

## Retention, Mobility, and Attrition among School and District Leaders in Colorado, Missouri, and South Dakota

Education decisionmakers in Colorado, Missouri, and South Dakota share concerns about mobility and attrition among school and district leaders. In collaboration with educators in these states, the Regional Educational Laboratory Central used administrative data to examine the percentages of school and district leaders who remained in a leadership position in the same school or district (retention/stayers), who transferred to a leadership position in a different school or district (mobility/movers), and who took a nonleadership position or left the state public school system (attrition/leavers). The study also examined the characteristics of principals, schools, and districts that were associated with principal mobility and attrition. The findings focus on one-year (2017/18 to 2018/19) and three-year (2015/16 to 2018/19) periods and provide region-specific and state-specific information about school and district leader retention, mobility, and attrition. Findings may be used to inform the design of policy and practices focused on attracting and retaining school and district leaders.

### Key findings

- *Four out of five school and district leaders remained in a leadership position in the same school or district after one year, and about half remained after three years.* For all three states combined after one year, 77–80 percent of school leaders remained in a school leadership position in the same school, and 79–82 percent of district leaders remained in a district leadership position in the same district. After three years 51–54 percent of school leaders remained in a school leadership position in the same school, and 55–56 percent of district leaders remained in a district leadership position in the same district. Costs and consequences associated with leader mobility and attrition suggest that decisionmakers might want to further explore approaches for supporting leader retention.
- *Principals who were younger, principals who identified as a racial/ethnic minority, and principals who earned a lower salary were more likely to be a mover than a stayer after three years.* Principals younger than age 40 were 144 percent more likely (nearly 2.5 times as likely) to be a mover after three years than were principals age 52 or older, for example. Principals who identified as a racial/ethnic minority were 53 percent more likely to be a mover after three years than were principals who identified as White. The findings suggest that decisionmakers might want to enhance supports for younger principals, focus recruitment and retention activities on racial/ethnic minority principals, and further examine how salary affects principals' decisions to stay in their position or move to a different school.
- *Principals in schools identified for improvement and principals in lower-performing districts were more likely to be a mover than a stayer after three years.* Principals in schools identified by state education agencies for improvement due to low performance were about three times as likely as principals in schools not identified for improvement to be a mover after three years. This finding suggests a need to provide additional support to principals in lower-performing schools and districts.
- *Principals in schools with lower average teacher salaries were more likely to be a leaver than a stayer after three years.* Decisionmakers may wish to further examine how teacher salaries affect principal decisions to leave a school leadership position.