

Evaluating Early Learnings and Success of the Philadelphia Affinity Group Network

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Project Conducted by Research for Action for Teach Plus PA

Introduction and Background

Teach Plus PA engaged Research for Action (RFA) as an evaluation partner to help define metrics of success and provide analysis of their new affinity group program, the Philadelphia Affinity Group Network (PAGN). This report shares the foundational knowledge gained through early learnings and successes of the PAGN and provides recommendations for future evaluation of the program. Key findings presented in this report include:

1. For the 2023-24 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 2023-24 PAGN participants and facilitators was higher than the retention rate of all educators in Philadelphia County and of the matching group.
3. Overall, PAGN participants and facilitators expressed positive experiences from the PAGN.
4. Participant feedback and early data suggest the PAGN has potential to improve retention of educators of color in Philadelphia's public-school systems.

The Importance of Educator Diversity in Philadelphia

Research underscores the benefit of diversity in the teaching workforce, including boosting the academic achievement and graduation rates of students of color, supporting culturally responsive teaching, as well as improving their sense of belonging and positive experiences in schools.¹ Existing research has documented that Black and other teachers of color cite systemic and interpersonal racism, lack of support, isolation, and lack of resources among the reasons they

¹ Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). *Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute; Griffin, A., and Tackie, H. *Through our eyes: Perspectives and reflections from Black teachers*. Education Trust, 2016.

leave the profession² and affinity spaces have been elevated as one strategy for the retention of teachers of color.³

For the Philadelphia region, the need for more teachers of color is clear. Although Philadelphia's public schools serve a majority Black student population, its teaching force is majority white and despite attention to this issue, research shows the Black teacher population is only declining.⁴ Leaders and advocates across the region are engaging in efforts to diversify the teacher workforce, including the efforts being led by the Philadelphia Citywide Talent Coalition⁵ to recruit, retain, and develop more quality teachers, and in particular, more teachers of color. The PAGN is one of the efforts taking place in Philadelphia to improve retention and support leadership development for high-quality educators of color.

About the PAGN

The PAGN⁶, led by Teach Plus PA, “seeks to cultivate authentic, inclusive, intersectional spaces” by providing structured affinity groups⁷ to help educators of color working in the Philadelphia region⁸ navigate their school environments. The network began in the 2023-24 school year with 21 affinity groups across the county serving 151 participants. The network expanded to 26 affinity groups in 2024-25, engaging approximately 100 additional participants.

Each affinity group is facilitated by a teacher leader (facilitator) who participates in monthly professional learning, coaching support from a Teach Plus PA leadership coach, and a community of practice of fellow facilitators. Facilitators design their affinity group and create a vision for the group, recruit members, and lead monthly affinity group meetings. The focus of the network is supporting educators of color in Philadelphia and meeting topics vary depending on the vision of each individual affinity group and input from participants. Example meeting topics include connectivity and relationship building, learning through concepts or stories to make sense of current inequities or injustices that need to be repaired, and building skills to be more effective anti-racist leaders.

² DeCuir-Gunby, Jessica T., and Norris W. Gunby Jr. “Racial microaggressions in the workplace: A critical race analysis of the experiences of African American educators.” *Urban Education* 51, no. 4 (2016): 390-414; 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

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

⁴ For more information on the PAGN, visit <https://www.researchforaction.org/research-resources/k-12/the-need-for-more-teachers-of-color/>.

⁵ For more information on the Philadelphia Citywide Talent Coalition, visit <https://elevate215.org/philadelphia-citywide-talent-coalition/>.

⁶ https://teachplus.org/regional_programs/philadelphia-affinity-group-network/

⁷ An affinity group can be defined as “a group of people linked by a common purpose, ideology, identity, or interest” (*NYS Library* at <https://nyslibrary.libguides.com/dei/affinity>).

⁸ There is one affinity group in Camden, New Jersey included in the PAGN that is part of the Mastery Charter School Network and considered part of the Philadelphia region.

Evaluation Approach

Because the PAGN is a new program for Teach Plus PA in Philadelphia, RFA first supported Teach Plus PA program leaders in identifying measures of success for the program. **Educator retention for Philadelphia County** was identified as the primary metric of success for educators who participate in the PAGN. The **educator retention rate** for the PAGN is defined as “the percentage of PAGN participants and facilitators who continue to work in a Philadelphia County public school the following year.”⁹ 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.

Research Questions

RFA and Teach Plus PA identified the following questions to guide early evaluation activities and better understand the retention and experiences of PAGN participants and facilitators who joined the network in the 2023-24 school year:

1. What was educator retention rate for PAGN participants and facilitators between the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years, as measured by the October 2024 and October 2025 snapshots reported by PDE?
2. How did the educator retention rate for PAGN participants and facilitators compare to retention rates for other Philadelphia educators who did not participate, as measured by the October 2024 and October 2025 snapshots reported by PDE?
3. How do participants and facilitators describe their experiences with the PAGN and their roles in education (benefits and challenges)? Which challenges could the affinity group better support?
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 this school year and beyond? Why or why not?

⁹ An educator can work in any position or school within Philadelphia County public schools the following year to be considered retained.

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 individual participants and facilitators who joined the PAGN as either a participant or facilitator in the 2023-24 school year from Teach Plus PA. RFA then identified the individuals in the Professional Personnel Individual Staff Report¹⁰ publicly available from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) for the 2023-24 school year. A total of 138 total participants and facilitators were identified in the PDE dataset. PAGN participating educators who held positions in Camden, New Jersey or in positions that PDE data does not report 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 2023-24 including race and ethnicity¹¹, position held, tenure in the field of 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 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years. In the datasets, each educator is assigned a unique "PublicID" or "random number generated to distinguish between different individuals and to link records pertaining to the same individual." RFA tracked whether the individuals who participated in the PAGN in 2023-24 were still working in Philadelphia County's public schools in 2024-25 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 additional 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. Focus groups with PAGN participants and facilitators who joined the network in the 2023-24 cohort: Twenty-five individuals involved in the PAGN participated in focus groups as part of this evaluation. More specifically, 19 PAGN participants and six PAGN facilitators engaged in 10 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.

¹⁰ <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/data-and-reporting/school-staff/professional-and-support-personnel#accordion-945bbf16e1-item-a76e74f49e>

¹¹ 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.

Characteristics of PAGN Participants and Facilitators

RFA's descriptive data analysis compared 2023-24 PAGN participants and facilitators ("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. More specifically, this analysis revealed:

1. **PAGN and non-PAGN educators are employed by the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) or charter school sectors at similar rates.** 68.1% of PAGN educators were employed by SDP and 31.9% were employed by charter schools. Similarly, 66.4% of non-PAGN Educators were employed by SDP and 33.6% were employed by charters in 2023-24.
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.** 84.8% of PAGN educators and 78.6% of non-PAGN educators were classroom teachers in Philadelphia in 2023-24. There were no PAGN educators with jobs categorized as School Administrator, Chief Administrator, or Other Supervisory Coordinator in 2023-24.
3. **PAGN educators have slightly less experience in education than non-PAGN educators.** The mean tenure of years in education among PAGN participants is 10.5 years while the mean tenure of years in education among non-PAGN participants is 12.2 years. Overall, 42.0% of educators participating in the PAGN have worked in PA's public schools for 5 years or less and 31.2% of non-PAGN educators have worked in PA's public schools for 5 years or less.
4. **The reported race and ethnicity demographics of PAGN educators are relatively similar to the race and ethnicity demographics of the subset of non-PAGN educators who are identified as educators of color.** As discussed, PAGN is specifically targeted to support educators of color. Thus, it is expected that the overall race and ethnicity of PAGN educators differs from the overall race and ethnicity of non-PAGN educators. In Table 1 we exclude teachers identified as white from both the PAGN and non-PAGN samples to compare just the subsets of educators of color. We find that the proportion of educators identified as Hispanic is smaller and the proportion of educators identified as Asian is larger among PAGN educators compared to non-PAGN educators (Table 1).

Table 1. Race and ethnicity for PAGN and non-PAGN educators of color as reported by PDE for the 2023-24 school year.

Race or Ethnicity	PAGN Educators of Color (N = 136 ¹²)	Non-PAGN Educators of Color (N = 6,152)
Black or African American	78.7%	69.7%
Multi-Racial ¹³	4.4%	9.6%
Hispanic	5.9%	13.3%
Asian	10.3%	6.9%
Other	.7%	.57%

Key Findings

Early Measures of Retention for PAGN Participants and Facilitators

Approach

To assess whether participation in the PAGN program supported educators in continuing to work 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. 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. The model-based analysis provides an estimate of retention differences that are more likely

¹²Two 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.

¹³ A data error was flagged for SDP in the 2023-24 data for overidentification of teachers identified as Multi-Racial. RFA adjusted race and ethnicity for individuals who were reported as Multi-Racial in SDP in 2023-24 but had a different race and ethnicity reported in 2024-25. For those identified, their 2023-24 race and ethnicity were changed to their 2024-25 category.

attributable to PAGN participation, rather than other factors such as demographic characteristics, teaching experience, or salary.

Propensity Score Matching: To begin, RFA 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 accounting for factors such as school leadership, student population, and working conditions that may influence retention. Educators from the 2024-2025 PAGN cohort were excluded from the comparison group, as their demonstrated interest in PAGN participation could introduce bias and skew the results.

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:

- Race and ethnicity
- Gender
- Salary
- Educational attainment (highest degree earned)
- Years in education
- Years in current LEA
- LEA Type (District vs. Charter)

Table 2 shows how the characteristics of educators in the PAGN program compare 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 2. Characteristics of PAGN Educators, Matched non-PAGN Educators, and All non-PAGN Educators, 2023-2024

	Characteristic	PAGN Educators (N = 138)	Propensity Score Matched Non-PAGN Educators (N = 138)	All non-PAGN Educators (N = 15,878)
Race/Ethnicity	% Black	77.5%	77.5%	27.0%
	% Asian	10.1%	9.4%	2.7%
	% Hispanic	5.8%	8.0%	5.1%
	% Mult-Racial	4.4%	3.6%	3.7%
	% White	1.5%	1.45%	61.3%
	% American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.7%	0%	0.2%
Gender	% Female	81.9%	80.4%	73.9%
	% Male	18.1%	19.6%	26.1%
Degree Level	% Bachelor's Degree	88.4%	90.6%	83.3%
	% Master's Degree	10.9%	8.7%	14.7%
	% Doctoral Degree	0.7%	0.7%	0.5%
LEA Type	% SDP	68.1%	72.5%	66.4%
	% Charter School	31.9%	27.5%	33.6%
Salary	Average Salary	\$75,147	\$74,859	\$81,181
Experience	Average Years in Education	10.5	10.5	12.2
	Average Years in LEA	9.0	9.2	11.0

Note: The group of all non-PAGN educators includes white educators.

Findings

RFA conducted both a descriptive analysis and a model-based analysis with a matched comparison group to examine the effect of PAGN participation on retention. In our descriptive analysis, we found that PAGN participants were retained at higher rates than their non-PAGN peers: 93.5% of PAGN participants returned as educators in 2024-2025, compared to 87.7% of matched non-PAGN participants and 86.4% of all non-PAGN participants in Philadelphia County. We also compared retention of PAGN educators and all non-PAGN educators by race, finding that among educators of color, PAGN participants had higher retention. Notably, PAGN educator retention exceeded the retention rate of white non-PAGN educators, who have consistently had higher rates of retention than educators of color in Philadelphia. The model-based analysis with a matched comparison group found that PAGN participants were seven percentage points more likely to continue as educators in Philadelphia County than non-PAGN participants, a statistically significant finding ($p < .10$). **Together, these findings suggest that participation in PAGN is associated with increased likelihood of educator retention.**

1. Retention rates are higher for PAGN educators

The descriptive analysis compares the unadjusted retention rates of PAGN educators and non-PAGN educators. Table 3 displays the retention rates of PAGN educators, the matched group of non-PAGN educators, and all non-PAGN educators in the county. Among all PAGN educators in 2023-2024 ($N = 138$), 93.5% of them returned as an educator in Philadelphia County in 2024-2025. Meanwhile, 87.7% of non-PAGN educators ($N = 138$) in our matched group and 86.4% of all non-PAGN educators ($N = 15,878$) were retained.

Table 3. Comparing Retention for PAGN and non-PAGN Educators

	PAGN Participants and Facilitators (N = 138)	Matched Comparison Group (N = 138)	All non-PAGN Participants in Philadelphia County (N = 15,878)
Number of Educators Retained in Philadelphia County	129	121	13,724
Percent of Educators Retained in Philadelphia County	93.5%	87.7%	86.4%

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.

2. Retention for educators of color overall is higher for PAGN Educators

Table 4 displays a more detailed comparison of retention rates by race and ethnicity between PAGN participants and all non-PAGN participants in Philadelphia County. Retention was notably higher among Black/African American and Asian PAGN educators compared to their non-PAGN counterparts. For example, 93.4% of Black PAGN educators were retained, compared to 84.6% of Black non-PAGN educators. Retention rates for Hispanic PAGN and non-PAGN participants were relatively similar. The only group with slightly lower retention among PAGN participants was multi-racial educators (66.7% compared to 70.1%). 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	Non-PAGN Participant Retention
Black or African American	93.4% (N = 107)	84.6% (N = 4,290)
Multi-Racial	66.7% (N = 6)	70.1% (N = 589)
Asian	100% (N = 14)	87.5% (N = 423)
Hispanic	87.5% (N = 8)	88.6% (N = 815)
White	100% (N = 2)	88.0% (N = 9,726)
American Indian or Alaska Native	100% (N = 1)	85.2% (N = 27)
Total	93.5% (N = 138)	86.4% (N = 15,878)

3. Mobility patterns of PAGN participants are generally comparable to those of non-PAGN educators

For the final descriptive analysis, RFA examined “mobility patterns” among educators who remained in Philadelphia County, comparing PAGN participants to both the matched group and broader pool of all non-PAGN educators. Mobility refers to the movement of educators within the county’s schools, LEAs, and across different positions within the county.

Table 5 displays these patterns, highlighting movements across schools, LEAs, and roles. Overall, the mobility patterns of PAGN participants are generally comparable to those of non-PAGN educators. Of the 129 PAGN educators who were retained in Philadelphia County, 11.6% moved to a new school in the county and 2.3% moved to a new LEA. When looking at role changes, we see that 24% of retained PAGN educators moved to a new role or position in the *same* school, and 3.1% moved to a new role or position at a *new* school.

Table 5. Mobility of PAGN Educators and non-PAGN Educators Who Were Retained in Philadelphia County

Educators in Philadelphia County Who:	PAGN Participants (N = 129)	Matched Non-PAGN Participants (N = 116)	All Non-PAGN Participants (N = 13,724)
Moved to a new school in Philadelphia County	15 (11.6%)	9 (7.4%)	1,131 (8.2%)
Moved to a new LEA in Philadelphia County	3 (2.3%)	3 (3.3%)	414 (3.02%)
Moved to a new role or position at the same school in Philadelphia County	31 (24.0%)	24 (20.7%)	3,620 (26.4%)
Moved to a new role or position at a new school in Philadelphia County	4 (3.1%)	5 (4.3%)	481 (3.5%)

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

4. Of the PAGN educators who left county schools, 100% left the Pennsylvania public school teacher workforce entirely

Table 6 displays the mobility trends of educators who left Philadelphia County. No PAGN participants or matched non-PAGN participants who left Philadelphia County moved to a Pennsylvania public school outside of the county. This contrasts with the broader sample of non-PAGN educators who left Philadelphia County, with 12.3% of them moving to a new school outside of the county and 87.7% leaving the Pennsylvania public school workforce entirely.

Table 6. Mobility of PAGN Educators and non-PAGN Educators Who Were Not Retained in Philadelphia County.

Teachers in Philadelphia County Who:	PAGN Participants (N = 9)	Matched Non-PAGN Participants (N = 22)	All Non-PAGN Participants (N = 2,154)
Moved to a Pennsylvania school outside of Philadelphia County	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	264 (12.3%)
Left the Pennsylvania public school teaching workforce entirely	9 (100%)	22 (100%)	1,890 (87.7%)

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 ($p < .10$).

As shown in Table 7, the adjusted retention rate was **92.8%** for PAGN educators and **85.7%** for matched non-PAGN educators. This represents a **7-percentage point difference** in the likelihood of continuing to work as an educator in Philadelphia County, suggesting that PAGN educators were more likely to be retained than similar non-PAGN educators.

Table 7. Predicted Probability of Retention for PAGN and non-PAGN Educators

Sample	Predicted Retention Rate
PAGN Educators (N = 138)	92.8%
Propensity Score Matched non-PAGN Educators (N = 138)	85.7%

Note: Predicted probabilities are model adjusted using logistic regression with matched samples.

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.

Understanding the Experiences of PAGN Participants and Facilitators

As discussed, to further understand the influence of participating in the PAGN, RFA conducted 10 total focus groups with 19 PAGN participants and six facilitators. Below we summarize findings of what participants shared about their experiences as educators in Philadelphia, involvement in the PAGN, and plans to remain in the field of education.

Who Participated

PAGN participants and facilitators who engaged in focus groups with the research team 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 K-12 classroom teaching positions for core subjects such as secondary math, elementary, and special education positions, supporting classroom positions such as assistant teachers or paraprofessionals, and non-classroom roles including instructional specialists/coaches and counselors.

Educator Experiences in their Positions and in the PAGN

Individuals who participated in the focus groups shared rich insights into their positions and experiences in Philadelphia's public schools, including both district and charters. More specifically, data from the focus groups revealed that:

- **The experiences of participants and facilitators in their school positions varied widely.** A few participants and facilitators described their overall work experience as positive, often because they enjoy the rewards of the teaching profession, connecting with their students, and working alongside their colleagues. Some felt mixed about their roles and others described negative experiences.
- **Participants and facilitators faced numerous and compounding challenges in their positions.** Participants and facilitators named **a wide range of issues** they encounter in their daily work as educators including (1) classroom challenges including supporting and motivating students, managing classroom behaviors, and balancing heavy workloads, (2) encountering systemic racism, microaggressions in their school environments, and school leaders who are not culturally responsive, (3) experiencing feelings of isolation, (4) challenges working in turbulent school environments due to high teacher turnover, a lack of safety protocols, and inadequate resources, and (5) other professional challenges like a lack of professional development. Select examples of how participants and facilitators described the challenges they faced are included below:

- **Managing the classroom and heavy workloads:** One participant shared, *“Some of the challenges are, well, one, the number of students in class, the fact that it's a full load, it's 33 every single class, every single year, which then [impacts] the amount of [grading] because these students [in a special admit school] students basically do all of their work.”*
- **Systemic racism and microaggressions:** One individual shared, *“I love my kids, and I think that with the staff being majority Caucasian or White, it's kind of hard, because there's a lot of microaggressions that we face every day, or that I face every day, and it's kind of like, how do you work in a school where you can't give the same respect to the adults who look like the students?”*
- **Navigating feelings of isolation:** One participant responded, *“I think that one thing that I struggle with sometimes is that teaching can feel very siloed just because there's not a lot of interaction with other teachers in the building.”*

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

1. A desire to access a support system and make connections outside of their schools.
2. Feeling represented in the backgrounds and identities of other participants and facilitators.
3. Additional benefits including stipends and meals which helped offset additional work outside of their positions in education.

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

- **The PAGN creates opportunities for building community, connection, and support that lessen the isolation teachers often experience.** As one teacher shared, *“...our group has been supportive in both ways, in supportive of the challenges we have in the educational space, as well as some of the challenges and things that we're going through as women, as Black women, as human beings, and as things that are happening in our homes and our lives. It's been good that you feel safe with the group, and you feel like you can share...”* Another teacher said she was planning to leave the classroom but decided to stay because of the support and guidance she received in her group while a facilitator shared that someone in their group was planning to leave her role due to challenges with her administration and that her group offered support and advice on how to address her situation.
- **The range of experience among educators in a given affinity group creates conditions for organic mentorship.** Newer teachers in particular spoke of the value of hearing from seasoned teachers.

- **Those who are involved with colleagues at the same school experience deepened bonds.** Several educators shared that their affinity group provided opportunities to connect with other teachers at their schools in new ways.

Facilitators also shed additional light on their experiences in a leadership role for the PAGN.

Several facilitators **acknowledged the amount of work and time they pour into this role and described it as meaningful and “worth it.”** Additional benefits facilitators named included:

- **The PAGN provides opportunities for facilitators to practice and develop new leadership skills.** One facilitator shared, *“it's definitely giving me balance because one thing I'm learning is to be a better leader. And it's also helping make sure my integrity is good in terms of like if I'm telling them oh, it's so important to refill your cup and you got to get rest, yet I'm not, and I'm like a facilitator, like, how does that look? So I've been trying to be more mindful...recognizing when you say things people are listening and you are setting an example and you want to be mindful of your words because people are watching and you want to see what you're doing.”*
- **The PAGN creates a sense of purpose among facilitators as they contribute to the retention of teachers.** For example, one facilitator spoke of the pride she feels in contributing to strengthening the retention of teachers of color: *“So when I hear great feedback... that's a big benefit because I'm like, wow, a teacher lives another day. ...if we're leaving our children to not see people who look like them in these spaces who are knowledgeable and have it, but they're just burnt out. So every time I hear them come in and they're excited and they appreciate it and that this event was good, it was just what they needed, that feels really good and rewarding.”*

Individual Reflections on Staying in the Field of Education and Perceptions of PAGN's Potential for Improving Educator Retention in Philadelphia

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 field of education because they like their jobs, feel like the profession is their calling, and have already invested time with the district. For example, one individual shared *“Every time I try to get away from it, I realized this is where I'm supposed to be.”*
- **Plans to stay in the field of education for the short term.** Others shared plans to stay in the classroom for the next few years, but were less clear about whether they would remain for the entirety of their careers. For example, one individual shared their approach to re-evaluate in a year, *“Let me give it one more year to see how I can refine and, you know, change things. That's all I have right now is one more year.”*

- **Feeling undecided about whether they would continue to work in education moving forward.** Others expressed mixed feelings or uncertainty about staying in the field. For example, one individual reflected, *“I would want to say, in the next three to five years, I would definitely be doing education, but like on paper, I like all the things that are my job, but all the things that come with it are what, like get me bogged down, stressed out, burned out, all that jazz. So, I don't know, it's hard.”*
- **Plans to move into a non-teaching position.** Some shared they did not plan on abandoning education but transitioning into administrative roles or moving into higher education.
- **Plans to leave the field of education.** Some shared plans on exiting the field soon due to stress, poor working conditions, inadequate pay, retirement, and lack of interest in their work due to curriculum requirements. One individual reflected, *“As far as whether I see myself doing this for three to five years, I do not, and that's because of a variety of factors, one being my workplace environment. It can be sometimes a hostile and toxic environment that I refuse to allow myself to continue to work in, and also the pay rate.”*

Participants and facilitators also shared their perceptions on the potential role the PAGN can have on improving educator retention in Philadelphia. Two main perspectives emerged:

1. **The PAGN shows promise in improving the retention of educators in Philadelphia for a variety of reasons.** Individuals acknowledged the communities created through the PAGN are an effective mechanism to retain teachers and are particularly powerful for new teachers or teachers in groups with varying years of experience. For example, regarding the impact of the PAGN on new teachers of color one individual said, *“I think for brand new people in particular coming into the school district, that is helpful for them, extremely helpful for them to have a community they're already a part of or they're a part as they're starting their careers. Because it can be a lot as just a brand-new teacher and people being at schools where they may be the only person of their identity or identities. And that's, like I said, it's very isolating. I didn't have that experience in my previous school.”*

A few individuals thought the **support offered** through the PAGN would help teachers navigate challenges that might contribute to attrition. For example, one individual shared the PAGN could lessen burn out, noting, *“Because if it is true that people are just burnt down, people can't get past their emergency certs, they can't pass their test, they're in toxic environments. Those are things that I would like PAGN to be able to help fix.”* Others thought the PAGN would help individuals reconnect with why they entered the profession in the first place and why they might ultimately stay.

2. **The PAGN may not be able to fully address issues that push educators out of their roles.** A few individuals expressed some concern that the PAGN might not be able to address all issues that cause attrition in the field including salary, challenges experienced daily in the classroom, and issues with administration or district and school policies. One

individual shared, “*But yeah, you guys, the things you're doing helps us to maintain but you can't manage to keep folks there, because you can't increase our pay, and you can't solve the real major issues that we're having. You can just provide us with coping mechanisms.*”

Reflections on Continuing to be Involved in the PAGN

Lastly, PAGN participants and facilitators 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. Participants who engaged in the focus groups overwhelmingly **expressed interest in continuing to participate** in the PAGN. For example, one individual shared, “*As long as I'm teaching, I think I will do the groups*” and another noted “*I know for me, I would like to... just because like I said, I'm on an island, so anytime I could get a chance to talk and interact with other educators, I'm always open to it.*”

Facilitators had more **mixed feelings** about continuing in their roles. Some **anticipate continuing to serve as a facilitator** for the PAGN in the future. For example, one facilitator reflected, “*It's, again, a great opportunity to network with other people I wouldn't necessarily have the opportunity to work with. I enjoy some of the professional development that Teach Plus has provided. And I haven't had any woes that would prevent me from coming back.*”

Other facilitators shared **reservations about continuing** and disclosed plans to step back from the responsibility due to competing priorities such as additional roles at local universities and family needs and time restraints from the demands of their full-time roles in education. For example, one facilitator shared they were “*stretched too thin*” while another reflected, “*I kind of just want it for myself to breathe a little bit. I want to give myself a break. But if life got a little easier, then I would.*”

Biannual Survey Results on Predictive Retention Measures

RFA also reviewed summary data from the middle of year (MOY) and end of year (EOY) surveys administered to PAGN participants in 2025 by Teach Plus PA. Both surveys received a high response rate (65-80%) and revealed a few related takeaways for this evaluation:

1. **Most participants are satisfied with the PAGN.** Similar to the data findings from the focus groups, survey respondents shared that the PAGN provided opportunities for professional growth, mutual support, a safe place to express themselves, opportunities to connect with colleagues, and help them feel an improved sense of empowerment, belonging, and community.
2. **Most participants plan on staying in education until retirement or longer.** In both the MOY and EOY surveys, many respondents (87% in MOY and 74% in EOY) shared they intend to stay in the field of education until retirement or later. While focus group participants shared more mixed feelings about how long they plan on continuing in their roles, the higher retention rate for PAGN participants supports this survey finding.

Conclusion

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

1. **The PAGN has attracted participants and facilitators that are largely representative of the county's educators of color overall.** Future recruitment could work to attract more participants and/or facilitators who identify as Hispanic or Latinx and hold administrative positions to better match these groups of educators in the county's workforce. The PAGN has attracted educators with less experience in their positions overall which shows the network is supporting newer or more novice educators.
2. **The educator retention rate for 2023-24 participants and facilitators exceeded that of all educators and of the matching group:** 93.5% of PAGN participants and facilitators from the 2023-24 cohort returned to education positions in Philadelphia County the following school year. PAGN participants were retained in Philadelphia County at higher rates than non-PAGN educators.
3. **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:** Overall, participants and facilitators who engaged in focus groups shared mixed reflections on whether they would continue to work in education. For those who plan on leaving or are unsure, a range of reasons were cited including poor working conditions, burn out, and inadequate pay. The findings from the focus group data collection were more mixed than the results from the MOY and EOY surveys administered by Teach Plus PA which shared many responses that participants plan on staying in education through retirement.
4. **Participant feedback and early data suggest the potential of the PAGN to improve retention of educators of color in Philadelphia's public-school systems:** While some participants and facilitators named that the PAGN won't be able to alleviate all of the key issues that drive educators out of their positions such as pay or working conditions, they noted the promise the program holds in improving experiences of educators, both new and veteran, that can contribute to improved retention.

The findings in this early evaluation provide a foundation for future evaluation of the PAGN. As the program continues, RFA recommends future evaluations:

1. Leverage quantitative and qualitative analysis to better understand PAGN participant and facilitator experiences and retention as educators in Philadelphia County. As the PAGN continues, recruitment for focus groups and interviews should prioritize individuals who have been participating in the PAGN for more than one school year (for example, those who participated for three or more years) to understand the impact of the PAGN on educator experiences overtime.

2. Continue monitoring the impact of the PAGN and the intentions of participants to stay in the field of education. Additional data gathering 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.
3. 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 making.
4. Include a sustainability study to understand 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.