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# Gallup's Perspective on Understanding the K-12 Teacher Experience



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## Executive Highlights

43%

of K-12 teachers are actively looking or watching for another job opportunity.

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31%

of K-12 teachers are engaged at work.

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39%

of K-12 teachers are frequently burned out.

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62%

of K-12 teachers are thriving in their overall lives.

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23%

of K-12 teachers strongly agree they have the materials and equipment they need to do their work right.

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16%

of K-12 teachers strongly agree their performance is managed in a way that motivates them to do outstanding work.

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## Introduction

Many education leaders once assumed that K-12 teachers would always stay within the profession — regardless of hardship — because educators believe so strongly in the mission and purpose of their work.

Districts competed primarily with each other for top educator talent, and a rise in resignation and early retirement rates was not on the radar.

However, it's clear that the job description of a K-12 educator has been widely disrupted by new expectations, evolving resource needs and changing technology. While teaching has always been a demanding profession, recent changes have made it even more difficult and stressful.

### How Are Teachers *Really* Doing?

Compared to employees working in other occupations, K-12 teachers face greater challenges in various ways. They are...

- less likely to have the materials and equipment they need to do their work right
- more likely to experience frequent burnout
- less likely to be treated with respect at work

Despite the many challenges K-12 educators face, they also experience some meaningful upsides to being in their role. Compared to employees working in other occupations, K-12 teachers are...

- more likely to feel connected to the mission or purpose of their organization
- more likely to be thriving in their overall wellbeing
- more likely to have a best friend at work

Amid these highs and lows of K-12 teaching lies a pedagogical shift in the profession. Education leaders can no longer assume that the mission, purpose and meaningfulness of the teaching role are enough to make their employees stay.

The long-held assumption that K-12 teachers will remain in their role because they love working with kids is **no longer valid**.

**It's time to rethink** the day-to-day experiences of K-12 educators at work.

# A New Perspective on K-12 Teacher Turnover

The primary concern about K-12 teacher turnover was once competition with other districts — but a growing number of K-12 teachers are now choosing to leave the profession entirely, introducing early retirement and other industries as very real competition for teaching talent.

## Trends From Gallup's American Workforce Surveys

Gallup has measured the voice of America's educators in ongoing, nationally representative surveys for decades. We identified 845 K-12 educators from a 2019 Gallup workforce survey who also completed a Gallup workforce survey in 2023.

Over these five years, 34% of these respondents left the workforce completely, and 20% were still employed but left the K-12 teaching profession for another occupation. Forty-six percent of these respondents remained a K-12 teacher in 2023.<sup>1</sup>

Survey data from 2019 shows meaningful differences in the work experiences of the K-12 teachers who stayed in the profession compared to those who left.

Those who remained teachers were 49% more likely than those who didn't to strongly agree they received recognition or praise for doing good work in the past seven days, and they were 61% more likely to strongly agree someone at work had talked to them about their progress in the past six months.

Forty-four percent of those who stayed in their roles were engaged at work, compared to 34% of those who left.

## Perspectives From Former K-12 Teachers

To better understand the reasons behind K-12 teacher turnover, Gallup researchers conducted in-depth interviews with ten educators who left K-12 teaching to pursue another occupation. The educators we interviewed had an average of 14 years of teaching experience and worked across elementary, middle and high school classrooms in public and private schools. Perspectives from these interviews are shared throughout this report.

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<sup>1</sup> These metrics are not nationally representative indicators of educator turnover over a five-year time frame. There were some educators in our 2019 survey whose current work situation is unknown, meaning we cannot determine the exact five-year career changes for U.S. educators overall with the data we currently have. We share these estimates to demonstrate various types of employment changes that K-12 teachers may realistically consider or experience over a five-year time frame.



## FORMER K-12 TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON

# Reasons for Turnover

"You work a full day with students. And then you still have to grade, lesson plan, email other teachers, email parents, if you had issues during the day — try to communicate that."

"It's hard, it really is, and you're up against a lot of different competing pressures and a lot of difficult choices that are really impactful in kids' lives."

"[Teaching] was probably more challenging in ways that I didn't really plan on, particularly not the work with kids, but work with the adults."

"Number one [reason for leaving] was my health. I could not physically go on. I just knew that if I continued that year, I would have a breakdown. There's only so many times you can have a breakdown on your way home that you finally realize that this just isn't good for my health."

"[There is] much less support from parents today than what there had been in the past. I think there's less engagement from parents, less recognition of just, 'thank you for everything you do.'"

"By the time that I finally decided to leave, I almost had a complete change of personality. To the point where it was becoming a detriment in my personal life. It was becoming a little bit of an issue in my relationship. And it was leaving me tired all the time, constantly anxious."

"When you have an administrator who creates toxic work environments, like, it's just not fun to be there, as much as you love kids, as much as you love your job."

"They were kind of adding on housekeeping duties, but they'd also cut our pay. And so it was starting to feel like we were unappreciated, but adding on work. And so that was definitely part of that choice."

"And when public sentiment starts to get directed towards teachers, it makes them really burned out. I mean, it's already exhausting and hard."

# Engagement

What does it mean for a teacher to be engaged in today's workplace? Based on decades of research, Gallup has identified 12 elements that drive high employee engagement in organizations.

## Percentage of K-12 Teachers Who Strongly Agree to Q<sup>12</sup>® Items

Q01	I know what is <b>expected of me</b> at work.	42
Q02	I have the <b>materials and equipment</b> I need to do my work right.	23
Q03	At work, I have the opportunity to <b>do what I do best</b> every day.	34
Q04	In the last seven days, I have received <b>recognition or praise</b> for doing good work.	25
Q05	My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to <b>care about me</b> as a person.	39
Q06	There is someone at work who <b>encourages my development</b> .	31
Q07	At work, my <b>opinions seem to count</b> .	21
Q08	The <b>mission or purpose of my organization</b> makes me feel my job is important.	43
Q09	My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing <b>quality work</b> .	29
Q10	I have a <b>best friend at work</b> .	26
Q11	In the last six months, someone at work has <b>talked to me about my progress</b> .	30
Q12	This last year, I have had opportunities at work to <b>learn and grow</b> .	35



Gallup has conducted comprehensive research on employee engagement, exploring the effectiveness of these 12 engagement elements across 456 different research studies at 276 organizations from 54 industries in 96 countries. This study — the largest of its kind — demonstrates that higher rates of engagement lead to better outcomes on the metrics and experiences that matter most for organizations and their workers.

Greater employee engagement in your school or district translates to better wellbeing, lower turnover and greater productivity for all types of employees.



**BETTER**

Wellbeing



**LOWER**

Turnover



**GREATER**

Productivity

When schools and districts face high turnover, a troubling workplace culture or issues with employee wellbeing, it's easy to lean on hunches and anecdotes for a solution, especially when time and budget already feel tight. However, the best solutions are driven by data and are specific to the unique situation at your school or district.

## How Does K-12 Educator Engagement Compare With the Rest of the Workforce?

K-12 teaching is a unique role that comes with its own set of successes and challenges.

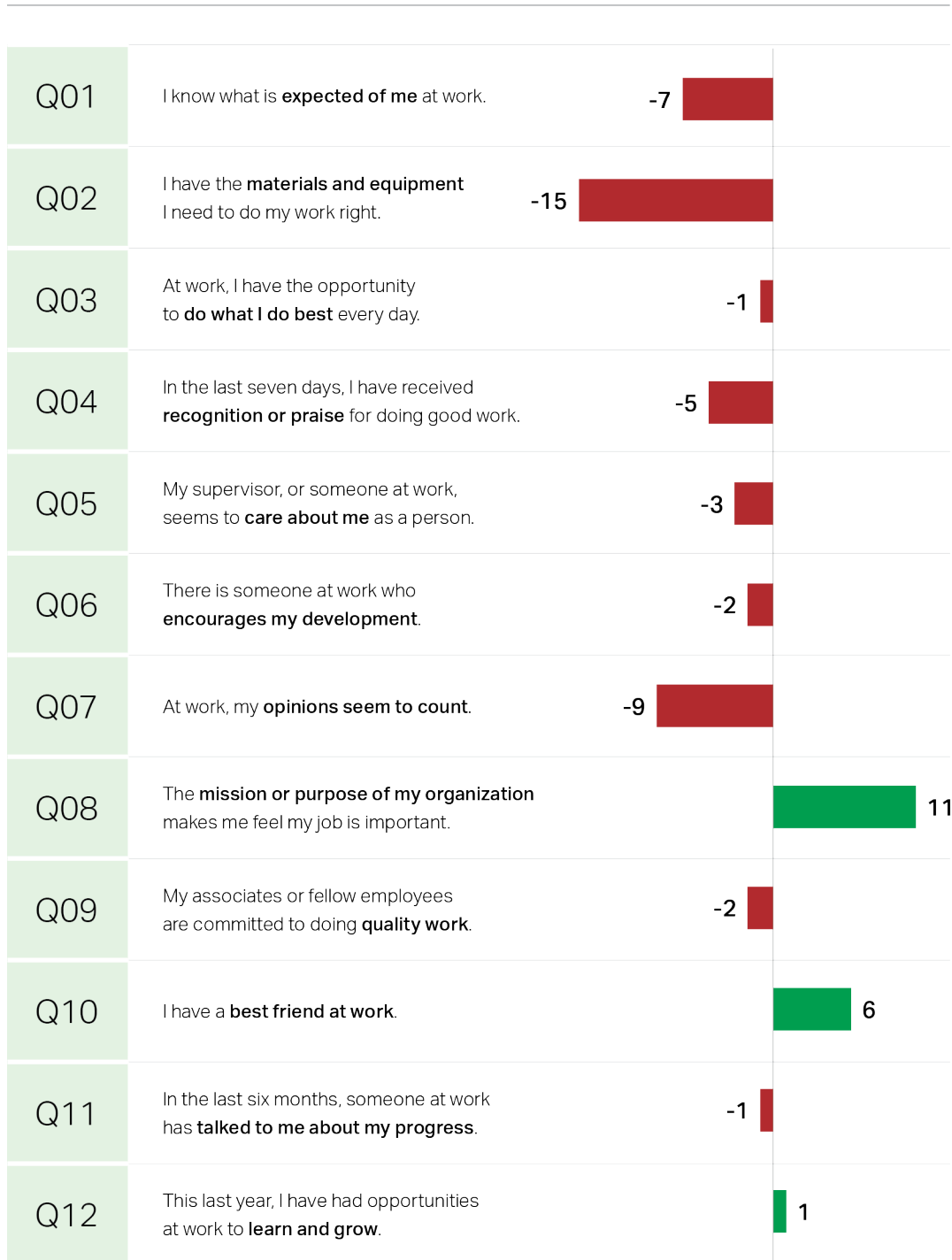
The Q<sup>12</sup> items where K-12 teachers are **least likely** to strongly agree compared to other employees are:

- I know what is expected of me at work.
- I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
- At work, my opinions seem to count.

The Q<sup>12</sup> items where K-12 teachers are **most likely** to strongly agree compared to other employees are:

- The mission or purpose of my organization makes me feel my job is important.
- I have a best friend at work.

### Percentage-Point Difference of K-12 Teachers Who Strongly Agree to Q<sup>12</sup> Items Compared to Other Employees



# The Seven Stages of the Teacher Life Cycle

Teachers have innumerable interactions and experiences throughout their careers that affect how they engage with their work. Gallup has identified seven key stages of the teacher life cycle during which leaders can make a significant difference in teacher engagement and outcomes.



Each stage of the teacher life cycle impacts the others. For example, how teachers are treated when they resign or retire from your school or district can directly impact your ability to attract new and better teachers, or to engage remaining educators who hear about how things went.

An uninspiring or insufficient teacher onboarding can set the stage for low engagement and poor performance. A hit-or-miss hiring process can make hiring decisions and subsequent employee development more challenging. For this reason, organizations need to approach change in a holistic, objective and systematic way to affect long-term outcomes.

Issues with talent, turnover, burnout and poor performance can often be traced back to failures at one of these stages.

**Questions you might ask about your own school or district based on the teacher life cycle:**

## **ATTRACT**

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How do we attract the best teachers using our unique identity and culture?

## **HIRE**

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Does our hiring process ensure fairness? Does our process identify future star performers?

## **ONBOARD**

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Does our onboarding program equip teachers with information and resources they need to excel?

## **ENGAGE**

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Are our teachers enthusiastic about their work? Do they get to do what they do best?

## **PERFORM**

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Does our performance management approach inspire teachers to do their best work?

## **DEVELOP**

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Are our professional development programs aligned with what teachers need most?

## **DEPART**

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Why do our best teachers leave, and where do they go?

## The Core Needs Across Every Stage

A teacher's experience is influenced by many factors throughout their career journey, from the moment they join a school to the day they resign or retire. Four of these factors are especially important for how today's educators feel about their work and their employer: their relationship with their principal, the clarity of their role, their team relationships and the resources they have to do their job right.

### PRINCIPAL

A teacher's relationship with their principal is their most important relationship at work. Warm, meaningful conversations (or the lack of them) set the tone for teachers' engagement, wellbeing and retention. Principals have a responsibility to listen to their teachers' concerns, provide helpful feedback and paint a positive vision of the future.

### ROLE

"What is expected of me?" is a simple but foundational question for performing any task well. Forty-two percent of K-12 teachers strongly agree they know what is expected of them at work. Orientation is an important stage for explaining a role; however, roles and expectations are ever-changing in the workplace, requiring regular communication about responsibilities.

### TEAM

Teachers want to be part of a team of colleagues they trust and respect. They also want to know what value they bring to the table. As schools and teams change over time, teachers must redefine their position in the group and figure out where they fit in. Team relationships are vital for teachers to share ideas and learn from each other. Feeling left out or disrespected can negatively affect daily performance.

**A teacher's team extends far beyond other teachers.** School staff, including classroom aides, secretaries, paraprofessionals and school nurses, play crucial roles in shaping school culture and boosting morale. Despite these employees' pivotal contributions, their efforts often go unnoticed. To create an exceptional employee experience at any school, it is essential not to overlook these dedicated staff members.

### RESOURCES

Everything from laptop chargers and software to textbooks and writing supplies impacts teachers' ability to do their jobs well. Having clear goals but lacking the tools and resources to achieve them is frustrating and a recipe for burnout. Insufficient materials, tools and technology all influence how teachers feel about where they work and how well they get their work done.

## HOW GALLUP CAN HELP

For decades, Gallup has worked with some of the largest U.S. school districts to bring our world-class research and advice to organizations like yours.

We partner with hundreds of districts each year to create positive learning cultures by:

- identifying and overcoming barriers to improving engagement and inclusion
- helping organizations understand and build on their unique strengths
- empowering leaders to manage through disruption
- developing high-potential leaders and managers
- providing validated benchmarks to help institutions know their unique strengths and opportunities

Collaborating with Gallup provides district leaders and principals a blueprint for crafting an exceptional teacher experience where teachers are more engaged, resulting in **improved metrics on student engagement and performance.**

# Improving the K-12 Teacher Experience

Teaching is a rewarding but demanding profession that requires passion, dedication and resilience. Many teachers face challenges that affect their performance and satisfaction across all stages of the employee experience.

Effectively managing the K-12 teacher experience should be a foundational expectation of every education leader's role, but oftentimes they are not provided the right training and resources to do so. Sometimes, deciding where to start can feel like an insurmountable task.

Through decades of surveys and interviews with educators, Gallup has identified six pivotal elements of the K-12 workplace that leaders can focus on to differentiate their school or district from the rest: burnout, wellbeing, discovering strengths, frequent meaningful feedback, recognition and career development.

By resolving obstacles in these six areas at their source, you can improve the K-12 teacher experience, increasing engagement and lowering turnover along the way.

## Address Burnout

K-12 employees are among the most highly burned-out workers. In 2023, 39% of K-12 teachers felt burned out always or very often, compared to 26% of workers in other occupations.

Many factors actively contribute to teacher burnout, including demanding workloads, insufficient resources, absorbing students' challenges or worries from outside of school, and unclear expectations for what is — and isn't — their job.

In some cases, teachers are asked to deal with student behavioral issues they aren't adequately equipped or prepared for. Both politics and parents add increased pressure to meet the demands of the job by setting additional expectations that impact the once-held respect and autonomy some educators deeply valued.

Despite the many competing demands for teachers' time and efforts, many still find ways to be intellectually and emotionally "on" for their students all day.

Having clear expectations and ongoing support from supervisors can lessen burnout to some extent. However, relying on guesswork to identify an appropriate solution may cause well-intended efforts to fall short of an ultimate resolution.

Past Gallup research demonstrates that *realistic* performance goals are pivotal for managing work-life balance and minimizing burnout. Being ranked against unachievable test scores, untenable grades or impossible graduation rates for your student population can feel demoralizing, especially when highly talented educators receive poor performance marks based on metrics they don't have total control over. As a first step toward mitigating burnout, administrators and teachers should work *together* to set realistic performance goals.

Addressing burnout in the right ways will reap benefits in both lower turnover and higher engagement: Burned-out teachers are 2.1 times as likely to be actively looking or watching for another job opportunity, whereas teachers who *aren't* burned out are 3.0 times as likely to be engaged.



## FORMER K-12 TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON

# Burnout

"It did feel, at times, like it was an emergency all the time."

"The requirements that the state puts on teachers are kind of untenable."

"There was a lot more expected of me than what was in the job description. I felt like I was wearing multiple hats all the time."

"I'd go home, and I'd just collapse on the couch, and then I wasn't energetic to interact with my family or do chores and stuff."

"Well, I knew I would be there longer than just the school hours... The amount, and I guess intensity, is not what was thought it would be."

"The workload's a lot. But then you don't always get support correcting papers or other duties you have to perform, like expecting to put up bulletin boards, or supervise recess and all this other stuff that they also want you to do that are not directly teaching things."

"I just found that I couldn't do a quality job, and in 45 to 50 hours a week. There were too many things on the plate."

"I was concerned about how well I was doing my job and I was really worried that there might be a day where I might just kind of lose it on the kids, and I never wanted to have that happen in front of students."



A real investment in lowering K-12 teacher burnout requires identifying the root of the problem and alleviating it at the source, which may be unique to your school or district.

To uncover ways to reduce burnout, ask teachers:

- What resources do you need that you don't currently have?
- Are there any unclear expectations resulting in an unrealistic workload?
- Are there any obstacles to getting your work done that we can resolve together?
- Are there any parts of your job where you feel you are going above and beyond, but feeling unnoticed for it?
- Which of your colleagues can you lean on for support during a particularly difficult day?

## Focus on Wellbeing

Teachers show higher levels of overall wellbeing compared to employees in other occupations. They gain meaning and energy from their work and have opportunities to build strong relationships with others.



### FORMER K-12 TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON

## Community and Connection

"I just really could connect with those kids and give them the love that they need."

"You felt like you were a big part of their lives, because we knew that in a lot of cases school was the happiest part of their life.."

"[In the beginning,] I was highly inspired. I thought I was doing really great work for the community. It felt like a service position. And so, I felt like I was going to be giving back. I was bright eyed and super excited to just call myself a teacher."

"I feel connected to the community in real ways that are positive."

"Teaching is pretty fulfilling emotionally. I would say, if you're in a good situation."

But a strong sense of purpose and community doesn't make teachers invincible against other difficulties of the job.

In a Gallup survey conducted in May 2023, when most schools were wrapping up the academic year, 57% of K-12 teachers said they felt stress during a lot of the previous day, and 16% felt anger.



## FORMER K-12 TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON

# Stress

"There's a lot of stress associated with teaching. You know, end of June is a happy time for a teacher."

"My stress level never went all the way down, it just was intensely high the whole time."

"I think teachers are more stressed today than ever before, and I think we could take some things off their plates to make them feel better."

"[Administrators] are really stressed, too, so they probably need more support and help doing their job as well."

From the same May 2023 survey, 16% of employees in the K-12 industry overall indicated they had experienced violence at work within the past month, and 42% reported being treated with disrespect — the highest rates among any industry in a nationally representative survey of more than 18,000 U.S. workers.

It begs the question, how many "good" workdays do teachers have? And what can be done to **support their wellbeing?**

Understanding that they, too, are humans bringing their whole selves to work every day is a simple way to start. Thirty-nine percent of K-12 teachers strongly agree their supervisor or someone at work seems to care about them as a person. Twenty-one percent strongly agree their opinion seems to count at work.

In some cases, out of necessity, school administrators have been asked to refocus their attention on other issues with parents, students, the community and politics, leaving less time available to touch base with classroom teachers.

This doesn't mean that educators' struggles, and opinions about how to improve them, can be ignored. Checking in on an educator by asking how they are doing, with sincerity, is an understated way to show them you care. Offering educators an opportunity to share their input through trusted surveys, interviews or focus groups are also valuable ways to identify solutions.

These employee listening strategies open up opportunities for discussing ways to fix easily solvable problems. K-12 teachers who strongly agree their supervisor or someone at work cares about them as a person are 9.5 times as likely as those who don't to strongly agree their organization cares about their overall wellbeing.

Gallup helps schools and districts support teachers' wellbeing by providing educators with opportunities to express their concerns — confidentially — in our unbiased interviews and surveys.

For leaders aimed at improving educators' wellbeing and reducing turnover, Gallup recommends adding four powerful items to a biannual Q<sup>12</sup> survey of all employees in your school or district.

- At work, I am treated with respect.
- My school cares about my overall wellbeing.
- I have received meaningful feedback in the last week.
- My school always delivers on the promise we make to students.

While measuring the current state is an important place to start, the needle will be moved by strategies implemented to actually make a change.

By pairing employee engagement strategies with a strengths-based culture, education leaders can support teachers' voices being heard while providing individual acknowledgment of their unique talents and classroom needs.

## Discover Strengths

Teachers' responsibilities have evolved in ways that distance many from the job description they originally signed up for.



### FORMER K-12 TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON

## Evolving Responsibilities

"It's like, another job on top of the job. The teaching part was one part and then kind of everything else was another part."

"They don't need to be a licensed person to watch them at recess, you know."

"We're in there to educate the kids. But right now, they're spending way more time on behavior management, getting social skills. You know, just how to be nice to each other. These kids, some of these kids in the public school, the behaviors are just out of control."

The percentage of K-12 teachers who strongly agreed that their work allows them to do what they do best every day has decreased by 17% over the past three years.

To incorporate a strengths-based culture at your school, initiate conversations with educators by asking, "What do you do best?" and "What parts of this role come most naturally to you?" Listen carefully to the answers you receive and intentionally create more opportunities for them to use their strengths. Pay special attention to areas where teachers are unable to use their strengths effectively due to competing priorities that could be addressed by somebody else at the school.

For instance, one teacher might express that one of their top strengths is communicating with many different types of people. Another might reveal that they've got a natural gift for staying organized and planning special events.

Knowing their strengths is an important step, but taking action to provide more opportunities for them to use these unique talents is foundational to a truly strengths-based culture.

You can give the teacher who excels at communicating an opportunity to thrive as a facilitator during an open house for students and their families. You can support the second educator in doing what they do best by offering them a chance to plan or coordinate the open house.

In a fast-paced workplace, the immediate reaction to a new task or project is often: "Who is available to do this?" However, in a strengths-based culture, the default question becomes: "Who is best *equipped* to do this?" and decisions about who does what are made with everyone's strengths in mind.

The importance of embracing educators' natural talents cannot be overstated. Employees who say they have the opportunity to do what they do best every day are 57% less likely to experience frequent burnout.



## FORMER K-12 TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON

# What They Do Best

"Interacting with the kids of all ages just seems to come pretty natural to me. So that's the fun part, when you don't have anything going on other than everybody's engaged, and you're doing your lesson, and you're watching them learn."

"As a teacher of high schoolers, it was easy for me to build relationships with students who, even sometimes, wouldn't open up to any of their teachers."

"Being able to meet people where they are: Ask questions, figure out what they need, and then figuring out how to translate something, to get them to get to where you are, kind of bridging that gap between understandings. I feel like that is a strength that I have."

"I was able to help guide students because of my experience with school, to, even if they didn't feel confident in what they're doing, at least being able to do what they needed to, to learn what they could, not beating themselves up if they weren't able to figure something out as quick as somebody else."

## What Is CliftonStrengths®?

The CliftonStrengths assessment measures your unique talents — your natural patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving — and categorizes them into the 34 CliftonStrengths themes.

When educators know their strengths, they're able to do more of what they do best — empowering them to deliver a unique and impactful educational experience.

That means they're better able to support students in overcoming challenges, achieving goals and moving toward a purpose that will leave them fulfilled and thriving for the rest of their lives.



**Isabella Rodriguez**  
Counselor

- 1. Achiever®
- 2. Learner®
- 3. Positivity®
- 4. Maximizer®
- 5. Relator®



**Aisha Johnson**  
Principal

- 1. Discipline®
- 2. Harmony®
- 3. Input®
- 4. Responsibility®
- 5. Focus®



**Marcus Williams**  
Middle School Educator

- 1. Significance®
- 2. Adaptability®
- 3. Arranger®
- 4. Woo®
- 5. Ideation®

## Give Frequent Meaningful Feedback

The traditional annual performance review, once a staple in evaluating an educator's performance, is outdated. Fifty-two percent of K-12 teachers meet with their supervisor to formally review performance goals and progress more than once per year, and a mere 16% strongly agree their performance is managed in a way that motivates them to do outstanding work.

Although the K-12 teaching role has undergone tremendous change in recent years, just 8% of K-12 teachers say they receive weekly feedback from their manager, and only 27% say they receive feedback from their manager a few times a month or more.



### FORMER K-12 TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON

## Performance Feedback

"I didn't receive a lot of performance feedback. I think that I would receive feedback [only] if something were to go wrong."

"A couple times I certainly was observed, but not in a consistent manner."

"There was a couple of times with my review, where [the administrator] didn't sit down to go over it till the last week of school. And I'm like, wow a lot of good that's going to do me."

"She would type out a whole script of what I said and what I did and send it to me. But then there wasn't really comments... So yeah, I see you typed out that I told the kid to put a shoe on, and then I told him to turn to Page 7 or whatever. But then there was no judgement of, 'Oh, this went smoothly, or not.'"

"I remember seeing my feedback, and I was like, I got my feedback here, but you never really came in the classroom."

"I used to joke that no news is good news."

"I really wasn't formally evaluated, for several years. Nobody came in and checked on me. And I'm like, well, I guess that's because they have trust in me, and they assume I'm doing a good job."

The consequences of educators being disconnected from their supervisor's feedback have far-reaching implications. Twenty-five percent of K-12 teachers strongly agree their supervisor knows what projects or tasks they're working on, making it difficult for most administrators to do their job of removing barriers, investing in educator development and giving meaningful feedback.

Education administrators and supervisors are often pressed for time and may find it challenging to provide frequent feedback. Many have not had opportunities to learn evidence-based practices for delivering meaningful feedback or supporting an educator's performance development. But this doesn't mean feedback and development for educators can be treated as unimportant.

### **One Meaningful Conversation Each Week**

Eighty percent of employees who say they have received meaningful feedback in the past week are fully engaged.

How does that play out in K-12 education? Maybe your school already has the infrastructure where teachers report to department heads or other staff — or maybe not. However, if your teachers don't have someone investing in them consistently on a personal level, they are likely missing out on opportunities to discuss issues that are important to them, such as their development, engagement and wellbeing.

Make weekly conversations meaningful by discussing one or more of the following: recognition or appreciation for recent work, collaboration and relationships, current goals and priorities at work, and ways to use their strengths.

Conversations don't need to be an hour long to be meaningful. Prioritize *what* is being talked about and the rest will fall into place.



When education leaders have more frequent feedback touchpoints with teachers, teachers are much more likely to feel supported. Their supervisor knows what they're working on and how things are going. Teachers feel like their development is invested in and know they can come forward with questions or barriers.

**Differences Between Teachers Who Receive Infrequent and Frequent Feedback**

Survey Item	Teachers With Infrequent Feedback	Teachers With Frequent Feedback
My manager removes barriers that get in the way of my performance. <i>% Strongly agree</i>	12	25
My manager invests in my development. <i>% Strongly agree</i>	19	40
I feel I can approach my manager with any type of question. <i>% Strongly agree</i>	33	51
Overall, how would you describe the feedback you typically get from your manager? <i>% Very helpful + % Inspires me to do my best work</i>	38	83

Note: Infrequent feedback=Less often than a few times a week. Frequent feedback=A few times a week, or daily. Teachers with frequent feedback column represents 8% of teachers (n=87); margins of error range from +/- 9-11%. Survey response options to describe the feedback typically given by the manager were: Inspires me to do my best work, very helpful, informative but not always relevant, confusing or unhelpful, and makes my job more difficult.

It's important to note that the need for frequent meaningful feedback doesn't stop once someone becomes a top performer. Providing frequent and meaningful feedback is critical for teachers of all tenures and performance levels, so don't overlook your stars.

## Appreciate Contributions

Twenty-four percent of K-12 teachers strongly agree they have received recognition or praise for doing good work in the last seven days. K-12 teachers are less likely to strongly agree that their manager gives them recognition when they do good work compared to employees in other occupations (23% vs. 37%).

Recognition that is authentic, personal and meaningful is most effective. While principals and administrators can't be around to observe and praise every notable moment in a teacher's work week, they can establish a culture of recognition in their school.



### FORMER K-12 TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON

## Appreciation

"Just hearing that you're doing a good job feels good, and I don't know if I was hearing that enough to feel like all of the hard work that I was doing was being seen."

"Students made me feel appreciated all the time. They would often tell me that I was, you know, their favorite teacher, or that they felt like they actually learned something."

"You're really isolated. Your students see what you're doing every day, but hardly anybody else sees that."

"[I received recognition] once or twice a year if I was lucky... It might have been a little trinket during Teacher Appreciation Week, like a key chain or something, or a pen. And at Christmastime that might have looked like a \$5 gift card to [a coffee shop]."

"I wish that more people could recognize and appreciate how hard teachers work because they really are forming the next generation. And what they do is so important. And they need support, too, because it's so hard."

Teachers should be encouraged to recognize each other when they see great contributions, and education leaders must set a precedent for how it's done. Whether it is acknowledging a great lesson plan, praising a student's performance growth or thanking someone for extra help at an after-school event, a little recognition from a peer or superior goes a long way.

Recognition from peers is certainly impactful, but our research shows that the most memorable recognition moments come from people higher up in an employee's organization. Leaders and managers often do not realize how much their gratitude for teachers' efforts matters.

When done right, a little appreciation goes a long way. According to a study by Gallup and Workhuman, employees who receive the right amount of recognition for the work they do are four times as likely to be engaged, 73% less likely to be frequently burned out and 56% less likely to be looking or watching for other job opportunities.

If you aren't sure how to recognize someone, remove the guesswork by asking them. Only 10% of employees have been asked how they like to be recognized at work.

### The Five Pillars of Strategic Recognition

Recognition comes in many shapes and sizes, and data shows that some forms are more effective than others.

Gallup and Workhuman partnered to study the most impactful types of praise, appreciation and gratitude across workplaces. We identified five key pillars of recognition that drive engagement and wellbeing, and buffer against the damaging effects of frequent burnout.



#### Fulfilling

*The amount you receive makes sense.*



#### Authentic

*It isn't just a "checklist" thing.*



#### Personalized

*One size doesn't fit all.*



#### Equitable

*It's given fairly, without playing favorites.*



#### Embedded

*It's integrated into the day-to-day.*

## Reimagine Career Growth

For many K-12 educators, traditional career advancement means becoming an administrator or department head. However, not all teachers want to take that path, as administrators face their own unique workplace challenges and stepping out of a classroom role removes many teachers from the reasons they originally pursued a K-12 career.



### FORMER K-12 TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON

## Career Growth

"Moving further into an administrative role is not something I would be interested in doing, especially in the context of a school. I think those are challenging and under-valued positions."

"Looking at what the department head role was, especially in the context of special education, didn't really lend itself to something I was excited about."

"If you're teaching in a classroom, there's not really any advancement. There's only pay increases year after year. But those pay increases are often very marginal and there's not really any room for negotiating pay... It's not that there aren't options. Cause you can go to administration or a job like that, but those have to be a very conscious choice. And the jobs are much different than being in the classroom itself."

Moreover, there are not enough administrative positions for all teachers who might want them. In the past 12 months, only 8% of K-12 educators have been promoted to a higher-level job, compared to 15% of employees in other occupations. This does not mean that K-12 teachers are less deserving of promotion than other workers, but that there are fewer promotions to be had.

Despite the seemingly clear-cut career path for most, only 16% of K-12 educators strongly agree that there is a well-defined plan for their career growth at their organization.

And investing in development pays off. K-12 teachers who strongly agree their manager invests in their development are 2.9 times as likely as those who don't to strongly agree they've had opportunities to learn and grow at work in the past year. They're also 8.7 times as likely to strongly agree there is a well-defined plan for their career growth at their school or district.

This poses a unique challenge for education leaders: How can you support teachers' growth and development without promotions? Fortunately, there are other ways to help teachers develop in their roles besides promotions. The career of any educator, regardless of their path toward administration, can be advanced by strategic professional development, conversations about progress and empowerment to grow within their current role.

## **RETHINK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

With rapid changes in technology, processes and policies, it's easy to default professional development days solely to the upkeep and onboarding for these shifts. Ask yourself this: Are we truly maximizing the value of professional development days? Beyond designated days, there are innovative ways to foster growth in teachers' classroom skills. Consider offering additional programs, learning resources or continuing education in their day-to-day routines. By doing so, we empower educators to continuously enhance their expertise and adapt to the dynamic educational environment at the same time.

## **TALK ABOUT PROGRESS**

Conversations around progress play a pivotal role in retaining educators. Unlike traditional performance reviews that focus on shortcomings and weaknesses, progress conversations focus on continual improvement, learning and growth. These dialogues shed light on how educators are advancing toward their improvement goals. Moreover, they allow us to identify barriers that hinder progress and explore strategies to remove them. By investing in these conversations, we pave the way for sustained professional growth.

## **EMPOWER GROWTH WITHIN CURRENT ROLE**

Empowering career growth doesn't necessarily equate to a title change. In fact, Gallup research has found that promoting someone into a leadership role, without truly considering whether the new role aligns with their strengths, can have damaging effects on team engagement. To foster growth within an educator's current role, you must understand their unique strengths and provide opportunities for them to refine the talents that they naturally have. When doing so, be mindful that adding strengths-based opportunities should not lead to additional burnout. Instead, consider whether an educator's least favorable tasks might better align with another teacher's strengths instead.

# Create an Exceptional Teacher Experience With Gallup

Attracting, developing and retaining great teachers begins with understanding the education workplace from the teacher's perspective.

Teachers are looking for meaningful work where they can use their talents every day. They want clear expectations and genuine opportunities to advance their career in a way that works for them.

Most importantly, they need the right resources and support systems in place to engage them throughout their entire employee experience.

When supported and coached by an engaging principal and surrounded by a consistent, distinctive culture, teachers thrive. When teachers receive regular feedback and feel connected to their team, they become more engaged at work — and are more likely to stay in their role.

## **DISCOVER** the Strengths of Your School

Our education experts empower your teachers to do what they do best at work every day.

Our strengths-based approach to education goes beyond professional development days.

We equip educators with the skills they need to deliver a unique and impactful educational experience for all students, and develop both personally and professionally along the way.

Gallup experts will help you create a strengths-based development strategy that works for your school with the research, advice and tested best practices of our coaches and consultants.

## **DRIVE** Educator Engagement

Our education experts help schools measure and improve what matters most.

Gallup has decades of experience measuring engagement and other aspects of the employee experience among K-12 educators.

Through a partnership with Gallup, you will discover unique opportunities and competitive advantages using our robust benchmarking capabilities of over 400,000 interviews with educators in our engagement database.

Our coaches and consultants will help you implement strategies and find solutions unique to your school or district.

## **DEVELOP** World-Class Leaders

Our education experts develop school leaders through in-person and virtual courses, Gallup events and webinars, and custom configured learning options.

Educators who bring our coaching and talent-development expertise to their schools invest in a lifetime of positive growth and better outcomes for teachers and students alike.

Everyone has natural talents, and our courses teach leaders to apply and develop their own, no matter the role as an educator, while also spotting and developing the talents of students.

# Methodology

## Survey Methodology

Results from this report are based on five surveys with members of the U.S. Gallup Panel™ who are employed full-time or part-time, aged 18 and older, and living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based longitudinal panel of U.S. adults whom Gallup selects using random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landlines and cellphones. Gallup also uses address-based sampling methods to recruit panel members. The Gallup Panel is not an opt-in panel.

Survey Information		All Employees		K-12 Teachers	
Survey Name	Survey Dates	n Size	Margin of Error	n Size	Margin of Error
Q4 2023	Nov. 8-20, 2023	19,836	±1.0	1,106	±2.9
Q3 2023	Aug. 9-24, 2023	18,665	±1.1	1,109	±2.9
Q2 2023	May 11-25, 2023	18,871	±1.1	1,133	±2.9
Q1 2023	Feb. 6-20, 2023	18,943	±1.1	1,166	±2.9
2019 Workforce Survey	Sept. 3-16, 2019	-	-	845*	±3.4

Note: Margins of error represent percentage points above or below a 50% point estimate at a 95% confidence level.

\*There were 903 total K-12 teachers in the 2019 survey. However, current employment status for 58 of these respondents cannot be determined, so results represent 845 respondents.

### Engagement, Q<sup>12</sup> Items, Burnout and Wellbeing (Thriving) Results

Results about engagement, Q<sup>12</sup> items, burnout and wellbeing (thriving) are based on average results across four surveys fielded in 2023 (Q1 2023, Q2 2023, Q3 2023 and Q4 2023). Burnout results represent only full-time employees.

### All Other Survey Results

Unless otherwise specified, all other results from this survey are based on Gallup's Q3 2023 survey of the American workforce.

## In-Depth Interviews

Qualitative insights and quotes in this report are derived from 10 in-depth interviews conducted with members of the Gallup Panel. All respondents were adults working in the U.S. who were previously employed as a K-12 teacher and left the K-12 teaching profession between 2019 and 2023. Respondents' teaching experience ranged from 1.5 to 28 years, with an average of 14 years. Ages ranged from 28 to 56 years of age (average age=42 years) and 60% were female.

Interviews were conducted by trained Gallup research consultants in a semi-structured format. Interviews were recorded with the consent of respondents and transcribed using Zoom transcription. Qualitative analysis was conducted by Gallup research associates, who identified key themes and patterns across the interviews.

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