

Featured: VACANT: Students stare at an empty teacher's desk as they wait for a substitute teacher to arrive. Former Clarke Central High School English department teacher Jake Reuse believes that retaining teachers is important in establishing a better education for students. "I think that we need to make (teaching) a desirable place for people to (work) because we want to be an educated country," Reuse said. "We want kids going out and doing great things and inspiring the next generation is huge. I think that we have to collectively do a better job of approaching that." Illustration by Eleanor Robinson



RETENTION RATE CRISIS

The efficacy of student learning and faculty performance is being hindered by high teacher turnover rates in the CCSD.

BY NICO WILLMAN News Editor | BY SOFIA BALSAMO News Staffer | LAYOUT BY AUDREY ENGHAUSER Print Editor-in-Chief | LAYOUT BY CHLOE SEARS Print Managing Editor

Student education is being impacted by rising teacher turnover rates, with an average of 14% of all Clarke County School District teachers departing annually.

According to the CCSD Human Resources department, the teacher turnover rate at Clarke Central High School rose from 10.74% to 14.15% between 2019 and 2021, resulting in negative effects on student achievement and teacher morale.

"It creates more challenges than most industries when a teacher leaves. There's the (loss of) institutional knowledge that happens. They know how to do something (and) they know how to do it really well," CCSD Executive Director of Recruitment and Development Dan Swartz said. "They've navigated that work environment for many years and they've put systems and structures in place to do things efficiently. When they leave, sometimes those have to (be) recreated and a loss of efficiency happens."

As the CCHS math department co-chair, Heather Julian has witnessed the effects teacher turnover has had on long-term teacher development.

"(Turnover) definitely affects the cohesiveness of planning teams, as well as what different people have been trained on. Every year, (students) learn a little bit more math and get better at math. (Professional learning) is the same way, so (teachers) get better at teaching or instructional strategies," Julian said. "When there's a lot of turnover, that means that the new people haven't necessarily gotten that training, or (we're) constantly trying to get them caught up and into the vision of what we do here at Clarke Central."

As of February 2022, the National Education Association reported that 55% of teachers nationwide considered leaving the profession earlier than planned, compared to the 37% in August 2021. According to CCHS Assistant Principal Dr. Summer Smith, this increases the shortage of hireable personnel and makes it more difficult to find experienced and skilled professionals.

"Teacher turnover affects everything," Smith said. "All the training and support and resources that we pour into teachers, if they just stay for a year and



"We want to retain teachers so we can develop them (and) increase their effectiveness so they can increase our students' learning."

-- DR. SELENA BLANKENSHIP,
CCSD Chief Human Resources Officer

then leave, then you're constantly doing that over and over again."

According to CCSD Chief Human Resource Officer Dr. Selena Blankenship, a former CCHS English department teacher, keeping teachers in the district is crucial for maintaining and increasing high student achievement. To foster retention, faculty members are offered professional development and growth opportunities to maximize their students' learning gains.

"Top educators produce five to seven months more learning gains for students annually than ineffective teachers," Blankenship said. "We want to retain teachers so we can develop them (and) increase their effectiveness so they can increase our students' learning."

However, with a declining applicant pool both nationally and in the CCSD,

employing teachers has become increasingly difficult, according to Swartz.

"(With) recruiting excellent educators, there's a time and investment standpoint. Those are dollars committed to not bolstering what we have, but trying to go out and recruit somebody (new)," Swartz said. "Then there is a challenge with finding excellent teachers. There is a labor shortage in every industry (and) the workforce for educators is shrinking."

Former CCHS English department teacher Jake Reuse, who taught from 2011 to 2014, believes that a lack of teacher retention also leads to gaps in emotional connections with students.

"The kids need those bonds. They need people they can rely on," Reuse said. "A lot of kids don't have that at home, or they don't have a teacher they necessarily go to (who) they trust or feel they can speak openly to. When you lose somebody like that, that's always going to be negative."

Former CCHS science department chair Buddy Sims was an educator for over 30 years. Sims encountered several occasions in which he felt as though teachers had been disregarded by administrative leadership.

"(Demands) get chucked down the line and teachers end up at the end of the food chain," Sims said. "It would be hard for me to account for all the

Photos by Lucas Donnelly



DR. SELENA BLANKENSHIP
CCSD Chief Human Resource Officer



BUDDY SIMS
former CCHS science department chair

Photo by Audrey Enghauser



CHRISTOPHER PENDLEY
former CMS Principal and current CCSD Human Resource Director of Employee Development

"(With) recruiting excellent educators, there's a time and investment standpoint. Those are dollars committed to not bolstering what we have, but trying to go out and recruit somebody (new)."

-- DAN SWARTZ,

CCSD Executive Director of Recruitment and Development



time I felt was lost in unproductive meetings, time taken away because someone else decided that that time was more valuable to them than it was to me."

Similar to CCHS, the Clarke Middle School community experienced a high turnover rate during the two years leading up to the pandemic, challenging remaining teachers and staff to re-establish cohesion within the school. CMS Assistant Principal Kristina Lerch-Batson and Blankenship both reported a total of between 60-62 and 65-72 teachers for the years 2018-19 and 2019-20, respectively.

"Our teacher turnover in the years 2018-19 and 2019-20 was about 20 staff members per year. The challenge to having so many new teachers was how to build continuity of our instructional goals year-to-year," Lerch-Batson said. "We really had to start at the beginning of our work with instructional planning each year since our content teams had so much change. However, it was beneficial to have new voices in the process each year to help push us forward with our work."

According to CMS Gifted Collaborator Chris Woodward, teacher turnover degenerates faculty culture, especially with losses of veteran teachers.

"We used to have a teacher who focused on Holocaust Remembrance Day, and they'd have (guest) speakers and a room where (students) could go and be solemn and reflective," Woodward said. "These things we did were special, were done for a reason and were impactful. The new people you have are trying to tread water and understand how to be a teacher."

Despite these challenges, former CMS Principal and current CCSD Human Resource Director of Employee Development Christopher Pendley implemented restorative practices among the CMS faculty and staff during his tenure in order to improve teacher retention.

"(We had to) work closely together, communicate clearly and openly and support one another," Pendley said. "That had the impact of helping to bring us together as a team. While we may have started the year with some anxiety, I think we finished the year with pretty high morale."


Despite various incentives, Smith believes teacher turnover is

Above: UNOCCUPIED: A teacher stands in between the silhouettes of unfilled teaching positions. Clarke County School District Chief Human Resources Officer Dr. Selena Blankenship noticed the profound impact teachers can have on their school community during her time as a Clarke Central High School teacher in the early 2000s. "Working in a school is different from working in some other kind of business because you're together. You're seeing each other all day long, sharing students, sharing joys and frustrations and ideas, and you're problem-solving together. You really bond through that experience," Blankenship said. "When your colleagues leave for different opportunities or they're moving away, it does leave a gap. It leaves a void. You miss those people because you have bonded." Illustration by Eleanor Robinson

inevitable.

"Not all turnovers are bad. Some people leave because they're growing, changing their job titles, or (for) personal reasons that can't be helped," Smith said. "Sometimes it is a bummer because we're losing somebody that we really like, but that's the nature of the beast."

In order to mitigate the issue of teacher turnover and increase retention rates, the CCSD Human Resources staff is providing incentives to establish a more supportive atmosphere for teachers.

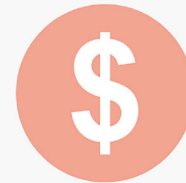
"We're trying to create as best of a culture and environment for teachers to work in as possible," Swartz said. "We're trying to reward them financially, as well as in other tangible ways, to recognize their hard work and skill in the profession. We're looking to grow them as individual(s) with their skills so that they can be even more successful in their jobs and potentially develop into other careers within education." 



CCSD Chief Human Resources Officer
Dr. Selena Blankenship

Clarke County School Districts' Salary, Support and Opportunity Method of Teacher Retainment:

01 Pay



"We look at how we can make sure that we're competitive with other areas, (and) how we can honor and value those teachers who have been in the profession for more than 20 years."



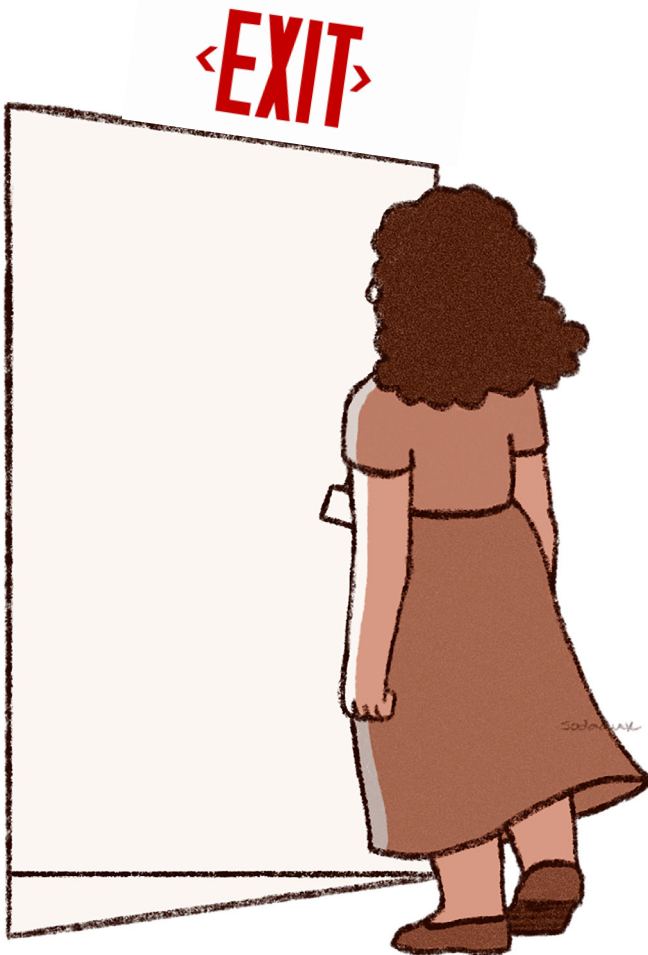
02 Support

"We primarily look at support for teachers in their first three years of teaching. We provide mentors and opportunities for them to get observed and have feedback, (as well as) professional learning."

03 Opportunity



"Once we support them in those induction years, and they've become a strong, effective teacher, we help them grow in that next phase of their career. We look at how (to) put them in position(s) to take advantage of leadership opportunities."



Above: MOVING ON: A teacher exits her classroom as she makes the decision to quit her job. In former Clarke Central High School science department chair Buddy Sims experience, a leading cause of why teachers consider leaving is a feeling of disenfranchisement. "One of the several reasons that are critical to teachers leaving the profession is that kind of sense of, 'I don't have a voice. I'm not being respected (and) my opinions are not respected,'" Sims said. "I think every teacher has heard the, 'If you don't like the way things are here, you can always go somewhere else,' kind of an idea. And that's the wrong idea to come from an administrative position, rather than supporting teachers and saying that things are difficult." Illustration by Eleanor Robinson

Above: INCENTIVES: An infographic displays three ways the Clarke County School District works to retain its teachers. According to CCSD Chief Human Resource Officer Dr. Selena Blankenship, maintaining effective educators is crucial to the CCSD. "What we want to do is try to make sure that we're doing what we can to retain teachers, and to retain highly effective teachers," Blankenship said. Infographic by Sofia Balsamo