

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

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Retaining Educators

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Retaining Educators

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Retaining Educators

This past school year was hard. Issues and concerns in the world of education seemed to exacerbate during the COVID-19 pandemic. An issue that remains prominent is teacher recruitment and retention.

The ability to attract and retain teachers whose deep hope for Christian education aligns with an institution's mission and vision is becoming increasingly difficult for many school leaders. The problem lies on both ends: data indicates that the number of people entering university teacher preparation programs continues to dwindle, while teacher attrition rates continue to rise with approximately 8% of all teachers leaving the profession annually (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, D. 2016). In addition, up to 41% of teachers leave the classroom before completing their fifth year (Ercole, 2019). Private schools are not exempt from these challenges.

There are several reasons teacher retention should be a priority for Christian school leaders. Keeping good teachers affects students' academic growth, staff morale, the ability to align classroom practices with the school's mission and vision, and teacher replacement costs. Bottomline, high teacher retention is critical because it is good for students and their learning (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wychoff, 2013).

There is no singular response that will increase teacher retention rates within a school. However, Christian school leaders might consider the following factors to positively influence teacher retention in their communities:

1. **Potential for leadership development.** One of the responsibilities of a principal is to develop leadership within the schoolhouse. School leaders must identify people on their staff who have different or even stronger gifts than them and leverage those gifts for the good of the community. Asking teachers to lead professional development or faculty meetings, help with scheduling, or mentor new teachers are some ways that a principal can begin to develop leadership among staff. *How are you identifying leaders within your school, and what opportunities are you providing to develop their leadership potential?*
2. **Amplification of teacher voice.** Heads of school are ultimately responsible for decisions that are made, but where possible, they can and should seek teacher input and suggestions as part of that process. Teacher voice not only has a positive impact on school climate, but Ingersoll suggests that "teachers who have more control over key schoolwide and classroom decisions have few problems with student misbehavior, show more collegiality and cooperation among teacher and administrators, have a more committed and engaged teaching staff, and do a better job of retaining teachers" (2007). Giving teachers a voice may not only impact

teacher retention, but school culture. *How often and to what degree do you seek out teacher voices?*

3. **Strong sense of community.** Though surrounded by people every day, teaching can be a vulnerable, lonely profession. It is essential that teachers experience community outside of the classroom with their colleagues. Formational practices such as prayer and singing together are integral in most Christian schools, but finding ways to embed other community-building practices into the week will help teachers see that they are part of a larger body. *How often does your staff eat together, play together, laugh together, or learn together? Are there some staff who feel they are not part of the community, and how might you enfold them?*
4. **Salary and benefits.** In too many Christian school communities, it is frowned upon to talk about salary and benefits because Christian school teaching is “ministry,” after all. Yet, the reality for some teachers is that they cannot afford to live in the neighborhood or city where their school is located. While it is typical in many professions for people to switch companies or vocations for financial reasons, Christian school teachers who seek out other jobs for those same reasons may be perceived as lacking commitment or not having a strong sense of calling. Whereas money may or may not affect teachers’ decisions to stay or leave, Daniel Pink states that “the best use of money as a motivator is to pay people enough to take the issue of money off the table” (2009). *Are salary and benefits an issue at your school? Should they be? Does your school provide a just and living wage for teachers so that they are able to live in the neighborhood in which the school is located?*
5. **Culture of care.** Teachers want and need to be cared for by their school principal. While most principals care deeply for their staff, they need to be intentional in demonstrating that care. Principals sometimes assume what care looks like for each teacher, but the way teachers feel appreciated varies. For some teachers, care looks like giving them the gift of time by covering a recess duty; for others, it means notes of affirmation or visiting their class on a regular basis and providing kind, specific, and helpful feedback. Consider being explicit in asking your teachers: “What does it look like for you to be cared for by me?” Principals can also walk the halls and do daily check-ins at the end of the day with teachers in their classrooms, informal interactions that can lead to stronger relationships. *Is your staff being cared for in ways meaningful to them?*

Whereas there are obviously factors beyond a principal’s control that affect teacher retention, school leaders and boards can apply retention strategies for the well-being of the staff, the students, and the entire school community.

We have good work to do, friends! May we seek to love our community members well, cultivating a culture of care within our schools and beyond.

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