



HIRING IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

Retaining Educators in Arkansas Public Schools

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Fort Smith Public Schools





WHO'S IN THE ROOM?

**WHAT ARE YOU HOPING
TO TAKE AWAY TODAY?**

**WHO ELSE NEEDS TO
HEAR THIS?**



RETENTION ACTION PLAN

Take a moment to reflect on your district's retention challenges and identify actionable next steps. Use this framework to develop a concrete plan you can begin implementing when you return.



One Retention Challenge

What is the biggest obstacle to keeping teachers in your district?

One Strategy to Address It

Which approach from today's session could help solve this challenge?

One Person to Help Implement

Who in your organization can champion this initiative with you?





**Source: University of
Arkansas Office for
Education Policy (OEP)
& Arkansas Department
of Education.**

THE ARKANSAS EDUCATOR WORKFORCE

Arkansas maintains an 87% teacher retention rate statewide, but this figure masks significant variation. District retention ranges from 55% to 95%, with rural areas facing the most acute staffing challenges.

Shortage Areas

SPED, Secondary Math, and Secondary Science face critical shortages.

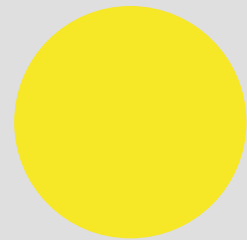
Rural Challenges

Rural districts struggle most with recruitment and retention.

Key Insight

Even small turnover increases create significant hiring needs.





THE COST OF TURNOVER

If your district loses 20 teachers per year, the financial and instructional impact is significant. Understanding these costs helps prioritize retention strategies.

Recruiting & Interviewing

Job postings, candidate screening, and interview processes.

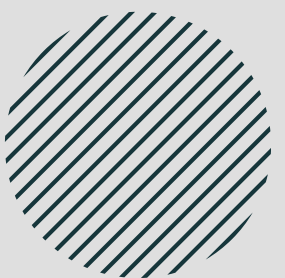
Training & Onboarding

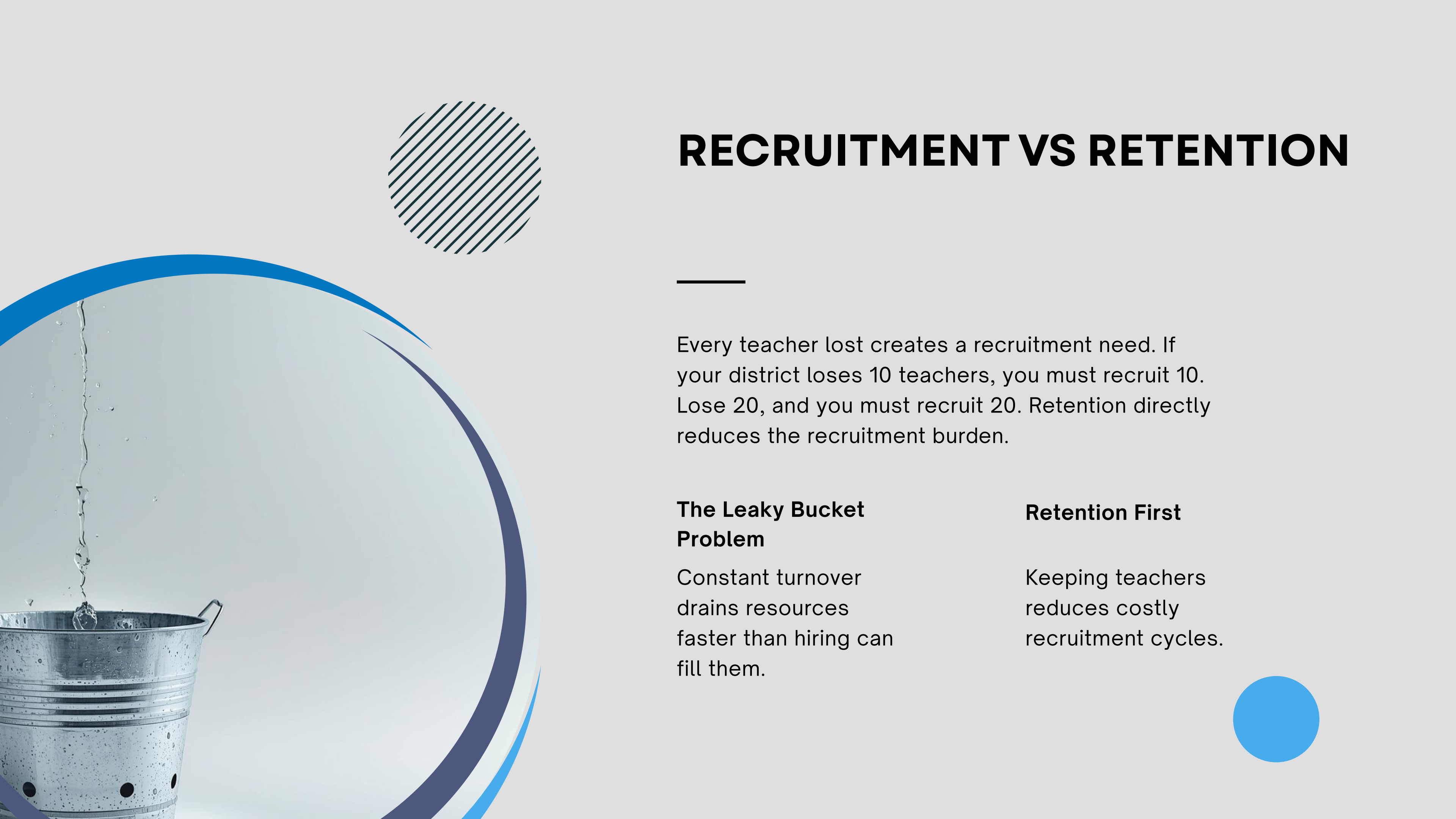
New hire orientation and professional development costs.

Lost Continuity & Mentorship

Estimated cost per teacher turnover: \$10,000–\$20,000.

Source: Learning Policy
Institute & National
Commission on
Teaching and America's
Future (NCTAF).





RECRUITMENT VS RETENTION

Every teacher lost creates a recruitment need. If your district loses 10 teachers, you must recruit 10. Lose 20, and you must recruit 20. Retention directly reduces the recruitment burden.

The Leaky Bucket Problem

Constant turnover drains resources faster than hiring can fill them.

Retention First

Keeping teachers reduces costly recruitment cycles.

WHY TEACHERS LEAVE

Understanding the factors that drive educator attrition is essential for developing effective retention strategies. These common challenges contribute to teachers leaving the profession or seeking opportunities elsewhere.

Lack of Support

Insufficient resources and administrative backing.

Limited Mentorship

New teachers without guidance struggle to succeed.

Limited Career Growth

Insufficient pathways for growth.

Culture of School/District

Unsupportive environments, lack of trust, or toxic school climate that make educators feel isolated.

Workload Stress

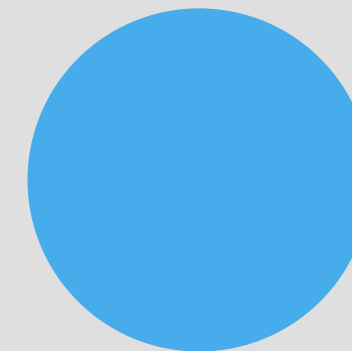
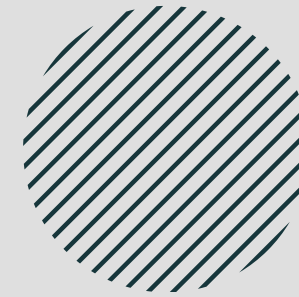
Overwhelming demands lead to burnout.

Leadership Challenges

Poor communication and lack of respect from administrators.

Work-life balance

Lack of self-care can lead to overextension and burnout.



STRENGTHENING RECRUITMENT PIPELINES

Recruitment matters—but retention matters more. Building strong pipelines ensures a steady flow of qualified educators while reducing long-term staffing pressures.

Grow Your Own Programs

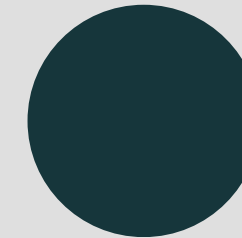
Develop local talent from within your community.

University Partnerships

Collaborate with colleges for student teaching placements.

Alternative Licensure

Create pathways for career changers to enter teaching.



THE FIRST 3 YEARS MATTER MOST

Research shows that most teacher attrition occurs within the first 3–5 years of teaching. Investing in early career support is critical to building a stable, experienced educator workforce in Arkansas schools.

Strong Onboarding

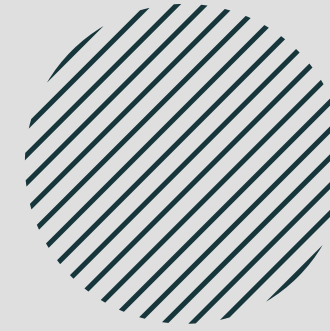
Structured orientation sets teachers up for success.

Mentorship Programs

Experienced mentors provide guidance and support.

Early Career Support

Resources and coaching to build confidence and skills.





EFFECTIVE ONBOARDING

The first days and weeks set the tone for a teacher's entire career. Strong onboarding programs provide new educators with the foundation they need to succeed and stay.

Structured Orientation

Comprehensive introduction to school culture and expectations.

Gradual Workload

Manageable responsibilities that increase over time.

Classroom Support

Frequent observations with real-time feedback.

Peer Collaboration

Building connections with colleagues for ongoing support.



MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

Effective mentoring is one of the most powerful tools for retaining new educators. Structured mentorship programs provide the guidance and support that help teachers thrive in their critical early years.

Trained Mentors

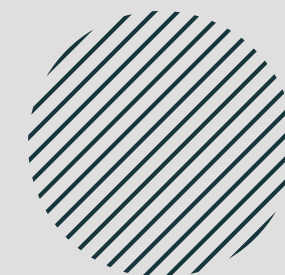
Experienced educators prepared to guide new teachers.

Scheduled Coaching Time

Dedicated time for observation and feedback sessions.

Year-Long Support

Reduced mentor workloads ensure sustained guidance. Consider attaching expectations with a stipend.





LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Principals are the #1 factor influencing teacher retention.
When school leaders create supportive environments with clear communication, educators feel valued and choose to stay.

Supportive Leadership

Teachers stay where leaders advocate for their needs.

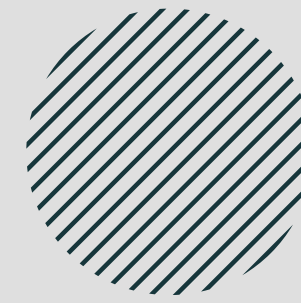
Clear Communication

Transparent, consistent messaging builds trust.

Visible Administrators

Teachers feel respected when leaders are present.





BUILDING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

Creating environments where educators thrive requires intentional effort. When teachers feel valued, heard, and respected, they're more likely to stay and contribute their best work to student success.



Collaboration

Teams working together toward shared goals.

Recognition & Trust

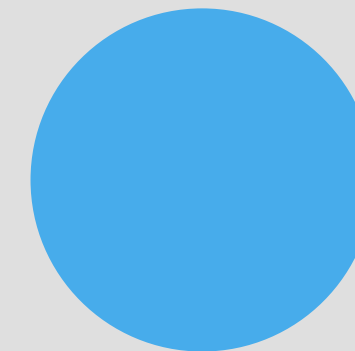
Celebrating contributions and building confidence.

Teacher Voice

Input valued in decisions that affect classrooms.

Professional Respect

Honoring expertise and supporting autonomy.



PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Career pathways that encourage retention help educators see a future in your district. When teachers can grow professionally without leaving the classroom, they stay longer and contribute more.



Instructional Coaching

Peer support roles that develop teaching expertise.

Teacher Leadership

Department heads, curriculum leads, and mentor positions.

Advanced Pathways

Professional learning and certification opportunities.



SUPPORTING TEACHER WELLBEING

Retention improves when educators feel supported in all aspects of their work and life. Arkansas districts can prioritize wellbeing through intentional policies and practices.

Workload Management

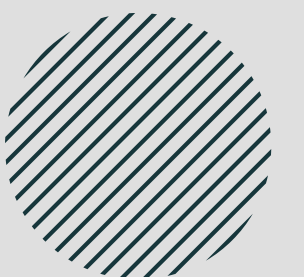
Reasonable class sizes and reduced administrative burden.

Mental Health Support

Access to counseling and stress management resources.

Meaningful Recognition

Celebrating contributions with early and often.





WHAT'S WORKING IN ARKANSAS

Arkansas districts are implementing innovative programs to build sustainable educator pipelines and improve retention. These local initiatives demonstrate that strategic investment in teachers yields measurable results.

Arkansas Grow Your Own

Developing local talent from community members.

Arkansas K-12 Registered Apprenticeship Program

Hands-on training pathways into teaching while earning a salary.

LEARNS Act Impact

Salary improvements attract and keep educators.

Arkansas Teacher Retirement System

The most robust educator pension structures in the Mid-South region





WHAT'S WORKING IN FORT SMITH

Vision

We are a destination district built on relationships, collaboration, and a culture of excellence.

Strong Executive Leadership - Trust, Transparency, and Continuous Improvement

Values - Students First, Relationships, Accountability, Transparency, & Safety

Collaborations- Higher Ed, Industry, & Partners in Education

Grow Your Own Pipelines - Substitutes and Paraprofessionals

Registered Apprenticeship Programs - Areas of Need

Engagement Surveys with Upbeat

Intentional Training - Certified and Classified

Stay Interviews - Teach leaders how to do this

Listening Tours - All stakeholders

Exit Surveys and Interviews





ENGAGEMENT SURVEYS & SCHOOL LEADER SURVEYS

- Upbeat is a K-12 education research and consulting company that focuses exclusively on K-12 staff retention through its research-backed survey tool and personalized leadership coaching services.
- Engagement Surveys, School Leader Surveys, Exit Surveys, Family Surveys
- **Guaranteed Confidentiality:** Powered by an independent third-party system with strict reporting thresholds, ensuring all feedback remains completely anonymous and focused on systemic growth.



UPBEAT

U | UPBEAT

HIDE

Dashboard

Engagement

School Leader Survey

Exit

Family Surveys

PRINT PDF

CHANGE CLUSTER

AM

Fort Smith Public Schools

Compared against Upbeat Global Cluster, Spring 2026

Results

Questions

Schools

Heat Map

FACULTY

STAFF

DEPARTMENT

+ Spring 2026

Survey Metrics

TOTAL QUESTIONS 56

COMPLETIONS 100

PARTICIPATION 94%

+ ADD A FILTER

+ COMPARISON

NO FILTERS SELECTED

CONSIDERATION	AVERAGE ENGAGEMENT SCORE ?	COMPARED WITH: UPBEAT GLOBAL CLUSTER Spring 2026
District Results	80	+11.4

Results by Question Category

% Positive % Neutral % Negative

+ Sort categories

CATEGORY	CATEGORY SUMMARY	COMPARISON ?
1 Professional Development	77 14 9	+6
2 Autonomy	91 5 4	+5
3 Principal/Employee Trust	95 3 2	+10

GROUP DISCUSSION

What is one retention strategy your district could implement this year? Take a moment to reflect on your school's unique challenges and opportunities for keeping great educators.



Support Systems

How can we better support teachers in their daily work?

School Culture

What culture changes would make teachers want to stay?

Mentorship

How can mentoring programs be strengthened?

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KEY TAKEAWAYS & QUESTIONS

Recruitment alone will not solve staffing challenges. Retention must be intentional, with strong support systems in place. Leadership and culture are the driving forces behind educator retention.

Retention is Intentional

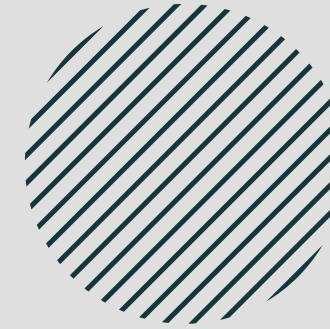
Strategic planning and commitment are essential.

Support Systems Matter

Mentorship, onboarding, and wellbeing drive success.

Questions Welcome

Let's discuss how to retain educators in your district.



CONTACT INFORMATION

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