



Student Achievement: Lessons Learned From Kentucky's Relatively Highest- And Lowest-Performing Schools

Presentation to the
Education Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee by the
Office of Education Accountability
November 8, 2024

Study Questions

- What are the characteristics of highest-impact schools?
- What barriers exist to improving student achievement in lowest-impact schools?
- How might existing policies or programs address those barriers?

Major Findings

- Highest-impact schools exhibit well-established best practices
 - Instructional systems
 - Behavioral systems
 - Effective local leadership
- Guidance and support exists through KDE and other sources

Major Findings

- Current school improvement planning underemphasizes key barriers
 - Leadership challenges: skill/will
 - Culture, climate, and student behavior challenges
 - Teacher/principal turnover
- In some schools, staffing challenges difficult to address through actions of school leaders alone

Outline

- **Background**
 - Data and methods
 - Improvement policies
- Spending and Staffing
- School Practices
- Conclusions and Recommendations

Data Used For Study

- Statewide data for 2022 & 2023 school years obtained from KDE included:
 - Student-level assessment (all subjects), demographic, program eligibility
 - Teacher and student survey data, expenditures, staffing, instructional time
- School/district site visits in spring 2024
 - 8 higher-impact schools, 6 lower-impact schools
 - Various school levels, sizes, populations, regions
 - Interviews with teachers, school administrators, and district administrators; classroom observations; document analysis

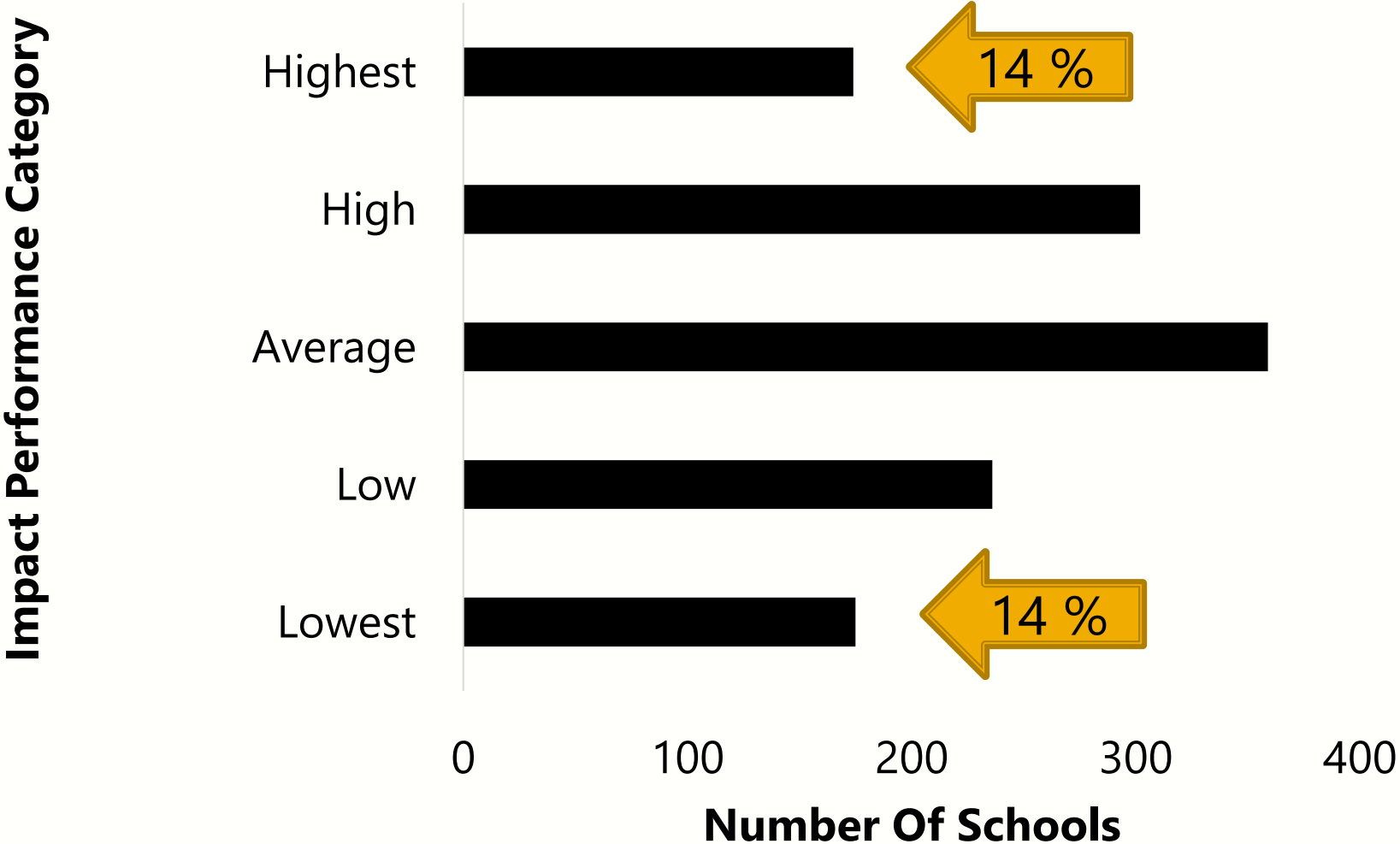
Methods To Determine Impact

- School impact determined by comparing schools' actual score with a statistically predicted score based on demographic characteristics of students in the school:
 - Eligible for federal free or reduced-priced lunch (FRPL), Limited English Proficiency (LEP), or special education
 - Attendance in high-poverty school
 - Race or ethnicity
 - Homeless; moved during school year
 - Community education level

Methods To Determine Impact

- Highest-impact schools far exceeded predicted score
- Lowest-impact schools fell far below predicted score
- In some cases, this method may disadvantage particular schools, such as those that may be more conservative in identification of students for special education
- The report does not identify impact categories of specific schools or districts

Number Of Schools By Impact Category, 2022 and 2023



Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

School Improvement Policies

- Federal Intervention and Assistance
 - Comprehensive Support And Assistance (CSI)
 - Targeted Support And Assistance for low-performing subgroups (TSI)
 - Currently the only requirements and funding for intervention and assistance
- Comprehensive School and District Planning (CSIPs and CDIPs)
 - Annually required plans for all districts and schools
 - KDE approves and may monitor implementation
 - Currently focuses on federally-identified categories

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- School Practices
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Spending Differences

Highest- And Lowest-Impact Schools

- Little difference in per-pupil spending between highest- and lowest-impact schools
- Some differences in how funds are spent
- Highest-impact schools spent
 - A slightly greater percentage of total spending on instruction
 - A slightly lower percentage of total spending on instructional support staff and school administration

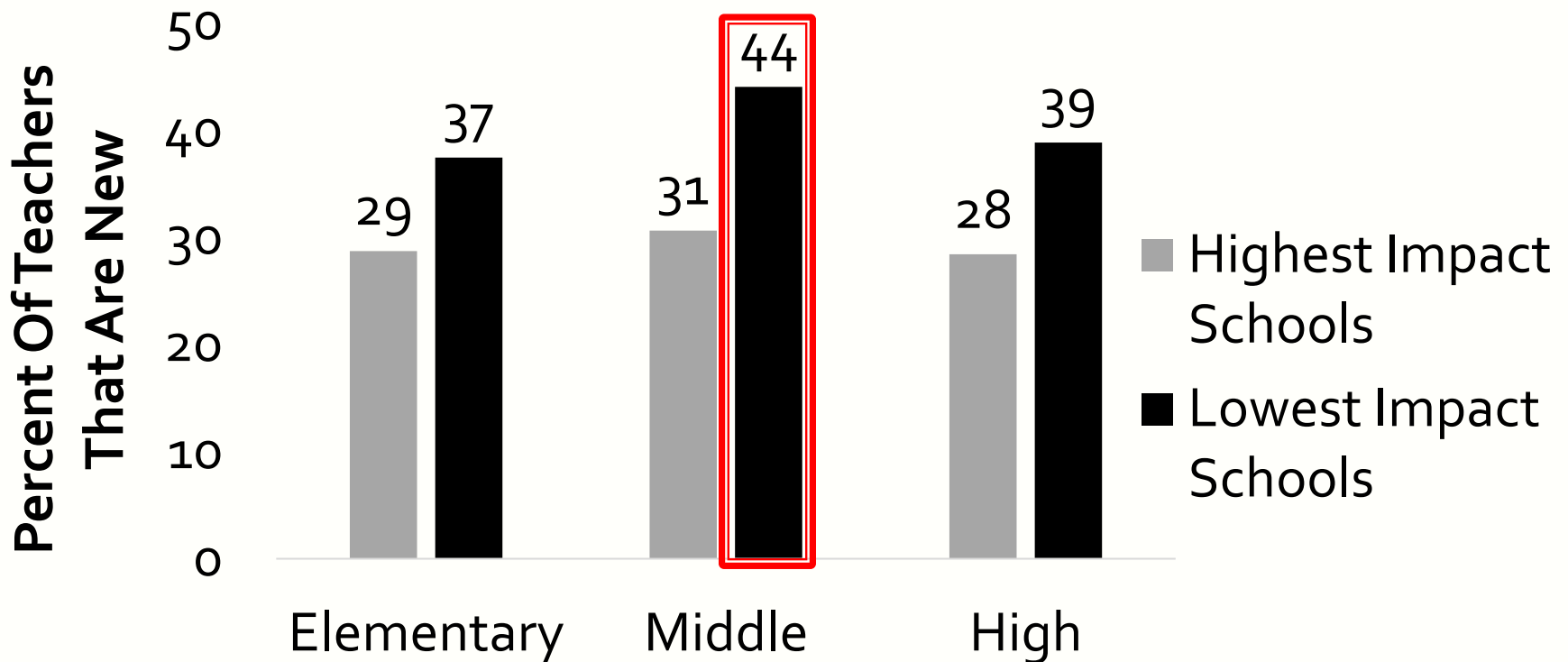
Staff Turnover, 2022- 2023

Highest- And Lowest-Impact Schools

Impact Category	Average Teacher Turnover Percent	Principal Years At School
Highest	15%	6
Lowest	21	4
All Schools	18	5

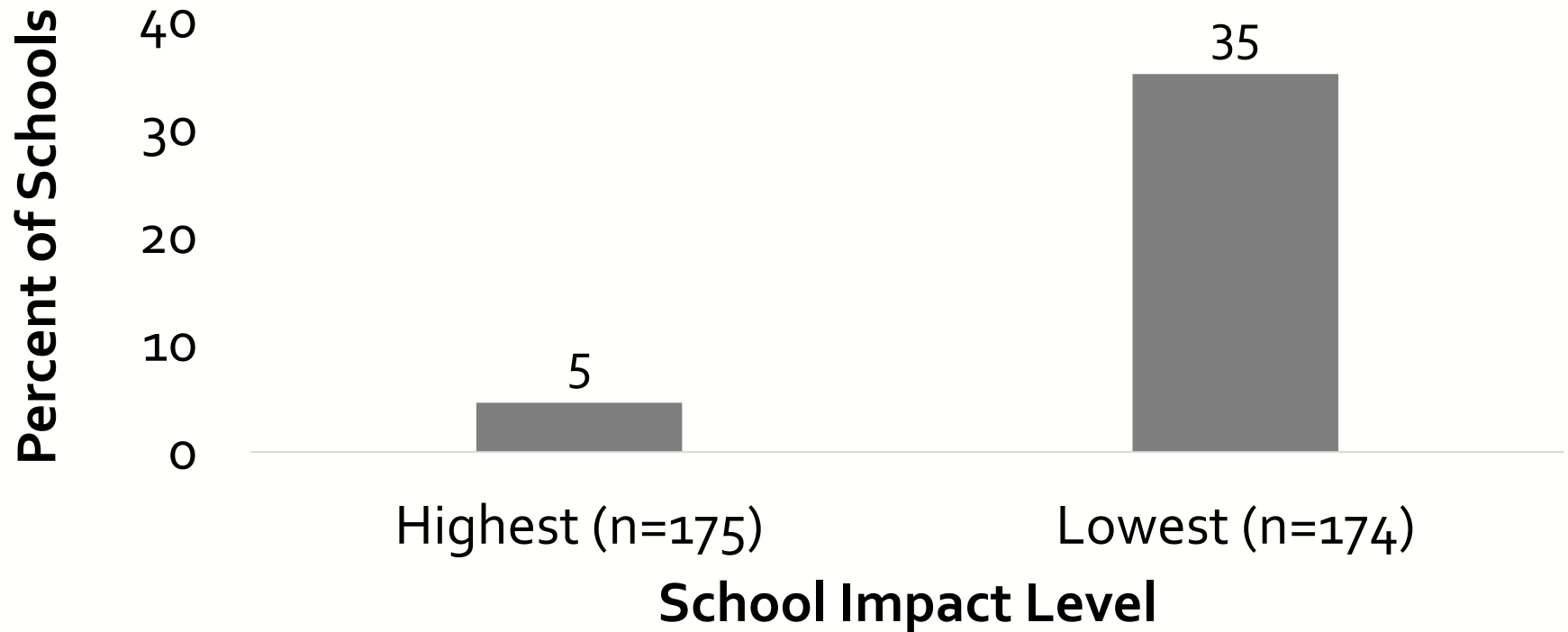
Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

Percent Of Teachers With 5 Or Fewer Years Highest- and Lowest-Impact Schools, 2022-2023



Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

Percent Of Highest- And Lowest-Impact Schools With Highest Turnover Rates*



Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

*Highest turnover rates were calculated by OEA for each school level. They were 25 percent or above for elementary schools, 28 percent or above for middle schools, and 23 percent or above for high schools.

Factors Affecting Turnover

- Factors outside of schools' control
 - Proximity of schools more desirable to teachers
 - Salary
 - Student population
 - Affordable housing
- Factors within schools' control
 - Teacher working conditions

Outline

- Background
- Spending and Staffing
- **School Practices**
 - Instructional systems (site visit data)
 - Behavioral systems
 - Leadership
 - Higher-impact districts
- Conclusions and Recommendations

Instructional Systems That Align Curriculum, Assessment, Monitoring, Instructional Support

Curriculum and Assessment

- Curriculum maps/guidance documents
- Classroom + interim (benchmark) assessments

Data Analysis And Remediation

- Collective analysis of data and student work
- Regular time for reteaching

Instructional Monitoring And Support

- Accountability
- Instructional support
 - Feedback and coaching

Supported by education research

Outlined in KDE guidance documents

Collective Accountability

Teacher in Highest-Impact School

“It’s like night and day now from 17 years ago. It is now more like “our kids” for all students than just the ones in your classroom. It used to be that a teacher may only care about the students in the grade they teach. Now, there are core check-ins based upon how well the teachers know the children and the level of instruction has increased.”

Role Of Effective, Experienced Teacher Teams

- Clarify instructional expectations through curriculum maps and classroom assessments
- Monitor instruction by reviewing data and student work
- Mentor new teachers
 - “You have to have the horses to pull the buggy (the newer teachers) are not necessarily good at the beginning, but older teachers pull them along.”
- Effective principals identify teacher leaders and help build teacher teams; this can take many years

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Instructional Monitoring And Support

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 - Feedback and coaching

In some lowest-impact schools, instructional systems were lacking entirely.

KDE assistance teams help with these.

Most lowest-impact schools lacked critical elements.

Barriers In Lowest-Impact Schools: Lack of Accountability For Classroom Instruction

- Ineffective classroom instruction urgently addressed by principals in highest-impact schools
- Principals in lowest-impact schools did not persist in addressing low performance
- In some cases, principals may lack the skill to address performance issues; others may be reluctant

Inconsistent Expectations Can Undermine Instruction And Morale

Teacher In Highest-Impact School

“There were different expectations among classrooms in my old school. My old principal had picks. It was a toxic work environment and I considered leaving teaching.”

Barriers In Lowest-Impact Schools: Lack of Subject-Specific Support

- Lowest-impact schools lacked experienced teacher teams
 - Teacher turnover
- Newer teachers lacked subject-specific support
 - Number of new teachers overwhelmed existing support, if available
 - OEA observed newer teachers struggling to teach content, lowering standards

School Climate, Culture, And Student Behavior

- Strong behavioral systems critical for school success
- Highest- and lowest-impact schools differed more on indicators of climate, culture, and behavior than on any other
- Data shown are based on the KDE teacher working conditions survey administered every two years to certified educators

Working Conditions Favorability Ratings Highest- and Lowest-Impact Schools

Topic Area	Highest	Lowest	Difference
Managing Student Behavior	77%	57%	19%
School Climate	74	55	19
Feedback and Coaching	68	51	17
Emotional Well-being	63	47	16
Resources	58	43	15
School Leadership	74	59	15
Professional Learning	67	54	13
Staff/Leadership Relationships	81	73	9
Educating All Students	71	65	7
Overall Favorability Ratings	72	58	14

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

Working Conditions Survey Questions With Greatest Differences Highest-And Lowest-Impact Schools*

Question	Highest	Lowest	Difference
How supportive are students in their interactions with each other?	75%	49%	26%
How often does student misconduct disrupt the learning environment at your school?	50	26	24
On most days, how enthusiastic are the students about being at school?	70	46	23

*Questions related to school resources also distinguished these schools. See p. 16 of full report.

Working Conditions Survey Questions With Greatest Differences Highest-And Lowest-Impact Schools

Question	Highest	Lowest	Difference
How often do you see students helping each other without being prompted?	81	59	21
How respectful are the relationships between teachers and students?	83	62	21
How effective are the school leaders at developing rules for students that facilitate their learning?	74	55	19

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

Student Survey Responses Also Differ Most On Climate, Culture, And Behavior

- Elementary:
 - Students being mean or hurtful
 - All students treated same if rules broken
 - Online bullying
- Middle And High:
 - Bullying
 - School is an encouraging place
 - School rules are fair
 - Students respect each other's differences (high)

Behavior Systems

Highest-Impact Schools

- Strong emphasis on building positive relationships among students and teachers
 - Heavy investment in time and resources to establish and reinforce behavior expectations
 - Persistent behavior challenges addressed; orderly classrooms a priority
- Principles of Positive Behavioral Interventions And Supports (PBIS) promoted by KDE.
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Behavior Challenges Lowest-Impact Site Visit Schools

- Small percentages (4-5 percent) of students can destabilize a school or classroom
- Little or no consequences for serious disruptive behavior of some students
- Low morale, teacher absences, substitutes refusing to work in building
- Some mentioned challenges associated with limitations on classroom removal for special education students
 - also mentioned in highest-impact schools

Importance Of Leadership In Many Aspects Of School Success

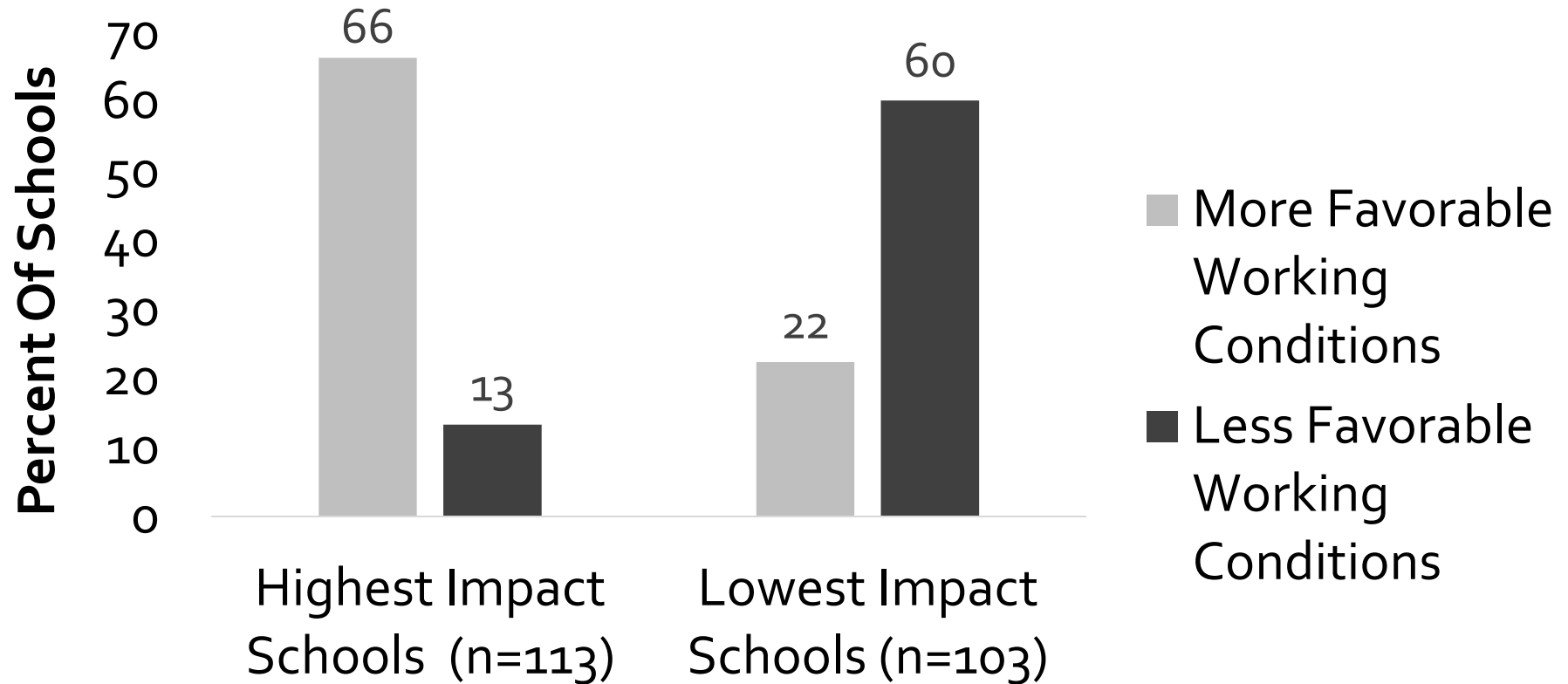
- Instructional systems
 - Set expectations
 - Provide support
 - Hold teachers accountable
- Behavioral systems
 - Build positive relationships
 - Invest time in establishing expectations
 - Address persistence behavior challenges
- Teacher recruitment and retention
 - Highest-impact schools desirable work environments

Teachers Seek Employment In Highest-Impact Schools

Teacher In Highest-Impact High School

“The principal is someone that we would follow into the fire. We would fight bears for her. We love her. She’s right there with us. She supports us in everything we do... All my life I’ve been looking for this place. This is the place I wouldn’t have fallen through the cracks (as a student). I’m so glad I’m here...the principal knows what each student may do and how to keep them on the right track. She knows about their lives. It’s like we are part of something here.”

Percent Of Highest- And Lowest-Impact Schools With More/Less Favorable Working Conditions*



Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

*As explained in Appendix B of the report, OEA categorized schools as having more or less favorable conditions based on average favorability ratings.

Leadership In Highest-Impact Districts

- Subject and program experts heavily involved in schools
 - Monitoring data and classroom instruction
 - Coaching principals and teachers
 - Leading professional development
 - Ensuring consistency across schools
- Strong investment in training
 - Regularly sent district and school staff to a variety of local cooperative trainings
- Longevity of district staff

Outline

- Background
- Spending and Staffing
- School Practices
- **Conclusions and Recommendations**
 - Relevance of findings to existing school improvement policies/practices

Conclusions

- Best practices for instruction are well established but difficult to implement
- Barriers in lowest-impact schools include
 - Lack of awareness/knowledge
 - Leadership challenges: skill/will to ensure teachers are supported and accountable
 - Poor climate, culture, or student behavior
 - Teacher/principal turnover

Relevant School Improvement Policies/Programs

- Comprehensive School And District Plans (CSIPs and CDIPs)
- Use of data from the KDE teacher working conditions survey
- Assistance options available to schools identified as lowest-performing by federal requirements
 - Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) schools

Comprehensive Improvement Planning: Potential To Highlight Critical Barriers

- Comprehensive School And District Planning (CSIPs and CDIPs):
 - Annually required plans for all schools
 - Primary mechanism by which KDE supports and monitors improvement efforts in all schools
 - Potential to highlight data and available resources related to critical challenges in low performing schools

Comprehensive Improvement Planning: Current Limitations

- Little or no direct focus on teacher turnover and working conditions; relatively less focus on culture, climate, and behavior
- Most schools receive little or no feedback on plans and report little impact on practices
 - KDE notes reduced staffing in recent years available for this purpose
- Plans perceived by educators as important in theory but lengthy, burdensome, inconveniently timed

Recommendation 3.1

KDE should consider soliciting feedback from superintendents, principals and SBDMs about CSIP and CDIP requirements and processes. Feedback should include: positive effects of the process; which elements might be required annually and which on a rotating basis; timing of submissions; software functionality; desired feedback; and desired sources of support.

Recommendation 3.2

By August 1, 2025, the Kentucky Board of Education should submit to the Interim Joint Committee on Education recommendations for any statutory changes or additional legislation that would allow for the department to carry out meaningful review, feedback, and monitoring of CSIPs or CDIPs in select districts or schools. Recommendations might include additional authority, if any, of the department to require schools or districts to take specific actions.

Recommendation 3.3

The General Assembly may wish to introduce legislation directing the Kentucky Department of Education to collect, review, and monitor school and district comprehensive plans. The legislation might address additional authority, if any, of the department to require districts or schools to take specific actions under certain conditions.

KDE Working Conditions Survey

Unfavorable working conditions are a potential red flag for school conditions that undermine instruction and achievement.

- Some local leaders appear unaware of urgent need indicated by data
- Teacher working conditions are not typically included in school or district planning documents
- Currently KDE does not take an active role in supporting data use
 - Resources exist: KDE-sponsored National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) and others

Recommendation 3.4

In connection with release of data from its working conditions survey, KDE should consider providing a list of resources and supports for schools seeking to understand and improve specific challenges identified by educators in survey data. Resources might include those available through the department, through the state's local educational cooperatives, best practice sites, professional organizations, or vendors.

Federal Intervention And Support Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI)

By federal requirements, KDE must:

- Identify the lowest-performing schools for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)
- Provide districts with vendor options to assist with improvement in CSI schools
- Distribute funding (@ \$19 million a year)

The report notes that challenges related to teacher working conditions and turnover are greater in CSI schools than in lowest-impact schools.

Recommendation 3.5

In assembling the list of vendors required by KRS 160.346 (1)(a), the Kentucky Board of Education should seek vendors with experience assisting districts to support schools with sustained challenges related to staff turnover; school climate and culture; and student behavior.

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