



How To Attract, Develop, and Retain Effective Teachers

Traditional Grading vs. Standard-based Grading

There's a commonly-held belief that a single teacher can change a student's life—supported by the fact that almost all of us had at least one exceptional teacher who inspired us to explore new ideas, think deeply, challenge ourselves, or even pursue a particular career.

Although many factors contribute to student achievement—individual characteristics, family, and environment, to name a few—teacher effectiveness has a greater impact than any other factor in a school system. Countless studies demonstrate how effective teachers impact student achievement, as well as the [potentially devastating effects of ineffective teaching](#).

Just like the students in our classroom, every teacher is an individual with his or her own interests, experiences, and preferences. Therefore, an effective teacher won't look the same in every classroom. But, there are some standard characteristics that all effective teachers possess.

What It Means To Be An Effective Teacher

Effective Teachers Are Prepared—The most effective teachers come to class each day ready to teach.

Students find it easy to learn in their classes because everything is organized, and time seems to fly because they're engaged rather than wasting instructional time.

Effective Teachers Have High Expectations—Their students are encouraged to try and try again, make mistakes and learn from them. These teachers create a supportive and judgment-free environment because they believe their students will be successful.

Effective Teachers Are Positive—They have an optimistic attitude about teaching and—more importantly—about their students. The effective teacher communicates with students about their progress and makes herself available. She also has strategies to help students act positively toward each other.

Effective Teachers Are Fair—They give students equal opportunities and privileges and realize that being “fair” doesn't necessarily mean treating everyone the same.

Effective Teachers Add A Personal Touch—They build relationships with students, share personal anecdotes, and demonstrate a genuine interest in the lives and interests of each one.

Effective Teachers Admit Mistakes—They aren't afraid to show that they're human. If a student is mistakenly accused, they apologize. The effective teacher is quick to make adjustments if a student points out a legitimate mistake in grading or other lesson materials.

Effective Teachers Are Lifelong Learners—They understand the value of education and want to grow and improve their practice. The effective teacher participates in professional development, as well as PLCs and PLNs, and regularly implement what they've learned.

Ideally, by this point, you're nodding along and making a mental list of all the faculty members who fit the bill. But even a staff full of highly-effective teachers has room for improvement, right? So, let's explore what it takes to not only attract but also develop and retain effective teachers.

Attracting Effective Teachers

Attracting excellent teachers is one of the main indicators of a well-functioning education system. If teaching is not perceived as an attractive profession, qualified educators may not apply. This would inevitably risk the quality of schools and a decline like that would be difficult to reverse. Therefore, it's up to everyone in the school system—from district leaders and administrators to students and parents—to prioritize and promote a positive, student-focused culture and great teaching.

According to a study by [The New Teacher Project](#) (TNTP), teachers want [work environments that resemble the classroom environments they create](#) for their students. TNTP found that educators want to know:

- Teachers and administrators share a common vision of what effective teaching looks like.
- [Expectations for effective teaching](#) are clearly defined.
- The school or district is committed to improving instructional practices for all teachers.

Along with these qualities—which are indicators of a strong culture—consider these factors when it comes to attracting effective teachers.

Focus on Student Learning

Student learning is a school's most important responsibility. Set high expectations for learning and convert them into specific goals for students that everyone focuses on throughout the year. Teachers want to know that a school has a culture that encourages (if not requires) them to collaborate with colleagues and administrators to [create measurable student goals that promote learning for all](#).

Instructional Leadership

School leaders who create strong instructional cultures are more than just building managers. They're focused on helping teachers reach their full potential in the classroom because the reward is student learning.

Instructional leadership involves giving teachers constructive feedback on their performance, setting clear goals, and ensuring that educational best practices are used in each classroom. Instructional leadership also means helping teachers improve their practice and taking an active role in professional development (we'll discuss that more in the upcoming section).



Developing Effective Teachers

The demands on both teachers and students are becoming more complex. Teachers are expected to stay up-to-date with new technologies in the classroom, respond effectively to students with different learning styles and behavioral issues, differentiate learning for diverse populations, maintain current knowledge of the rapidly developing changes in student assessment, and the list goes on. Most importantly, teachers must be capable of preparing students for a society in which they'll be expected to be self-directed learners.

Each year, \$18 Million is spent on professional development. Unfortunately, according to [a study conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#), only 29% of teachers are highly satisfied with the professional development they receive. And this comes as no surprise to administrators because in [Schoolology's 2017 Global State of Digital Learning](#) survey, more than 40% of administrators reported that providing effective professional development for teachers was one of their top challenges.

Teachers want the professional development experience to be relevant, interactive, sustained over time, and delivered by someone who understands their experience.

Here are a few things to consider about developing effective teachers through effective professional development:

Professional learning experiences should focus more on opportunities to apply learning—Rather than focusing solely on presentation style professional development, give teachers the opportunity to participate in demonstrations or modeling and practice.

Maintain a high-functioning PLC—Ultimately, teachers learn and grow best in environments where they have well-structured collaboration with benefits that are clear in their day-to-day work. Sounds like an [effective PLC](#) to me.

Offer teachers more choices in professional development opportunities—Teachers with more choice report higher levels of satisfaction with professional development.

A large number of teachers view professional development as a compliance rather than a learning opportunity, which means it's not providing them with the value they need to grow.

Retaining Effective Teachers

Once you've attracted quality teachers with a strong culture, and helped them improve their practice with effective professional learning experiences, the goal is getting them to stick around. Teachers are leaving the profession in droves. In fact, since 2011, [nearly 25% of teachers who qualified have already left the field](#). The most likely to leave the profession are extremely high performing teachers, those in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools, and new teachers. Surveys find that [lack of support is a main reason why teachers leave the profession or change schools](#).

Teachers who are well-prepared, mentored, and supported are much more likely to stay in education—and be effective. Here are some ideas for supporting teachers to lessen the steady trickle of quality educators leaving the field:

Solicit teacher feedback and incorporate it in decision making—Many teachers feel like their voice goes unheard. Some even feel like [they're treated more like students than professionals](#). Seek feedback from teachers on curriculum, plans, and school activities. Teachers are an underutilized resource in policy making. Allowing teachers to be involved is a way to empower them.

Provide leadership and growth opportunities—A significant part of the teacher population has no intention of becoming a principal. But that doesn't mean they don't want opportunities to learn and grow. Give teachers meaningful leadership opportunities that are challenging and enriching—and paid. Teachers can help with curriculum planning, academic coaching, technology integration, and even lead professional development for colleagues.

Provide a sense of humanity in schools for both teachers and students—For many teachers, finding a way to manage the basics can be a challenge: finding time to run to the bathroom, eat lunch, or even express milk for a baby. Teachers also have schedules created for them with little to no say or consideration of how it may affect them. Seek teacher feedback when creating schedules, considering that teachers need time to take care of themselves, especially during standardized testing and special events. Frustrations with simple and necessary tasks can lead to expedited burnout and health problems.

Create a culture that acknowledges and compensates master teachers as they continue to learn, grow, and perform—Much of the push for higher pay in education leans toward raising the entry-level salary for new teachers. We can all appreciate that, as we've all been there before. But what about the mid-career educators who may be feeling stagnant and only see nominal increases in pay each year?

Teaching is one of the only careers where the level of education and responsibility is not commensurate with the compensation.

Final Thoughts

Great teachers are able to affect people's lives long after they leave the classroom. If we want to keep good teachers and attract new, younger teachers, an important culture shift must occur. It's imperative that we focus our efforts of attracting the best talent, ensuring they receive quality professional learning experiences and support them throughout their journeys, so that they'll find joy and success in teaching.

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