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## Encouraging Our Community and Retaining Our Educators

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## Encouraging Our Community and Retaining Our Educators

### Abstract

Posting about the challenge of retaining high quality, committed teachers from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/encouraging-our-community-and-retaining-our-educators/>

### Keywords

In All Things, encouragement, educators, teacher turnover

### Disciplines

Christianity | Education

### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt University](#).

# Encouraging Our Community and Retaining Our Educators

Matthew Beimers

July 8, 2021

This school year was hard. Although hardships and adjustments in the past couple years differ greatly depending on one's community, educational needs continue to arise within both our public and Christian school settings, exacerbated recently by the global pandemic. As this article specifically addresses the common needs of teachers and how principals can support those in education, notice how these needs might extend to our many roles as parents, professionals, caretakers, and church members in the areas of our work, play, and community.

It is no secret that the ability to attract and retain teachers whose deep hope for Christian education aligns with an institute's mission and vision is becoming increasingly difficult for many school leaders. The need to retain teachers is only accentuated by the data that indicates that the number of people entering university teacher preparation programs continues to dwindle, while teacher attrition rates continue to rise with approximately 8% of all teachers leaving the profession annually<sup>1</sup>. In addition, up to 41% of teachers leave the classroom before completing their 5th year<sup>2</sup>. Such statistics only magnify the importance of the issue for both private and government schools.

There are several reasons teacher retention should be a priority for Christian school leaders, including potential positive impact on students' academic growth, staff morale, ability to align classroom practices with the school's mission and vision, and teacher replacement costs. While it may seem overly simplistic, keeping good teachers is integral because high teacher retention is good for students and their learning<sup>3</sup>.

There is no singular response that will immediately increase teacher retention rates within a school. That said, Christian school leaders might consider some of the factors that might positively influence teacher retention in their communities:

**Potential for leadership development:** One of the responsibilities of a principal is to develop leadership within the schoolhouse. School leaders must identify people on their staff who have different or even stronger gifts than them and leverage those gifts for the good of the community. Asking teachers to lead professional development or faculty meetings, help with scheduling, or mentor new teachers are some ways that a principal can begin to develop leadership among staff. How are you identifying leaders within your school, and what opportunities are you providing to develop their leadership?

**Teacher voice matters:** Heads of school are ultimately responsible for decisions that are made, but where possible, they can and should still seek teacher input and suggestions as part of that

process. Teacher voice not only has a positive impact on school climate, but Ingersoll suggests that “teachers who have more control over key schoolwide and classroom decisions have few problems with student misbehavior, show more collegiality and cooperation among teacher and administrators, have a more committed and engaged teaching staff, and do a better job of retaining teachers”<sup>4</sup>. Giving teachers a voice may not only impact teacher retention, but school culture. How often and to what degree do you seek out teacher voices?

**Strong sense of community:** Even though surrounded by people every day, teaching can be a vulnerable, lonely profession, so it is essential that teachers experience community outside of the classroom with their colleagues. Formational practices such as prayer and singing together are integral in most Christian schools but finding ways to embed other community-building practices into the week will help teachers see that they are part of a larger body. How often does your staff eat together, play together, laugh together, or learn together? Are there some staff who feel they are not part of the community and how might you enfold them?

**Salary and benefits:** In too many Christian school communities, it is frowned upon to talk about salary and benefits. Yet, the reality for some teachers is that they cannot afford to live in the neighborhood or city where their school is located. While it is typical in many professions for people to switch companies or vocations for financial reasons, in some Christian school communities, Christian school teachers who seek out other jobs for those same reasons are often seen as lacking commitment or not having a strong sense of calling. While money may or may not motivate some teachers, Daniel Pink states that “the best use of money as a motivator is to pay people enough to take the issue of money off the table”<sup>5</sup>. Are salary and benefits an issue at your school? Should they be? Does your school provide a just and living wage for teachers so that they are able to live in the neighborhood in which the school is located?

**Culture of care:** Teachers want and need to be cared for by their school principal. While most principals care deeply for their staff, they need to be intentional in demonstrating that care. At times it can be easy for principals to assume what care looks like for each teacher. For some teachers, care looks like giving them the gift of time by covering a recess duty; for others it might mean words of affirmation or visiting their class on a regular basis and providing kind, specific and helpful feedback. Principals can also walk the halls and do daily check-ins at the end of the day with teachers in their classrooms, which hopefully leads to teachers being better known and knowing their principal better. Consider being explicit in asking your teachers: “What does it look like for you to be cared for by me?”

While there are many other factors beyond a principal’s control that might influence teacher retention and the list above is in no way exhaustive, school leaders and boards are encouraged to consider local factors that might be essential to improving retention strategies in their communities.

We have good work to do, friends! May we seek to love our community members well—not only in the roles of educating our children, but also as we listen to others and cultivate a culture of care within all areas of our community.

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