

# REWRITING THE RETENTION PLAYBOOK

*Shifts to build a sustainable educator workforce*

FINDINGS FROM THE 2025 NATIONAL  
EDUCATOR SHORTAGE SUMMIT



## FOREWORD: WHY WE'RE REWRITING THE RETENTION PLAYBOOK

The workforce shortage remains one of the most pressing challenges facing our education system, impacting student outcomes, educator well-being, and the long-term sustainability of the profession, all of which significantly impact student achievement. In response, the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA) continues to bring together a diverse group of PK-12 administrators, higher education leaders, and state and local education officials to engage in honest dialogue, share strategies, and build collaborative solutions.

At the 4th Annual National Educator Shortage Summit (NESS) in 2025, the work continued with a new focus on educator retention as a key component to address the educator shortage. NESS provides a unique, solutions-oriented environment where participants examine the root causes of educator shortages and co-design practical, high-impact strategies. Discussions move beyond identifying challenges to creating sustainable, systemwide solutions that are both locally grounded and nationally relevant.

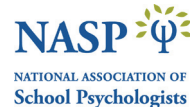
The Retention Playbook emerged from the 2025 convening. This paper captures the key themes, bold ideas, and promising practices shared during the summit. It is intended to be a living resource—one that grows and evolves as more organizations innovate and learn how to retain and support the educators who shape our future.

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## INTRODUCTION: WHY IT'S TIME FOR A NEW PLAYBOOK

The United States is experiencing a national educator workforce crisis that extends beyond the classroom. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2024), half of all school leaders reported their schools were understaffed, particularly in special education, custodial services, classroom aides, and mental health professionals in fall 2024. Chronic shortages of qualified teachers, especially in high-need subject areas and underserved communities, have been compounded by high attrition rates and a weakened pipeline of new educators. During the 2022-23 school year, nearly one in eight teaching positions remained either unfilled or were staffed by teachers without full certification (Tan et al., 2024). Although educator turnover has declined from its pandemic-era peak, it remains elevated. Approximately 7% of teachers and 8% of principals left their roles during the 2023-24 school year, compared to pre-pandemic rates of 6% and 3% respectively (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2025). These workforce challenges disrupt learning, strain school budgets, and erode school climate, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive educator retention strategies.

Education leaders have long been working to address these issues, not only by building stronger educator pipelines and rethinking their approach to recruitment, but by investing in strategies to retain the great teachers, leaders, and support staff already serving our schools. As part of this response, the National Educator Shortage Summit was created as a dynamic, solutions-oriented convening of PK-20 stakeholders—including PK-12 administrators, higher education leaders, state education agencies, and other education leaders. Now in its fourth iteration, the 2025 summit focused on actionable strategies to confront the complex issues of retention and career sustainability.

This publication builds on the work of the previous three summits and captures the collective wisdom of the 2025 convening. It elevates five key shifts in thinking and practice that emerged from this year's summit as essential to long-term educator retention. A sixth, bonus shift urges stakeholders to align isolated efforts into coordinated, long-term plans for workforce stability.

These shifts are not theoretical; they are rooted in real-world practices from across the country. As districts, preparation programs, and agencies innovate, this publication will continue to evolve—highlighting emerging strategies and offering updated guidance to help education organizations scale what works.

## HOW TO USE THE RETENTION PLAYBOOK: A GUIDE FOR STAKEHOLDERS

This resource is designed to serve as a practical guide and strategic planning tool for stakeholders across the educator preparation and employment continuum. Each section offers concrete, role-specific strategies for implementing the five shifts and collectively moving from crisis management to career sustainability.

- **PK-12 School Districts** can use the shifts to audit current practices, spark cross-department collaboration, and embed retention into improvement plans, budgets, and talent development pipelines.
- **Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs)** can integrate these shifts into coursework, field experiences, and partnerships to better prepare candidates for longevity in the profession—and to ensure alignment with district needs.
- **State Education Agencies (SEAs)** can align policy, funding, and technical assistance efforts to create coherent, state-level retention strategies that support local implementation and remove systemic barriers.
- **Cross-institutional Teams** can use the shifts to co-design scalable solutions such as shared micro-credentials, career ladders, and residency/apprenticeship programs that reduce fragmentation across the pipeline.



We encourage users to:

- Use the shifts as a **self-assessment tool** to identify priority areas for local action.
- Adapt the strategies into **local strategic plans, grant proposals, or improvement initiatives**.
- Convene **cross-organization conversations** to align efforts across preparation, induction, leadership, and long-term retention.

In short, this publication is both a call to action and a roadmap—inviting all education stakeholders to work together to build an educator workforce that is prepared, supported, and inspired to stay.

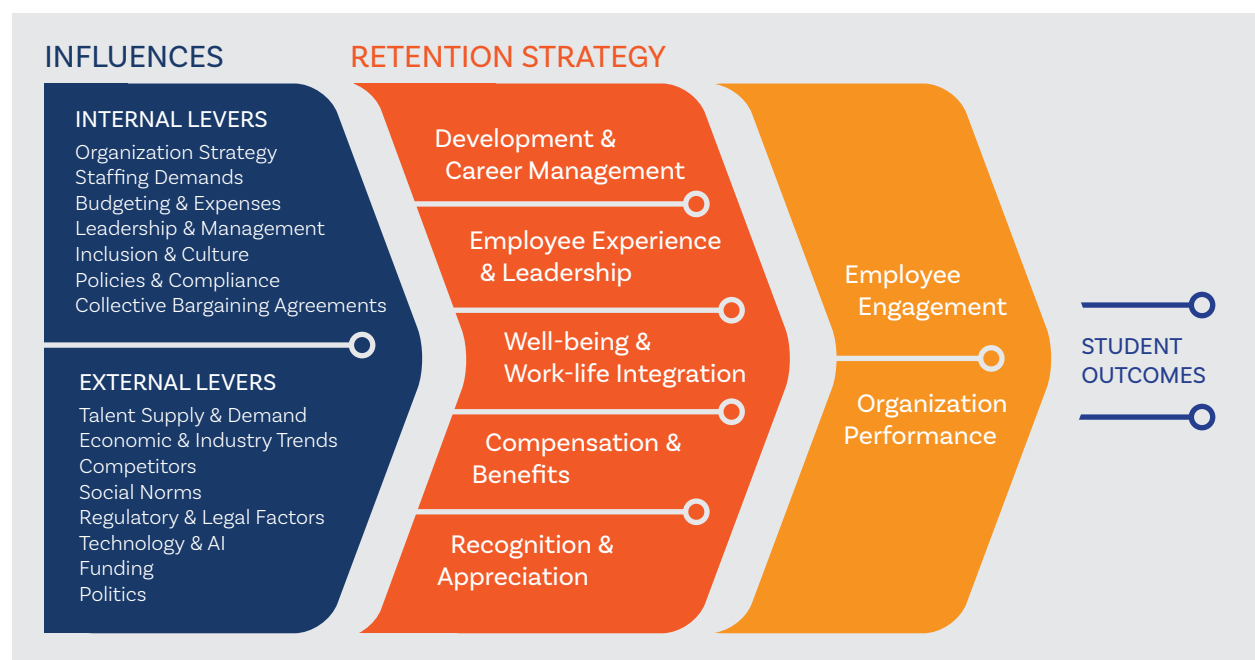
## METHODOLOGY: HOW THE PLAYBOOK WAS BUILT

This paper presents a set of strategic shifts to improve educator retention, developed through a collaborative, multi-stage design process grounded in stakeholder expertise and thematic analysis. The methodology combined expert facilitation with the strategic use of Generative AI to ensure the process remained rigorous and responsive to field-based insights.

### *Strengthening the Educator Workforce: A Comprehensive Framework for Retention*

The Retention Framework offers a practical and comprehensive approach to tackling educator retention challenges by aligning human capital strategy with the needs and realities of the education workforce. Adapted for the education sector from the WorldatWork Total Rewards Framework (2023), this model helps practitioners and policymakers consider the full range of factors that shape educators' day-to-day experiences, long-term career satisfaction, and intent to stay in the profession.

## RETENTION FRAMEWORK



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Central to the framework are five key domains:

- 1. Development & Career Management** - Opportunities for employees to build new skills, grow professionally, and advance along meaningful career pathways.
- 2. Employee Experience & Leadership** - The values and behaviors of leadership and the organization that shape culture, build trust, and influence the day-to-day employee experience.
- 3. Well-being & Work-life integration** - Programs and policies that support employees' physical, mental, emotional, and financial well-being, enabling them to manage work and personal responsibilities.
- 4. Compensation & Benefits** - The full range of financial and non-financial rewards offered to employees.
- 5. Recognition & Appreciation** - Formal and informal ways organizations celebrate employee contributions, milestones, and impact.

Together, these domains form the foundation of a comprehensive retention strategy and define a compelling employee value proposition. An employee value proposition defines the unique set of benefits, opportunities, and values that an organization offers to attract and retain talent. A strong employee value proposition communicates why individuals should join and stay with an organization, aligning what employees need and value with what the organization provides. The framework also accounts for broader internal and external forces that influence retention, from policy shifts to labor market trends, encouraging systems-level alignment across departments and institutions. When organizations intentionally design strategies that address all five core domains, they create conditions for stronger employee engagement and improved organizational performance—critical outcomes that ultimately directly contribute to better experiences and outcomes for students. This holistic approach enables leaders to move beyond one-off initiatives and develop targeted retention strategies that are responsive to evolving challenges and support educators throughout their career.

### ***Participant Engagement and Data Collection***

NESS attendees participated in a structured, collaborative process to generate, refine and prioritize actionable strategies for improving educator retention across the five domains of the Retention Framework. The framework served as both a guide for focused dialogue and a tool for fostering cross-organizational understanding.

Participants were assigned to mixed stakeholder teams, which included representatives from PK-12 districts, educator preparation programs (EPPs), and state education agencies to ensure strategies reflected multiple perspectives across the educator workforce ecosystem. Each team followed a multi-phase protocol: beginning with rapid individual ideation, organizing ideas within the Retention Framework, and then selecting and exploring top strategies in depth. Final strategies were shared in a full-group debrief to support cross-team learning and synthesis.

### ***Data Analysis***

A thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns and synthesize strategies into broader systemic shifts. Generative AI tools (ChatGPT 4.5 research, Copilot, and DeepSeek) were used to assist in coding and clustering the raw data, including strategy submissions and notes taken during small and large group discussions. The AI-supported analysis emphasized the identification of high-leverage themes that represented a clear departure from traditional approaches to educator retention.

Human review was integral throughout the process to ensure contextual accuracy, interpret nuanced meaning, and validate emerging patterns. Analysts revisited original data sources, particularly notes from day two's deeper strategy refinement, to extract concrete examples and actions aligned to each shift. The final themes were defined not only by their frequency, but by their potential to transform how education systems support and retain educators across stakeholder groups.



## THE NEW PLAYS: SIX SHIFTS FOR A SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE



### SHIFT 01 |

*Development & Career Management Shift: From linear advancement to dynamic career pathways*

#### TRADITIONAL CALL TO ACTION

Advancement means leaving the classroom or current role for a supervisory or administrative position.

#### COMPREHENSIVE & SYSTEMIC ACTION

Expand opportunities to grow within current or similar roles through non-linear career pathways.

Expanding from traditional, linear promotion models to dynamic, non-linear career pathways is a powerful lever for retaining the diverse talent that sustains PK-12 schools. Too often, advancement has meant leaving a role one loves—especially for educators, support staff, and specialists who thrive in direct service to students. Employees are more likely to remain in their organization if they believe they can achieve their career goals and experience meaningful development (Killham, E, 2025). By offering role-flexible progression—like teacher-leader, lab class mentor, research educator, or master support professional—districts affirm individual strengths and allow staff to grow without abandoning their passions. These multidirectional pathways not only improve morale and engagement but also reduce turnover by meeting employees where they are whether in the classroom, front office, or facilities team.



### ***PK-12 School Districts***

- Offer cross-training or lateral mobility to expand skills without requiring promotion.
- Design and communicate clear career lattices (e.g., mentor, lead teacher, instructional coach, content specialist) that enable educators to advance.
- Hold regular professional growth conversations and document individual aspirations.
- Provide competency-based and micro-credential advancement opportunities.
- Offer personalized professional development (PD) opportunities aligned with individual career aspirations.
- Build pipelines for classified-to-certified career bridges.

### ***Education Preparation Providers***

- Integrate career exploration and mapping into coursework.
- Provide micro-credentials for career advancement and leadership roles in alignment with P-12 needs (e.g., peer coach, mentor).
- Align advanced programs and field experiences with partner district career ladder roles.
- Develop and deliver asynchronous, accessible learning options aligned with different career goals (e.g., aspiring coaches, mentors, or administrators).

### ***State Education Agencies***

- Develop tiered licensure or endorsement pathways aligned to career growth (e.g., Master Teacher, NBCT incentives).
- Incentivize teacher leadership through pay and credential recognition, allowing educators to stay in the classroom while growing professionally.
- Fund career development initiatives (e.g. microcredentials) tied to workforce needs.
- Develop career ladder models tied to competencies, not just coursework.

### ***Cross-Institutional***

- Co-design career and leadership pipelines across PK-20 systems.
- Build shared micro-credentials ecosystems.
- Create shared databases for tracking educator growth and pipeline transitions.
- Co-design and expand Registered Apprenticeship Programs and paid Teacher Residencies that offer debt-free, job-embedded pathways into teaching. These models require close collaboration between PK-12 districts, EPPs, and state agencies to align coursework, on-the-job training, licensure requirements, and funding.





## SHIFT 02 |

*Employee Experience & Leadership Shift: From selecting managers to developing leaders who prioritize employee experience*

### TRADITIONAL CALL TO ACTION

Promotions are based on technical skill, not readiness to lead or support people.

### COMPREHENSIVE & SYSTEMIC ACTION

Equip leaders at all levels to foster professional growth, strengthen team culture and address workplace challenges.

Prioritizing leadership that enhances the day-to-day experience of educators is essential to building a resilient and committed workforce. Rather than promoting individuals based solely on technical expertise, education organizations must cultivate people-centric leaders who know how to support professional growth, strengthen team culture, and address workplace challenges. Gallup research shows that managers account for 70% of the variance in team engagement (Clifton, n.d.), and that at least 75% of voluntary turnover is influenced by factors managers can control (Robison, 2008). When leaders are equipped to build trust, coach effectively, and foster inclusion, employees are significantly more likely to stay, feel valued, and contribute beyond expectations. In contrast, poorly supported or disengaged leadership can drive attrition, even in otherwise stable organizations.

### *PK-12 School Districts*

- Develop leadership academies that prepare aspiring leaders across departments (not just principals) with the skills to lead people—not just processes.
- Recognize and support leadership potential through mentorship roles, site-based project leadership, or process improvement teams.
- Provide mentoring and side-by-side coaching for new supervisors across all departments to help them communicate effectively, build strong teams, and navigate early leadership challenges.
- Embed retention and growth planning into regular supervisory practices (e.g., career planning checklists, milestone maps, differentiated support) to ensure growth conversations happen at all career stages.
- Normalize feedback and voice by using surveys, listening sessions, and stakeholder input loops to shape how leaders make decisions and improve employee engagement.

### *Education Preparation Providers*

- Design leadership training with flexible scheduling to model and support work-life balance.
- Expand and/or add leadership development options for all educators—not just aspiring principals—with a focus on skills to assist with team leadership, peer coaching, and collaborative decision-making.
- Integrate real-world case studies that highlight effective strategies for creating a positive and supportive employee experience.
- Embed key areas such as staff wellness, onboarding, mentoring, and communication practices into leadership preparation curricula to foster engaging, caring, and sustainable work environments for all educators.

### *State Education Agencies*

- Support principal and supervisor coaching programs.
- Fund leadership coaching programs to help administrators retain and grow their staff.
- Provide state-level professional learning focused on empathy, inclusive leadership, and workload realities (e.g., SPED).
- Support data use to help leaders make data-informed improvements that address educator needs.
- Develop leadership academies.



### **Cross-Institutional**

- Develop collaborations among EPPs, districts, educational service centers, and SEA leaders to co-design leadership programs.
- Share leadership pipeline data to identify gaps and progress.
- Align leadership preparation with retention metrics.
- Create partnerships to embed training on culture, communication, coaching, and retention practices.

## **SHIFT 03 |**

*Well-being & Work-Life Integration Shift: From treating burnout to proactive, holistic well-being.*

### **TRADITIONAL CALL TO ACTION**

Wellness efforts are reactive and separate from daily operations.

### **COMPREHENSIVE & SYSTEMIC ACTION**

Embedded flexible, proactive supports that address root causes of burnout and promote holistic well-being.

In today's high-stress school environments, promoting proactive, holistic well-being is essential for retaining educators. Instead of treating burnout reactively, effective districts embed supports like flexible scheduling, mental health resources, and workload management into daily operations. These practices don't just reduce absenteeism—they improve morale and retention by signaling that educators are truly valued. According to Gallup, employees who strongly agree their employer cares about their overall well-being are three times more likely to be engaged and 69% less likely to be actively job searching (Harter, 2023). Given the well-documented spillover effects of workplace stress on family life, mental health, and long-term resilience, well-being is no longer a wellness perk—it's a strategic imperative for building a stable, committed workforce.

### **PK-12 School Districts**

- Pilot alternate scheduling modules, such as four-day instructional weeks, extended prep time, early release, or late start days.
- Redesign staffing and service delivery models to allow greater flexibility in work locations, roles, and team-based approaches.
- Create wellness spaces and offer on-site services (e.g., childcare, counseling) to alleviate personal stressors.
- Offer a diverse range of benefits that support physical, emotional, financial, and social well-being.
- Provide guidance to help employees navigate, understand, and make the most of their wellness.
- Leverage Generative AI to improve efficiency and reduce workload demands for employees.
- Provide training and guidance to help employees use technology effectively and responsibly.

### **Education Preparation Providers**

- Offer flexible scheduling and hybrid pathways for candidates (e.g., evening/weekend cohorts, online or competency-based options and in-person classes at accessible community).
- Provide wraparound services (e.g., childcare referrals, licensure exam preparation, mental health).
- Integrate digital literacy and ethical AI use into coursework to prepare candidates to effectively leverage Generative AI and productivity tools for streamlining tasks, reducing workload, and enhancing impact.
- Incorporate principles of educator well-being and professional boundary-setting into coursework and clinical experiences to model sustainable practices that mitigate burnout.



## State Education Agencies

- Vet and support health and wellness providers with educator-friendly hours and flexible care.
- Normalize educator wellness in messaging and retention priorities.
- Support mental health resources like Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), educator wellness hubs, and burnout-prevention training.
- Develop policies and guidance on the appropriate use of AI and technology tools.
- Fund statewide wellness grants to support district innovation in mental health and work-life programs.
- Invest in valid tools and resources to assess workplace culture and working conditions, paired with coaching.

## Cross-Institutional

- Partner on childcare, transportation, and wellness access for educator preparation candidates and employees to reduce barriers.
- Co-develop a multi-tiered framework for educator well-being that addresses systemic root causes of stress, strengthens support structures, and provides individuals with tools to manage stress.
- Collaborate with education stakeholders to scale the use of Generative AI and workload-reducing technologies.

## SHIFT 04 |

*Compensation & Benefits: From publishing salary schedules to transparently communicating total rewards*

### TRADITIONAL CALL TO ACTION

Organizations focus on base salary, with limited visibility into the value of benefits and other incentives.

### COMPREHENSIVE & SYSTEMIC ACTION

Help educators understand and utilize the full value of their total compensation package.

Transparent communication of total rewards—not just base salary—is a critical driver of educator retention (Morgan, 2024). When school systems clearly articulate the full value of compensation, including health benefits, retirement contributions, paid leave, and wellness incentives, employees are more likely to feel valued and stay committed long-term. Yet many educators remain unaware of the substantial financial advantages tied to staying in the profession. By making compensation packages more visible and understandable, districts build trust, strengthen satisfaction, and reduce turnover—especially when transparency is paired with equity and long-term planning tools.

## PK-12 School Districts

- Issue personalized total compensation statements annually that highlight salary, health benefits, retirement contributions, leave accrual, and any other incentives.
- Develop a compensation philosophy to communicate and guide how compensation decisions are made.
- Conduct regular compensation studies to ensure pay and benefits are equitable and competitive.
- Educate staff on retirement readiness and financial planning. Offer financial literacy coaching and retirement readiness tools.
- Proactively inform staff about eligibility for Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and assist them with navigating the process.



- Introduce longevity incentives such as bonuses, retirement cash-outs, and experience credits.
- Provide housing assistance and partner with financial institutions to help employees navigate the process of purchasing a home.

### **Education Preparation Providers**

- Educate candidates about total compensation—including Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), retirement, health benefits, leave, and incentives—compared to private sector jobs.
- Host financial literacy workshops in partnership with state retirement systems and local financial advisors.
- Connect candidates with district HR teams during preparation so they can ask questions and make informed employment decisions.
- Equip future building and district leaders with a foundational understanding of compensation structures, benefits packages, and collective bargaining.

### **State Education Agencies**

- Promote total compensation dashboards and salary transparency to help educators understand the full value of their benefits.
- Fund financial coaching and support for educator-specific benefits.
- Support equitable transfer policies for experience across districts or sectors and creative benefits like housing stipends.
- Explore housing or financial assistance programs through vetted credit unions or community foundations.

### **Cross-Institutional**

- Partner on financial literacy events for candidates and early-career teachers.
- Align messaging around total rewards and the value of public sector employment.

## **SHIFT 05 |**

### *Recognition & Appreciation: From formal recognition programs to a culture of appreciation*

#### **TRADITIONAL CALL TO ACTION**

Recognition is infrequent, formal, and often focused on a few positions.

#### **COMPREHENSIVE & SYSTEMIC ACTION**

Foster a culture of meaningful and consistent appreciation for all staff.

Fostering a culture of appreciation—where all staff are consistently recognized for their contributions—plays a powerful role in improving retention. Unlike infrequent, formal awards focused on a few roles, daily and inclusive recognition strengthens employees’ sense of value, belonging, and motivation. Research shows that employees who receive frequent praise are over 40% more engaged and significantly less likely to leave their jobs (Littlefield, 2022; Hsu, 2024). When schools normalize meaningful appreciation, whether through peer shout-outs, small tokens, or verbal affirmations, they not only reinforce a positive workplace culture but also reduce stress and promote social connection. A culture of recognition doesn’t just boost morale; it also helps build a workforce that’s resilient, loyal, and proud to contribute.

### ***PK-12 School Districts***

- Promote a culture of appreciation through regular acknowledgments and celebrations of staff efforts.
- Embed appreciation into routines that reinforce shared purpose and morale.
- Implement peer-to-peer recognition platforms that allow staff to acknowledge each other's contributions.
- Celebrate classified and certified staff equally, elevating unseen wins.
- Offer personalized recognition options (e.g., public praise, private notes, professional growth opportunities) based on staff preferences.
- Tailor acknowledgements to specific contributions and stages of an educator's journey, especially in the critical first years.

### ***Education Preparation Providers***

- Foster candidate appreciation through cohort celebrations and spotlights.
- Highlight alumni successes to elevate the profession.
- Recognize mentor teachers and cooperating educators through meaningful acknowledgment and involvement in program design or feedback loops.
- Train future leaders to build a sustained culture of appreciation by embedding regular, meaningful recognition of all staff contributions into daily practice - not just formal events.

### ***State Education Agencies***

- Recognize educators, leaders, and staff in state-sponsored events, newsletters, and professional learning convenings.
- Showcase innovative local efforts to employee appreciation through SEA communications and platforms to elevate and encourage investment in people.
- Integrate moments of gratitude and recognition into state-led trainings, conferences, and advisory group meetings.

### ***Cross-Institutional***

- Collaborate on recognition events that span preparation and early teaching years.
- Create joint campaigns to elevate the profession and show public appreciation.
- Partner with local organizations to provide incentives and rewards for educators.





## SHIFT 06 |

### *Strategic Retention: From isolated actions to systemwide retention strategies*

#### **TRADITIONAL CALL TO ACTION**

Retention efforts are often fragmented, reactive and disconnected from strategy.

#### **COMPREHENSIVE & SYSTEMIC ACTION**

Develop a unified strategy that aligns policies, practices and partnerships to promote career sustainability.

Improving retention requires more than isolated efforts—it demands a systemwide strategy that aligns career development, compensation, well-being, and workplace culture. Fragmented or reactive initiatives, such as one-time bonuses or disconnected programs, have limited long-term impact. In contrast, unified strategies that embed retention into district-wide policies and practices—through tools like stay interviews, leadership pipelines, and integrated HR systems—create lasting stability. Research shows that organizations with aligned, holistic retention strategies significantly outperform those using piecemeal approaches in reducing turnover and improving workforce sustainability (Chitra & Shanthi, 2023). By making retention a core metric of success and investing in structures that support educators at every stage, districts can build a more resilient, engaged, and committed workforce.

#### ***PK-12 School Districts***

- Create a multi-year educator workforce strategy that includes retention goals, aligned initiatives, and success metrics across recruitment, development, support, and advancement.
- Establish cross-departmental retention teams (e.g., HR, academics, operations) to coordinate efforts, review data, and drive systemwide improvements.
- Embed retention goals in school improvement plans and superintendent evaluation criteria to ensure leadership accountability.
- Align budgets and grant funding to sustain evidence-based retention efforts—not just new hiring incentives.
- Routinely assess employee experience data (e.g., exit surveys, climate surveys, stay interviews) and act on themes at the system level.
- Institutionalize onboarding and mentoring systems as strategic investments, not one-off programs.

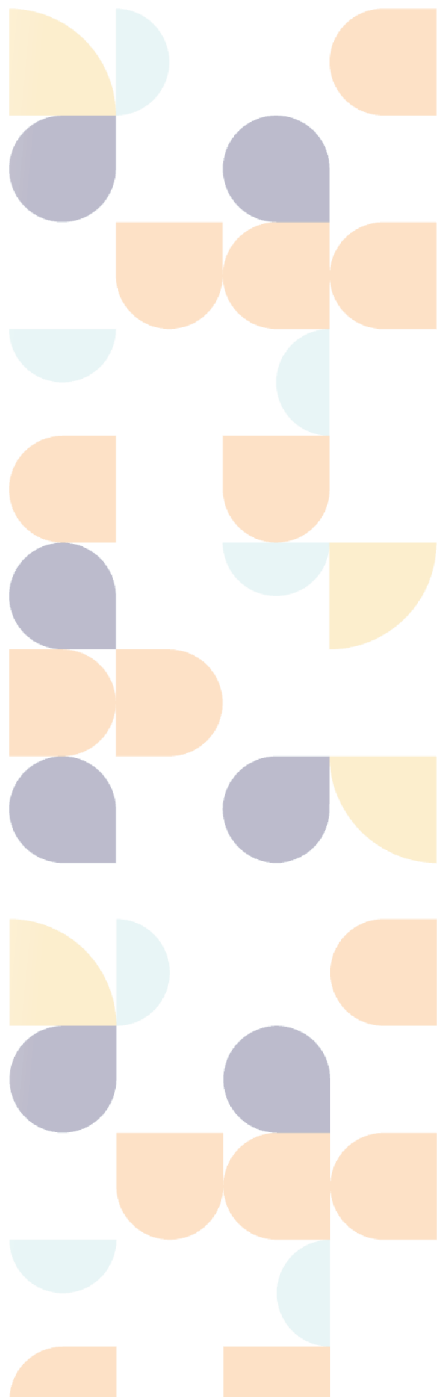
#### ***Education Preparation Providers***

- Develop a comprehensive pipeline-to-practice framework in partnership with districts to align coursework, clinical experiences, and induction in support of long-term retention goals.
- Use alumni outcome data to inform program improvements, particularly around preparedness and early-career persistence.
- Build faculty and leadership capacity to engage in continuous improvement and partnership work focused on educator career longevity.
- Prioritize preparation for high-need, hard-to-staff roles (e.g., SPED, STEM, multilingual learners) as a strategic lever for systemwide stability.
- Partner with PK-12 systems and state agencies on joint research, pilots, and innovations that improve long-term workforce outcomes.
- Prepare leaders to design and implement comprehensive, long-term strategies that align policies, practices and partnerships to attract, support, and retain educators.



## State Education Agencies

- Create a statewide educator workforce strategy that aligns preparation, certification, recruitment, retention, and advancement under one coordinated vision.
- Fund cross-sector collaborations (e.g., district-EPP compacts, regional pipeline initiatives) that foster long-term retention through aligned systems.
- Streamline and align licensure, data, and funding systems to reduce duplication and remove barriers across institutions.
- Provide technical assistance and tools (e.g., retention data dashboards, strategic planning templates) to help local systems build sustainable strategies.
- Use policy levers to incentivize retention-focused practices, such as teacher leadership pathways, high-retention preparation models, or benefits that promote career longevity.





## CONCLUSION: A CALL TO COLLABORATIVE ACTION

Addressing educator retention is not the work of any single institution. It is a collective responsibility that demands coordinated action across the entire P-20 continuum. The shifts outlined in this paper offer a clear roadmap for creating the conditions where educators can thrive and remain in the profession. They call on all education stakeholders—PK-12 systems, educator preparation programs, state agencies, policymakers, community partners, and educators themselves—to work in partnership toward a common goal.

Together, we must listen deeply to those closest to the work, align efforts across systems, and invest in sustainable solutions that support the whole educator. By co-creating tools, policies, and programs that reduce fragmentation and respond to real needs, we can transform how we attract, support, and retain talent in education.

While each shift offers a distinct lens for improving retention, certain strategies transcend all domains and serve as foundational practices for lasting change:

- Collaborate across P-20 stakeholders (e.g., joint retention plans, shared cohorts, data dashboards) to reduce duplication and better serve candidate needs.
- Create advisory boards with school district leaders, candidates, and community partners to ensure programs remain relevant and retention-focused.
- Listen deeply to employees through surveys, focus groups, and check-ins to understand and respond to evolving needs.
- Co-create tools and programs that all partners can adopt and adapt.

Use this paper to spark conversations, guide strategic planning, and align investments. Together, we can move beyond short-term fixes and siloed initiatives to enact long-term, systemic strategies that center educator well-being and success. Through a common understanding of the issue, a unified vision, and focused action, the essential task of eliminating educator shortages is within our reach. Every step toward stronger retention brings us closer to the goal that unites us: every student, in every classroom, supported by a well-prepared educator who chooses to stay.

Go to [www.edshortage.org](http://www.edshortage.org) for more information.

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## RUNNING THE PLAY

### 01. Development and Career Management

**Organization:** The School District of Lee County (FL)

**Program:** Teacher Career Bridge

#### Context & Innovation

To move beyond traditional career advancement in education, the School District of Lee County (FL) launched the Teacher Career Bridge. This tiered internal leadership development model is open to classroom teachers who want to take on instructional leadership roles without leaving the classroom. This approach addresses a key retention barrier by offering advancement without sacrificing classroom connection.

#### Program Design

Teachers can apply to one of three structured leadership roles:

- Peer Collaborative Teacher (50% teaching / 50% coaching and professional development design and delivery)
- Learning & Leadership Teacher (20% co-teaching with a new teacher, 80% coaching and professional development design and delivery)
- Professional Development Course Facilitator (Facilitate online and in-person professional learning for teachers outside contracted hours)

Eligible participants earn a \$10,125 annual supplement, contingent on maintaining an “effective” or “highly effective” performance rating.

#### Impact on Retention

By creating advancement pathways that center educators’ strengths and keep them in the classroom, Lee County boosts instructional capacity and strengthens retention. The program incentivizes leadership while honoring the desire many teachers have to remain close to students.

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### 02. Employee Selection and Leadership

**Organization:** Ogden Public Schools (UT)

**Program:** Aspiring Leadership Academy

#### Context & Innovation

To build a diverse leadership pipeline and strengthen internal succession, Ogden School District launched a cross-role Aspiring Leadership Academy. Open to teachers and support professionals, such as food service managers and custodial leads, the program identifies high-potential employees who are interested in leadership and invests in their development long before formal vacancies arise.

#### Program Design

The academy is offered every two years. Supervisors begin the identification process during annual goal-setting conversations, asking employees about their five-year aspirations. Those who express interest in leadership opportunities are invited to join the program and receive coaching and development tailored to their goals.

#### Impact on Retention

This approach not only supports strategic succession planning but also elevates the leadership potential of current employees.



### 03. Wellbeing and Work-life Integration

**Organization:** Parkway School District (MO)

**Program:** Health Clinics

#### Context & Innovation

Parkway School District partnered with CareATC to bring convenient healthcare directly to the workplace at low-to-no cost for eligible employees and their dependents who are enrolled in the district's health plan. The initiative removes common access barriers, such as appointment wait times and out-of-pocket costs, while embedding wellness into everyday work life.

#### Program Design

The onsite clinics offer preventative care and mental health services to benefits eligible employees and their family members. The model integrates annual wellness incentives and secure digital scheduling.

#### Impact on Retention

By reducing the time, stress, and cost associated with managing healthcare, Parkway supports the holistic well-being of its staff. This investment reinforces a culture of care and helps reduce attrition linked to burnout and chronic health-related absences.

**Organization:** Nampa School District (ID)

**Program:** Onsite Childcare for Staff

#### Context & Innovation

Recognizing the rising cost and inaccessibility of childcare for educators, Nampa School District opened an on-site daycare at Endeavor Elementary. The program supports working parents and serves as a practical recruitment and retention tool for the district, which doesn't pay teachers as much as neighboring districts.

#### Program Design

The childcare center is district-owned and operated, with services subsidized by grants and parent fees. Teachers pay significantly reduced rates—or nothing at all—for early childhood care. Payments are aligned with the school calendar, so educators are not charged during summer months and only pay half tuition in August and December. Locating the center in a school cuts down on commute time and enables teachers to check in on their children during the day.

#### Impact on Retention

The program eases work-life stress and serves as a differentiator for Nampa's employee value proposition. It keeps educators—especially new mothers—in the classroom, offering a blend of convenience, affordability, and emotional reassurance.

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### 04. Compensation & Benefits

**Organization:** Rockdale County Public Schools (GA)

**Program:** Retirement Planning & Financial Wellness

#### Context & Innovation

Rockdale County Public Schools (RCPS) developed a retirement education strategy that begins early in employees' careers and grows more targeted as retirement nears. This initiative helps staff understand the full value of their total compensation—particularly the long-term benefits of public employment—and promotes financial confidence through each career stage.



### **Program Design**

In partnership with a financial advisory vendor, RCPS offers regular retirement planning workshops and one-on-one consultations. Services include:

- Early-career sessions focused on sick leave policies, TRS eligibility, and contribution strategies
- Mid- and late-career planning, including retirement projections and Social Security integration
- Detailed comparisons between RCPS benefits and private-sector packages to help employees understand unique advantages like pension systems and state health coverage.

The district also educates employees about Georgia's TRS policy that allows unused sick leave to count toward retirement eligibility. This incentivizes attendance and supports earlier retirement.

### **Impact on Retention**

By helping staff plan for the future and understand the value of staying in the system, RCPS fosters financial literacy, stability, and long-term commitment. The program supports retention while also cultivating informed, retirement-ready educators.

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## **05. Recognition & Appreciation**

**Organization:** Highline Public Schools (WA)

**Program:** Living Our Promise Pins

### **Context & Innovation**

Highline Public Schools created the Living Our Promise pin program to foster a visible, inclusive culture of appreciation across all employee groups. Rather than rely solely on formal awards, the initiative empowers staff to recognize one another for embodying the district's central promise: EVERY STUDENT in Highline Public Schools is known by name, strength and need, and graduates prepared for the future they choose.

### **Program Design**

Staff receive recognition pins during public moments—at meetings, in classrooms, or on campuses. Pins are awarded based on observable behaviors tied to values like equity, inclusion, and student-centeredness. Employees wear the pins on lanyards or bags, turning recognition into a visible and ongoing cultural signal.

### **Impact on Retention**

By embedding appreciation into daily interactions, Highline builds belonging and boosts morale—especially among often-overlooked roles. The pins serve as tangible markers of impact and commitment, contributing to a sense of shared purpose and recognition.

**Organization:** Orange County Public Schools (GA)

**Program:** Hero Award

### **Context & Innovation**

To spotlight everyday excellence across the district, Orange County Public Schools launched the OCPS Hero Award. The program highlights teachers and support staff who embody qualities like courage, selflessness, dedication, and strong student advocacy in visible ways.

### **Program Design**

Each of the district's 191 schools, plus two acceleration campuses and five technical centers can nominate a staff member annually. Honorees are celebrated in person with the goal of surprising them at work with the award. These recognitions are shared through district communications and social media.



### **Impact on Retention**

This initiative strengthens culture and morale by publicly affirming the value of individual educators. By spreading recognition across all schools, OCPS boosts employee engagement and reinforces positive staff identity.

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## **06. Strategic Retention**

**Organization:** Ohio Department of Education & Workforce

**Program:** Ohio Human Capital Resource Center (OhioHCRC.org)

### **Context & Innovation**

To move beyond fragmented retention efforts, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce created the Ohio Human Capital Resource Center (HCRC), a statewide hub for building sustainable human capital systems. Developed in collaboration with a statewide advisory team, the HCRC provides research-based tools, training resources, and online courses to help districts attract, develop, and retain staff at all levels.

### **Program Design**

The Ohio HCRC offers self-assessments, design guides, and other resources aligned to Professional Human Capital Leaders in Education (pHCLE) national standards. Resources are easily accessible online and provided at no cost to Ohio educators.

### **Impact on Retention Strategy**

In FY25, HCRC training and resources reached over 837 education organizations representing 82% of Ohio's student population. With 27,000+ website visits in FY25, HCRC has become a go-to resource for Ohio districts. Ohio's HCRC builds retention capacity at scale, helping education leaders across the state design more cohesive strategies for recruiting, developing, and keeping great educators.



