



# Improving Teacher Support and Retention

## A PowerSchool Miniguide



# Supporting Teachers Can Improve Retention

Supporting educators remains a top priority for K-12 HR teams across the U.S. and Canada. Our own research and surveys conducted in 2021 and 2022 show that school and district leaders are very concerned about educator attrition. Although teacher recruitment was the top HR priority for respondents surveyed in our **2022 PowerSchool K-12 Talent Index**, supporting teachers' social and emotional wellbeing and teacher retention ranked second and third, respectively. Attracting new teachers and providing them with a positive start to their careers is important for district leaders. Support plays a key role in helping new teachers realize their full potential as educators, contributing to long-term career fulfillment and retention.

Additionally, our **2022 Education Focus Report** reveals that K-12 leaders know stress and burnout are serious concerns. They identified "a less stressful work environment" as the leading factor luring today's teachers away from the profession. School district talent leaders surveyed for the report ranked teacher support equal to adequate pay or benefits as the most effective levers for improving retention.

Finding ways to better support teachers frequently comes up in our conversations with district leaders, talent specialists, and classroom educators. From taking a more collaborative, growth-focused approach to the evaluations process, to offering personalized professional learning and SEL training to all staff members, teacher wellbeing is a primary focus.

**Rand Corp. research** shows that teachers affect student performance more than any other classroom factor. That's why focusing on teacher support is an investment in student success. Effective, engaged, and experienced teachers directly support better outcomes. Today's K-12 leaders and HR professionals know this, and in this guide, we'll share important takeaways from some of our top content on this topic.



## In This Miniguide:

Schools, districts, and K-12 thought leaders share countless tips and strategies with us for supporting teachers. Blogs, webinars, customer videos, case studies, and eBooks in the **Resources** section of our website offer real-world best practices and expert tips. In this miniguide, we distill much of this valuable insight into some key takeaways from a few of our most helpful teacher support and retention resources.

In this guide you'll learn some of our top thought-leader advice and real-world examples of:

- Guiding teacher support with student data and classroom needs
- Supporting teacher growth by rethinking evaluations as collaborations
- Making the most of everyday interactions with teachers
- Personalizing professional learning and driving long-term growth

# Guiding Teacher Support with Student Data and Classroom Needs

From the eBook: **Using Student Data to Inform Professional Learning and Educator Effectiveness**

## How to do it:

- 1 Look to real-time student data to see where they need support
- 2 Identify skills that would help teachers better support them
- 3 Search professional learning resources for recommendations
- 4 Discuss recommendations with teachers and adapt PD plans
- 5 Revisit student data at future check-ins and commend progress

## Key to success:

A unified edtech ecosystem connects all of your data, enabling HR leaders to see real-time student data analytics and incorporate findings into teacher evaluations, check-ins, and PD plans.

Helping teachers grow the skills they need starts with identifying which skills and focus areas will most benefit their students. That's why looking at student data can tell administrators, instructional coaches, and mentors a lot about how to best support teachers. For educators of all backgrounds, goals always come back to helping students succeed.

Integrated technology allows administrators and instructional coaches to more easily make the critical connection between student and teacher needs. In our eBook, **Using Student Data to Inform Professional Learning and Educator Effectiveness**, we look at ways to support teachers using student data. Educators and thought leaders share actionable ways to drive supportive, engaging professional development using student performance data.

One example that stands out in the eBook is from one of the highest performing districts in Florida. Lafayette County Schools looks to the powerful student performance insights they get through Unified Classroom® Performance Matters to make sure their PD strategy makes the most sense for teachers, students, and the district's overall priorities.



## In Real Life: Making Informed Decisions on Professional Development

"Lafayette County School District is the second-highest performing school district in the state of Florida. We believe [Unified Classroom®] Performance Matters has played a noteworthy role in our success ... allowing us to compare pieces of data that were not possible before. This tool has allowed school leadership to make informed decisions on professional development opportunities and school initiatives."

**ALISSA HINGSON** | Director of Teaching and Learning Services,  
Lafayette County Schools, Florida

With integrated software, talent leaders and administrators at Lafayette County Schools can see specific areas where students need support and then translate that into PD plans for teachers. Whether it's subject-specific training, classroom management skills, behavioral support, or SEL, teachers get to spend their valuable PD time completing relevant courses and activities. Helping teachers build the skills that they know increase their classroom effectiveness can contribute to long-term job satisfaction and career success—key components of improved retention.

Vital to success, however, is the timeliness of student data that's used. Integrated systems that offer real-time data and analytics significantly increase its power to inform teacher support. The key is knowing where their students are right now and tracking real-time progress. As PowerSchool Director of Education Solutions Lisa Andrejko says, data that comes in too late isn't helpful for day-to-day decision making.



## PowerSchool Advisor Insight

“ Administrators and teachers have been using student data for a long time. In fact, I did this as an assistant principal in the last century. However, the data was coming in too late and wasn't helpful for day-to-day practice. It also was not integrated through various software solutions that educators use. It was good for evaluation, but not supervisions—which have more of an impact on student performance. ”

**LISA ANDREJKO, ED.D**

Director of Education Solutions,  
PowerSchool (former superintendent)



# Supporting Teacher Growth by Rethinking Evaluations as Collaborations

## Customer Spotlight: "Boosting Teacher Retention with Easier, Supportive Evaluations"

### How to do it:

- 1 Review historical data for each teacher before a check-in or evaluation
- 2 Go over a previous evaluation to explore professional goals and opportunities
- 3 Align goals to teacher and supervisor expectations, then plan check-in dates
- 4 Commend progress and point to impact on student achievement in future check-ins

### Key to success:

An **online teacher evaluations tool** that simplifies processes and reporting gives administrators more time to review historical data and collaborate with teachers.

Today's educators agree that teams can accomplish more than individuals. That's why improving collaboration between teachers and administration can play a huge role in support and retention. As teachers grow their instructional effectiveness, and they see the positive impact they're making in the classroom, they'll have a stronger desire to stay in the profession and at the school or district.

Surveying educators for our 2022 Education Focus Report, we found that most think it's time to rethink evaluations. Almost nine out of 10 (87%) called for a change to the conventional process that focuses on accountability rather than forward-looking support. About half (48%) said future evaluations should "more equally balance teacher supports and accountability," while more than a third (38%) aligned with an effort to "shift emphasis from accountability to support."

When we interact with school and district administrators, they frequently point out that times have changed since the days when compliance requirements dictated PD and assessment techniques. There's so much more to helping teachers build their skills than ticking off compliance boxes. By meeting teachers where they are, listening to their needs and aspirations, and working together to develop PD plans, K-12 HR leaders tell us they see much more progress.

Another common complaint with traditional evaluations is cumbersome paperwork and long delays in receiving feedback. By using integrated technology, including an online records system, completing administrative processes around evaluations, check-ins, and contract renewals is easy and fast for teachers. Plus, they can see feedback the same day and more readily associate comments to their experience in the classroom that day. Teachers' plates are already full, and they want to commit their focus to students. Simplifying processes and eliminating paperwork helps them spend more time on what matters most.

**Olentangy Local School District in Ohio maintains a teacher retention rate well above the national average.** They attribute their success to collaborative, supportive growth conversations with teachers and staff. Principals and administrators look at historical student data and teacher PD records to identify needs and opportunities for improvement.

Olentangy uses historical data to recognize teachers for their impact on student success. Taking all of this into account, they're able to build and refine PD plans throughout the school year. Nancy Freese, Director of Human Resources at Olentangy Local School District, says communication is key. "The process is about dialogue and collaboration," Freese says. Teachers and principals keep the conversation open so that they better understand and trust each other. She says their **educators are much more satisfied with their jobs as a result, and that they saw zero attrition due to stress and burnout.**



**“We’ve had an incredibly high retention rate, well above the national average. Our teachers feel supported.”**

**NANCY FREESE**  
Director of Human Resources,  
Olentangy Local School District, Ohio

# Make the Most of Every Opportunity to Support Teachers

Blog: ["5 Steps to Prep for Successful K-12 Teacher Evaluations"](#)

## How to do it:

- 1 Establish and review each teacher's professional growth plan
- 2 Gather multiple types of evidence to assess a teacher's performance
- 3 Make it a two-way, interactive evaluation
- 4 Invite each teacher's feedback
- 5 Update professional growth goals and plans

## Key to success:

An intuitive, online professional learning system where teachers can access their goals and PD plan, check their progress, and leave feedback supports engagement and promotes sustained growth.

Planning and preparation can help administrators elevate collaboration in both check-ins and annual teacher evaluations. Going into the conversation with an understanding of goals the teacher has been working toward, reviewing evidence (like student performance data or professional learning milestones) of their progress, and asking for their feedback invite collaboration. A little extra preparation upfront helps get teachers and administrators past the traditional "tick the box" approach to evaluations.

Supporting teachers is also about listening, support, and collaboration around the smaller things. In the same way that Olentangy Local School District strives to keep growth conversations going between teachers and principals throughout the year, focusing on everyday support can go a long way toward teacher support. Showing teachers you have their backs forms a solid foundation for trust and understanding.

Amy McIntosh, PowerSchool Board Member and former Assistant Secretary of the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development at the U.S. Department of Education, writes about everyday teacher support in the PowerSchool blog post, "5 Steps to Prep for Successful K-12 Teacher Evaluations." McIntosh says that the trust built through day-to-day listening, support, and understanding can help districts achieve bigger goals, like improving teacher retention, growing educator effectiveness, and driving better student outcomes.



**"[T]he best leaders also have lots of informal moments of feedback that include specific and immediate points of feedback, ideally more positive reinforcements than points that are critical. Frequent informal feedback allows teachers to more easily apply feedback to their daily practice, and there are fewer surprises in the formal year-end discussion."**

**AMY MCINTOSH** | PowerSchool Board Member and former Assistant Secretary of the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, U.S. Department of Education

Everyday opportunities to recognize teachers, listen to their concerns, and provide positive feedback during quick conversations can contribute to an overall more collaborative approach to growth. Getting away from a strictly compliance-based model can help a district reshape its culture and realize much more value from evaluations and PD plans.

# Personalizing Professional Learning and Driving Long-Term Growth

eBook: **K-12 Buyer's Guide: Professional Learning Management System**

## How to do it:

- 1 Build initial teacher PD plans based on their students' needs
- 2 Review and discuss their students' performance over time in evaluations
- 3 Schedule check-ins throughout the year to discuss progress, needs, and concerns
- 4 Recognize student success in relation to skills teacher has developed

## Key to success:

A **flexible, adaptable, and always-on professional learning system** lets you build individualized PD plans, while giving teachers the freedom to learn when, where, and how they prefer.

Integrated software systems are at the heart of the stories and tactics shared here. Ensuring that educators have the information they need, and easy access to it, helps leaders and administrators provide more meaningful and informed support. The right tools facilitate ongoing and collaborative learning to keep teachers engaged and in control of their progress.

Consistent, collaborative professional development provides more support than the dated once-a-year approach of years past. Educators agree, according to our 2022 Education Focus Report. When offered a range of options for improving instruction and student support, respondents overwhelmingly chose collaboration and ongoing learning over "sit-and-get" methods. Their top three were "Regular ongoing coaching" (41%), "Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)" (40%), and "Multi-session workshops" (31%). All three of these options include frequent learning sessions and chances to learn with colleagues.

Our *K-12 Buyer's Guide: Professional Learning Management System* details the capabilities of flexible, scalable technology to improve teacher support and fuel growth. It outlines tools to promote teacher and administrator collaboration, like an online system for evaluations and 24/7 remote access to PD courses, activities, and communication channels. And with comprehensive data and analytics, integrated with student data systems, classroom needs can guide PD plan development and success tracking over time.

Tracking student progress over time shows their growth, but it also reflects the teacher's impact in the classroom. You can enhance educators' growth by basing their initial level of professional learning and PD plans on where their students are. They'll spend their professional learning time on skills and information that most benefit them and their students. Checking in along the way on student progress then gives teachers a chance to reflect on their own growth, too. This provides an opportunity for administrators and instructional coaches to recognize and commend their growth, driving career satisfaction as the teacher sees a real connection between their PD hours and student success.

Like Lafayette Public Schools in Florida and Olentangy Local School District in Ohio, Comal ISD offers an example of a Texas district prioritizing support to drive educator growth and retention. They focus heavily on personalizing professional learning for each educator, steering away from a more traditional one-size approach. The goal is to ensure that each educator gets the most out of the time they invest in PD activities.

“We look at performance data for each individual, and we use that to drive their professional activities. That's been a huge tool for our Director of Professional Learning. We're actually saying, 'This is where we need help,' and, 'We don't need to focus on this.'”

**MARIE KUEHLER**

Director of Human Resources  
and Customer Service,  
Comal ISD, Texas

Teachers' time is precious. Integrated technology helps Comal ISD focus all professional learning courses on what each teacher wants and needs. Most importantly, the system also makes it easier for teachers to access their learning, see their progress, and automatically log completions for compliance. Eliminating courses and activities teachers don't need and simplifying administrative processes for them are powerful teacher support tools for this Texas district and others using an integrated talent management system.

# Building a Solid Strategy for Supporting Teachers and Improving Retention

Identifying support needs, improving collaboration, and delivering personalized professional learning content and PD plans are crucial to supporting teachers and improving retention. The examples highlighted in this PowerSchool Miniguide show a few powerful ways districts find success. Using these stories as inspiration, and the actionable how-to tips, your school or district can take steps to improve support and make a positive impact on retention.

An important, common thread in all these stories is the positive role integrated technology can play in supporting teachers. By helping administrators personalize feedback, create well-informed PD plans, simplify the administrative process, and provide a convenient place for feedback and discussions, the right technology forms the backbone of a people-first talent management strategy.

When teachers feel supported, valued, and optimistic about their career prospects, they have a long list of reasons to stay in the profession and in the classroom. The new teachers you support and help grow today will become the experienced educators and valuable mentors that students and future educators need. For this reason, students, staff, and the entire school community benefit from improved teacher retention. And it all starts with meaningful teacher support today.



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