

Do Teachers Feel Like They Matter? A New Report Connects Low Morale to Severe Educator Burnout

Gallup survey finds only one in three K-12 educators feels a strong sense of mattering at school, with fewer than half of undervalued staff planning to remain in education.

WASHINGTON, D.C., Oct. 14, 2026 — A new report released today by the [Walton Family Foundation, Gallup and The Mattering Institute](#) shows that educator burnout is deeply tied to whether K-12 teachers feel valued by their school communities. The findings show that one in five teachers doesn't think they matter much or at all and barely a third say they matter a great deal. Among those who lack a sense of mattering, 68% are frequently burned out, and fewer than half plan to remain in education.

The low levels of mattering persist across gender, race, ethnicity, subject area and grade level, demonstrating that the challenge is systemic to school environments rather than tied to any individual demographic.

The findings arrive at a pivotal moment as the initial energy of back-to-school gives way to the "disillusionment phase," the mid-fall period when educator morale often begins to dip. The study, *The Mattering Gap Among K-12 Educators*, evaluates educator experiences using the SAID framework created by Jennifer B. Wallace, assessing four core dimensions: Significance, Appreciation, Invested In and Depended On.

"The findings of our study reveal a troubling gap: too few of America's K-12 educators feel they truly matter. But they also point to a path forward, with simple, research-backed practices that school leaders, parents and communities can use to help educators feel valued, supported and able to see the difference they make," said Jennifer Wallace, *New York Times* bestselling author and founder of The Mattering Institute. "The people who help our children know they matter deserve to know they matter, too."

Educator Workforce Retention

The survey findings point directly to a growing workforce retention challenge, with one in four educators reporting they are likely to leave their current positions within the next 12 months. Among educators who feel they matter little or not at all, fewer than half expect to remain in education long term.

The "Invested In" dimension has the strongest connection to staff turnover. The percentage of educators planning to leave their jobs drops from 41% among those with low investment scores down to 12% among those who feel supported. Yet only 19% of educators say someone in their building actively invests in their professional growth, and just 16% feel the school as an organization cares about their future.

Making this turnover risk even more acute is the emotional deficit inside schools: two-thirds of educators say they always or often give more to their school community than they receive in return. Frequent burnout spikes to 57% among educators who feel their daily contributions go unreturned, compared with just 13% among those who rarely or never experience that imbalance.

The Appreciation Deficit

The survey found that feeling appreciated emerged as the single strongest driver of whether an educator feels they matter. Nearly three in four educators with high appreciation scores say they matter a great deal, compared with just 7% among those with low scores.

While 42% of educators report feeling appreciated by fellow teachers, only 24% believe their school as an organization prioritizes educator appreciation. Further, recognition from supervisors carries an outsized impact on mattering, yet only one in four educators receives praise from a school leader weekly or more often.

By comparison, 47% receive regular appreciation from their students. And the research shows that an educator's sense of mattering is closely tied to how they engage with students, with 85% citing helping a

student work through a difficult challenge and 74% citing seeing students perform well academically as moments that make them feel they matter a great deal.

“Behind every student who feels seen, supported and capable is an educator who helps make that possible,” said Romy Drucker, director of the Education Program at the Walton Family Foundation. “This research reminds us that when we invest in educators and ensure they feel valued, we’re also building stronger schools where every student can thrive.”

How to Show Teachers They Matter

The report identifies actionable ways schools and families can build a stronger sense of mattering among educators:

- **Making appreciation systemic, not incidental.** Formal practices that make recognition a routine part of school culture, rather than something that depends on individual colleagues, may close that gap.
- **Equipping supervisors to recognize educators regularly.** Because supervisor recognition has an outsized relationship with mattering, even though it happens least often, training and expectations that make this a consistent part of a supervisor’s role could have meaningful effects.
- **Investing visibly in educators’ growth and futures.** Since Invested In carries the strongest link to retention, schools may benefit from making career growth and development a clear, ongoing part of how they support educators, not something educators have to reach out for on their own.
- **Balancing what is asked of educators with what they receive.** Given how sharply burnout rises as the giving-versus-receiving imbalance grows, schools might look at whether educators who are asked to do more, such as classroom teachers, or those with a decade or more of experience, are also receiving support that matches those demands.
- **Creating room for creative practice.** With frequent “making” associated with a stronger sense of mattering, incorporating creative, hands-on activities into professional practice may offer schools a low-cost way to strengthen another part of that ecosystem.

Methodology

Results are based on a Gallup Panel™ web survey conducted July 28-Aug. 14, 2026, with a sample of 1,952 U.S. educators working in public K-12 schools living in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. For this survey, Gallup defined K-12 educators as K-12 staff who identified as classroom teachers, teaching assistants, paraprofessionals, substitute teachers or other K-12 staff who work directly with students in classrooms. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based panel of U.S. adults who are randomly selected using address-based sampling methodology. Gallup also recruits using random digit-dial phone interviews that cover landlines and cellphones. For the total sample of 1,952 U.S. educators, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

About The Mattering Institute

The Mattering Institute is a mission-driven social impact enterprise that works with organizations across sectors to create cultures that value people for who they are and what they do.

Grounded in decades of peer-reviewed psychological research, our approach translates science into practical, evidence-based strategies that support wellbeing and strengthen engagement, retention, and performance.

About the Walton Family Foundation

The Walton Family Foundation is, at its core, a family-led foundation. Three generations of the descendants of our founders, Sam and Helen Walton, and their spouses work together to lead the foundation and create access to opportunity for people and communities. We work in three areas: improving education, protecting rivers and oceans and the communities they support, and investing in our home region of Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta. To learn more, visit waltonfamilyfoundation.org and follow us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and [X](#).

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.