



Recharging and Sustaining Our Teachers

5 Strategies for School Leaders



Teachers are tired. They are often [overworked](#), [underpaid](#), and [burnt out](#). The implications of this are far-reaching.

First, teachers are quitting the profession at an increasing rate. [Recent survey data](#) reveals that **33% of teachers** planned to leave the profession by the end of the 2021-2022 school year, a significant increase from pre-pandemic levels. [Research demonstrates](#) how even when teachers stay in the profession, high levels of burnout can lead to increased absenteeism, lower productivity, and decreased mental health in teachers.

Unsurprisingly, students are also impacted by teacher burnout. When teachers experience burnout, [students often have lower academic achievement, less motivation, and more antagonistic relationships with their teachers.](#)

The stress and anxiety of the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly [exacerbated issues of teacher burnout and turnover](#), making the need to address these concerns even more pressing.

All of this research and survey data demonstrates what everyone in the field of education knows and observes everyday: our teachers and students deserve better.

As school leaders and administrators, it can be easy to believe that many of the conditions creating teacher burnout are out of your control. With critical components of schools like education funding, curricular and testing expectations, data and reporting requirements all determined by legislators, many school leaders can feel like their hands are tied.

It's important to recognize, however, that there are simultaneously critical components of school districts over which administrators **do** have control. School leaders can take actionable steps to create a positive school culture that respects teachers' professionalism, invests in their leadership, responds to their needs, and validates their worth and their efforts.

The strategies below detail how school leaders can not only combat teacher burnout, but create more sustainable, humanizing, and energizing environments for teachers, staff, and students alike.

Demonstrate Appreciation, Regularly and Meaningfully

First and foremost, it is critical for school leaders to express ongoing, honest, and meaningful appreciation for their teachers and staff. When teachers' hard work and dedication is only recognized during Teacher Appreciation week, it can feel inauthentic, forced, and even disrespectful. On the other hand, when appreciation is communicated regularly, when it is part of a positive and supportive school culture, the impacts on teacher morale and wellbeing can be significant.

What does the research say?

- ◆ [According to research from Gallop](#), **29% of surveyed teachers** strongly agreed with the following: "In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work."
- ◆ That [same research](#) shows that teachers who receive frequent appreciation are more productive and engaged, less likely to leave their school, and more likely to receive positive feedback from students and parents.

Tips for demonstrating genuine appreciation:

- 1. Schedule time for appreciation:** School leaders are responsible for so much throughout the day. Because of that, less tangible tasks like expressing gratitude can fall off the radar, despite the best intentions. Creating weekly calendar reminders or blocking off 30 minutes in your schedule each week can help create self-accountability for making appreciation an integral part of your leadership duties.
- 2. Be specific:** General compliments like "good job" and "keep up the great work" can feel shallow and obligatory, having minimal or no impact. When demonstrating appreciation for your teachers and staff, be as specific as possible: "*Ms. Smith, I noticed you have been helping the new English teacher with writing her lesson plans lately. I appreciate your leadership! You are such an important member of our team.*" When gratitude is expressed with specificity, teachers feel seen, and they are more likely to feel motivated to continue doing whatever it is you praised!
- 3. Ask teachers what appreciation looks like:** We all experience appreciation differently. While some teachers would be thrilled to have their picture broadcast to the school under a "Teacher of the Month" banner, other teachers might prefer less public forms of appreciation. Take time to ask your teachers and staff what appreciation looks like to them, and try to express recognition in ways that align with their preferences.
- 4. Create appreciation mailboxes:** To support integrating appreciation as part of your school culture, you can make appreciation mailboxes. Each teacher gets their own mailbox, and they are encouraged to write letters of appreciation to their colleagues throughout the year. This could even be an ongoing component of staff meetings, so that teachers have structured time to write letters.
- 5. Invest in your own leadership:** Beyond individual expressions of gratitude, creating a culture of appreciation and value is not an easy task. It requires thoughtful, strategic, research-based approaches to leadership. Participating in professional learning focused on cultivating a positive school culture can help provide the necessary skills and capacity to engage in this work.

Related BetterLesson Professional Offerings

The following BetterLesson workshops can equip school leaders with the skills and insights necessary to provide positive, tangible feedback and to transform school culture:

- [Developing a Strengths Based Approach to Leadership](#)
- [Deepening Your Principalship Journey](#)
- [Building an Equity Mindset for an Inclusive School Culture](#)
- [Sharing Deeper Feedback to Support Learning Improvements](#)



Listen to Your Teachers and Respond

As school leaders, it is important to create opportunities to listen to teachers. Without hearing directly from teachers, leaders are operating under assumptions about their teachers' experiences, perspectives, and needs. Instead, when school leaders hear directly from their teachers—their frustrations, their needs, their successes, and more—they can create plans to improve school culture and conditions that are responsive to their staff. Moreover, this allows educators to be involved in decision-making processes within their school, increasing engagement and motivation.

What does the research say?

Research cited in Edutopia demonstrates:

- Only **19% of educators** believe their opinions are considered in district-level decision-making.
- **Almost half** of surveyed teachers believe their opinions are **not** considered in school-level decision-making.
- Teachers' perceptions of whether they have a voice in school-level decisions is correlated to job satisfaction.

Tips for listening and responding to teachers' needs:

1. **Survey your staff:** Gaining feedback and insights through a survey can be a great starting point to being responsive to your teachers. It's important to give teachers the option of completing the survey anonymously, to avoid concerns about repercussions. Additionally, creating time during a staff meeting for teachers to complete the survey ensures that all teachers respond without cutting into their own planning time. To the right is a template that school leaders can use to survey their staff.
2. **Be transparent, responsive, and accountable:** After teachers have completed the survey, spend time analyzing the data. Identify the most common stressors, review the teachers' suggestions for addressing them, contribute your own ideas, and develop a clear and actionable plan for school improvement. Then, present this information to your teachers, demonstrating that your teachers have a voice in their school. If there are recurring teacher suggestions that are outside of the control of school leaders (i.e. eliminate high-stakes testing), then explicitly address that so teachers don't feel unheard. At various points throughout the school year, refer back to the plan created as a result of this survey, provide updates on actions that have been taken, and elicit further teacher feedback.

School Climate Survey

Purpose: As school leadership, we want to ensure that we are responsive to your needs and concerns and supportive of your successes. By sharing your experiences, perspectives, and needs, we are able to address issues that negatively impact our school climate. We value your feedback and opinions!

Name: (please leave blank if you prefer to remain anonymous)

1. On a scale of 1 - 5, how stressed are you because of your work?
 - 1 (not at all)
 - 2 (a little)
 - 3 (somewhat)
 - 4 (very)
 - 5 (extremely)
2. What are the top three stressor of your job? (feel free to explain, if necessary)
3. How could school administrators address or alleviate those stressors?
4. What are the top three positive aspects of your job? (feel free to explain, if necessary)
5. How could school administrators support or encourage those positive aspects?
6. Is there anything else your administration needs to know about your or your school's needs, concerns, frustrations, or successes?

Provide Mentorship to All Teachers

Teachers, novice and seasoned alike, deserve access to [ongoing mentorship](#). Not only does this support retention, but it promotes ongoing learning, collaboration, and community-building. We often think about mentoring as something exclusive to new teachers. While it is true that early career teachers have a unique and specific need for mentorship, experienced educators, too, benefit from learning new strategies and practices.

What does the research say?

- ◆ When new teachers receive high-quality and ongoing mentorship, [the increases in student learning are comparable to an additional five months of learning](#).
- ◆ Mentoring experienced teachers is [shown to deepen their sense of identity as professional educators](#).
- ◆ [Retention of early-career teachers](#) is related to the quantity of time engaging in mentoring activities.

Tips for creating an effective teacher mentor program:

- 1. Structure time for mentoring activities:** When school leaders assign mentors without creating protected time for mentoring activities, they could be inadvertently contributing to teacher stress by adding more responsibilities without providing more capacity. Whatever structures already exist in your school or district's schedule—recurring staff meetings, department or grade level meetings, data meetings, etc.—consider how to integrate mentoring activities (training on effective mentor strategies, mentor-mentee meetings, etc) into those structures.
- 2. Provide training to achieve high quality mentorship:** A highly skilled and knowledgeable educator is not necessarily an effective professional mentor. Without providing mentors with training on how to be an impactful mentor, the partnership could elicit no meaningful improvement in teacher practice or student performance.
- 3. Connect mentoring to school or district goals:** Mentoring is a powerful strategy for supporting teachers' professional growth and development. In addition to the individual benefit, mentoring can and should also support school or district wide goals. Whether your school is focused on implementing new

literacy strategies or building stronger connections with parents and caretakers, the goals of mentoring activities should be explicitly supportive of the school's goals.

- 4. Integrate mentoring into professional development activities:** Professional development should take a multifaceted and integrated approach; PD activities should build upon each other and facilitate opportunities for ongoing and scaffolded learning. Consider how mentoring can be integrated as a component of a broader professional development plan. During a professional development session, for example, allow mentors-mentees time and space to debrief and create action plans.

Related BetterLesson Professional Offerings

- BetterLesson offers [individualized coaching for teachers](#). Paired with an expert BL coach, educators get hands-on support ([learning walks](#), 1:1 coaching sessions, and more) to achieve their professional and district goals.
- BetterLesson's [coaching for instructional coaches](#) is a critical component in building a successful infrastructure for embedded academic support. By engaging in this process, instructional coaches learn skills and strategies that offer increased capacity and insight into how best to support the professional growth and development of classroom teachers.
- This guide, [Coaching the Coach: Why Education Leaders Need Coaches Too](#), can help equip your instructional coaches with the skills necessary to provide more impactful mentorship and support to teachers.

Create Leadership Opportunities

Leadership structures are a reflection of an institution's values; investing in teacher leadership demonstrates a value of teachers' knowledge and insights. Teachers are a wealth of knowledge within a school system. Their daily experiences—connecting directly with students, working within the school-wide expectations, teaching and planning—allow them to have different insights from administrators into how schools are functioning. [Creating opportunities for educators to step into leadership roles](#) brings those critical perspectives into important conversations and decision-making processes within a school.

What does the research say?

- Schools who have teacher leaders participating in decision-making have [significantly higher levels of student achievement](#).
- When teachers share leadership through decision-making, [they reportedly have higher career satisfaction](#).

Tips for creating teacher leadership opportunities:

- 1. Identify gaps in your current leadership structure/capacity:** Teacher leadership roles shouldn't be assigned without a clear understanding of how those roles will support the vision and goals of your school or district. Is your instructional coach overburdened by providing instructional support to an increased number of new teachers? Are teachers lacking necessary support in implementing a new curriculum? Is the school struggling to build and sustain connections with parents, caretakers, and community? Whatever the gaps are in your current leadership's capacity and skill sets, identifying them is a necessary starting point for understanding the roles teacher leaders can meaningfully fill.
- 2. Create a pipeline for leadership roles:** Rather than individually choosing teachers who receive leadership roles and teachers who do not, which can foster divisiveness and animosity, it can be helpful to create a clear pathway for teachers to access leadership roles. That might look like attending particular trainings, demonstrating aptitude for relevant skills, or gaining a particular set or duration of teaching experiences.

An explicit path to leadership opportunities helps promote more equitable and fair access.

- 3. Provide teacher leaders time, capacity, and/or compensation to fulfill leadership roles:** Teacher leadership roles should not feel like one more thing on top of an already heavy workload, otherwise there is a risk of increased burnout. Before establishing teacher leadership roles, consider how to make them more accessible: Are you able to offer an additional planning period for teachers to perform leadership responsibilities? Are you able to offer teacher leaders a stipend to compensate them for the additional workload? Are you able to substitute an existing responsibility (i.e. writing lesson plans) with a leadership responsibility (i.e. supporting new teachers in writing lesson plans)?



Related BetterLesson Professional Offerings

- Webinar: [Teacher Leadership Career Ladder: Improve Teacher Retention and Early Career Success](#)
- Webinar: [3 Pillars of Teacher Retention and Sustainable Growth](#)

Give the Gift of Time and Capacity

Outside of teaching, educators are tasked with a lot of responsibilities with minimal time to carry them out. From writing lesson plans to assessing and grading student work, calling parents and caretakers to completing paperwork, there is often simply not enough time for teachers to do their jobs well. One of the most straightforward, but admittedly challenging, ways that administrators can recharge and sustain their teachers is with the gift of more time and capacity.

What does the research say?

- ◆ [Years of survey data](#) reveal increased planning time as a top priority for teachers.
- ◆ [Recent survey data](#) indicates that over **50% of teachers** are currently working more than one job.

Tips for giving teachers more time:

- 1. Scale back teacher tasks:** Think about where you can reduce or eliminate teacher tasks to provide more time for planning, grading, and teacher collaboration. Whether it's minimizing lesson plan requirements or providing time or support for completion of paperwork and administrative tasks, school leaders can have a significant impact on where teachers are able to focus their time and energy.
- 2. Encourage the use of technology:** In the [emerging age of artificial intelligence \(AI\) technologies](#), there are opportunities for AI to minimize time spent on various tasks. Educators can use AI technologies to create outlines of lesson plans, draft emails to parents and caretakers, or scaffold content to different learning levels. Offering training on how to meaningfully incorporate technology in schools could support teachers who have varying levels of familiarity and comfort with new technologies.
- 3. Explore alternative schedules that offer teachers additional planning time:** Offering teachers more time within a fixed schedule is a challenging task, and school schedules are complex and contingent on layers of requirements, such as mandatory courses, lunch, passing time between classes, and more. However, with some creativity, dedication, and

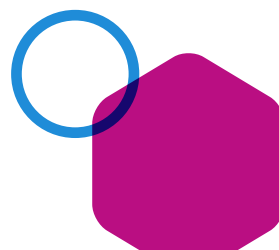
collaboration, alternative schedules are possible. There are [models of school schedules](#) that give teachers more time for planning, collaboration, and professional development.

4. Explore ways to increase compensation for teachers:

While school budgets are no doubt complicated, the issue of teacher compensation is one that needs to be integrated into the conversation of teacher time. Lack of adequate compensation leads to teachers working multiple jobs or leaving the profession entirely for higher-paying careers. Raising teacher salaries is a critical and larger issue, and it often requires multiple stakeholders: teachers' unions, state legislators, school administrators, school boards, and more. There are, however, opportunities to explore additional compensation that are more immediately attainable, such as offering stipends for leadership roles or applying for grants to compensate teachers for professional development or [micro-credentials](#).

Related BetterLesson Professional Offerings

- One of BetterLesson's core focus areas in professional development is [Meaningful Tech Integration](#). We can partner with your school or district to provide hands-on support, training, and coaching on utilizing technology to support teacher practice and student learning.
- Workshop: [Integrating Technology Meaningfully to Support Learning](#)



Conclusion

Recharging, reenergizing, and sustaining teachers goes deeper than teacher retention.

“Retaining teachers is not just about making them feel better - it’s about developing them long term for them to feel successful in this job, and that will make them want to stick around. So it’s not just about the care piece, it’s about the development and care piece.”

Romain Bertrand

BetterLesson’s Solution Design Director, [Teacher Retention Webinar](#)

Teachers need holistically supportive environments to thrive, to help our students thrive. That means environments where they feel appreciated and validated, where they receive the professional support they need to be confident in their practice, where they have time and space for collaboration and for planning.

Ultimately, investing in professional wellbeing and development of educators is investing in classrooms where students can learn and thrive.

The path to sustainably recharging educators is windy, multifaceted, and never ending, but it is a path upon which all school leaders must embark strategically, boldly, and creatively.



Resources

- [Job-Related Stress Threatens the Teacher Supply: Key Findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey](#)
- [For K-12 Schools Struggling With Staff and Teacher Retention, These Best Practices Can Help](#)
- [Understanding how COVID-19 has Changed Teachers’ Chances of Remaining in the Classroom](#)
- [How the pandemic has changed teachers’ commitment to remaining in the classroom](#)
- [Job-Embedded Coaching for Teachers Improves Retention, and More](#)
- [Building a school climate that makes teachers want to stay](#)
- [Teacher Leadership Career Ladder: Improve Teacher Retention and Early Career Success](#)
- [Coaching the Coach: Why Educational Leaders Need Coaches Too](#)



BetterLesson connects K-12 educators with comprehensive professional learning solutions that help them thrive in an increasingly complex world. We have partnered with more than 30,000 educators across 47 states, plus D.C., Puerto Rico, and five countries internationally. Through research-based professional development centered on student outcomes, educators gain the necessary skills to create meaningful student-centered learning experiences that meet all students' needs.



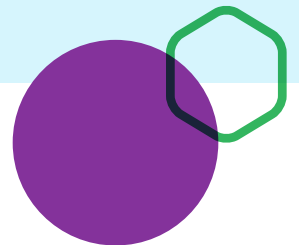
Our comprehensive learning plans incorporate in-person, virtual, group, and self-directed learning experiences throughout the full school year, creating scaffolds of support aligned with how adult learners actually learn. By intentionally aligning professional learning to strategic goals, we enable districts to unlock the full potential of every educator, and thus, every student.



Get in Touch

Keep educators in the classroom and connected to their passion with personalized support for Principals and District Leaders implementing these strategies.

Get in touch and begin building a personalized professional learning plan for your school or district.



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