

RELATIONSHIP
CENTERED
SCHOOLS:
Teacher Retention
Starts with
Relationships

OAKLAND





In 2017 student leaders with Californians for Justice in Oakland conducted surveys on teacher retention with 84 teachers, interviews with 5 principals and education policymakers, and held focus groups with 8 teachers and 60 students. The core theme of **relationships between students and staff** emerged as the key to school and teacher success.


But teachers often don't have the time, capacity, and conditions to cultivate these meaningful relationships with students. According to a survey we conducted with Oakland teachers, **70% agree that their school prioritizes school staff having meaningful relationships with students, but far less (39%) believe that their school provides them with necessary support to create meaningful relationships with students** (i.e. professional development, mentoring, and additional staff support).

96%
of teachers agree that having meaningful relationships with students is key to their teaching success.

What's working in Oakland Unified to Create Relationship Centered Schools:

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Valuing Student Voice:
Two-thirds of students had been asked by teachers and staff to share their opinion about what happens in class or school.¹
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Investing in Staff:
Oakland Unified's Growing Our Own Teaching Pathways partners with local universities so employees can pursue a Special Education teaching credential while working in the district.
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Creating Space for Relationship Building:
The Teaching & Learning department provides a structure for peer mentoring and coaching that focuses on engaging and supporting struggling students.

Why Invest in Staff

Californians for Justice student leaders described how teachers have made all the difference in helping students, especially students of color, feel like they belong, are believed in, and have the support they need to succeed.

Teacher Shannon Carey from MetWest is one of those teachers. She is *"able to connect to each student and knows where to push us and show us where our skills are. She always asks us about our personal life, always caring to know if everything is alright. She works so hard to have us do our best - and we can feel that."*

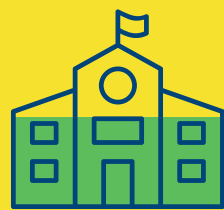


When districts are short on teachers, they cope by eliminating classes, moving students to already over-crowded classes, and turning to teachers who have had limited preparation to fill classrooms². Between 2012-2015, emergency-style provisional and short-term permits in California nearly quintupled³.

Students of color and students who are low-income, have disabilities, or are English Language Learners, are most negatively impacted by the teacher shortage⁴.



Turnover rates are about **50% higher** for teachers in Title I schools (which serve more low-income students)⁵.



Turnover rates are **70% higher** for teachers in schools serving the largest concentration of students of color⁶.

The Teacher Shortage Through Students' Eyes

I've seen firsthand what happens when a school district has a hard time hiring and keeping teachers to fill all of its classrooms. Over the years, I've had short- and long-term substitutes, been enrolled in classes with no teacher assigned to them, and felt the impact of starting a new school year and realizing a favorite teacher—someone I had connected with and was looking forward to seeing—hadn't returned. Each of these experiences creates a stressful situation and makes it difficult to learn.

Teacher turnover has serious, long-lasting effects on students, but it doesn't end there—it also impacts school and district budgets. Learning Policy Institute's turnover calculator estimates costs for Oakland Unified at \$4,961,880 annually. That's a lot of money, especially in a district and state where school funding is low and we don't have enough resources to meet all of our needs.

*Then there's another cost that's not as easy to calculate. **When teachers come and go we lose the strong connections students need to feel safe and comfortable at school.** We can struggle and fall behind in our classes. We can become overwhelmed and not know who to turn to for assistance. We can check out and go through an entire day without talking in class or connecting with an adult.*

By investing in teacher support and retention, we are investing in one of our students' most important resources so that every student has a caring and supportive adult on campus - everyday and at every school.



- Jiawen
Californians for Justice Leader
Student @ Oakland High School

Oakland Teacher Voices and Research from the Field

Californians for Justice's survey of Oakland teachers builds on previous research, which finds that **inadequate compensation, teaching conditions, mentorship and support, and administrative support** are key reasons for teacher attrition and turnover⁷.

Salary and Compensation: According to our teacher retention survey, 79% of teachers did not believe⁸ that they received adequate salary and benefits, especially for Oakland's cost of living⁹. Oakland Unified's exit survey also found that half of teachers left because of low salaries. *"I got priced out of Oakland and now I commute. That's an hour longer to my day just to work for OUSD."*

Teaching Conditions: The Learning Policy Institute found that teaching conditions are also critical factors in whether teachers stay or leave¹⁰. Thirty-nine percent of teachers in Oakland Unified's exit survey cited poor working conditions. One teacher noted, *"I have ants for months in my classroom, where temperatures reach 90 degrees 40-60 days each year."* More than half of teachers believed that they needed more technology, classroom supplies, and updated instructional materials.

Mentorship and Support: Oakland Unified's exit survey found that 62% of teachers left because of excessive work stress/pressure. One principal highlighted these pressures: *"On the official state and federal accountability measures when they don't see as much movement they feel blamed for it - without support they feel like they are hitting a wall."*

- In our survey, 61% stated that they needed more mentoring and support to succeed.
- Close to a third (28%) identified high quality induction, professional development, mentoring, and other ongoing support as one of the top solutions for retaining teachers.

Support from Administrators: LPI found that teachers who felt unsupported by leadership are more than twice as likely to leave than those who feel well-supported¹¹. One Oakland Principal observed that although there isn't a single reason that people leave, *"people stay because of leadership."*

- 51% of teachers we surveyed said that high quality principals who support staff and create positive school culture are one of the top solutions to retaining teachers.
- 74% of teachers we surveyed feel that their school administration values them. But 39% felt that their school administrators could do more to provide a positive and collaborative work culture.

From our survey data, teachers identified these top priorities:



Professional mentoring/induction programs



Increasing salaries/benefits



High quality principals who support staff and create positive school culture



Housing incentives

- Oakland Unified’s exit survey found that teachers who left generally felt a lack of support for all employees to develop and reach their potential, and a lack of recognition for their contributions/ work.

Our Recommendations for Teacher Retention in Oakland Unified

Students, teachers, and education decision-makers identified the following evidence-based solutions as a critical starting point to address teacher turnover and attrition in Oakland Unified.

1) Invest in Staff:

In our survey, teachers frequently identified the importance of a “mutually supportive, collaborative culture of educators” and the need for more mentoring and support to succeed as a teacher. In Oakland Unified’s exit survey, 75% of teachers highlighted relationships with co-workers as one of the most enjoyable aspects of their job. This speaks to a need for investing in professional development centered in peer relationships and co-learning.

Mentoring and Coaching with Teacher Input: Through coaching, teachers get the opportunity to “learn from other effective teachers...[who] have shown improvement and achievement, who are real practitioners.” Coaches can help novice teachers by mentoring and leading professional development through one-on-one support, classroom observations, and shadowing. They also play an important role in helping new teachers stay in the profession.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) especially at Middle School and Elementary Schools¹²: PLCs build community through of co-learning and collaboration. Teams of teachers reflect on their classroom practices, adapt practices and learn from each other through shared planning and troubleshooting. Grade level teams can develop and agree upon assessments, criteria, and skills, meeting regularly throughout the week to reflect and strategize.

Competitive, Equitable Compensation: Teachers in our surveys identified increasing salaries and/or benefits and housing incentives such as money for rent, relocation, and down payment as top solutions for teacher retention¹³. Other supports such as childcare and loan forgiveness, can make living as a teacher more sustainable.



“If we’re going to have relationships with kids we need to have relationships with each other. Every teacher needs to be on a team. [At my school] we structure our work in teams, we have grade level teams and content department teams and they meet weekly. We’re spending 8 hours a week in teams, they’re supportive, collaborative, break down the isolation.”
- Oakland Unified teacher



High quality and affordable entry and retention pathways: One solution involves making teacher training accessible and affordable without compromising rigor: a best practice is covering training costs for high quality preparation programs for those who will teach in high need fields or locations for at least four-years, similar to medical teaching/ residency programs.

Invest in Administrators: Principal preparation and training can develop administrators’ capacities and abilities to foster supportive and productive environments that improve teaching conditions and help create relationship-centered schools.

2) Value Student Voice:

Increasing student voice and input on teacher performance and hiring can be a reliable way to shape effective teaching practices¹⁴ and enhance teacher relationships with students.

Student Feedback for Continuous Improvement: Students can play an important role in teachers’ professional development. When teachers hear directly from students about their educational experiences they can adapt practices accordingly, and support students’ growth. Teachers can incorporate student feedback by using surveys for input on specific aspects of their practice¹⁵.

Student Input in Hiring: Student voice has also been shown to be an effective factor in hiring decisions. In the five academies at Esteban Torres High School in LA, students play a substantive role in teacher hiring processes. Students with a range of academic and social experiences sit in on second interviews and engage candidates on scenarios. Students also sit in on teaching demonstrations and give feedback as part of the hiring decision conversation.

3) Create Space for Relationship Building:

In order for relationships to thrive, teachers also need more time for planning, collaboration, and honing effective strategies. 79% of teachers in our survey felt they needed more preparation time, echoing broader patterns in which teachers often find themselves severely short on time¹⁶. A participant in our focus group explained: “I think a whole lot more of relationship building would happen if teachers had more time. We should have a prep every single day.”

Master Schedule Changes create time for advisory, collaboration, prep time or staff development. Schools can create time for collaboration and relationship building with early dismissal or block schedules, additional class time such as advisory, and increased paid time for teachers outside of school hours.

Common Prep Time fosters collaboration where staff teams meet a few times a week to engage in joint lesson planning, identify students' specific needs and strengths, discuss best practices, and troubleshoot issues¹⁷. This can be built in through block schedules or early dismissal. Other schools have created blocks of time through physical activity periods by bringing in community members to deliver content and increase community relationships¹⁸.

Advisories can provide spaces for students to develop meaningful relationships with an adult at school, build connections with peers, and receive personalized social, emotional, and academic support. With an established curriculum, teachers can practice restorative justice circles and other practices to better understand students' educational and life experiences and keep track of their academics and well-being¹⁹.

Paid Time for Teachers Outside of School Hours could support parent-teacher home visits and after-school help. Home visits or conferences with parents and families build relationships and trust, and allow staff to share experiences, communicate expectations, and identify how to best support students' academic and social emotional needs²⁰.



Call to Action

Join us in creating Relationship Centered Schools that invest in staff so that all students can have the support and conditions to succeed.

 caljustice.org/believeinme

 [@Cal4Justice](https://twitter.com/Cal4Justice)

 facebook.com/caljustice

At Californians for Justice, we believe that young people are the leaders we need to create the healthy, just, and thriving schools that all our communities deserve.

Footnotes

¹Based on surveys where we asked 51 Oakland students to observe their interactions with teachers and staff over the course of a single day

²The teacher shortage is not limited to Oakland. In 2016, the Learning Policy Institute reported that 75% of districts across California were experiencing teacher shortages, and most reported that the shortage was worsening. Podolsky, Anne and Leib Sutchter. 2016. *California Teacher Shortages: A Persistent Problem*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/ca-teacher-shortage-persistent-problem-brief>).

³Carver-Thomas, Desiree and Linda Darling-Hammond. 2017. *Addressing California's Growing Teacher Shortage: 2017 Update*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Addressing-Californias-Growing-Teacher-Shortage-2017-Update-REPORT.pdf>).

⁴Sutchter, Leib, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Desiree Carver-Thomas. 2016. *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.* Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coming-crisis-teaching>).

⁵*A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S*

⁶Carver-Thomas, Desiree and Linda Darling-Hammond. 2017. *Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Teacher_Turnover-REPORT.pdf).

⁷Previous research shows that school leadership, school culture, and strength of relationships are important factors for teacher retention. *A Coming Crisis in Teaching?*

⁸Survey findings are based on percentage stating "somewhat," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" in response to the statement (e.g. response to "I receive adequate salary and benefits")

⁹From survey and focus group findings

¹⁰*A Coming Crisis in Teaching?*

¹¹*A Coming Crisis in Teaching?*

¹²Provinci, Celine. 2012. "Education World: Best Practices for Professional Learning Communities." Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://a_admin/best-practices-for-professional-learning-communities.shtml).

¹³*A Coming Crisis in Teaching?*

¹⁴MET Project. 2012. *Asking Students about Teaching: Student Perception Surveys and Their Implementation*. Seattle, WA: The MET Project. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://www.youthtruthsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Asking_Students_Practitioner_Brief.pdf).

¹⁵Advocates for Children of New York. 2012. *Essential Voices: Including Student and Parent Input in Teacher Evaluation*. New York City: Advocates for Children of New York. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/essential-voices_june2012.pdf?pt=1).

¹⁶Reeves, Cynthia, Scott Emerick, and Eric Hirsch. 2006. *Creating Non-Instructional Time for Elementary School Teachers: Strategies from Schools in North Carolina*. Carrboro, North Carolina: Center for Teaching Quality. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED498767.pdf>).

¹⁷Cotton, K. (2001). *New small learning communities: Findings from recent literature*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. (ERIC Document Retrieval Service No. ED459539); "[Transforming the High School Experience: How New York City's Small Schools are Boosting Student Achievement and Graduation Rates](#)"; [From High School to Learning Communities: Five Domains of Best Practice](#)

¹⁸Reeves, Cynthia, Scott Emerick, and Eric Hirsch. 2006. *Creating Non-Instructional Time for Elementary School Teachers: Strategies from Schools in North Carolina*. Carrboro, North Carolina: Center for Teaching Quality. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED498767.pdf>).

¹⁹[Promising Practices ; Advisory Programs in High School Restructuring](#)

²⁰Parent Teacher Home Visits." <http://www.pthvp.org/>



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