



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

Presentation to the
Senate Standing Committee on Education

Office of Education Accountability
January 9, 2025

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

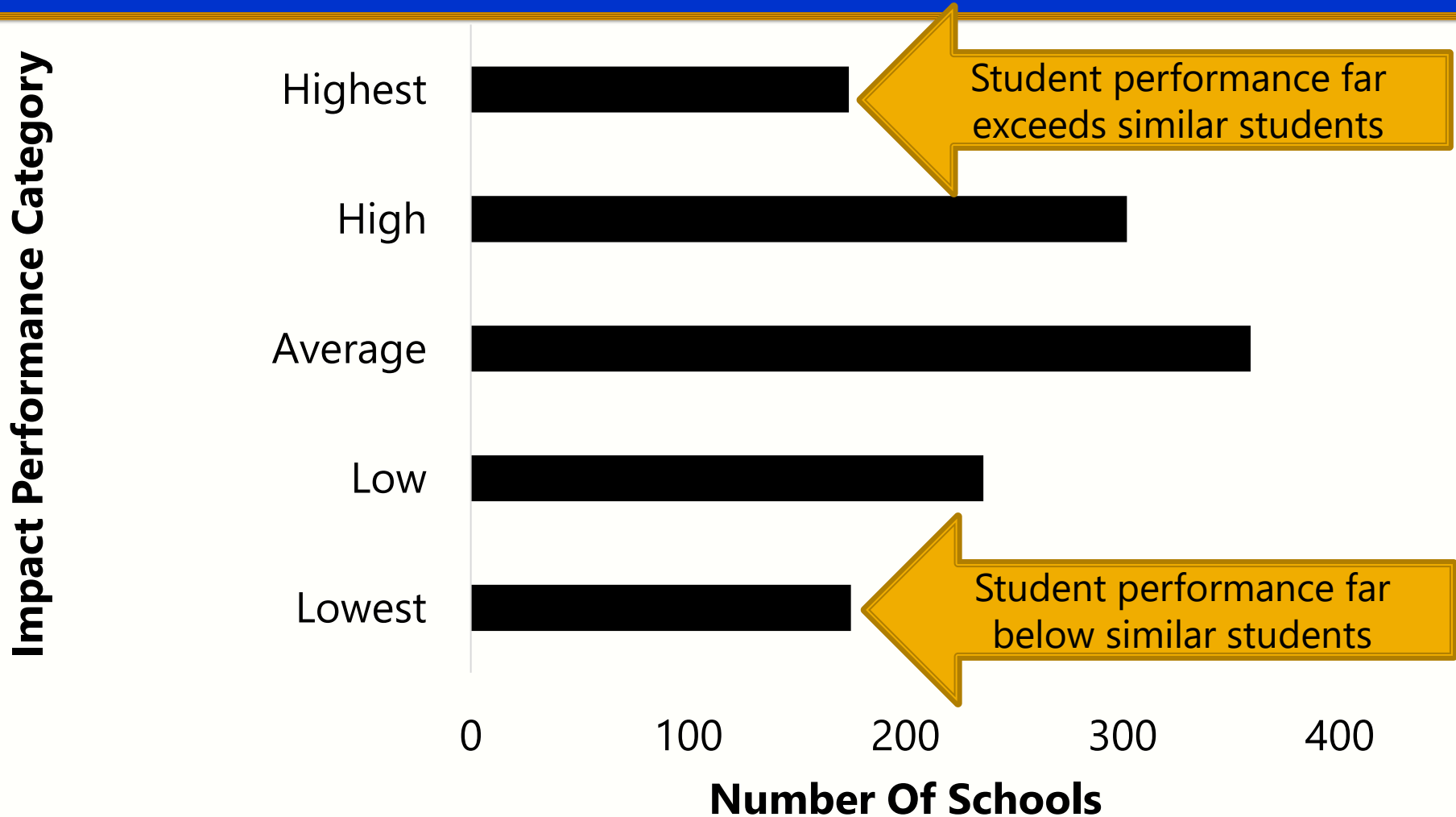
- Highest-impact schools exhibit best practices well established in education research and supported by KDE guidance:
 - Instructional systems
 - Behavioral systems/positive climate and culture
 - Stable, effective local leadership teams
- Challenges
 - Skill/will/support of local leaders
 - Staff recruitment/turnover challenges
 - High percentages of new teachers
- Potential for greater monitoring and support of a subset of schools and districts as indicated by data on student performance, staff turnover, culture/climate/behavior challenges
- Some challenges difficult to address through local action alone

Presentation Outline

- **Data and Methods**
 - Data from 2022 and 2023 school years*
- Spending and Staffing
- School Characteristics and Leadership
- Conclusions and Recommendations

*Site visits and some teacher survey data from 2024.

Number Of Schools By Impact Category



Methods To Determine Impact

- Schools' actual scores in all state-assessed subjects compared 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), IEP(special education), homeless services
 - Attendance in high-poverty school
 - Race or ethnicity
 - Moved during school year
 - Community education level

Note: the report does not identify impact categories of specific schools or districts

Data Used To Determine Characteristics Of Highest/Lowest Impact Schools

- Statewide data, including:
 - Per-pupil expenditures, expenditure patterns, staffing numbers, turnover, teacher and student survey data (culture/climate/behavior indicators)
- School/district site visits
 - 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

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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
 - More experienced teachers (higher salaries)
 - More instructional staff per students at middle and high
 - A slightly lower percentage of total spending on instructional support staff and school administration

Staff Turnover

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

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

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- Data and Methods
- Spending and Staffing
- **School Characteristics and Leadership**
 - Instructional systems (site visit data)
 - School climate, culture, and behavior
 - 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

Assistance also available from other organizations

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.”

Experienced Teachers And Leaders Provide Accountability And Support

- **Clarify instructional expectations** through curriculum maps and classroom assessments
- **Monitor learning** 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.”
- **Principals must set/maintain standards for classroom instruction**

Barriers To Effective Instructional Systems In Lowest-Impact Schools

- Incomplete/nonexistent instructional systems
 - Recent support from KDE assistance teams cited as beneficial in several schools
- Insufficient accountability for classroom instruction
- Insufficient, subject-specific support
 - Absence of teacher or other instructional leaders
 - High numbers of new teachers

School Climate, Culture, And Student Behavior

- Strong behavioral systems critical for school success
- Statewide, highest- and lowest-impact schools differed more on indicators of climate, culture, and behavior than on any other indicator
- KDE teacher working conditions survey administered every two years to certified educators
 - Topics include climate, behavior, resources, feedback/coaching, emotional well being, leadership, professional development

Working Conditions Survey Questions With Greatest Differences In Teachers' Favorable Ratings 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 In Teachers' Favorable Ratings 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

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
 - Political will often necessary
- 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
 - Invest time in supporting teachers and students to meet expectations
 - Address persistence behavior challenges
- Teacher recruitment and retention
 - Highest-impact schools desirable work environments

Leadership training available through KDE and others emphasize many of these qualities; valued by many site visit administrators

Personal, on-site mentoring cited by ALL site visit administrators as most important source of support

- “walking in my shoes”

Leadership challenges requiring difficult conversations, political will most often lacking in lowest-impact site visit schools

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.”

Presentation Outline

- Data and Methods
- Spending and Staffing
- School Characteristics and Leadership
- **Conclusions and Recommendations**
 - Relevant to existing policies and programs
 - Some of the barriers mentioned not addressed by existing policies and programs

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/support 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 Support and 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
- No direct, comprehensive statutory guidance for CSIPs and CDIPs

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
 - Lengthy annual plans for all schools required in few other states

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 Support And 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)

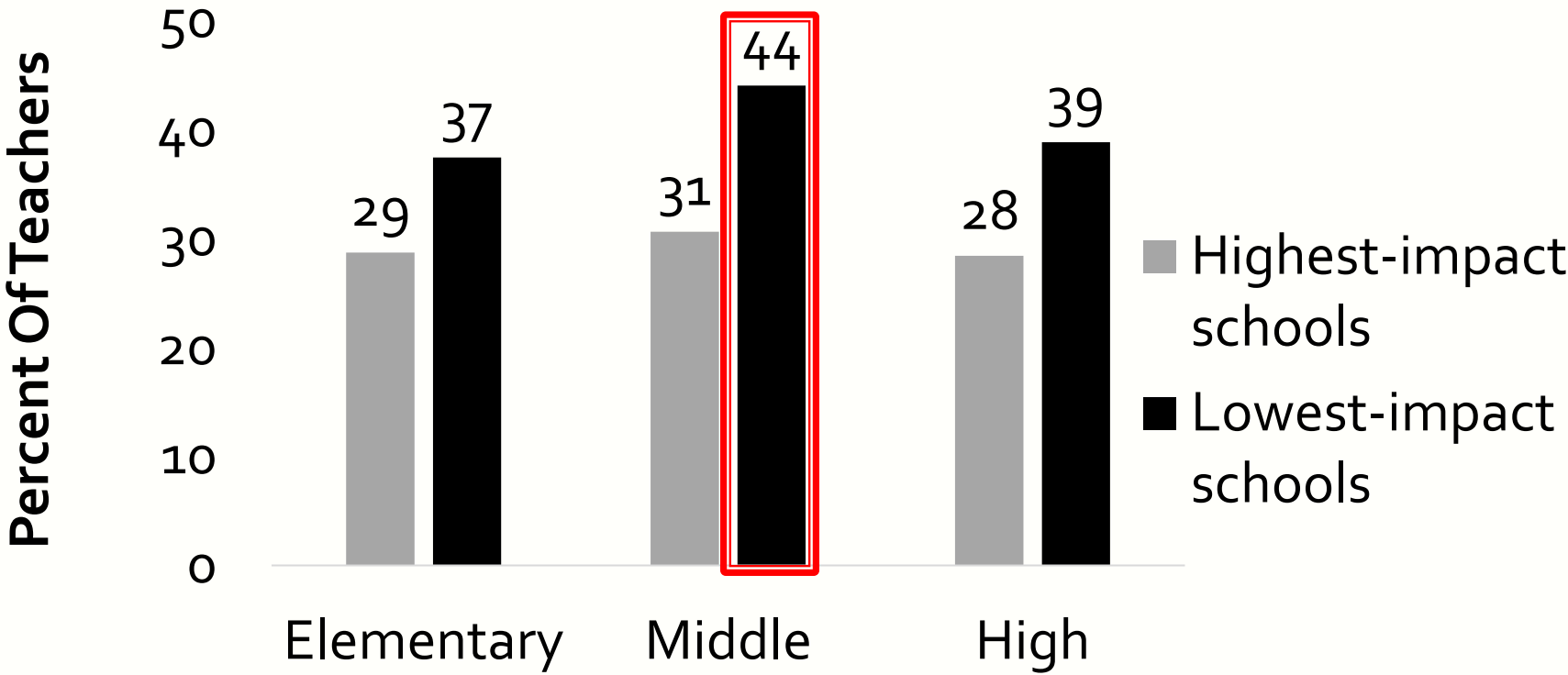
The report notes that challenges related to teacher working conditions and turnover are greater in CSI schools than in lowest-impact schools.

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.

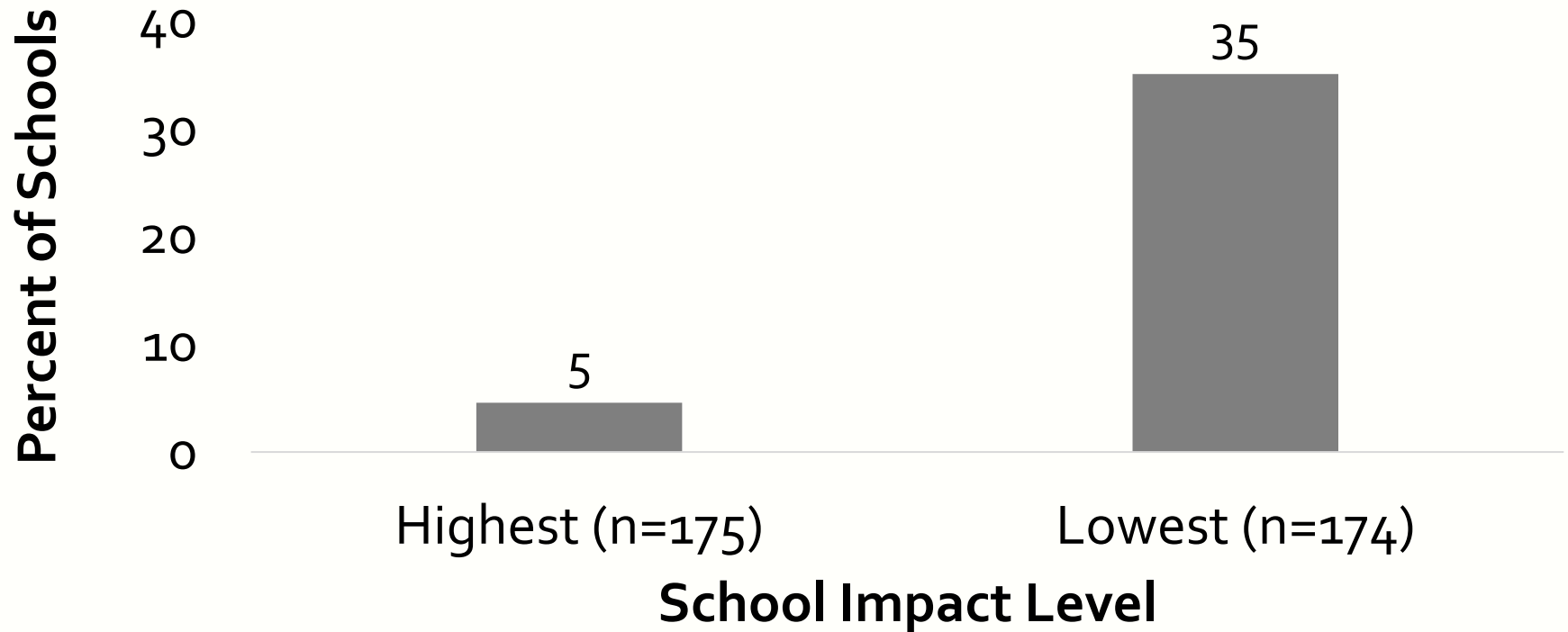
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Percent Of Teachers With 5 Years' Experience Or Less Highest- and Lowest-Impact Schools



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

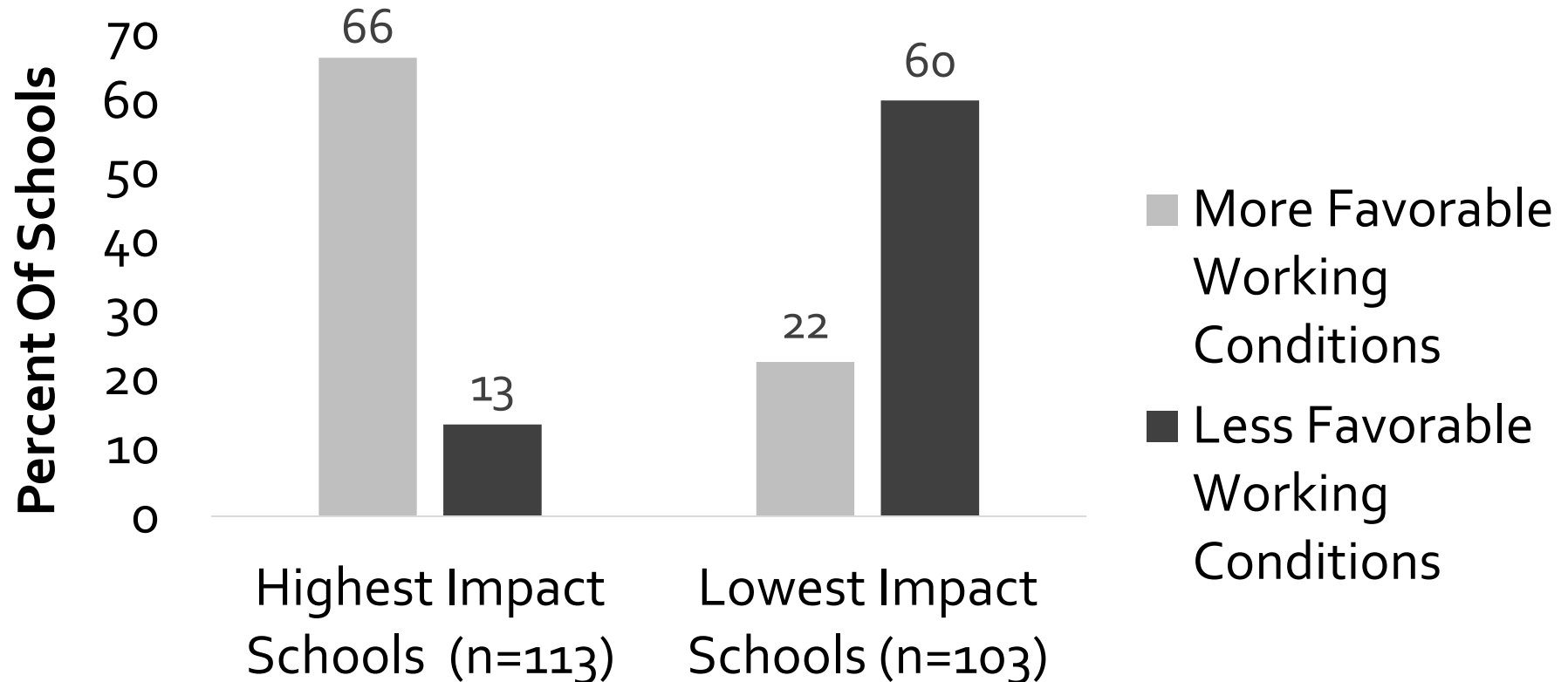
Percent Of Highest- And Lowest-Impact Schools With Highest Turnover Rates*



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.

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.

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)