

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR TEACHER RETENTION

# What Teacher Turnover Really Costs and What Schools Can Do About It

Research drawn from the Learning Policy Institute  
"What's the Cost of Teacher Turnover?" (2024 Update)  
learningpolicyinstitute.org

Presented in connection with The GUIDE Cycle · [www.theguidecycle.com](http://www.theguidecycle.com)

## Teacher turnover is one of the most expensive, least discussed challenges in American education.

Most conversations about the teacher shortage focus on recruitment — how to find more teachers and attract them to the profession. But the data from the Learning Policy Institute tells a different story: the majority of open teaching positions each year are not created by a shortage of new teachers. They are created by teachers leaving roles they already held.

**This document translates that research into a financial and strategic case for prioritizing teacher retention — and for investing in the coaching culture that makes retention possible.**

## SECTION 1 · THE NUMBERS: WHAT TURNOVER ACTUALLY COSTS

### Replacing one teacher costs nearly \$25,000.

According to the Learning Policy Institute's 2024 updated research, larger school districts spend an average of nearly \$25,000 to replace a single departing teacher when all associated costs are accounted for. That figure includes expenses across four categories: separation costs, recruitment costs, hiring costs, and the onboarding and training investment required before a new teacher becomes fully effective in the classroom.

~\$25K

per teacher replaced

2024 LPI research

6 in 10

new hires replace  
teachers who left  
early  
not retirees

2.5x

more likely to leave  
without strong prep  
underprepared teachers

2x+

higher turnover rate  
without mentoring  
unsupported new  
teachers

**For a school that loses 5 teachers in a year, turnover costs alone can exceed \$125,000 — before a single new hire steps into a classroom.**

### The four components of turnover cost

The Learning Policy Institute's calculator breaks down replacement costs across four distinct categories. Each one represents real time and real money spent by your school — and none of it produces any educational value.

Cost category	What this includes	Impact
<b>Separation costs</b>	Administrative processing of resignations, exit interviews, substitute coverage during the vacancy period, and management time spent handling the transition.	<i>Time, administration, and disruption to students during the gap</i>
<b>Recruitment costs</b>	Job posting fees, recruitment fairs and events, staff time reviewing applications and conducting interviews, and travel costs for candidates.	<i>Significant staff hours diverted from educational work</i>
<b>Hiring costs</b>	Onboarding administration, background checks, credential verification, HR processing, and the time school leaders invest in orienting a new hire.	<i>Front-loaded cost before the new teacher teaches a single class</i>
<b>Training and lost productivity</b>	The investment in professional development for a new hire, plus the documented productivity gap during the first one to two years before they reach full effectiveness.	<i>Largest single cost — and entirely lost if the teacher leaves again early</i>

#### Source note

All data in this section is drawn from: Learning Policy Institute. (2024). 2024 Update: What's the Cost of Teacher Turnover? [Interactive tool]. [learningpolicyinstitute.org](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org)

The original calculator was published in September 2017. The 2024 update reflects current cost data and updated research on teacher retention strategies. The calculator is publicly available and can be used to estimate turnover costs specific to your school or district.

## SECTION 2 · WHY TEACHERS LEAVE: WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

### The top reason teachers leave is not salary. It is feeling unsupported.

The Learning Policy Institute's research identifies four primary drivers of teacher turnover. Compensation matters — but it is consistently outranked by working conditions and professional support as the reason teachers cite for leaving. This has significant implications for where schools invest their retention resources.

	Factor	What the research shows	What schools can do
01	<b>Lack of support from principals</b>	Teachers consistently cite lack of support from school leadership as the top reason for leaving. When teachers feel unseen, unheard, and unsupported in their professional growth, the relationship with the school breaks down — regardless of other factors.	<i>Invest in principals' capacity to coach and support teachers through structured, consistent, non-evaluative processes.</i>
02	<b>Limited collaboration and community</b>	Teachers who lack meaningful opportunities to collaborate with colleagues feel professionally isolated. Isolation is a powerful predictor of early departure, particularly for first- and second-year teachers who are still building their professional identity.	<i>Create structured collaborative cultures — team coaching, shared data conversations, and professional learning communities with real substance.</i>
03	<b>Inadequate preparation and induction</b>	Beginning teachers who enter the profession without comprehensive preparation are 2.5 times more likely to leave after just one year. New teachers without strong mentoring and induction support leave at more than twice the rate of those who receive it.	<i>Build a tiered induction structure that provides new teachers with frequent contact, low-stakes support, and early wins — not just a mentor assignment on paper.</i>
04	<b>Compensation below comparable fields</b>	After adjusting for the school year calendar, beginning teachers earn roughly 20% less than college graduates in other fields — a gap that can reach 30% for mid-career educators. Low pay contributes to turnover, particularly when combined with poor working conditions.	<i>While compensation is often outside a single school's control, schools that invest in working conditions and professional growth can offset the compensation gap in teachers' decision-making.</i>

### The implication for school leaders

The top three drivers of teacher turnover — lack of principal support, professional isolation, and inadequate induction — are all directly addressable through a strong instructional coaching culture. They do not require budget increases, policy changes, or district-level approval.

They require leaders who have a consistent, respectful, evidence-based process for being present in teachers' professional lives. That is exactly what a structured coaching framework provides.

## Most of the teachers leaving are the ones schools just invested in hiring.

The Learning Policy Institute's research makes clear that teacher attrition is concentrated in the early years of a teaching career. This means that the full cost of recruitment, hiring, and training is spent on teachers who leave before that investment pays its full dividend — creating a compounding cycle of cost and disruption.

### Without strong support

# 2.5x

*more likely to leave after year one*

Teachers who enter the classroom without comprehensive preparation are dramatically more likely to exit before developing real effectiveness.

### With structured mentoring

# 2x+

*higher retention when well supported*

New teachers who receive quality mentoring and induction stay at more than twice the rate of those who do not — and become effective faster.

### The compounding cost of early departure

When a new teacher leaves after one or two years, the school absorbs the full cost of their recruitment, hiring, and onboarding — but receives only a fraction of the instructional value that investment was designed to produce. The Learning Policy Institute notes that the training and productivity investment does not pay its full dividend when teachers leave within a few years of being hired.

In practical terms: a school that spends \$25,000 to replace a teacher, trains that replacement, and then loses them again in year two has spent \$50,000 and is still back where it started — with a vacancy, a disrupted classroom, and students who have experienced two teacher transitions in three years.

### What strong induction looks like — from the research

The Learning Policy Institute identifies three evidence-based induction practices that meaningfully reduce early-career attrition:

1. Quality mentoring provided free to all new teachers — not an optional add-on but a structured, consistent relationship with a trained mentor.
2. A reduced teaching load and collaborative planning time — giving new teachers the space to learn from colleagues without the pressure of a full independent workload from day one.
3. Trained mentors supported by an ongoing learning community — not teachers assigned to mentor informally, but leaders with skills, time, and their own professional development.

## Schools that invest in principal quality and teacher collaboration keep more teachers.

The Learning Policy Institute's research identifies working conditions as one of the most powerful — and most actionable — levers for teacher retention. Unlike compensation, which is often constrained by

district contracts, working conditions are largely within the control of school leaders. The research points to three specific working condition factors that predict whether teachers stay.

Working conditions that predict teacher retention · Learning Policy Institute, 2024		
<b>High-quality school leadership</b>	The research identifies investment in principal quality as a primary working condition strategy. When principals create productive, collaborative work settings, teachers stay. This requires giving principals the professional learning opportunities they need to lead — not just manage.	<i>Schools where principals are trained in structured, non-evaluative teacher support see meaningfully higher retention — particularly among mid-career teachers who have other options.</i>
<b>Collaborative professional culture</b>	Teachers who have meaningful opportunities to collaborate with colleagues — shared planning time, professional learning communities, team data conversations — are significantly less likely to leave. Isolation, not salary, is often the decisive factor.	<i>Scheduled collaboration time with real substance (not just logistics) is one of the most cost-effective retention investments a school can make. It costs time, not money.</i>
<b>Teacher involvement in decision-making</b>	Teachers who have input into instructional decisions and school policy feel genuine professional agency. Those who feel talked at rather than included report lower satisfaction and higher intention to leave.	<i>Coaching models that position teachers as the experts on their own students — and that treat teacher goals and experiments as the center of the work — directly address this factor.</i>

**Working conditions are the highest-leverage retention investment available to most school leaders — and they are largely within your control.**

## SECTION 5 · THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT: RUNNING THE NUMBERS

### What does teacher retention actually save?

The following illustrative calculations use the Learning Policy Institute's research as the foundation. They are designed to help school leaders make the financial case for investing in coaching culture — both internally and to their boards.

Scenario	Annual turnover cost	Cost if retention improves by 2 teachers
Small school (20 teachers) 10% annual turnover = 2 teachers leaving	<b>2 x \$25,000 = \$50,000 per year in turnover costs</b>	\$0 in replacement costs + retained institutional knowledge + stable classrooms

Mid-size school (50 teachers) 12% annual turnover = 6 teachers leaving	<b>6 x \$25,000 = \$150,000 per year in turnover costs</b>	Retaining 2 additional teachers saves \$50,000 — more than enough to fund a full coaching program
Large school (100 teachers) 15% annual turnover = 15 teachers leaving	<b>15 x \$25,000 = \$375,000 per year in turnover costs</b>	Each teacher retained saves \$25,000. Retaining 5 more = \$125,000 in savings annually

### The investment comparison

A full-day GUIDE Cycle Foundation Training with complete materials: \$6,000

Cost of replacing one teacher lost to an unsupportive professional culture: ~\$25,000

If the training helps retain even one teacher who might otherwise have left, the investment pays for itself more than three times over — in year one alone.

A year-one implementation support package costs less than the turnover cost of a single mid-career teacher with institutional knowledge and strong student relationships.

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### The costs that don't appear on a spreadsheet

The \$25,000 figure captures the direct financial cost of teacher turnover. It does not capture several additional costs that are real but harder to quantify:

- Student relationship continuity: students — particularly those with the greatest need — are disproportionately harmed by repeated teacher transitions.
- Institutional knowledge loss: a teacher who leaves takes years of relationships, curriculum expertise, and community trust that cannot be hired back.
- Team culture disruption: high turnover destabilizes grade-level and department teams, reducing collaborative effectiveness for the teachers who remain.
- Reputation and recruitment: schools known for high turnover find it harder to attract strong candidates, creating a compounding disadvantage.
- Leader time: every teacher who leaves requires weeks of a principal's or curriculum director's time — time diverted from leading, coaching, and improving instruction.

## SECTION 6 · WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS WORKS

### Evidence-based strategies for reducing teacher turnover

The Learning Policy Institute identifies five high-leverage strategies for reducing teacher turnover. These are not opinions — they are conclusions drawn from a substantial body of research on what keeps teachers in schools and what pushes them out.

## Five evidence-based retention strategies · Learning Policy Institute, 2024

1	<b>Strengthen teacher preparation</b>	Beginning teachers with little preparation are 2.5 times more likely to leave after year one. Strong preparation — including clinical experience, mentoring, and pedagogical grounding — is the foundation of retention.
2	<b>Invest in mentoring and induction for new teachers</b>	New teachers without mentoring leave at more than twice the rate of those who are well supported. Quality induction — not just an assigned buddy, but a structured professional relationship — is one of the highest-return investments a school can make.
3	<b>Develop high-quality principals</b>	Teachers leave buildings, not professions. When principals are skilled at creating collaborative, supportive professional environments, retention improves across the board. This requires giving principals their own professional development — not just asking them to do more.
4	<b>Create a collaborative professional culture</b>	Scheduled time for meaningful collaboration — not logistics meetings, but genuine shared learning — reduces the professional isolation that drives mid-career teachers out of schools. PLCs with real data conversations and shared purpose are a structural retention investment.
5	<b>Increase compensation and recognize expertise</b>	Beginning teachers earn roughly 20% less than comparable college graduates. While compensation constraints are real, the research also shows that non-monetary recognition — leadership roles, stipends for mentoring, opportunities for expertise to matter — can meaningfully offset the gap.

### The GUIDE Cycle directly addresses four of these five strategies

The GUIDE Cycle framework is explicitly designed to implement the evidence-based retention strategies identified by the Learning Policy Institute — specifically the three working condition strategies that are most within a school leader's direct control:

- **Strategy 2** — Mentoring and induction: The GUIDE Cycle's tiered model provides structured, non-evaluative coaching for new teachers with short cycles, frequent contact, and early celebration of student growth.
- **Strategy 3** — Principal quality: The train-the-trainer model builds principals' capacity to coach rather than simply evaluate — giving them a consistent, evidence-based process for being present in teachers' professional lives.
- **Strategy 4** — Collaborative culture: Group and team coaching built into the GUIDE Cycle framework creates shared professional language, collaborative data conversations, and genuine professional community.
- **Strategy 5** — Recognition of expertise: The framework explicitly creates leadership pathways for experienced and veteran teachers — modeling cycles, team facilitation, peer observation — that honor expertise rather than ignore it.

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## The schools that keep their teachers do one thing differently.

Across the Learning Policy Institute's research on teacher retention, a consistent pattern emerges. The schools that keep their best teachers — the ones where turnover is low and tenure is long — are not necessarily the ones that pay the most. They are the ones where teachers feel like they belong to something, where their professional growth is taken seriously, and where their leaders are present in their work as partners rather than evaluators.

That culture does not happen by accident. It is built deliberately, through the professional development of leaders, through the creation of structured time and space for collaboration, and through a commitment to treating every teacher — regardless of subject area, grade level, or experience — as a professional whose growth matters.

### Schools with high turnover

- X Principals who observe and evaluate — but don't coach
- X New teachers left to figure it out alone
- X Veteran teachers treated as invisible until they're a problem
- X Professional development that happens to teachers
- X No shared language for talking about student growth
- X Collaborative time spent on logistics, not learning

### Schools with strong retention

- ✓ Leaders who coach — with a consistent, non-evaluative process
- ✓ New teachers with structured mentoring and early wins
- ✓ Veteran teachers recognized as leaders and mentors
- ✓ Professional development that belongs to teachers
- ✓ A shared framework for student-centered growth conversations
- ✓ Collaborative time anchored in real student evidence

### Primary source cited in this document

*Learning Policy Institute. (2024). 2024 Update: What's the Cost of Teacher Turnover? [Interactive tool]. Retrieved from [learningpolicyinstitute.org](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org)*

Original tool published September 13, 2017. Updated September 17, 2024. The interactive calculator allows schools and districts to estimate their specific turnover costs based on school size, turnover rate, and local salary data.

For the full technical supplement including methodology and underlying studies: [learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/4435/download](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/4435/download)

***This document is created in connection with The GUIDE Cycle  
A Student-Centered Instructional Coaching Framework for Schools***

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