

Addressing Working Conditions to Improve Teacher Retention: An Exploration of the Research

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Teacher mobility and attrition negatively impact student achievement¹ and result in significant costs for districts needing to recruit and onboard new teachers.² Though some teacher attrition is natural and unavoidable (e.g., moving away from the district, retirement, and other life changes), factors within a district's control, such as teacher working conditions, may influence teachers' decisions to stay or leave.

REL Northwest is supporting the Lower Kuskokwim School District in Alaska to improve teacher retention in the district through the [Alaska Improving Teacher Retention and Recruitment in Rural Schools partnership](#). To ground the work, REL Northwest gathered existing research that examined the relationship between teacher working conditions and teacher retention.³

From the studies, REL Northwest identified eight categories of working conditions that may influence a teacher's decision to stay or leave. District leaders may consider developing strategies to address these factors to support teacher retention.

Engaging with Families and Communities⁴

Teachers may be more likely to stay if there is positive family and community engagement, such as:

- Schools have a strong connection with community organizations to provide resources and supports for students during and outside of school time, such as food insecurities, social and mental health services, and recreational activities.
- Parents are involved in meaningful ways, such as volunteering in the classroom.

School Leadership⁵

Teachers may be more likely to stay if there is supportive school leadership, such as:

- Teachers have high levels of trust in their principal.
- The principal provides meaningful feedback to teachers and serves as a supportive instructional leader.

¹ Atteberry et al. (2017)

² Borman & Dowling (2017)

³ A limited number of studies were found that used a correlational methodology to provide information on the strength of the relationship between teacher working conditions and teacher retention. Additional research is needed to fully understand the relationship. For the full reference list visit https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/northwest/pdf/230301_Teacher%20Working%20Conditions_References-508.pdf

⁴ Allensworth et al. (2009), Barnett et al. (2021), Ulferts (2016)

⁵ Allensworth et al. (2009), Barnett et al. (2021), Borman & Dowling (2008), Boyd et al. (2011), Bozeman et al. (2013), Toropova et al. (2021)

Managing Student Conduct⁶

Teachers may be more likely to stay if there is consistent and equitable management of student conduct, such as:

- Schools implement and uphold policies and practices to address student conduct issues and ensure a safe school environment.
- Teachers share an understanding of school rules and respond in consistent ways to student conduct.

Teacher Leadership⁷

Teachers may be more likely to stay if they are actively engaged in leadership opportunities, such as:

- Teachers are involved in decisions that impact classroom and school practices.
- Teachers are recognized as educational experts by peers and school leaders.

School Facilities and Resources⁸

Teachers may be more likely to stay if school facilities and resources are conducive to supporting teaching and learning, such as:

- Teachers have the workspace, instructional materials, and supplies needed to deliver quality instruction.
- Teachers have sufficient access to instructional technology to meet the needs of their students.

Instructional Practices and Support⁹

Teachers may be more likely to stay if they are collectively supported to implement instructional practices, such as:

- District and school leaders ensure that instructional initiatives are connected and coherently built on each other.
- Teachers develop shared practices and commit to students' academic and social development.

Use of Time¹⁰

Teachers may be more likely to stay if they have time for teaching and planning, such as:

- Schools protect teachers' time to work together to share ideas and develop materials for instruction.
- School leaders provide teachers with release times to observe other teachers to improve instructional practices.

Professional Development¹¹

Teachers may be more likely to stay if they are provided with relevant professional development opportunities, such as:

- New teachers are provided training and support to make them feel welcome in the school and the community.
- Districts and schools provide professional development focused on time for teachers to collaborate around instructional practice.

⁶. Allensworth et al. (2009), Barnett et al. (2021), Boyd et al. (2011), Bozeman et al. (2013), Toropova et al. (2021), Ulferts (2016).

⁷. Barnett et al. (2021), Borman & Dowling (2008), Toropova et al. (2021), Ulferts (2016).

⁸. Allensworth et al. (2009), Boyd et al. (2011), Bozeman et al. (2013), Ulferts (2016).

⁹. Allensworth et al. (2009), Barnett et al. (2021), Borman & Dowling (2008), Boyd et al. (2011), Ulferts (2016).

¹⁰. Allensworth et al. (2009), Barnett et al. (2021), Borman & Dowling (2008), Boyd et al. (2011), Bozeman et al. (2013), Ulferts (2016).

¹¹. Allensworth et al. (2009), Barnett et al. (2021), Borman & Dowling (2008), Boyd et al. (2011), Bozeman et al. (2013), Toropova et al. (2021).