

Educator Recruitment & Retention

“Why I Stay: Educator Retention Survey 2026”

Reflection

Introduction

The Why I Stay: Educator Retention Survey 2026 captures the perspectives of appropriately certified Arizona educators who chose to return to the classroom. Unlike attrition surveys, these responses come from teachers who remain committed to the profession. The survey was designed to better understand why educators continue teaching and to identify concerns before they contribute to burnout or future turnover. Survey respondents were appropriately certified educators returning to Arizona classrooms. The results provide valuable insight into both the strengths and challenges experienced by Arizona's retained educator workforce.

Areas to Celebrate

The survey highlights several strengths across Arizona schools. Most respondents reported feeling safe, supported, and connected to their school communities. Many also reported positive school cultures and strong relationships with school leaders. While these conditions matter, teachers overwhelmingly continue to return because of their students. Educators consistently described student relationships, growth, and making a difference as the primary reasons they stay.

Supporting Data

- 76.77% of respondents agreed they feel safe and supported at their school site.
 - 74.88% agreed their school fosters a positive and collaborative culture.
 - 73.83% agreed they feel a strong sense of belonging in their school community.
 - Student relationships and impact were referenced in 1,029 open-ended responses.
 - *“My administrator and my colleagues. I feel safe and belong.”*
 - *“I have a supportive administration. I love kids and teaching and feel valued where I work.”*
 - *“The students keep me in teaching - their growth, lightbulb moments, and confidence. Watching them learn new skills, manage emotions, and feel safe sharing, makes every day meaningful.”*
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Opportunities to Strengthen Retention

The results also identify opportunities to strengthen retention. School leaders can continue improving communication, feedback, coaching, and support for student behavior. Educators benefit when they have the resources, guidance, and time needed to focus on teaching. Reducing unnecessary burdens and strengthening support systems can help sustain the passion educators bring to their work. These efforts build on existing strengths rather than replace them.

Supporting Data

- 65.32% agreed administration communicates effectively and transparently.
- 63.16% agreed they receive meaningful feedback that supports their growth.
- 57.33% agreed they are supported with student behavioral and disciplinary issues.
- 26.80% agreed they have sufficient time during the workday to complete non-instructional responsibilities.
- *“No prep periods, poor pay, and large class sizes are wearing me down.”*
- *“I am in it for the students. The thing that makes me want to leave is the workload, the lack of support and true respect for my experience and the pay.”*

- *“As a single mom, I don't have a choice but to stay. I loved teaching when I began, now there's less support, more requirements & it has taken a toll on my mental, emotional, and physical health.”*
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Summary

The 2026 Why I Stay Survey tells a story of commitment, purpose, and resilience. Arizona educators continue to return because they believe in their students and the impact of their work. Their dedication deserves recognition, but dedication alone should not carry the profession forward. The goal is to create conditions that protect and sustain the heart of the teacher. When educators feel supported, valued, and empowered, both teachers and students benefit.

Looking Ahead

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) Educator Recruitment and Retention Unit launched the Why I Stay: Educator Retention Survey 2026 as part of ongoing efforts to better understand and strengthen teacher retention. The insights gained will help inform statewide and local strategies to strengthen working conditions, improve retention, and support effective educators over time.

Through continued stakeholder engagement efforts, the ADE will create new opportunities for Local Education Agencies (LEA) and varying employee groups to provide ongoing feedback to inform the work. As these new opportunities become available, the Educator Recruitment and Retention Unit will reach out to LEAs and the public. For more information, reach out to the Educator Recruitment and Retention Unit at: teach@azed.gov.

LEAs and educators are encouraged to reflect on the survey data within their local contexts. The questions below can aid in the reflection process.

Reflective Questions

The Why I Stay: Educator Retention Survey 2026 provides LEAs and educators with the opportunity to analyze the working conditions that are within their immediate locus of control. The reflective questions below can assist in analyzing survey data and can guide local action steps to improve working conditions and retention efforts.

- In looking at the survey data/dashboard for your context, which of the 20 indicators were ranked highest in agreement by respondents?
 - Which indicators were ranked lowest in agreement by respondents?
 - What themes emerge that can inform changes to working conditions?
- How many of the 20 indicators are connected to working conditions that are within site administrators' direct locus of control?
 - Which indicators are within district level administrators' locus of control?
 - Which indicators are within teacher leaders' locus of control?
 - Which indicators are within teachers' locus of control?
- Which of the 20 indicators may be connected to working conditions that are influenced by external public and/or policy considerations?
- In comparing levels of agreement from survey questions to indicators directly connected to site-based working conditions, what narrative emerges that can help inform campus and/or district retention plans?