

ESS Recruitment & Retention Updates

Special Education Professionals Check-In

September 17, 2026



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

ESS Recruitment & Retention

The ESS Recruitment and Retention Team offers recruitment resources, professional learning, and technical assistance to support public education agencies in attracting and retaining skilled special education professionals who cultivate the growth and success of students with disabilities.



What's New

- FY27 Teacher Attrition Survey Updates
- Joint Guidance Memo
- Retention Resources

Teacher Attrition Survey Updates



ADE/ESS Teacher Attrition Survey

- Completed annually by all Arizona public education agencies
- Open from November 1 to January 31
- Collects information about special education staffing and recruitment and retention strategies



Purpose

- Monitor trends in special education staffing and workforce needs across Arizona
- Inform statewide planning, technical assistance, and funding decisions
- Understand how the changing educational landscape is impacting special education personnel



Refined with Intention

- Streamlined survey questions to reduce completion time and improve data quality
- Enhanced recruitment and retention information to support statewide workforce efforts



Key Updates

- Decreased the number of survey questions by 20%
- Updated wording and definitions for greater clarity and consistency
- Organized into main three sections:
 - Special Education Directors
 - Special Education Personnel
 - Impactful Recruitment & Retention strategies



Key Updates

- Simplified personnel reporting to capture:
 - Employed FTE
 - Contract Agency FTE
 - Vacant FTE
- Removed questions about reasons for attrition
- New section for impactful recruitment and retention strategies



Resources & Support

- Visit the [Teacher Attrition Survey webpage](#).
- Email the ESSRandRInbox@azed.gov.



Joint Guidance Memo



Joint Guidance Memo

- The [Joint Guidance Memo on Personnel Requirements](#) was released on Sept. 2
- Addresses IDEA, ESSA, and state certification requirements for personnel who provide special education services under the IDEA
- Clarifies requirements for participants in Grow Your Own (GYO) programs

Your Questions:



Retention Resources





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."*

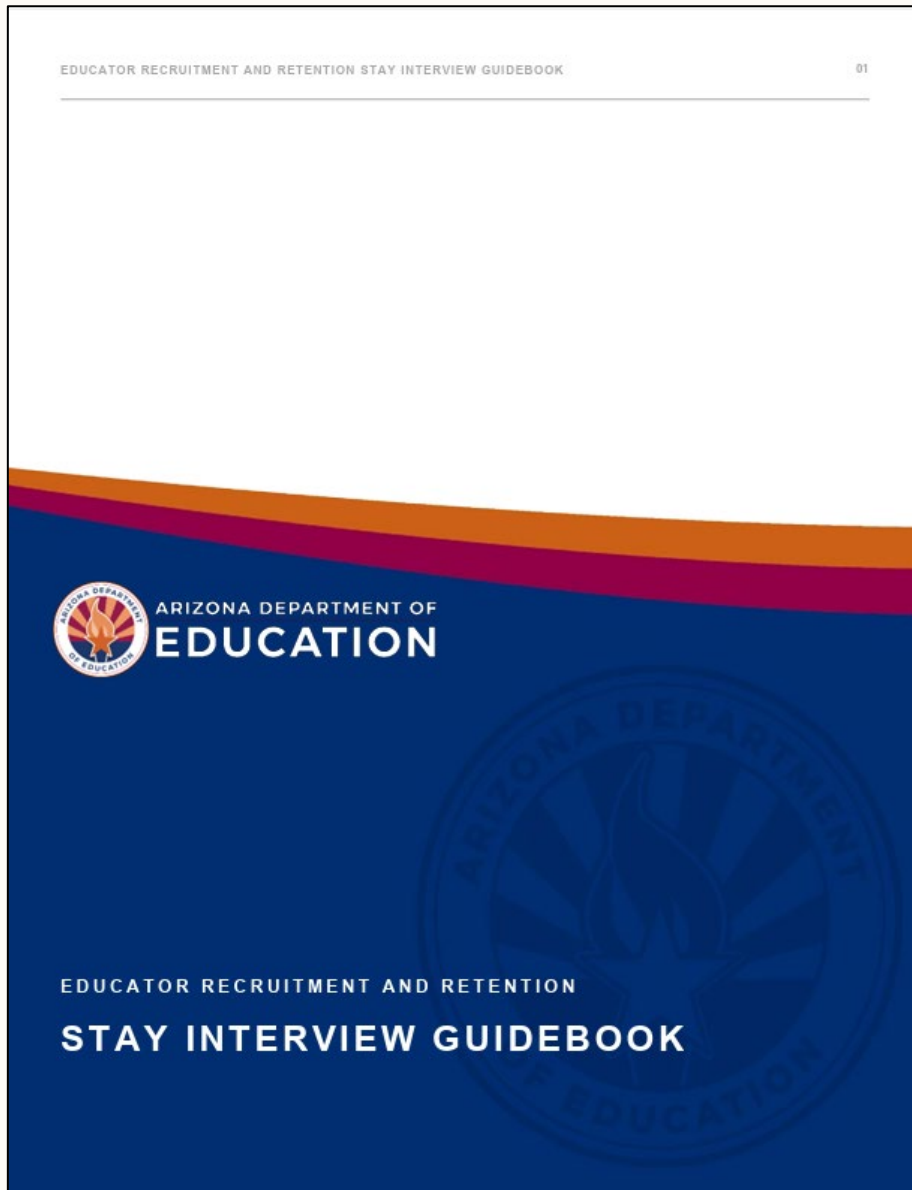
Opportunities to Strengthen Retention

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."*

Why I Stay: Educator Retention Survey 2026



Stay Interview Guidebook

[Stay Interview Guidebook document](#)



Thank you!

Email:

ESSRandR@azed.gov

Webpage:

<https://www.azed.gov/specialeducation/findretainstaff>