4 STRATEGIES TO INCREASE TEACHER RETENTION
INTRODUCTION

Teacher retention has become a serious concern for many districts. The pandemic’s negative impact on existing teacher shortages poses a serious challenge to schools’ efforts to reopen in the short-term and maintain appropriate staffing levels in the future. Balancing in-person and remote instruction—sometimes concurrently—while facilitating their own children’s learning has placed enormous stress on many teachers, leading some to decide against returning to the classroom entirely.

Hanover’s report, 4 Strategies to Increase Teacher Retention, outlines the following research-based strategies for mitigating attrition:

- Support teacher wellbeing
- Promote teacher engagement
- Create a supportive school climate
- Monitor teacher retention and attrition
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4 STRATEGIES TO INCREASE TEACHER RETENTION

DRIVERS OF TEACHER ATTRITION

Teacher Shortages: A Decade-Long Dilemma

Teacher shortages, which emerged in the United States more than a decade ago, will likely continue as more teachers leave the profession and fewer enter. Total enrollment in teacher preparation programs fell from 940,520 students in 2010 to 604,264 students in 2018. The number of enrolled students completing teacher preparation programs also declined by 28% during the same time period. This means districts must hire new teachers from a shrinking pool of traditionally qualified applicants. A 2018 survey of superintendents found that they encountered teacher pipeline challenges in all settings, but significantly more in rural areas, cities, and towns than in suburban areas. Students of color and students in high-poverty schools seem disproportionately affected by teacher attrition, in particular, as teachers of color are among those most likely to leave the profession.

83% of superintendents struggle with teacher recruitment and retention

From 2010-2018, the number of enrolled students completing teacher preparation programs declined by 28%.

Source: Center for American Progress

TOTAL ENROLLMENT IN TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>940,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>604,264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

36% decline from 2010 to 2018.
DRIVERS OF TEACHER ATTRITION

7 Trends In Today's Teacher Workforce

1. MORE TEACHERS HAVE ENTERED THE PROFESSION
   Between 1987-1988 and 2015-2016, the number of teachers in public, private, and charter schools increased by more than three times the rate of student enrollment increases.

2. BUT MANY LEAVE IN THE FIRST FEW YEARS
   However, 44% of new teachers leave the profession within five years.

3. TEACHER TURNOVER DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTS SOME SCHOOLS
   About half of all teacher turnover occurs in only 25% of public schools, with high-poverty, high-minority, urban, and rural public schools typically experiencing the highest turnover rates.

4. TEACHERS ARE YOUNGER
   At the same time, public school teachers have gotten younger. In 2007-2008, the most common age among teachers was 55 years old, whereas teachers were typically in their mid-30s to mid-40s in 2015-2016.

5. TEACHERS ARE LESS EXPERIENCED
   In 2015-2016, teachers most commonly had 1 to 3 years of experience, a sharp decline from the 15 years of experience teachers typically had in 1987-1988.

6. FEWER MEN ARE TEACHING
   Women accounted for more than 76% of public school teachers in 2015-2016.

7. MINORITY TEACHERS ARE STILL UNDERREPRESENTED
   Although hiring of minority (non-white) teachers has increased, a parity gap remained in 2015-2016, with minorities accounting for 51% of public school students and only 20% of public school teachers. Minority teachers also are among the most likely to leave the profession.

Source: University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education
DRIVERS OF TEACHER ATTRITION

Pandemic Impact on Teacher Shortages

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing teacher shortages. Now, one-third of teachers are somewhat or very likely to leave the profession, compared with only 8% prior to the pandemic. Turnover rates are expected to be highest among teachers over 55, who represent 17% of public school teachers. The loss of these teachers will further reduce the level of experience in many schools and classrooms. The teachers who remain face increasing workloads and express lower levels of workplace satisfaction. A November 2020 survey by the Horace Mann Educators Corporation found that 77% of surveyed teachers, administrators, and support personnel were spending more time working and 60% were enjoying their jobs less in 2020 than 2019.

Amid these shortages, districts may also need additional teachers to implement social distancing, reduced class sizes, and staggered scheduling as schools reopen. Since many districts are limited in their capacity to offer financial incentives to entice teachers and support staff due to budget uncertainty, these safety protocols may worsen these shortages even further.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood Before COVID-19 Pandemic</th>
<th>Current Likelihood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Unlikely</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Unlikely</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Likely</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Likely</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Education Week

33% of teachers are now somewhat or very likely to leave the profession
8% of teachers were somewhat or very likely to leave the profession prior to the COVID-19 pandemic
Support Teacher Wellbeing

Districts must address teacher burnout by promoting teacher wellness. A majority of teachers feel stressed, anxious, and uncertain, and this emotional and psychological distress can result in teacher burnout, and ultimately, attrition. District and school leaders, as well as teachers themselves, should look for and be able to recognize signs of teacher burnout, such as high rates of absenteeism, issues with sleep and fatigue, changes in behavior (e.g., withdrawal from social interactions), and changes in physical appearance. Districts can reduce the likelihood of teacher burnout and support teacher wellness by providing wellness programs, school-wide wellness policies, mental health-focused professional learning, and self-care strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A MAJORITY OF TEACHERS FEEL “SOMewhat” OR “EXTREMELY”:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: THE Journal
Teacher self-care can play an important role in not only reducing stress, but also identifying additional physical, mental, and emotional needs. Self-care should be a consistent—and ideally daily—practice that enables teachers to alleviate tension, acknowledge feelings, recognize needs, and plan for additional supports. When district and school leaders encourage teachers to engage in self-care, they should remind teachers of their importance and the linkages between their and their students’ wellbeing. District and school leaders also should take steps to destigmatize mental health concerns and engage in self-care themselves in order to care for their own mental health while leading by example.

**SPOTLIGHT:**
The School District of Newberry County (SC)

The School District of Newberry County in South Carolina supports teacher wellness by designating Wednesdays as virtual learning days for all students and allowing teachers to leave school at 1:00 p.m. While the district uses this time to deep clean school facilities, Paige Graham, Director of Accountability, Assessment, and Professional Development, emphasizes that “teachers have commented time and time again how wonderful this [time] has been for them to renew and plan for the upcoming days. Our school board has been supportive of this, as everyone agrees it allows us to honor the professionalism of our teachers and staff.”

**SELF-CARE ACTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS**

### WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

- Increase their knowledge and awareness of the effects of trauma and secondary traumatic stress (STS).
- Assess their current level of burnout, STS, and vicarious trauma.
- Stay connected to other people and groups that are supportive and nourishing.
- Identify and incorporate specific self-care strategies for promoting resilience and maintaining a healthy work-life balance (e.g., exercise, good nutrition, supportive networks).

### WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Educate staff about the effects of trauma, STS, and related conditions and provide regular opportunities for staff to address potential issues related to STS.
- Identify and monitor STS and related conditions among staff.
- Encourage and develop formal strategies for peer support and mentorship.
- Create a culture that fosters staff resilience that includes fair leave policies, adequate benefits, a physically safe and secure working environment, sufficient supervision, support, resources to do the work, and processes for shared decision-making.

*Source: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments*
Promote Teacher Engagement

Districts can reduce teacher burnout by communicating with teachers transparently and engaging them strategically. To engage teachers more effectively, districts should include them in key communications and value their contributions to district and school decision-making and initiatives.

DISTRICTS ALSO CAN ENGAGE TEACHERS BY:

Building Teacher Self-Efficacy and Autonomy
Teachers who feel a strong sense of self-efficacy and autonomy in their professional lives indicate higher levels of engagement. When teachers feel competent in their professional abilities and have the freedom to exercise their competence, their overall job satisfaction improves.

Giving Them a Voice
Engaging and retaining teachers requires districts to allow teachers to feel their voices and opinions have value and are heard. Districts may positively impact teacher engagement by allowing teacher input on decisions that may impact them at the school level.

Recognizing Their Contributions
Districts are more likely to retain teachers who feel recognized for their contributions. Recognition can include monetary rewards, work-life balance improvements, career pathway development, and direct response to upward feedback.

Supporting Their Professional Growth
Constructive, actionable, and timely feedback helps teachers feel directly engaged through productive discussions that focus on their professional development. Feedback providers can coordinate their messages to teachers for organizational consistency and overall message effectiveness.

Sources: Gallup, TNTP, Carnegie Foundation, Harvard Business Review, National Education Association
Create A Supportive School Climate

Establishing a positive school climate and supportive working environment also increases teacher retention, perhaps to an even greater extent than offering financial incentives. Aspects of teachers' working conditions that districts and schools can improve include:

- **Physical features** of buildings, equipment, and resources, which serve as a platform for teachers' work
- **Instructional features**, such as curriculum and testing policies, that may enhance or constrain what teachers can teach
- **Psychological features**, such as the meaningfulness of what they do day to day or the opportunities they find for learning and growth, that may sustain or deplete them personally
- **Political features**, such as whether teachers have opportunities to participate in important decisions
- **Sociological features** that shape how teachers experience their work, including their roles, status, and the characteristics of their students and peers
- **Cultural features**, such as values, traditions, and norms, that influence teachers’ interpretation of what they do and their commitment
- **Organizational structures**, such as lines of authority, workload, autonomy, and supervisory arrangements, that define teachers’ formal positions and relationships with others in the school

Source: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
Monitor Teacher Retention And Attrition

To identify the factors contributing to teacher attrition and then implement targeted responses, districts should monitor trends in teacher retention at various levels. Districts can use the types of data and information outlined here for this purpose, looking for changes in teacher retention over time and updating stakeholders periodically on trends at the classroom, school, and system levels.

### FACTORS TO MONITOR AT THE TEACHER LEVEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTORS</th>
<th>EXAMPLE MEASURES</th>
<th>RATIONALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>Age, race/ethnicity, gender</td>
<td>To monitor changes in diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Service Experience</td>
<td>Type of teacher preparation program attended</td>
<td>To assess potential differences in teachers' retention from different programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications</td>
<td>Certification type, additional certifications</td>
<td>To assess differences in teachers' retention by types of qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience Levels</td>
<td>Teaching experience within the profession, district, and school</td>
<td>To determine whether beginning or more experienced teachers are leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Ratings</td>
<td>Teacher evaluation ratings, teacher observation ratings, student growth measures</td>
<td>To gauge the extent that high and/or low performers are staying, moving, or leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Factors</td>
<td>Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job embeddedness, and turnover intentions</td>
<td>To predict teacher retention and turnover and identify potential solution strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Department of Education
### FACTORS TO MONITOR AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTORS</th>
<th>EXAMPLE MEASURES</th>
<th>RATIONALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School-Level Demographics</td>
<td>Student demographics, grade ranges, locale</td>
<td>To monitor potential inequities in teacher retention and turnover across schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>Climate surveys, student discipline</td>
<td>To assess the influence of school climate on teacher retention and turnover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Levels</td>
<td>Achievement scores on standardized assessments</td>
<td>To evaluate the influence of students’ performance levels on teacher retention and turnover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Support</td>
<td>Leadership surveys, principal evaluation ratings</td>
<td>To consider the influence of school leadership on teacher turnover and retention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### FACTORS TO MONITOR AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTORS</th>
<th>EXAMPLE MEASURES</th>
<th>RATIONALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Characteristics</td>
<td>Enrollment and enrollment change, student poverty level, percentage of minority students, percentage of bilingual students</td>
<td>To account for the extent that changes in student enrollment levels may influence teacher turnover; To assess how changes in demographics over time may be associated with teacher retention and/or turnover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation Policies</td>
<td>Overall compensation levels, stipends for hard-to-staff schools</td>
<td>To determine to what extent changes in salary levels may influence teacher retention or turnover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Service Policies</td>
<td>Induction programs, peer assistance and review</td>
<td>To evaluate whether in-service policies are influencing teacher retention and turnover</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Department of Education
INTRODUCTION


TEACHER SHORTAGES: A DECADE-LONG DILEMMA


7 TRENDS IN TODAY’S TEACHER WORKFORCE

Figure text adapted from: “The Teacher Workforce Is Transforming. Here’s What It Means for Schools and Students.” University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, October 23, 2018. https://www.gse.upenn.edu/news/teacher-workforce

PANDEMIC IMPACT ON TEACHER SHORTAGES


Email correspondence with Paige Graham, Director of Accountability, Assessment, and Professional Development, School District of Newberry County. Received February 12, 2021.

**PROMOTE TEACHER ENGAGEMENT**


**CREATE A SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE**


**MONITOR TEACHER RETENTION AND ATTRITION**


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