

Costs and Benefits of Teacher Retention

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The recent pandemic has contributed to a climbing number of [teacher vacancies](#), though [retention has long been an issue](#). Approximately 10% of teachers leave within their first year, and 44% leave within five. This high level of attrition leads to an increasing [shortage](#) of *experienced* teachers. A shortage of teachers can [threaten the stability of providing a quality education](#), ultimately [impacting student performance](#) and discipline. Teacher attrition can contribute to educational inequities as the students most in need are also the [most impacted](#) by turnover. The turnover rate for teachers who are already underrepresented in the workforce¹ is particularly [high](#), which is concerning given the [positive impact](#) of diversity in the classroom for all students. [Students of color](#) and [students learning English](#)², in particular, benefit from having teachers who look like them and/or [speak](#) their language, engage in [asset-based teaching](#), and understand connections to language development in deep and meaningful ways.

Districts are often responsible for managing the teacher workforce within their jurisdiction, but the [high costs](#) to do that places a strain on already limited resources, which can be [compounded for rural areas](#). Strategies can be employed by policymakers to enable districts to both [retain K-12 teachers](#) and diversify the teacher workforce.

Strategies to Promote Retention

Factors connected to the retention of teachers, as well as various associated strategies for policymakers to **consider**, are discussed below.

- Teachers' **working conditions** are [strongly related](#) to retention. Workplace characteristics associated with [greater teacher retention success](#) include strong [leadership](#), effective [mentoring](#), high-quality [professional development](#), supports that effectively address barriers to learning and teaching, and a strong sense of collegiality and community. In contrast, experiencing [discrimination](#) and [lack of support for diversity](#) are negatively associated with retention.
 - Identify, implement, and evaluate efforts to improve characteristics of the workplace associated with teachers' retention.
 - Incorporate planning and professional development into teachers' contractual time, which promotes quality working conditions. Some districts are moving to [4-day work weeks](#), which provides teachers with scheduled time to utilize for planning, grading, communicating with parents, and completing professional development [without negatively impacting student achievement](#).
 - Strengthen the quality of school leaders through recruitment and development initiatives, for which states are permitted - if they wish - to set aside up to 3% of their [Title II formula funds](#) to invest in.
- **Salary** also plays a [significant](#) role in teacher retention, as do the [benefits](#) teachers receive. Teachers' salary levels not only affect the quality of those who choose to enter the profession, but also whether they stay and the [impact they have on their students' achievement](#). There is also emerging evidence that compensation packages for attracting teachers may differ slightly from what is needed to retain them.
 - Given the cost of replacing teachers, an alternative could be to invest more in current teachers (e.g., improve wage competitiveness, benefit packages). Various [types of teacher compensation reform](#) or other forms of [financial incentives](#) could also be considered based on district or state need.

¹ such as teachers of color, bilingual/dual language teachers, and special education teachers

² Students who are learning English may be [referred to as](#) Bilingual Learners, English Language Learners, or Dual-Language Learners. More information about these students and how to promote their success can be found [here](#).

- Other individual-level factors, such as a teacher's **sense of achievement**, also matter. Teachers who believe their work is important and impactful are more likely to remain in the teaching profession. A growing body of research documents the role that community-based teachers play in promoting a sense of achievement.
 - Cultivate school environments where [mentorship](#) relationships can be easily formed and accountability for one another is widely promoted, which can be particularly beneficial for teachers of color.
 - Reflect on how prohibitive the requirements to become a teacher are and consider whether or how pathways could be developed to [expand the teaching pipeline](#) to individuals with vested interests in the education of [their community](#). Examples include recruiting teacher candidates when they are students (e.g., [pre-collegiate](#)) and creating local entry points into teaching through [partnerships](#) between K-12 and universities, [community-based organizations](#), and education policymakers.

Additional Resources

- Baker (2017). [How money matters for schools](#).
- Carver-Thomas (2018). [Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color](#).
- Castro et al. (2022). [Teacher retention policy coherence: An analysis of policies and practices across federal, state, and division levels](#).
- Holmes et al. (2019). [Rethinking retention in hard-to-staff schools](#).
- Podolsky et al. (2016). [Solving the teacher shortage: How to attract and retain excellent educators](#).
- Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) [benefit-cost results for PK-12 education](#).