

Leveraging School Climate & Creating Positive Working Conditions



Problem Overview

The work of the American Federation of Teachers Teacher and School Staff Shortage Task Force found that the shortage of teachers has resulted from the lack of quality and professional working conditions and shortage of respecting and paying teachers.

A recent [study](#) conducted by Rand Corp. found that, “teachers and principals reported worse well-being than other working adults.” Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, research indicated that enrollment in teacher preparation programs had dropped 35 percent between 2009-14 and that 30percent of teachers leave the profession within the first five years of their employment (American Federation of Teachers, July 2022).

School climate reflects how teachers, students, and parents currently feel about a certain school. Research suggests that teachers tend to stay longer at schools with positive climates and that a positive climate can improve a school’s ability to hire and retain quality educators (Wagner, A., March 2022). One research paper shows that some educators describe school climate as having four dimensions – academic, social, physical, and affective. The academic dimension refers to the academic expectations, instructional norms, and school beliefs and practices. The social dimension refers to the type of communication and interactions among students and teachers. The physical dimension refers to the quality of the physical building and access to materials. The final dimension refers to feelings and attitudes, such as high morale, and academic and social growth (Gonder, P.O; Hymes, D., 1994). Another research paper suggests that to overcome the teacher shortage, there must be a focus on four Cs and four Ts. The four Cs are climate, culture, conditions, and compensation. The four Ts are tools, time, trust, and training (American Federation of teachers, 2022).

Strategy Summary

The following suggested research-based strategies are proven to leverage positive school climate and work conditions:

- Implement effective schoolwide policies and practices related to student behavior. Training and equipping teachers with tools and skills to support students will reduce student negative behavior. Teachers struggling with classroom management need [extra support](#).
- Fund mental health programs to provide support for students and teachers.

It is important that schools provide students and staff with access to mental health resources and support on school grounds.

- Provide staff with affordable health care options. Raising premiums, copays, and deductibles and shifting costs of health care to employees have become evident in both public and private sectors. Data show that the total cost of public-school workers and their family’s health care coverage



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increased by 45% between 2010 and 2021 (American Federation of Teachers, 2022).

- Leverage school climate survey to identify areas on which to focus.

Teacher and student surveys are effective tools for assessing working conditions and school climate and identifying trends in the retention of high-performing teachers. The [5Essentials Survey](#), which is administered across the state, can help leaders identify the primary

Illinois 5Essentials Survey

causes of teacher attrition. Surveys can provide valuable information on important factors that drive teacher attrition in high-need schools, including instructional culture, staff collaboration, and leadership quality. Identifying these drivers can enable schools to develop targeted strategies to address them and improve teacher retention rates.

Examples

Washington, D.C., administered the [DC Staffing Collaborative Project](#), a voluntary effort in which districts were invited to participate in a state-funded analysis and to voluntarily submit teacher-level data on preparation, development, evaluation, retention, and compensation. Additionally, districts administer a working conditions survey to each teacher; the data are reported to a third-party research partner instead of the state.

In exchange for their participation, districts receive regular and timely reports on relevant topics, such as school culture, staffing, and differential retention. These reports provide valuable insights that can help districts address gaps in equity planning, such as root-cause planning and research-based strategies to close gaps.

Sources

Steiner et al. (Restoring Teacher and Principal Well-Being Is an Essential Step for Rebuilding Schools: Findings from the State of the American Teacher and State of the American Principal Surveys. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2022.) https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-4.html.

Gonder, Peggy Odell. "Improving School Climate & Culture. AASA Critical Issues Report NO 27, 1994.

[Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?](#) Report from the AFT Teacher and School Staff Shortage Task Force, July, 2022.