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Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Racial Composition in Detroit

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, teacher recruitment and retention have become more difficult in Michigan, especially in the state's highest-need districts (Kilbride et al., 2023). At the same time, the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) has substantially reduced large annual teacher vacancies. The district's strategies to hire and retain teachers have included increased teacher compensation, improved working conditions, and a "Grow Your Own" program (Higgins, 2021; Walker, 2024).

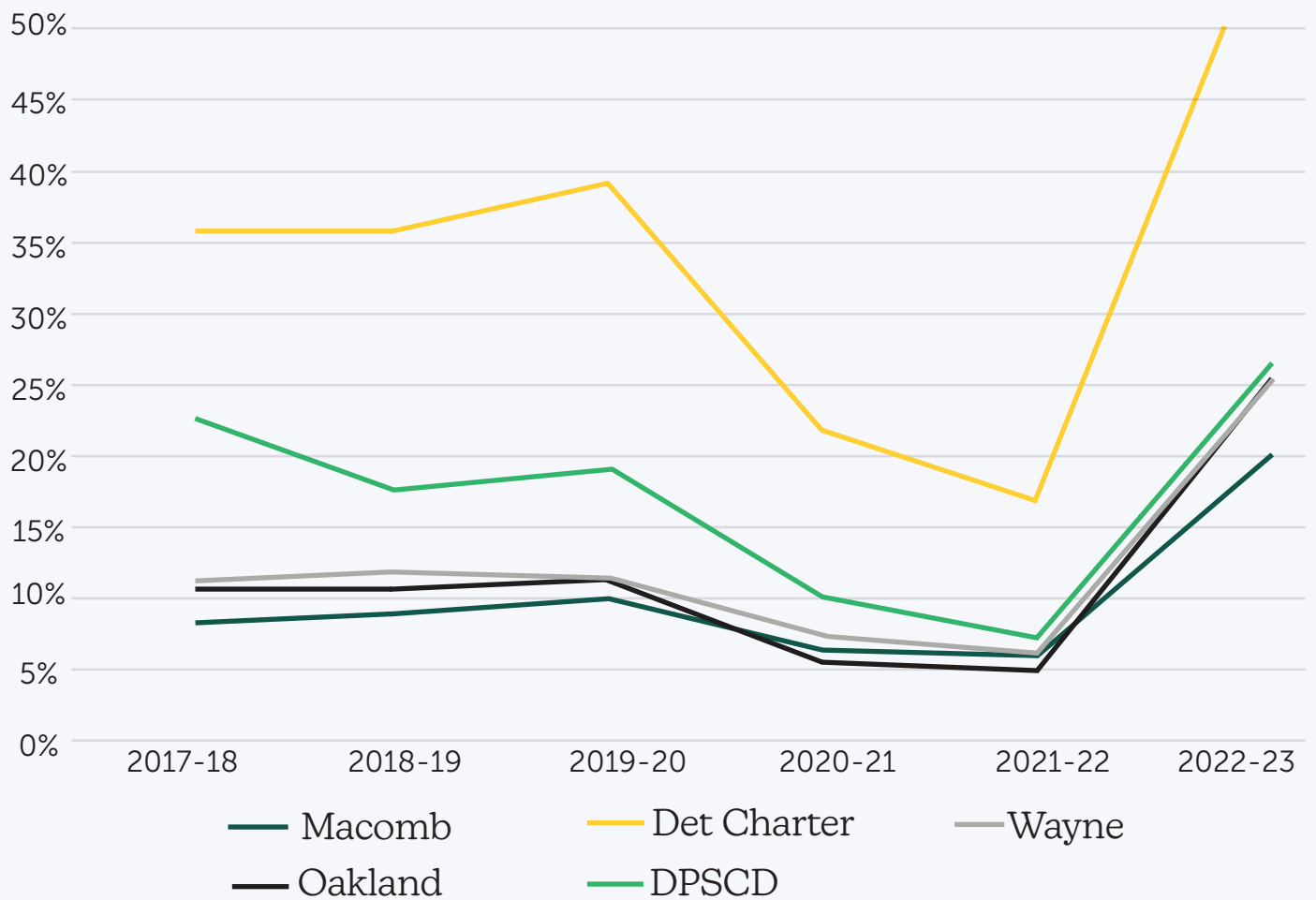
How does teacher recruitment and retention in DPSCD compare to Detroit charter schools and other districts in metro Detroit? And over time, to what extent has the racial composition of the teachers changed in Detroit and the metro area? We answer these questions through an analysis of longitudinal state administrative records on teachers and teaching positions in metro Detroit, for the 2016-17 through 2022-23 school years.

DPSCD RANKS AMONG THE HIGHEST-RETENTION DISTRICTS IN DETROIT AND THE METRO AREA

Figure 1 and 2 show the percentage of teachers over time who are new entrants (i.e., newly hired) and exiters (i.e., leaving their jobs). These figures are not exactly measures of retention, as they may also reflect the creation or elimination of teaching positions; but they are a useful way to track trends over time and compare those trends for Detroit to the rest of the metro area. DPSCD's trends were largely in line with the region as a whole. That said, their rate of new entrants over time declined more quickly than other metro area districts, suggesting some improvement in retention over time.

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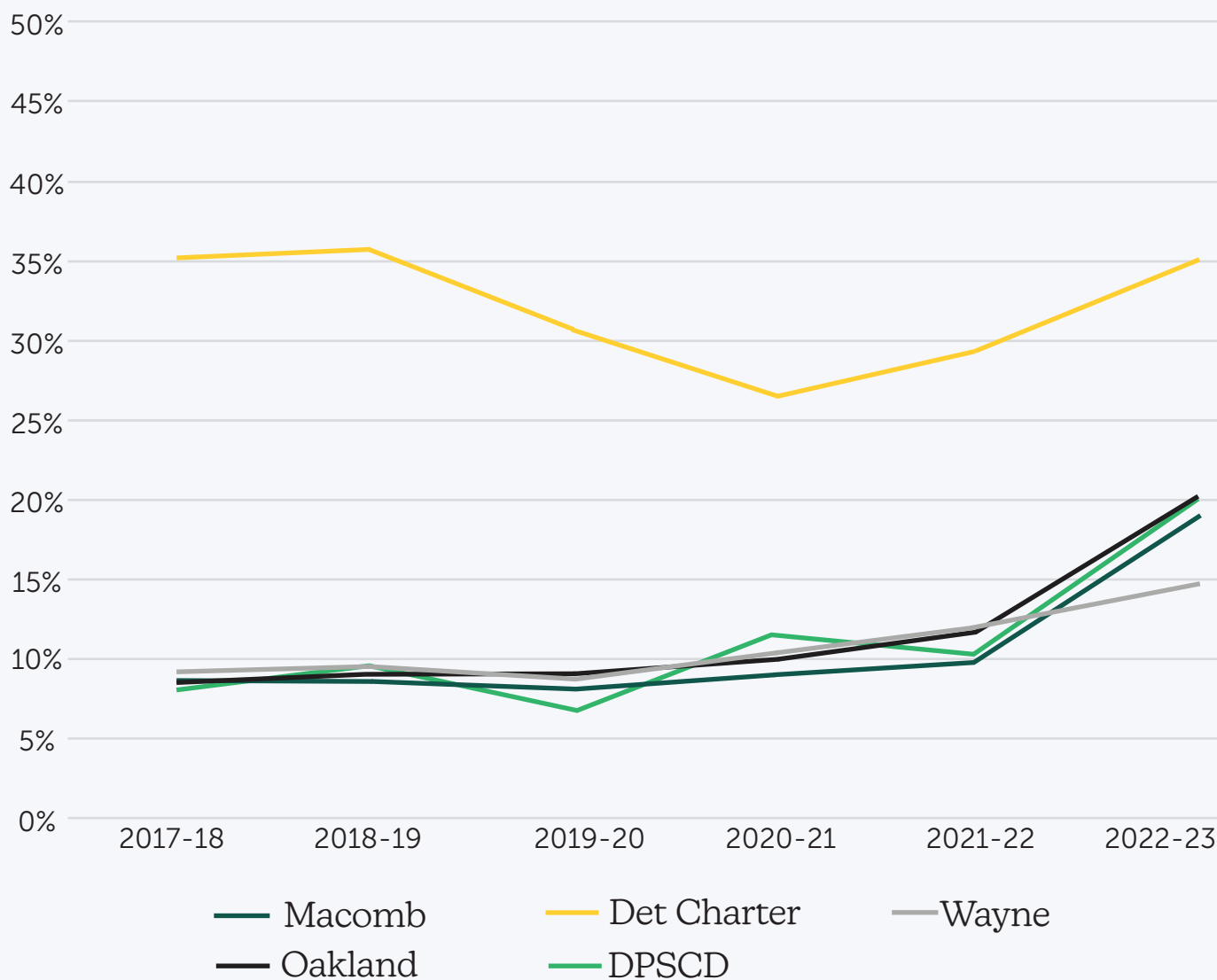
Figure 1: Percent of Teachers Who Were New Entrants in Metro Detroit



Note: this figure shows the percentage of public school teachers who were new entrants (i.e., newly hired) for the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), Detroit charter districts (Det charter), and districts in Wayne County (excluding DPSCD and Detroit charter districts), Macomb County, and Oakland County.

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Figure 2: Percent Teacher Exit in Metro Detroit



Note: this figure shows the percentage of public school teachers who exited their district, separately for the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), Detroit charter districts (Det charter), and districts in Wayne County (excluding DPSCD and Detroit charter districts), Macomb County, and Oakland County.

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As for the Detroit charter sector, the city's charter schools continue to have much higher rates of new entrants and exiters than DPSCD and other metro area districts. While the change over time for Detroit charters largely followed regional trends, these schools had an especially great increase in new entrants in 2022-23, likely a result of both increased turn-over and increased hiring.

For further context on DPSCD's retention rates, Table 1 shows the percentile rank of DPSCD within metro Detroit and Detroit only. The 50th percentile represents the average retention rate, so districts above the 50th percentile have above-average teacher retention. DPSCD's ranking has fluctuated over time, but since 2017-18 has consistently ranked at the 62nd percentile or higher, reflecting consistently above-average retention rates for the metro Detroit area. For Black teacher retention specifically, the district ranked even higher. Within Detroit only, DPSCD consistently ranked above the 90th percentile overall, and consistently at or above the 84th percentile for Black teachers.

Table 1: DPSCD's Teacher Retention Ranking (Percentile)

Years	METRO DETROIT		DETROIT ONLY	
	All Teachers	Black Teachers	All Teachers	Black Teachers
2017-18	70	82	96	86
2018-19	62	81	91	89
2019-20	72	84	97	95
2020-21	62	77	95	96
2021-22	76	75	97	84
2022-23	62	80	92	92

Note: This table shows the percentile rank of the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) for teacher retention. For example, 65 would represent the 65th percentile, indicating that DPSCD's teacher retention rate for that school year was higher than 64% of districts. The table shows the percentile rank for all teachers and only Black teachers, compared to all metro Detroit districts and compared only to Detroit charter districts.

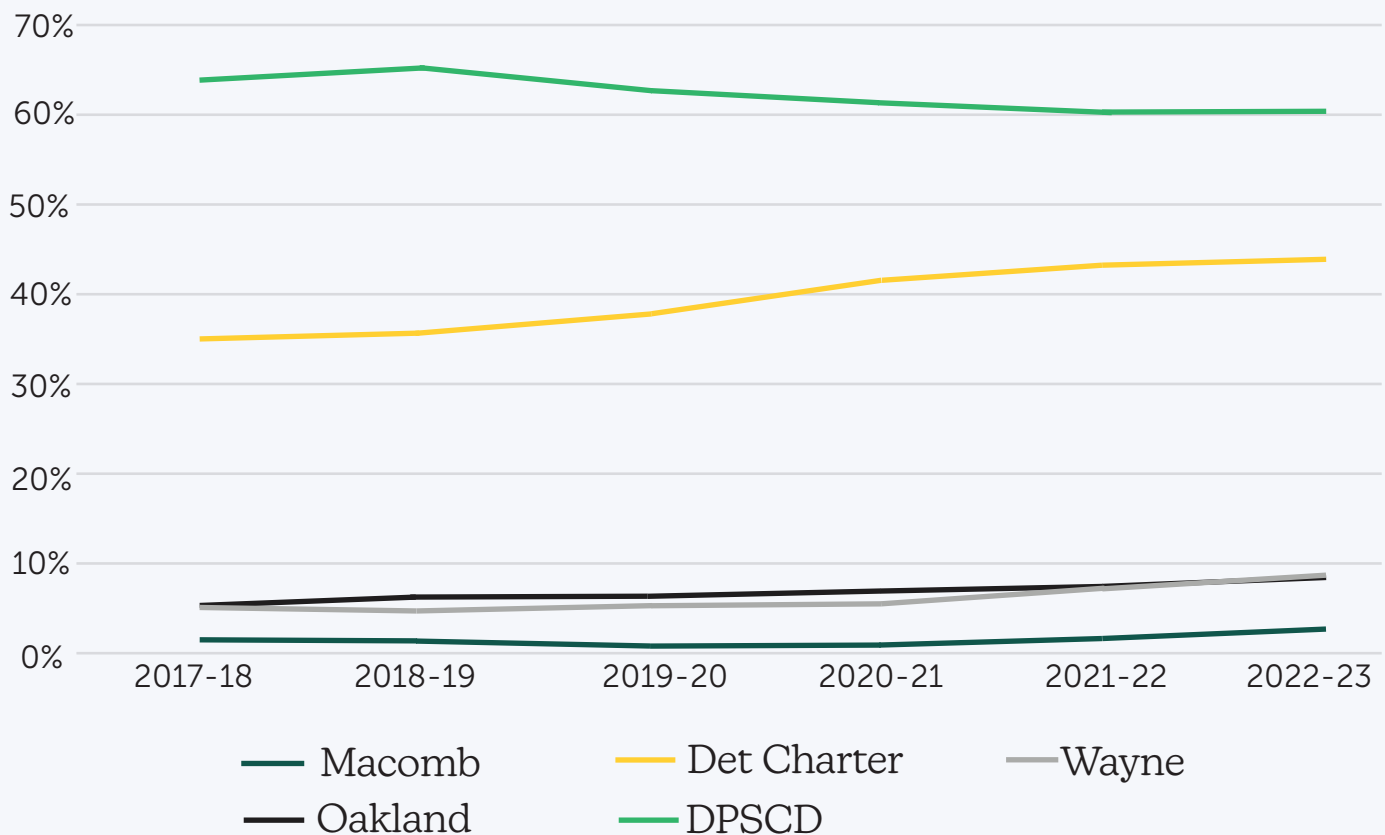
DPSCD HAS MAINTAINED A HIGH SHARE OF BLACK TEACHERS, AND DETROIT CHARTERS HAVE INCREASED THEIR SHARE OF BLACK TEACHERS

While most teachers nationally are white women (Will, 2020), DPSCD has historically employed a majority-Black and racially diverse teacher workforce. Researchers have found that having a Black teacher can improve Black students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral outcomes—likely due to a combination of identity-based role-model effects and a set of professional and socio-cultural competencies that could be developed by Black and non-Black teachers alike (Blazar, 2024). Given that the majority of Detroit students are Black, DPSCD and Detroit charter schools have an imperative to recruit and retain Black teachers.

Figure 3 shows the share of teachers who are Black over time for DPSCD and the Detroit charter school sector, as well as other districts in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties. In the 2016-17 school year, 65% of DPSCD teachers were Black. The share of Black teachers in the district declined slightly, to 61% in the 2022-23 school year, but remains greater than the share of Black teachers in the Detroit charter school sector and other districts in the metro area. The share of Black teachers in the Detroit charter school sector steadily increased from 35% in 2016-17 to 44% in 2022-23. The share of Black teachers in other Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb districts has also increased over time, but remains below 10%.

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Figure 3: Percent Black Teachers in Metro Detroit



Note: this figure shows the percentage of public school teachers whose racial/ethnic identity is recorded as Black or African American, separately for the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), Detroit charter districts (Det charter), and districts in Wayne County (excluding DPSCD and Detroit charter districts), Macomb County, and Oakland County.

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CONCLUSION

This report provides an analysis of trends over time in teacher recruitment, retention, and racial composition for DPSCD as well as for Detroit charter schools and the metro Detroit area more generally. While we cannot attribute cause-and-effect relationships to any of DPSCD’s specific initiatives, the district has been able to continue to recruit and (maybe more importantly) retain teachers at a relatively high rate, as well as maintain a high share of Black teachers. It will be important to continue to evaluate whether compensation reforms contribute to low teacher vacancies, looking both at their ability to recruit and to retain teachers. Districts may also be reliant on “undercredentialed” teachers—those without full certification or whose certifications do not match their positions (Kilbride et al., 2023)—but we were unable to examine this in the present analysis. Having a clearer understanding of all of this can help inform recruitment and retention strategies for other districts in metro Detroit.

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