



A School Leader's Guide to Employee Engagement

Unlock the potential of your staff.

Truly engaged employees have the transformative potential to shape a learning environment. This guide equips you with tools that can help you reignite that spark of motivation within your school community. Learn how to measure your current employee engagement along with practical strategies you can start implementing now.

You'll explore the benefits of engagement, find ways to assess the current pulse in your district, and better understand how to create a work environment that celebrates collaboration and helps drive employee success.

Are you ready to develop engagement that resonates throughout your school?

Introduction

As an educator, certain payoffs can feel like winning the lottery—the light in a student’s eyes when a new concept clicks, the home team’s Friday night win, or a first-generation graduate walking across the stage. These magic moments help make every tough day worth it.

But for all the big rewards, teachers can face big challenges, too. Many of their students struggle with problems like poverty, bullying, mental health struggles, chronic absenteeism, and addiction.¹

Educators are often left to deal with the fallout from these issues. That can be in addition to their standard workload and filling ad hoc roles to balance out school staffing shortages. Perhaps that’s why 44% of K-12 teachers report feeling burned out, which is the highest percentage among U.S. workforce groups.²

If left unchecked, that burnout may lead to poor student outcomes, unengaged employees, and high turnover. It’s critical to take steps now to help mitigate burnout’s effect on your team.

44% of K-12 teachers report feeling burned out.²

Show employees you’ve got their back by fostering a culture that promotes communication, autonomy, well-being, and support. Boost their benefits with options they actually want. What you encourage should reflect the culture of wellness you want to see within your workplace. Let’s explore actionable steps you can take to help make it a reality.



What is Employee Engagement?

We tend to remember teachers and employees who put forth an effort, show us that they care, or take a unique approach to a lesson. That is what employee engagement should look like. Can you think of an educator who made a long-term impact on you?

Employee engagement at its core is a way to measure how involved and connected employees are to their job.

- Are they putting in effort and innovation?
- Do they care about outcomes?
- Are they just running through the motions?
- Do they wait out the clock until it's time to go home?

The current education system relies on employee engagement for success. Students need connected mentors and mindful adults to guide them. Statistically, students have a better experience with educators who are invested in their success.³

However, that doesn't mean the responsibility for that engagement rests on solely on employees' already-burdened shoulders. Everything from administration to school culture can play a part in this, too.

In order to understand how you can more positively affect engagement in the future, we'll need to explore what factors might be affecting it now.



What Lowers Employee Engagement?

Burnout isn't just a buzzword to label when an employee has given up or can't get themselves together. Burnout is often a reflection of broken-down boundaries, a full plate, or a lack of purpose. It may look like fatigue and disinterest. Let's consider what may be preventing your employees from staying engaged in the classroom.

Resource Constraints

When employees don't have access to what they need to do their jobs properly it can be disheartening. Limited resources may be a major roadblock to employee engagement.

Like a construction worker without tools or a mechanic without the right parts, you're less likely to feel invested in a project you know can't be done the right way.

Changing Educational Landscapes

Education is one field that will likely never stop evolving. Some of those changes are fun and exciting. Others can metaphorically take the wind out of your sails. From technology integration to policy changes, so much can change on a dime that may directly impact educator roles.

Lack of Growth Opportunities

From chances for a promotion to ways to improve the craft of teaching, employees often need something to work toward. Without those opportunities, you might see more teachers checking out.

A big part of that growth can include recognition as well. Teachers who don't feel seen for their hard work may decide to leave for another job that does acknowledge them.

Discussion Questions for Administration

1. What are some common causes of burnout among your educators and staff?
2. Can you list at least three symptoms of burnout that your educators are experiencing?
3. How can limited resources and support impact employee engagement?
4. What is an example of a situation where resource constraints have negatively affected engagement?
5. In what ways does technology influence educator roles and satisfaction in your district?
6. What is the potential impact of policy changes and societal expectations on employee engagement for your staff?
7. How can the lack of recognition contribute to employee disengagement?
8. Why is professional development important for maintaining high levels of employee engagement?



How Do You Measure Employee Engagement?

There are several different types of surveys that you can use to solicit feedback. Each one serves a unique purpose and yields different data. When woven together, this data can tell a contextual, detailed story of employee engagement in your school or district.

Common Education Survey Types

Annual Engagement Surveys:

The goal of this survey is to gather high-level data on employee feelings over the course of a year. It's a tool for spurring discussion at the leadership level and helps to yield information that can inform broad initiatives. These surveys can be more extensive, covering topics like culture, expectations, compensation, and diversity.

If you don't measure employee engagement at all, conducting this survey may be a good place to start. But don't rely solely on its data for too long. Annual employee engagement surveys may not capture the day-to-day issues or interactions that sometimes drives engagement down over time.

Pulse Surveys:

These surveys are usually shorter (no more than 10 questions) and can be deployed often. They help give you a real-time look into what your team is going through. They can alert you to issues sooner, which may give you more time to address them. They can also give you a snapshot of employee engagement around milestones like the middle or end of a school year or grading period.

Employee Net Promoter Score Surveys (eNPS):

The purpose of the eNPS is to measure employee loyalty and how it may directly influence retention and recruiting. Low scores can often indicate employees who may be at risk of leaving or are undermining morale. Understanding who they are can help you prevent good employees from leaving.

When it comes to your eNPS, high scores help identify your ambassadors. Testimonials from real people who genuinely like their workplace can go a long way toward helping to attract top talent.

Define Key Engagement Indicators

For the surveys, you can identify data points to calculate your employee engagement score. Here are some examples:

- Satisfaction with the role
- Connection to school culture
- Opinions on training needs

Data points help you develop the survey's focus and questions. Whether you focus on a couple of these points or all of them, measure engagement in a way that makes sense for your team.



Know Your End Goal

To create a benchmark, ask yourself questions to define the goals you have in mind for your school. How do you want engagement to look? How quickly do you want to see change? Let these ideals shape your surveys.

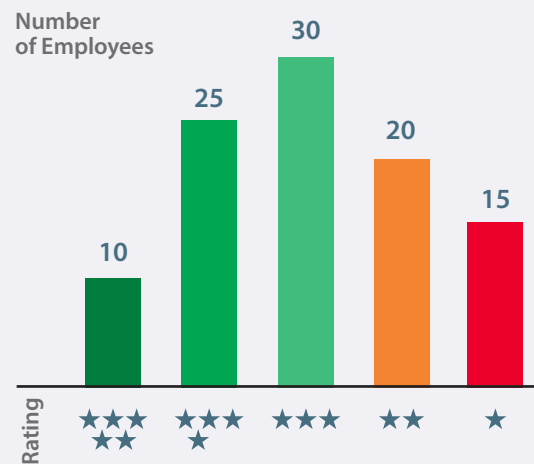
Calculate Engagement Scores

Once you have your data, it's time to figure out what it means for you and your school district. One way is to assign a point value or grading system to the questions you've selected. Here's one example of how it could work:



Let's say you've selected five questions to produce the data points you need. Each question asks employees to rate their experience on a scale of one to five, with five being the highest. You give the survey to 100 employees, and the results for one question look like this:

Sample Answer Distribution



To find the average (A) for this question, we'll break it down into two steps:

1. Find the rating score (S) for the question by multiplying the rating level (L) by the number of votes (V) for that rating (i.e., 5 stars multiplied by 10 votes). Repeat this for each rating level and add the results together:

$$S = (L \times V)$$

In this example, the score would be 295.

2. Divide the score (S) by the total number of survey responses (R) to find the question average (i.e., 295 divided by 100 total responses):

$$A = (S / R)$$

The question average for the sample question would be 2.95. Your question average can be your benchmark to measure future efforts against. Remember that progress is often more important than perfection.

How Do You Build Employee Engagement?

Are you ready to improve that score? It's important to understand what factors are behind it. There are four pillars of employee engagement that we'll be going over in this guide.

Employee Well-Being

Both physical and mental well-being are crucial elements to maintaining high levels of teacher engagement. As a school leader, you play a vital role in supporting that by prioritizing a supportive and engaging work environment. Here are some active ways to incorporate this in your school's strategies:

Strategies for Improving Engagement

Purpose in Action Board: Dedicate a bulletin board in a common area where teachers can post notes, pictures, or other things that represent their sense of purpose in action. This could be student work, a meaningful quote, a photograph of a classroom activity, or a brief anecdote. Encourage teachers to regularly contribute.

Health and Wellness Programs: Provide access to wellness initiatives, such as gym memberships, nutrition counseling, financial coaching, or mindfulness training. Organize walking or biking groups, dance classes, or teacher fun runs. You could offer swag for participation or let your staff team up to compete for prizes.

Employee Assistance Programs: Establish programs that offer confidential counseling and support services to teachers. This can help employees navigate personal challenges and improve their mental health.

Flex Schedules: Allow teachers or classified employees to have some control over their daily schedules, including flexibility in planning and preparation periods. As a district, consider split-shift job sharing options or revised start and end times that work better for your staff.

Remote Work Solutions: Explore the possibility of scheduled remote learning days, particularly for tasks that can be effectively accomplished outside the school premises. This can provide teachers with a better work-life balance and reduce commuting-related stress.



Classroom Autonomy

Educators are constantly coming up with fresh ideas, methodologies, and classroom games or themes. Consider how much they could accomplish with the backing of school leadership. This means promoting autonomy, fostering innovation, encouraging creativity, and aligning individual and organizational goals. As a school leader, you can implement the following actionable ideas to support these areas:

Strategies for Improving Engagement

Curriculum Development Committees: Establish committees focused on specific subjects or grade levels. These committees can review, update, and develop curriculum materials and teaching strategies based on current educational research, student performance data, and feedback from both teachers and students.

Teaching Method Workshops: Encourage teachers to lead workshops based on their areas of expertise or innovative teaching methods they have successfully implemented. Provide support and resources to help them apply new strategies, such as blended learning, project-based learning, or flipped classrooms.

Innovation Power Hour: Set aside specific time for teachers to engage in innovative and creative activities. This could include regular designated periods during professional development days. Encourage teachers to explore new teaching techniques, technologies, and instructional materials to enhance their classroom practices.

Idea Sharing Platforms: Establish platforms, such as online forums or internal communication tools, for teachers to share innovative ideas, resources, and success stories. Encourage collaboration and inspire teachers to learn from one another.

Teacher-Initiated Pilot Programs: Allow teachers to submit proposals and lead pilot programs for new teaching methods, technologies, or curricular approaches. After a trial period, these initiatives could be evaluated for effectiveness and potential adoption across the school or district.



Community Environment

A sense of belonging can be a big step towards helping employees feel more comfortable participating. Look for ways to create a safe space through diversity and inclusion programs. You can also give instruction on effective communication and set a standard for peaceful resolutions of workplace conflicts. Finally, don't forget the power of recognition in building a stronger community. These are a few ways you can help improve recognition efforts in your school:

Strategies for Improving Engagement

Peer Appreciation: Encourage a culture of appreciation by providing opportunities for teachers to recognize and celebrate each other's achievements. This can be through monthly peer-nominated awards, shout-outs during staff meetings, or a dedicated appreciation platform.

Public Recognition: Acknowledge teachers' accomplishments and milestones publicly, such as mentioning them in school newsletters, on social platforms, or coordinate with local media. This public recognition can boost morale and reinforce a sense of value and appreciation.

Spotlight on Excellence: Recognize and celebrate teachers who have made significant contributions towards achieving individual and organizational goals. This can be done through community hero awards or performance-based incentives. Acknowledging their efforts helps reinforce a sense of purpose and motivates teachers.



Professional Development

Employees tend to feel more engaged when they believe their efforts have an affect on their own career. This is a great opportunity to give each staff member's personalized career path a little attention. Since mentoring to every employee can be overwhelming, look for ways to group teachers and staff by interest and opportunity.

Strategies for Improving Engagement

Growth Navigator Program: Pair participants with a growth navigator—an experienced mentor who provides guidance, resources, and support. Consider including resume building, interview coaching, developing action plans, and regular check-ins to monitor progress.

Professional Learning Communities: Establish a professional learning community (PLC) where teachers can share ideas, collaborate on projects, or improve teaching skills and student outcomes. PLCs can be organized by grade level, subject area, or instructional challenges. This collaborative approach helps empower teachers and provides opportunities for professional growth.

Success Sprints: Success Sprints are short, focused periods where educators work towards specific, achievable goals with the support of structured feedback loops. They emphasize rapid goal setting, implementation, reflection, and adjustment over a set period, like four to six weeks, to help improve agile responses to challenges.

Career Blueprint Initiative: Help educators map out their career paths within the education sector, offering clarity on potential growth opportunities, required competencies, and steps to achieve their long-term career goals. Support teachers in attending conferences, workshops, and training programs, as this can help enhance their skills and job satisfaction.





Demonstrating Employer Engagement

If you want your teachers and classified employees to be engaged at work, the school administration should consider proving that they're engaged, too.

Here are a few ways you can help show that:

- Participate in school activities
- Be active in recognitions and celebrations
- Provide transparency around decision-making
- Change up your benefits package

Research shows that 64% of employees depend on their benefits to contribute to their job satisfaction.⁴ That's why we emphasize helping your colleagues understand all the benefits available to them.

How to Personalize Benefits to Boost Engagement

Don't be afraid to ask about how your team feels about their benefits in your initial round of surveys. Of everything that makes up an employee's compensation package, salary and benefits tend to be highly valued. If raising salaries isn't possible, you may have more wiggle room with benefits to make changes that can help improve employee engagement.

To get started, make sure you have all of your bases covered and then branch out to consider more competitive additions.

Establish the Basics

When it comes to improving total compensation with benefits, starting with a firm foundation is key. Help ensure your employees' incomes and their families are better protected by offering:

- Health insurance
- Reimbursement accounts
- Disability insurance
- Life insurance

Next, bake enrollment flexibility into the program. A one-size-fits-all approach may not meet employees' unique needs. Provide the opportunity to customize coverage so your workers aren't paying for something they don't need.

67% of employers say benefits are crucial to improving employee engagement.⁵

Expand Your Horizons

To build a plan employees can value, consider also including benefits that fall outside of the traditional definition. After all, 67% of employers say benefits are crucial to improving employee engagement.⁵ Bulking up your offering with additional resources could be just the thing to boost morale.

Mental Health

Unfortunately, educators are three times more likely to experience symptoms of depression than other adults.⁶ Encouraging teachers to prioritize self-care and speak up when they're struggling can help in some ways. But that also puts the burden back on the person who's burned out, asking them

to go the extra mile when there may be nothing left in the tank.

You can show support by offering mental health benefits like an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). An EAP helps employees and their family confidentially deal with personal or work-related issues, including stress management, grief, mental health conditions, and more. One study showed that mental health issues were the top reason for seeking an EAP, making up 30% of cases.⁷

Dependent Support

Dependent Care Accounts (DCAs) are a great option to help employees navigate the stress of childcare or dependent caretaking. They allow employees to set aside pre-tax dollars and use that money to pay for eligible dependent care expenses, like daycare, before or after school care, or day camps.

Mental health issues were the top reason for seeking an EAP, making up 30% of cases⁷

Serious Injuries

We've already mentioned disability insurance, but did you know other supplemental options exist to help cover deductibles, coinsurance, and other expenses that may not be covered by other policies? These types of benefits can help employees rest easier knowing they have additional coverage in case they fall victim to unforeseen events. When it comes down to it, employees need resources that support their well-being. Providing options that deliver a holistic approach may lead to higher employee engagement and retention.

Create a Benefits Education Strategy for Employees

Using your benefits package as a tool for driving

engagement likely won't have much impact if no one knows it exists or if it's too confusing. Yet only 60% of workers in education feel confident in understanding their benefits.⁸ This is why communication is crucial.

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Not only does spreading the word help fill the information gap, it can also cut down on absenteeism and expenses. Employees who seek and receive preventative care tend to be healthier, miss less work, and drive health care costs down by up to 33%.⁹ Help make sure your employees feel as comfortable and confident with your benefits package as possible.

Make Resources Available

Before enrollment, sharing resources with employees to help them understand their benefits is key. But it may not be enough. So before you hand out a few brochures or post some flyers in the teacher's lounge and call it a day, consider this: employees typically spend 30 minutes or less on average researching their options.¹⁰

That's not nearly enough time for them to fully understand the value your benefits package provides.

Consider using different ways to share information with employees over the course of a couple weeks before enrollment begins. That could include videos, presentations for in-person or teleconference meetings, or live Q&A sessions.

Implementing Change

If you're ready to start making changes at your school to boost employee engagement, make sure you remember these five key elements:

- Employee well-being
- Classroom autonomy
- Community environment
- Professional development
- Employer engagement

And the Survey Says...

We started the process by encouraging you to find out where employees stood on how engaged they feel, including around total compensation and benefits. After making all these changes you should consider checking in to see how they feel again.

You may want to make your survey recurring, with enough time for changes to take place and employees to be affected. You may even want to plan to survey multiple times after changes have been made to follow up with your progress.

When you get your new scores, don't be afraid to share them with your staff. Bringing your employees in on making and keeping these school-wide goals can help increase engagement, too.

Don't Go It Alone

Working in education can be a uniquely rewarding



enough to keep morale high when you're facing tough challenges. Your employees may need support and insurance benefits they can count on. When it comes to building such a crucial piece of your employee engagement strategy, partner with a provider you can rely on.

From finding well-fitting benefits packages and helping meet individual needs to walking employees through the process one-on-one, American Fidelity can help.



Scan for more information and
visit our website at
americanfidelity.com/education



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