-PAGN educators with similar characteristics.

Table 2. Comparing Retention for PAGN and non-PAGN Educators

	PAGN Participants and Facilitators (N = 224)	Matched Comparison Group (N = 224)	All non-PAGN Participants in Philadelphia County (N = 15,758)
Number of Educators Retained in Philadelphia County	211	201	14,239
Percent of Educators Retained in Philadelphia County	94.2%	89.7%	90.4%

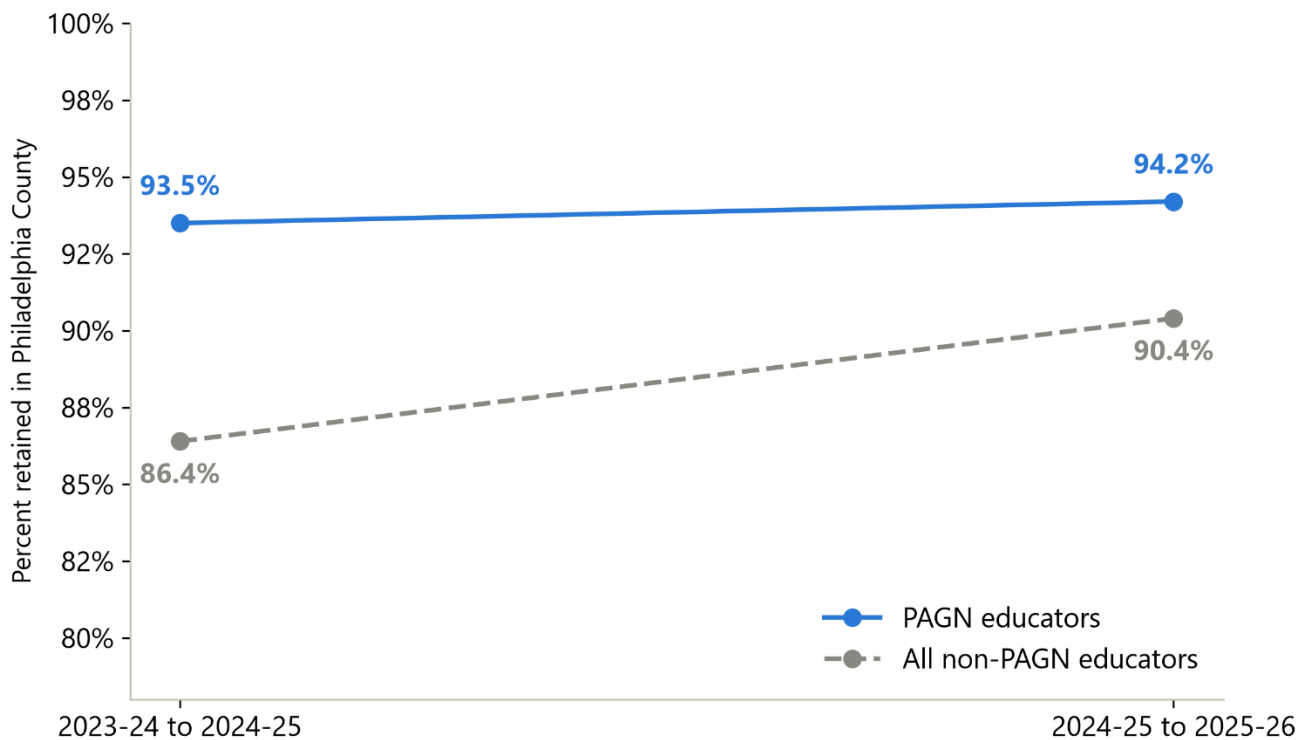
Note: Retention rates reported above are for all educators in Philadelphia County. These rates differ from RFA's other public reporting on retention rates which primarily focus on classroom teachers.

¹⁰Four PAGN educators are reported in the PDE data as White and are excluded from this table. These figures report the percentage of each race/ethnicity among educators of color in each sample as reported by the PDE Professional Personnel Individual Staff Dataset. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) including SDP and the county's charter schools submit this data to PDE for each school year. It is possible that an educator could self-identify as a person of color and have the race and ethnicity category listed as White in the PDE dataset.

2. Retention rates for PAGN educators and non-PAGN educators in 2024-25→2025-26 were higher than last year (2023-24→2024-25)

Educator retention in Philadelphia County increased in the most recent year. From 2023-24 to 2024-25, 93.5% of PAGN educators and 86.4% of non-PAGN educators were retained in the county. In the following year, measuring retention from 2024-25 to 2025-26, retention rose to 94.2% (+0.7 percentage points) for PAGN educators and 90.4% (+4.0 percentage points) for non-PAGN educators. As Figure 1 shows, PAGN educator retention was higher than non-PAGN educator retention in both years of RFA's analysis. In the most recent year, however, the gap between the two groups narrowed, as non-PAGN educator retention rose significantly.

Figure 1. Comparing Retention for PAGN and non-PAGN Educators, 2023-24 to 2024-25 and 2024-25 to 2025-26



3. Retention rates were higher for PAGN educators

The descriptive analysis compares the unadjusted retention rates of PAGN educators to all non-PAGN educators and to a matched sample of non-PAGN educators. Table 3 displays the retention rates for all three groups. As previously detailed, 94.2% of PAGN educators were retained, compared to 90.4% of all non-PAGN educators. Among the matched sample of non-PAGN educators (N = 224), 89.7% were retained from 2024-25 to 2025-26. PAGN educators had higher retention rates than non-PAGN educators overall, and higher rates still than non-PAGN educators with similar characteristics.

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Note: Retention rates reported above are for all educators in Philadelphia County. These rates differ from RFA's other public reporting on retention rates which primarily focus on classroom teachers.

4. Retention rates of educators of color were higher for PAGN educators

Table 4 displays a more detailed comparison of retention rates by race and ethnicity between PAGN educators and all non-PAGN educators. Retention was notably higher among Black/African American, Hispanic, and Multi-Racial PAGN educators than non-PAGN educators in the same racial and ethnic groups. For example, 93.3% of Black PAGN educators were retained in Philadelphia County, compared to 88.0% of Black non-PAGN educators. Retention rates for Asian identifying PAGN and non-PAGN educators were relatively similar. While retention for White and American Indian/Alaska Native PAGN educators was 100%, these groups had very small sample sizes and results should be interpreted with caution.

Table 4. Comparing Retention of PAGN Educators and All non-PAGN Educators, by Race and Ethnicity

Race and Ethnicity	PAGN Participant Retention	Matched Comparison Group Retention	Non-PAGN Participant Retention
Black or African American	93.3% (N = 163)	89.7% (N = 165)	88.0% (N = 4,417)
Hispanic	100% (N = 22)	87.0% (N = 23)	89.8% (N = 852)
Asian	89.5% (N = 19)	100% (N = 14)	90.2% (N = 419)
Multi-Racial	100.0% (N = 15)	83.3% (N = 18)	87.4% (N = 606)
White	100% (N = 4)	100% (N = 4)	91.8% (N = 9,417)
American Indian or Alaska Native	100% (N = 1)	N/A (N = 0)	80.0% (N = 40)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	N/A (N = 0)	N/A (N = 0)	85.7% (N = 7)
Total	94.2% (N = 224)	89.7% (N = 224)	90.4% (N = 15,758)

5. *Model-Based Analysis with a Matched Comparison Group Shows statistically significant association between PAGN participation and retention*

To provide a more rigorous comparison than the descriptive analysis, RFA conducted a logistic regression analysis using the propensity score matched sample of PAGN and non-PAGN educators. This approach accounts for key differences in educator characteristics and statistically adjusts for any remaining variation not addressed through matching. The results indicate a statistically significant association between PAGN participation and retention ($p < .05$).

As shown in Table 5, the adjusted retention rate was **93.9%** for PAGN educators and **89.7%** for matched non-PAGN educators, a **4-percentage-point difference**. This suggests that PAGN educators were more likely to be retained than similar non-PAGN educators.

Table 5. Predicted Probability of Retention for PAGN and non-PAGN Educators

Sample	Predicted Retention Rate
PAGN Educators (N = 224)	93.9%
Propensity Score Matched non-PAGN Educators (N = 224)	89.7%

Note: Predicted probabilities are model adjusted using logistic regression with matched samples. The logistic regression measures the association between PAGN participation and retention while controlling for race/ethnicity, gender, salary, degree level, years of experience, years in an LEA, and LEA type.

A note on interpretation of predicted probability: While this analysis strengthens the evidence for an association between PAGN participation and retention, it does not imply a causal relationship. These findings build on the descriptive analysis and suggest a consistent pattern of greater retention among PAGN educators.

Mobility Patterns for PAGN Participants and Facilitators

1. PAGN educators were more mobile within Philadelphia County than non-PAGN educators

Among educators retained in Philadelphia County, PAGN educators showed higher rates of mobility than their counterparts. PAGN educators moved to a new school at a notably higher rate than all non-PAGN educators (20.9% versus 11.7%) and moved to a new role or position at a new school at roughly three times the rate (14.2% versus 4.7%). PAGN educators also showed slightly higher rates of moving to a new role or position at the same school than non-PAGN educators (28.4% vs. 25.8%). Moving to a new LEA was relatively less common than other mobility outcomes, but PAGN educators also did so at a slightly higher rate (4.3% vs. 3.1%).

Compared to the matched non-PAGN sample specifically, PAGN educators still moved schools more often (20.9% versus 17.4%) and changed roles at a new school at nearly twice the rate (14.2% versus 7.5%), suggesting this pattern isn't fully explained by the characteristics used in matching. Table 6 compares these patterns of mobility of PAGN educators to both matched and all non-PAGN educators.

Table 6. Mobility of PAGN Educators and non-PAGN Educators Who Were Retained in Philadelphia County

Educators in Philadelphia County Who:	PAGN Participants (N = 211)	Matched Non-PAGN Participants (N = 201)	All Non-PAGN Participants (N = 14,239)
Moved to a new school in Philadelphia County	44 (20.9%)	35 (17.4%)	1,672 (11.7%)
Moved to a new LEA in Philadelphia County	9 (4.3%)	7 (3.5%)	448 (3.1%)
Moved to a new role or position at the same school in Philadelphia County	60 (28.4%)	52 (25.9%)	3,677 (25.8%)
Moved to a new role or position at a new school in Philadelphia County	30 (14.2%)	15 (7.5%)	670 (4.7%)

Note: This table includes only educators who were retained in Philadelphia County.

2. *Most educators who left Philadelphia County left the Pennsylvania educator workforce entirely*

Table 7 details the mobility patterns of educators who left Philadelphia County, comparing PAGN educators against both matched non-PAGN and all non-PAGN educators.

Across all three groups, most educators who left Philadelphia County left the Pennsylvania public school teaching workforce entirely, rather than moving to another Pennsylvania school. This was true for PAGN educators (92.3%) at a higher rate than for either matched non-PAGN (87.0%) or all non-PAGN educators (86.7%), whose shares were nearly identical to each other. A relatively small number of educators in each group moved to a Pennsylvania school outside of Philadelphia County. Sample sizes for the PAGN (N = 13) and matched non-PAGN (N = 25) groups are small, so these rates should be interpreted with caution.

Table 7. Mobility of PAGN Educators and non-PAGN Educators Who Were Not Retained in Philadelphia County

Teachers in Philadelphia County Who:	PAGN Participants (N = 13)	Matched Non-PAGN Participants (N = 23)	All Non-PAGN Participants (N = 1,519)
Moved to a Pennsylvania school outside of Philadelphia County	1 (7.7%)	3 (13.0%)	202 (13.3%)
Left the Pennsylvania public school teaching workforce entirely	12 (92.3%)	20 (87.0%)	1,317 (86.7%)

Focus Group Findings

As discussed, to further understand the influence of participating in the PAGN, RFA analyzed data gathered through 5 focus groups with PAGN educators (11 PAGN participants and three facilitators). Below we summarize findings of what participating PAGN educators shared about their experiences working in Philadelphia County's public schools, involvement in the PAGN, and plans to remain in the field of education. More details on the sample of PAGN educators included in focus groups can be found in Appendix B.

1. *Educator Experiences in Their Positions*

Individuals who participated in the focus groups shared rich insights into their positions and experiences in Philadelphia's public schools, both district and charter. Overall, participants shared a mixture of positive and challenging aspects of their work, as summarized in Table 8 below:

Table 8. Positive and Challenging Aspects of Educator Positions as reported in PAGN Educator Focus Groups.

	Positive Aspects of Educator Positions	Challenging Aspects of Educator Positions
Commonly Reported	- Students: Enjoy working and building relationships with students - Role assignment: Interest and expertise in the subject matter they are responsible for teaching, small class sizes in alternative setting, ability to support the whole student through counselor position, and instructional coaches enjoy supporting teachers who are struggling to improve their practices - Professional growth: Constantly learning and evolving their instructional practices - Relationships with colleagues: Feel supported and have mentors in their school buildings, acknowledgement of strong work ethic in colleagues	- Isolation: Feeling isolated as an educator of color and not having friends in their school - Workload: Heavy workload disrupts work-life balance and increases individual stress - Lack of autonomy: No decision-making power on key issues that impact teachers and students
Reported occasionally (once or twice)	- Skill level: Confident in their teaching ability	- Student motivation: Students showing disinterest and lack of motivation for academic interventions - Systemic Racism: New administration reinforcing systemic racism by placing less emphasis and value in cultural diversity - Time: Not having enough time to work directly with students

2. Educator Experiences in the PAGN

Focus group participants also shared details about their experiences thus far in the network. PAGN educators provided a few key reasons they ultimately decided to join the PAGN, including:

- A desire to access a **support system** and **make connections** outside of their schools to help them stay in the profession.
- Aligned with their **personal values** of equity and appreciation of diverse perspectives.
- Feeling **represented** in the backgrounds and identities of other participants and facilitators.
- Access to **professional development**.
- Additional **benefits** such as stipends and meals helped offset additional work outside of their positions in education.

After joining and engaging in the network as either a participant or facilitator, PAGN educators reported the following benefits of their involvement in the PAGN:

- **Welcoming community and sense of belonging:** Affinity groups provide a consistent space for PAGN educators to connect with others, decompress, and feel part of a larger community. For example, one participant identified the “*opportunity to have a sense of*

community, a space where I could kind of go and just talk freely and really, honestly, not feel judged, or not feel like an outsider” as their most valued benefit of the PAGN.

- **Strong relationships and supportive mentorship:** Participating PAGN educators value the supportive relationships across their groups, which include intergenerational mentorship that extends beyond scheduled meetings. As one novice teacher shared, *“It was nice to meet other people who could relate to experiences I had, and also people who were very open and willing to mentor me right away. Without me asking, they were looking out for me a lot. I feel like I have that network now, outside of our formal affinity group meetings.”*
- **Validation and representation for educators of color:** Affinity groups provide an identity-affirming space where educators feel understood, see themselves represented long-term in the profession, and feel less isolated in the profession. As one participant reflected, *“Sometimes at work you can’t share certain stories, especially related to identity, because people just won’t get it, or will even push back. It’s nice to have a validating space where people have gone through similar things and can say, ‘yeah, that has happened to me.’”* Another educator shared, *“It’s really nice being in a space with other AAPI teachers who have been in the district for a long time, because it gives me that representation — there are other teachers who look like me and have had my experiences and have lasted a long time in the field. It makes me feel comfortable having that community, and it makes it feel more sustainable.”*
- **Broadened perspectives:** Affinity groups expose educators to different viewpoints and career paths that expand members’ thinking about the field. One participant reflected, *“The diversity in thoughts has been beneficial for me to open my scope and how I viewed education and not be so jaded about it.”* Another shared, *“Teachers who are part of an affinity group get exposure to a lot of things other than just the classroom... For example, someone might hear ‘You’d be wonderful as a pre-K coach, you’d be wonderful as a field administrator.’”*
- **Improved well-being:** Affinity groups provide an important reminder for participants to rest, prioritize self-care, and reflect upon the joy in the work that can help sustain individuals in the profession. One participant gave credit to the PAGN for teaching them to *“prioritize my work-life balance the same way I prioritized the meeting. Rest and being grounded, it’s a non-negotiable to take care of yourself.”* Another reflected that *“It’s nice to have a reminder of some of the really simple things that bring a lot of joy to being in the position.”*

Facilitators who participated in focus groups also shed additional light on their experiences in a leadership role for the PAGN. Facilitators reflected that while the position required substantial work, facilitating affinity groups provided two strong benefits:

- Their roles as facilitators provided opportunities to **build strong relationships** with their affinity group members and with other facilitators.
- Their responsibilities also served as **professional development** to sharpen their skills in facilitating discussions, matching individuals with resources catered to their needs, and deepening their capacity to organize groups of individuals.

PAGN participants who took part in focus groups also gave facilitators strong praise for creating welcoming spaces and organizing thoughtful events that provided time to decompress, reflect, and discuss, at times, heavy topics.

- **Connection to the PAGN biannual survey results:** 92% of MOY respondents and 96.8% of EOY survey respondents reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are overall “satisfied with the Philadelphia Affinity Group Network.”

3. Educator Retention: Individual Reflections and PAGN’s Role

Participants and facilitators who participated in the focus groups shared a wide range of responses related to their intentions to stay in the field of education, including:

- **Plans to stay in the field of education for the long term.** Individuals reflected that they plan on staying in the classroom or education because they like their jobs, enjoy working with students or other teachers, and have already invested time with the district. For example, one individual shared *“I find great value in going in and supporting my colleagues, co-teaching with them and team teaching with them.”*
 - **Plans to stay in the field of education with interest in more leadership opportunities.** Others shared plans to stay in the classroom for the next few years but are considering career changes that provide more leadership opportunities within education such as becoming an instructional coach or administrator. One individual reflected, *“I feel like I want to leave with my legacy intact, so maybe after this final year, I may look into becoming an assistant principal.”*
 - **Feeling undecided about whether they would continue to work in education moving forward.** Others expressed mixed feelings or uncertainty about staying in the field and a desire to continue evolving.
 - **Plans to leave the field of education.** Only one participant shared plans to leave the field, at least temporarily, to complete a graduate program. This participant openly shared, *“This past school year was really challenging, and then with the budget cuts and everything, we were going to have less support in our classroom. I still want to finish my master’s degree, so I decided to take time off to do that.”*
- **Connection to the PAGN biannual survey results:** In the EOY participant survey, 91.6% of respondents plan to stay in education at least 3 years and over 70% shared that they intend to stay until retirement age or later.

PAGN educators also shared their perceptions on the potential role the PAGN can have on improving educator retention in Philadelphia. PAGN educators agreed that:

- **Affinity groups are a meaningful lever for retention.** PAGN educators participating in focus groups broadly believe the groups help retention by countering isolation and building a support network that makes a hard job more sustainable. One participant reflected, *“I believe in the power of affinity spaces for teacher retention. You feel like you’re just not alone in everything, and I think that’s really powerful.”* Another participant shared, *“Knowing that people have a community that they can turn to — if*

their school doesn't already provide it — is pretty big for retention. Because a lot of the leaving happens when people feel unsupported. So, if you have a community that you know is going to support you, I think it makes it a lot more likely that you stay."

- **Affinity groups are particularly beneficial for newteacher retention**. New teachers gain a wider network of support and access to veteran colleagues beyond their immediate team which helps sustain them in the classroom. One novice educator shared, *"Once I joined the group and started being around more Black educators, especially ones who've been in the profession 10, 15, 20 years... I was like, okay, I can do this. I don't have anything to be afraid of, and if there's something I'm going through, I at least have somebody to lean on in this group."* Another novice educator reflected, *"I think it really helped as a first-year teacher. [...] It benefited me to have people that I saw consistently, and I was able to learn their names and get to know them, even if I didn't get to interact with them during the school day. Because it felt like I had an even wider network of support other than my direct coaches and the people that I directly interacted with every day. That's something that everyone, especially new teachers, can benefit from. [...] Being in this group has made me want to stay at my school."*

4. Reflections on Continuing to be Involved in the PAGN

Lastly, PAGN educators who plan on staying in the field of education for at least the short term were asked whether they intend to continue participating in PAGN in future school years. Overall, PAGN educators who engaged in the focus groups overwhelmingly **expressed interest in continuing to participate** in the PAGN. For example, one individual shared, *"We had a positive experience with the affinity group but our problems and issues didn't disappear after this year, right? We're going to still need those spaces next year to reaffirm us."*

Conclusion

This evaluation documents early indicators of the effectiveness and impact of the Philadelphia Affinity Group Network, including that:

- **The PAGN continues to attract educators whose race and ethnicity mirror the county's educators of color overall.** The characteristics of PAGN educators were mostly similar to non-PAGN educators, with some notable differences. PAGN educators had slightly lower average experience, degree attainment, and salaries than non-PAGN educators, indicating that the PAGN continues to succeed in recruiting new or more novice educators.
- **For the second year in a row, PAGN educators were retained in Philadelphia County at higher rates than non-PAGN educators.** 94.2% of the 2024-25 PAGN cohort returned to education positions in Philadelphia County the following year, compared to 89.7% of the matched comparison group and 90.4% of all non-PAGN educators. A model-based analysis using propensity score matching found PAGN participation was associated with a statistically significant four-percentage-point increase in retention ($p < .05$), even after controlling for race/ethnicity, gender, salary, degree level, years in education, years in LEA, and LEA type.
- **In general, both participants and facilitators of the PAGN expressed positive experiences with the network but had varying reflections on staying in the field of**

education: While limited to the 14 focus group participants, PAGN educators shared some mixed reflections on whether they would continue to work in education. For the few who plan on leaving or are unsure, a range of reasons were cited including heavy workloads and a desire for professional growth. Findings from the focus group data collection were more mixed than the results from the EOY surveys administered by Teach Plus PA which shared many responses that participants plan on staying in education through retirement age.

- **PAGN educator feedback and early data suggest the potential of the PAGN to improve retention of educators of color in Philadelphia’s public-school systems:** PAGN educators overwhelmingly believe the program holds promise in improving the experiences of educators, both new and veteran, which can contribute to improved retention.

The findings in this second evaluation provide an even stronger foundation for continued evaluation of the PAGN. As the program continues, RFA recommends future evaluations that:

1. **Leverage the existing network to gather insights into the reasons why educators leave.** Collect additional data via short surveys or through outreach to PAGN participants and facilitators who leave their positions as educators in Philadelphia to better understand factors that led to their decision. Individuals who leave education are often difficult to connect with after departing, but the relationships built through the PAGN could be leveraged to make those connections and better understand the conditions and circumstances that led to their decision.
2. **Collect data on individuals interested in joining the PAGN but not participating or individuals who took part in the PAGN no longer attending.** If Teach Plus is able to identify educators who expressed interest in participating in the PAGN but did not sign up or attend a PAGN meeting or individuals who attended an early PAGN session but did not participate in remaining sessions, additional data could be collected through surveys or interviews to better understand the reasons individuals did not participate fully. In addition, these interested individuals who did not ultimately participate could be used in a comparison group for future retention analyses, with or without PSM, to get more robust analyses of possible effects of participation.
3. **Expand data collection for participant intentions to stay in the field of education.** Additional data gathering through refined survey questions and continued focus groups should specifically query whether PAGN participants and facilitators intend on staying in education in Philadelphia County or are considering serving public schools outside of Philadelphia. This keeps the focus on the primary measure of success—educator retention—defined as continuing to serve Philadelphia schools.
4. **Conduct a sustainability study to understand the conditions needed to sustain the PAGN.** This type of evaluation could (1) document the resources required for launching and maintaining the PAGN including the role of the steering committee, (2) evaluate the benefits of the PAGN to the school systems of Philadelphia County, (3) investigate the potential of including more supporting agencies (weighing the benefits of one nonprofit agency like Teach Plus PA vs. LEA-specific affinity groups), and (4) draw on promising structures from the field to inform PAGN’s structure and sustainability. The current evaluation’s early findings show the PAGN holds great promise as a support and resource for new and veteran

teachers alike. Further understanding the conditions to sustain the effort would be beneficial to the county's educator workforce and school systems long term.

5. **Share learnings for PAGN evaluations to date with the field.** As mentioned, research on affinity groups continues to emerge with existing learnings showing great promise for affinity groups improving educator experience. The findings from PAGN's evaluations to date can be particularly useful for individuals working in or supporting human resources within school systems and advocating for resources to support the educator workforce in the region and state.

Appendix A: Retention Evaluation Methodology

To evaluate whether the PAGN supported educator retention in Philadelphia County, RFA conducted both descriptive and model-based regression analyses. The descriptive analysis compared unadjusted retention rates among PAGN educators, matched non-PAGN educators, and all non-PAGN educators. The model-based regression analysis examined differences in retention between PAGN educators and matched non-PAGN educators identified through propensity score matching. The model-based analysis provides an estimate of retention differences that are more likely attributable to PAGN participation, rather than other factors such as demographic characteristics, teaching experience, or salary.

Propensity Score Matching: Rather than comparing PAGN educators to all Philadelphia educators alone, this approach allowed us to compare PAGN participants with non-PAGN educators who share similar characteristics and professional experiences, including race and ethnicity, gender, experience, salary, degree level, years in education, years in LEA, and LEA type. To identify a matched comparison group of non-PAGN educators, RFA first identified a pool of educators who were “eligible” to be included in the matched group based on their school placement. Only educators working at schools with at least one PAGN educator were considered eligible to be included in the matched group. This approach ensured that comparisons were made among teachers working in similar school contexts, thereby partially accounting for factors such as school leadership, student population, and working conditions that may influence retention.

From this refined pool, RFA conducted propensity score matching to identify non-PAGN educators with background characteristics similar to those of PAGN educators. Matching was based on the following characteristics:

- a. Race and ethnicity
- b. Gender
- c. Salary
- d. Educational attainment (highest degree earned)
- e. Years in education
- f. Years in current LEA
- g. LEA Type (District vs. Charter)

Table A1 shows how the characteristics of educators in the PAGN program compared to (1) the group of matched non-PAGN educators with similar backgrounds and (2) the full group of non-PAGN educators in Philadelphia County, including individuals of all racial backgrounds and selected without matching. The propensity score matched group of non-PAGN educators is much more similar to the group of PAGN educators in terms of key background characteristics that can influence retention, like race, gender, salary, experience, and degree level. This means that we were comparing “like with like” – increasing our confidence that any differences in retention outcomes are more likely to be attributable to PAGN participation rather than other factors.

Table A1. Characteristics of PAGN Educators, Matched non-PAGN Educators, and All non-PAGN Educators, 2024-2025

	Characteristic	PAGN Educators (N = 224)	Propensity Score Matched Non-PAGN Educators (N = 224)	All non-PAGN Educators (N = 15,758)
Race/Ethnicity	% Black	72.8%	73.7%	28.0%
	% Hispanic	9.8%	10.3%	5.4%
	% Asian	8.5%	6.3%	2.7%
	% Mult-Racial	6.7%	8.0%	3.9%
	% White	1.8%	1.8%	59.8%
	% American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.5%	0.0%	0.3%
Gender	% Female	85.3%	82.6%	74.1%
	% Male	14.7%	17.4%	25.9%
Degree Level	% Bachelor's Degree	92.9%	94.2%	83.3%
	% Master's Degree	7.1%	5.8%	14.4%
LEA Type	% SDP	82.1%	84.4%	65.3%
	% Charter School	17.9%	15.6%	34.7%
Salary	Average Salary	\$80,516	\$80,028	\$84,752
Experience	Average Years in Education	11.5	11.7	12.1
	Average Years in LEA	11.0	11.0	10.7

Appendix B: Focus Group Analytic Approach

Approach: RFA worked closely with Teach Plus PA staff to tailor focus group protocols based on role within the PAGN (participant or facilitator). Teach Plus PA research and evaluation team members conducted the five focus groups remotely over Zoom. Transcripts from the focus groups were lightly cleaned for accuracy by Teach Plus staff and uploaded to Dedoose (qualitative analysis platform) by RFA. Two RFA researchers met to develop and refine the code list, clarify definitions, and establish inter-coder reliability. After coding full dataset, data was exported by individual code for thematic analysis. Later, themes were triangulated with data from other sources.

Sample: PAGN participants and facilitators who engaged in focus groups represented a diverse sample of educators. Focus group participants identified as Black, Asian, or Multi-Racial, worked in both district and charter settings, and held a variety of positions including PK-12 classroom teaching positions (preschool, general elementary, secondary English, special education, and music), instructional specialists, instructional coaches, and counselors. Participants held a range of experience in education with the sample including some veteran teachers with 18-24 years of experience, mid-career educators with 5-10 years of experience, and novice teachers with less than 3 years of experience. For educators working directly with students, most participants described working with predominately students of color and large populations of English language learners in K-12 settings. Two participants held positions that work in an alternative setting. Most participants described most of their school-based colleagues as White.