



# Key Strategies for Improving Teacher Retention





# Teacher Retention

Choosing to become a teacher is not just picking a profession—it's a lifetime commitment to the development of young people. Although every educator has their own reasons for choosing the profession, common responses from teachers include:

- Working with children
- Making a meaningful impact in the community
- Changing the lives of students
- Possessing a passion for learning
- Wanting to improve the state of education

For whatever reason one decides to enter the profession, there is no denying that teachers are hugely influential figures in children's lives. Impactful teachers will be remembered into adulthood. Every one of us was taught by a community of caring, loving professionals who helped mold us into the people we are today.



# Rewards Of Working In Education

Gaining close relationships with students is a powerful benefit that drives many into teaching as a career choice. Teachers describe feelings of pride and joy in watching their students grow up and change the world around them.

And students never forget the teachers that impacted their lives and helped shape them into the people they are. As Jay Floyd, Director of Customer Success at CENTEGIX, says, “There’s nothing better than a kid coming back to visit a favorite teacher. Not once does a kid come back to visit their former math book, but always the favorite teacher.”

Jay Floyd spent 34 years working in schools—22 of which were spent in administration. He understands the perspectives of teachers and administrators and truly believes that empowered, passionate, caring teachers make up the core of a successful school.

As principal of Lowndes High School in Valdosta, Georgia, Mr. Floyd saw the graduation rate rise from 66.8% to 82.9%, and the discipline rate decrease by 50%. After 12 years as Principal and Assistant Principal of Cartersville High School in Cartersville, Georgia, CHS became a *USA Today* Top 30 School in Mr. Floyd’s last year.

Mr. Floyd says, “teaching is as rewarding as it’s always been,” reflecting on the lifelong benefits of working in education, cultivating relationships with students, and witnessing his tangible impact in the school environments he worked in. Like germinating seeds, relationships between students and staff need the right environment to thrive. Structure, discipline, and safety make up the soil from which the sprout emerges.



It grows with the dedication to the development of teachers and students alike and a community that is inclusive, welcoming, and appreciative. Teachers find their careers most rewarding when they feel empowered, protected, and valued.

## Safety As A Prerequisite

New and experienced teachers alike are concerned about how safe they will be in school. School shootings remain a concern for many as we witness recurring violence in our country and in our schools. But far more often, teachers and staff are handling incidents far less serious, though still disruptive.

Although everyday episodes don't make headlines, they should not be downplayed. Potential teacher recruits may avoid certain schools and districts known to have inordinate behavior problems. Many teachers and staff are leaving the profession due to a feeling of insecurity in their workplace. And students trying to learn may be constantly disturbed by their classmates and become frustrated or even afraid to come to school.

Security also means knowing that the administration has your back. Strong school leadership empowers teachers with the confidence that is necessary for creating boundaries and discipline in the classroom. Administration can show up for teachers by spending time in their classrooms, gaining insight into the behavior issues teachers are confronting, and helping teachers address issues before they become unmanageable or even dangerous. In addition, consistency in discipline enforcement by administrative support is key. Teachers need to know that they are supported by administrators at every step, and that consequences are fair and administered evenly.


## Covid And School Safety


District administrators and safety leaders are concerned about the effects of quarantine and isolation on the social-emotional learning of students. Less structure and social interaction during periods of virtual/remote learning compounded with economic challenges and stress experienced by many families cause students to act out in the classrooms and on campuses more than before.

After reopening for in-person learning, teachers are reporting an [increase in behavior issues and a lack of response from administrators](#). Many former teachers and staff cite pandemic-related stress as a reason for pursuing a new career path.

## Other Issues In The Classroom

Behavior issues are not the only concerns teachers have for their classrooms and can impact teacher retention. Students have a wide variety of medical conditions and special needs, and teachers must be equipped and supported in handling them.





Teachers also fulfill other roles, such as playground or bus duty, where injuries and incidents can and do occur regularly. Administrators should provide tools and training for a variety of emergencies and campus locations including:

- Medical incidents
- Inclement or dangerous weather
- Intruders or active shooters
- Threats from parents or other family members

By creating safe spaces, teachers and administrators support an environment where students can learn, teachers can grow, and long-lasting, impactful relationships can be nurtured between students and teachers.

## Teacher Recruitment

Teacher retention begins with thoughtful teacher recruitment.

As teachers leave the profession or retire, the remaining teachers, staff, and students feel the burden of understaffed. In addition to normal teacher attrition due to retirements and relocation, teachers are leaving at record numbers due to burnout, a clear indicator that something has to give.

Retaining teachers is at the top of everyone's mind as the nation experiences a teacher shortage that is causing some districts to take drastic measures in the way they recruit new candidates and operate their schools.

Some steps schools can take to recruit candidates that are a good fit:

- ① **Pay above the state salary scale**—even 5% makes a huge difference.
- ② **Assist with housing**—living within the district is associated with higher teacher retention.
- ③ **Work with local colleges in your area**—recruit new graduates and build your reputation among students studying education.

## The Teacher Interview

A job interview is an opportunity for both the candidate and the school to make a first impression and distinguish themselves from the competition. The interview can also reveal whether the candidate and the school are compatible. Items to discuss should vary to ensure agreement on all levels.

Some examples of things to discuss in a teacher interview:

- ① **The school's safety and security plan**—what systems are in place to ensure the safety of teachers and staff?
- ② **Professional development**—how is the administration committed to teachers' growth long-term?
- ③ **Data**—how is data used to support instruction and identify students with issues or specific learning needs?
- ④ **Engagement**—how do the school and teachers work together to keep kids motivated and enthusiastic about learning?
- ⑤ **Technology**—how does the school integrate technology, both into its systems and curriculum?

Look for a sense of what motivates the candidate to teach and their level of commitment to students' academic, emotional, and social development. The most important trait for a teacher is truly caring for their students. You can train a lot of things, but you cannot train people to care. When you recruit a teacher with a genuine concern for the children in their classroom, do everything you can to retain them.

## Teacher Retention

Of course, you cannot prevent teachers from leaving. Schools across the country are suffering from alarming rates of teacher turnover.

Unavoidable reasons for teacher turnover include:







- Relocation
- Retirement
- Health Concerns
- Life Changes

But there are things the administration can focus on to retain more teachers—a top priority for school leadership anywhere. Successful schools have tradition and organization at their core. Retaining teachers who care about the traditions of the school ensures the traditions live on. Relationships between students and teachers can continue beyond the classroom together when familiar faces remain in the building for years. [And, as one would expect in any profession, experience can be a valuable teacher.](#) Teachers with more time in the classroom may be better prepared to navigate issues and impart a deeper impact than newer teachers on students.

Supporting teachers in the early stages of their career until their retirement will encourage teachers to remain with the school, as will providing critical support for the challenges they are bound to face over the years.

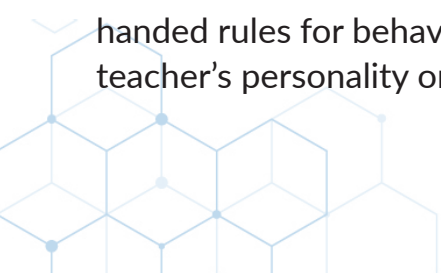
This support can take many forms, including:

- ① Classroom autonomy for teachers—with support and assistance as needed.
- ② Extensive training on de-escalating tension in the classroom, medical emergencies, and serving students with all needs and abilities.
- ③ Promoting a close-knit community of teachers to maintain a warm and inclusive work environment.

## Classroom Environment

Classrooms thrive when expectations are clear and discipline is consistent. As Mr. Floyd says, “What you tolerate is what you encourage.” Having consistent behavior expectations with firm disciplinary plans for students is a foundation of classroom order and an environment conducive to learning.

These values could be a part of the school’s motto. They should be enforced in each classroom and all common areas like the bus, playground, halls, and cafeteria. By maintaining even-handed rules for behavior, more uniform discipline can be maintained, regardless of a given teacher’s personality or teaching style.



Regulations for behavior can be made clear to students by:

- Teachers and staff modeling expected behavior
- Using rituals and routines to reinforce expectations
- Recognizing positive student behavior
- Implementing swift consequences for misbehavior
- Sharing behavior contracts with parents and guardians

Training all staff—including counselors, deans, and administrators, to implement the same disciplinary procedures across the entire school is best for everyone involved. Students benefit from a common approach from all of the adults they encounter. Parents and guardians can help instill values at home so that they become second nature to the children. Teachers can refine their classroom management strategies from watching their colleagues.

However, teachers also have a desire to be autonomous. As Mr. Floyd says, they are the “CEOs of their classrooms.” Leadership can tailor initial teacher training to promote learning and equip teachers with a set of tools for handling behavioral incidents. This allows teachers to feel ownership of their space and empowered in their roles.

Carving out time for leadership to visit classrooms is the best way for administrators to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each teacher, the most common issues in each class, and how to build a classroom environment where every student and teacher can thrive.

Seeing leaders in the classroom helps students and teachers feel more connected to school leadership. Students will likely behave better if they not only know the principal is nearby, but have a first-hand acquaintance with them. Teachers who know leadership is on their side feel more comfortable asking for help as they navigate the trials and tribulations of modern-day education. Administrators who trust their teachers treat them accordingly, leading to better communication when help is needed.

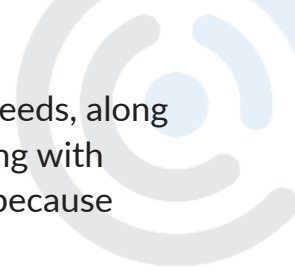
The environment is central to a satisfying workplace. When teachers feel safe and valued, they stay.

## Professional Development

Across professional fields, employees long for a career where they can grow. Providing ongoing support for career development, training in pedagogy and behavior management, and other growth opportunities creates conditions that teachers will not want to leave.

Some valuable professional development topics that contribute to a healthy work and classroom environment include:



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- ① **Whole child training**—understanding children’s physical and psychological needs, along with tangible plans to support them, can help new teachers adjust to working with children and remind experienced teachers that students may be struggling because these needs aren’t met.
  - ② **Methodology and pedagogy**—teachers are passionate about their subject matter and love to learn new ways to deliver the material. Even experienced teachers appreciate some new ideas to shake things up in their classrooms.
  - ③ **Self-care**—just as children have physical and psychological needs, teachers do also. We are all human, after all. Teachers are at risk for compassion fatigue and burnout, and are often operating under a lot of stress. Covering classes when a teacher is out, honoring teacher planning periods, canceling meetings when you can, and teacher-led PD opportunities help teachers care for themselves and show them that leadership is invested in their well-being.

Offering schoolwide professional development sessions can build community among teachers and staff. Taking time away from their classrooms to discuss what they are passionate about and learn ways to be better can be so beneficial.

But, to resonate with everyone, these sessions tend to be more general. A way of showing teachers how valued they are is by offering tailored professional development support with behavior specialists and interventionists or sending teachers to training tailored to their unique interests and concerns. Individual professional development, coupled with general professional development, supports teachers with their unique interests and concerns while offering opportunities to bond with their colleagues.

## Creating Community Among Teachers

Having friends at work increases job satisfaction, employee engagement, and productivity while decreasing employee turnover.

Here are a few ways administrators can prioritize creating an environment that promotes collaboration and friendship:

- ① **Celebrate successes!** Let teachers know their hard work is noticed and appreciated. By sharing this with their colleagues, they will have the chance to celebrate each other.
- ② **Listen to teachers.** Create space for a candid discussion about difficult topics, and take action where possible.
- ③ **Genuine demonstrations of appreciation.** Small gestures go a long way. Provide donuts and coffee one morning per week, or host outings for teachers. A gesture that brings teachers together socially expressing genuine gratitude can improve school culture for teachers.

# Conclusion

People become teachers because they are dedicated to making the world a better place and they love working with children as well as learning themselves. Teaching is an extremely rewarding career.

But teachers face challenges. Strong school leadership, from principals to superintendents, can support a rewarding culture where teachers are free to shape the classroom environment, pursue professional development and community among teachers, and promote a safe and secure environment for all.

A basis for this is providing the foundation of safety, training, and support. [CENTEGIX's CrisisAlert™ badge](#) offers a level of security beyond most school safety systems. Teachers know that a quick response in an emergency is the press of a button away. This gives both new and experienced teachers peace of mind and can assist with teacher recruitment. Mr. Floyd shares just how influential the [CENTEGIX](#) school safety system can be in candidates' decision-making. "In fact, it seals the deal for many teachers in the hiring process of which district to choose."



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