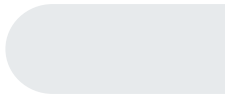# The State of the K-12 Workforce in 2025

Insights and Strategies for Superintendents
Navigating Today's Staffing Trends

frontline education®

# Insights and Strategies for Superintendents Navigating Today's Staffing Trends

Introduction

The strength of any school district lies in its people. Teachers, school leaders, support staff, and specialists are the heart of the educational experience—and they're also the linchpin of every district's success. But across the country, K-12 leaders are navigating unprecedented workforce challenges: persistent staff shortages, increasing burnout, and a shifting labor market that demands new approaches to attract and retain talent.

In this moment, superintendents are being called to lead not just instructional transformation, but workforce transformation. That means building a culture where great educators want to stay, using data to make strategic staffing decisions, and thinking differently about how to support the whole employee—not just in their role, but as a person.

This ebook explores the current state of the K-12 workforce in 2025, offering insights, case studies, and actionable strategies to help you meet the challenges head-on. Whether you're wrestling with staffing shortfalls, looking to improve retention, or preparing for the future with better workforce planning, you'll find ideas and inspiration here to guide your next steps.

Let's take a clear-eyed look at where we are—and where district leadership can go from here.
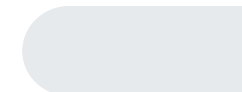
Chapter 1:

The Current State of the K-12 Workforce

Across the country, the K-12 workforce is facing a critical inflection point. Teacher shortages, rising resignation rates, and increased competition for talent have reshaped the landscape of public education. While these challenges aren't new, their scale and urgency have intensified—forcing districts to adapt quickly or risk falling behind.

A Look at the Numbers

Recent data[i] tells a clear story:

- **Nearly 70% of districts** report teacher shortages in at least one area.

- **Teacher vacancies remain highest** in key subjects like special education.

- **Average teacher retention rates** are hovering just under 80%.

- **Districts are spending more** on recruitment and retention—but many still struggle to compete with private sector flexibility and compensation.

Even as hiring rebounds in some areas, retaining experienced staff has become just as critical. Burnout continues to take a toll, and many educators are rethinking their long-term careers in education. In fact, more than half of teachers recently surveyed say they've considered leaving the profession earlier than planned.[ii]

What's Driving the Shift?

Several factors are converging:

- **Post-pandemic fatigue** among educators, exacerbated by increased responsibilities and public scrutiny.

- **Changing expectations of work**, particularly from younger educators who value flexibility, wellness, and meaningful support.

- **Rising costs of living**, with educator salaries often lagging behind inflation and comparable professions.

- **A declining pipeline** of new teachers, with fewer college students entering education programs.

These trends are compounded by regional disparities. High-poverty districts are often hit hardest, with fewer applicants and more difficulty retaining staff. Meanwhile, urban districts are seeing increased competition from charter and private schools offering pay or more autonomy.
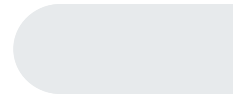
The Impact on Students and Systems

Workforce challenges don't just affect HR departments—they directly impact the student experience. Fewer teachers mean larger class sizes, reduced instructional time, and increased pressure on remaining staff. Over time, this leads to lower morale, higher turnover, and gaps in student achievement and support services.

Districts are also grappling with the administrative ripple effects: constant onboarding cycles, strained mentorship systems, and difficulty planning strategically when the ground is always shifting.

Superintendents in the Middle

As district leaders, superintendents are navigating all sides of the issue—balancing budgets, supporting staff, answering to boards and communities, and ensuring students receive high-quality instruction. The workforce crisis isn't just a staffing problem; it's a leadership challenge that demands a proactive, people-centered response.
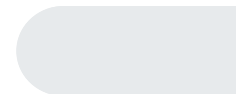
Chapter 2:

Recruitment in a Competitive Market

Recruiting high-quality educators has always been a critical function for school districts—but today, it feels more like a race against time. With fewer applicants, more competition, and evolving candidate expectations, district leaders are finding that traditional recruitment tactics simply don't cut it anymore.

The Shrinking Talent Pool

Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has dropped by more than 30% over the past decade.[iii] New graduates are choosing alternate career paths, while mid-career professionals are opting for roles with more flexibility and higher pay. Districts aren't just competing with each other anymore—they're competing with entirely different industries.

And yet, despite the shrinking pool, the need for passionate, qualified educators has never been greater. The pressure is especially high in specialized areas[iv] like:

- Special education
- English language learning
- STEM subjects
- Mental health and student support services

Districts must now think more like recruiters—actively marketing their culture, showcasing their impact, and meeting candidates where they are.

What Today's Candidates Want

Educators today are looking for more than a job—they want purpose, support, and balance. According to recent surveys:

- **Support systems make a difference.** New teachers seek mentorship, coaching, and manageable workloads.

- **Financial wellness is a factor.** From student loan assistance to early wage access, candidates are increasingly evaluating total compensation and benefits.

- **District culture matters.** Candidates research districts online, read reviews, and expect a welcoming, inclusive climate.
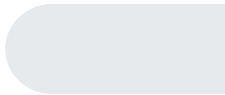
Shifting from Passive to Proactive

To succeed in this competitive market, districts are rethinking recruitment strategies with a more proactive, personalized approach:

Build a Strong Employer Brand

Share stories of educator impact. Highlight growth opportunities. Use video, social media, and your website to give candidates a real feel for your culture.

Streamline the Hiring Experience

Lengthy applications, unclear processes, or delays in communication turn candidates away. A smooth, timely, and tech-enabled experience reflects positively on your district.

Expand the Talent Pipeline

Partner with local universities, launch "grow your own" programs, and tap into non-traditional pools like paraprofessionals, career switchers, and retirees.

Engage Early and Often

Attend virtual job fairs. Build relationships before roles are open. Reach out to student teachers and interns with clear next steps.

CASE STUDY SPOTLIGHT:

Fannin County School District Doubles Applicants and Streamlines Hiring

Read Now ⋯>

Facing limited reach and time-consuming hiring processes, rural Georgia's Fannin County School District adopted Frontline Recruiting & Hiring and Central to modernize recruitment and onboarding. The result? Applications doubled, onboarding time dropped from 90 minutes to a few clicks, and contracts that once took days were signed within 24–48 hours. "It totally changed our view of workflow efficiency and working smarter, not harder," said Amy Buchanan, HR Coordinator. Even with a small team, the district created a streamlined, people-first hiring experience that attracted more qualified candidates and improved employee satisfaction from day one.
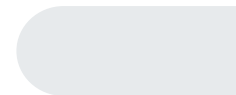
Chapter 3:

Recruitment in a Competitive Market

Hiring great educators is only part of the equation—keeping them is the real challenge. In today's environment, retaining staff means more than offering competitive salaries. It requires an intentional commitment to supporting educators' wellbeing, professional growth, and sense of purpose.

Why Educators Leave

The reasons educators leave are complex—but the patterns are clear. Exit interviews and national surveys point to several recurring themes[v]:

- **Burnout and workload overload**
- **Lack of support or recognition**
- **Limited opportunities for advancement**
- **Increased student needs without additional resources**
- **Better pay or flexibility in other industries**

For many, it's not a single issue—it's the accumulation of small daily stressors without meaningful support.

The Hidden Costs of Turnover

When an educator leaves, the impact ripples beyond the classroom[vi]:

- **Student learning is disrupted**
- **Morale among remaining staff dips**
- **Recruitment and onboarding costs rise** (averaging over $20,000 per lost teacher)[vii]
- **Institutional knowledge and team cohesion suffer**

Districts can't afford to view turnover as inevitable—it's preventable with the right strategy.
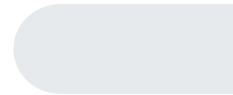
Building a Culture That Keeps People

Retention begins with relationships and respect. Districts that succeed in keeping talent often focus on three core areas:

1. Support Systems that Start on Day One

- Structured onboarding and mentorship
- Regular check-ins from leadership
- Clearly defined growth paths for teachers and support staff

2. Wellbeing and Flexibility

- Mental health resources and employee assistance programs
- Early wage access and financial wellness programs to reduce stress

3. Recognition and Voice

- Celebrate wins—big and small
- Include educators in decision-making processes
- Use staff surveys and act on feedback to build trust

CASE STUDY SPOTLIGHT:

Mount Laurel Township Streamlines HR and Elevates Staff Support

Read Now ··›

When Mount Laurel Township School District set out to modernize its hiring and onboarding processes, the goal wasn't just efficiency—it was improving the experience for staff. By implementing Frontline Recruiting & Hiring and Frontline Central, the district replaced manual, paper-heavy workflows with a fully digital system. As a result, HR gained visibility into candidate progress, onboarding became faster and more organized, and staff had instant access to their documents and contracts. "We just wanted contracts, and we've gotten so much more," said Administrative Assistant Debbie Derengowski. With less time spent chasing paperwork, the HR team now focuses on what matters most: creating a smooth, supportive experience for every employee from day one.

Retention is Everyone's Job

Retention isn't just an HR issue—it's a leadership priority. When superintendents model care, communicate transparently, and invest in staff development, it sets the tone across the system. And when educators feel seen, heard, and supported, they're far more likely to stay.

Chapter 4:

Workforce Planning & Optimization

A strong workforce isn't built on good intentions—it's built on strategy. For superintendents, workforce planning is about more than just filling positions. It's about aligning the right people, in the right roles, at the right time to meet the evolving needs of students and the community.

Done well, workforce planning can improve instructional quality, drive operational efficiency, and protect your budget. Done poorly—or not at all—it can lead to staffing mismatches, costly overages, and service gaps that ripple across your district.

The Need for Strategic Alignment

Districts today face a complex balancing act:

- **Enrollment fluctuations** that shift staffing needs

- **Budget constraints** tied to local, state, and federal funding

- **Programmatic changes,** like expanding mental health services or CTE offerings

- **Contractual and compliance obligations** that impact who can work where and when

Too often, staffing decisions are reactive—made in response to pressure, vacancies, or year-end budget realities. But districts leading the way are shifting from reactive to predictive planning.

What Strategic Workforce Planning Looks Like

Strategic workforce planning brings data, goals, and cross-functional input together. It's not just an HR exercise—it's a leadership mindset.

Here's how successful districts approach it:

Use Data to Drive Decisions

- Analyze staffing trends, vacancy patterns, and retention risk

- Map current roles to student enrollment, course demand, and IEP/504 needs

- Leverage workforce analytics to identify over- or under-resourced areas

Collaborate Across Departments

- Partner HR with curriculum, special education, and finance teams

- Use forecasting to align hiring with budget planning cycles

- Identify opportunities to redeploy existing staff more strategically
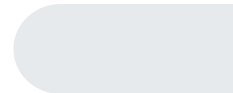
Plan for Flexibility

- Build contingency plans for mid-year staffing changes

- Explore part-time, itinerant, or shared-service models

- Invest in professional development to support role versatility

CASE STUDY SPOTLIGHT:

Queen Creek USD Uses Analytics to Plan Smarter and Hire Faster

Read Now ··>

With rapid growth and new schools opening each year, Queen Creek Unified School District needed a smarter way to scale its workforce. Using Frontline Human Capital Analytics, the HR team gained real-time insights into hiring trends, referral effectiveness, and pipeline speed—helping them allocate resources, identify bottlenecks, and act quickly before top talent slipped away. Director of HR Keegan Bassett now uses data to drive decisions, replicate success across schools, and present clear KPIs to leadership. "You're able to zero in on different focus areas within a couple of clicks," he said. "That's not something you typically find in other platforms."

From Planning to Execution

Of course, even the best plan is only as strong as its execution. That's where visibility and agility come in. Superintendents need real-time access to data, a shared understanding with department leaders, and the confidence that their staffing decisions are both equitable and sustainable.

Frontline districts often describe this as shifting from "guesswork to guidance"—where the fog of uncertainty clears, and leaders can take action with clarity.
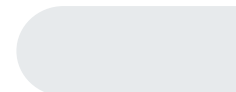
Chapter 5:

Supporting School Leaders

If teachers are the heartbeat of a school, principals and school leaders are the backbone. They set the tone, guide instructional priorities, manage staff, handle crises, and serve as the face of their buildings. But across the country, school leaders are under more pressure than ever—and they're burning out fast.

The Principal Retention Crisis

Recent reports show a troubling trend:

- Nearly **1 in 3 principals** say they are considering leaving their role in the next few years.[viii]

- Turnover is highest in high-poverty schools, impacting students with the greatest need.

- The average tenure for a principal is now **less than 5 years**, and even shorter in urban districts.

When a principal leaves, the entire school feels the impact. Staff morale often dips, student performance can suffer, and culture takes time to rebuild. Supporting principals isn't just a leadership priority—it's a retention and equity issue.

Why Principals are Leaving

The causes echo those of teachers, but with higher stakes:

- **Unsustainable workloads** and long hours

- **Lack of decision-making autonomy**

- **Pressure from both above and below**—district demands, staff needs, and community expectations

- **Limited professional development or advancement opportunities**

It's a high-stakes job with high emotional labor. And too often, support is reactive rather than proactive.
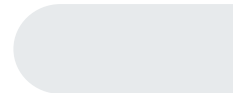
Building a Culture of Support from the Top Down

Superintendents who prioritize principal support often see positive ripple effects throughout the system. Strong school leaders:

- Improve teacher retention

- Drive better student outcomes

- Cultivate healthier school climates

Here's how forward-thinking districts are investing in their building leaders:

Mentorship & Peer Networks

- Pair early-career principals with experienced mentors

- Create regular, structured opportunities for peer collaboration and problem-solving

Leadership Development Pipelines

- Identify high-potential staff early and provide leadership training

- Offer aspiring principal academies or in-house credentialing partnerships

Autonomy + Accountability

- Set clear expectations, but allow flexibility in how goals are met

- Encourage innovation while maintaining alignment to district vision

Mental Health & Wellness Supports

- Recognize the emotional load principals carry

- Provide coaching, wellness stipends, or access to counseling services

Leadership Longevity Starts with District Vision

The best way to retain principals? Help them thrive. That means clear communication, thoughtful onboarding, authentic recognition, and a district culture that sees them as more than building managers—they're mission-critical leaders.
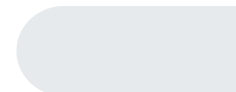
Chapter 6:

Technology's Role in Supporting the Workforce

People are at the heart of every school district—but the right technology can help support, empower, and retain them. In today's environment, superintendents can't afford to overlook the role of digital tools in building a more efficient, equitable, and employee-centered workforce.

Yet the goal isn't just to digitize—it's to humanize. The best technology doesn't replace people; it gives them time back, makes their work more visible, and removes friction from the systems they rely on every day.

From Paperwork to Purpose

Educators didn't join the profession to fill out forms or chase down approvals. But when districts lack integrated systems, time that could be spent coaching teachers or connecting with students is lost to manual processes and workarounds.

Modern workforce tools help districts:

- Automate repetitive administrative tasks

- Ensure transparency and consistency in hiring, evaluations, and compensation

- Streamline service tracking, absence management, and scheduling

- Enable data-driven decision-making across HR, finance, and instruction

When technology works well, employees don't just feel more efficient—they feel more supported.

Technology That Supports the Employee Experience

Here are a few key ways technology can directly improve recruitment, retention, and staff satisfaction:

Simplify Hiring and Onboarding

- Online application portals that are mobile-friendly and easy to navigate

- Automated workflows for background checks, contracts, and orientation

- New hire dashboards that clarify next steps and foster connection early
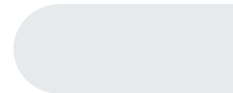
Make Data Actionable

- Dashboards that bring together HR, payroll, and evaluation data

- Tools that flag retention risk or forecast staffing gaps

- Reports that help district leaders advocate for resources or identify inequities

Support Growth and Development

- Centralized professional learning management systems

- Integrated observation and feedback tools

- Career pathway tracking that aligns PD with promotion opportunities

Promote Financial Wellness

- Transparent time and attendance systems that prevent errors and build trust

- Compensation models that are equitable and easy to explain

- Early wage access tools that reduce financial stress

CASE STUDY SPOTLIGHT:

Whitehall-Coplay Unifies HR Systems to Empower Staff

Read Now ··>

With multiple disconnected systems and a paper-heavy hiring process, Whitehall-Coplay School District knew it needed a better way to serve employees. By centralizing recruiting, onboarding, time tracking, benefits, and professional growth with Frontline solutions, the district created a true "one-stop shop" for staff and HR alike. New hires now onboard seamlessly, principals have real-time visibility into candidates and evaluations, and employees can access their information without logging into multiple systems. "We did a total 180," said HR Specialist Kristen Riedy. "It's more efficient, better organized, and gives staff the tools they need—when and where they need them."

The Tech + Touch Balance

Technology can't replace empathy, leadership, or connection—but it can free up time and energy to focus on them. When systems are integrated and thoughtfully deployed, staff spend less time navigating bureaucracy and more time doing what matters. For superintendents, this is a strategic imperative: to build a district infrastructure that supports both the mission and the people who carry it forward.

Chapter 7:

The Road Ahead – What Superintendents Can Do Now

The challenges facing the K-12 workforce are real—but so is your opportunity to lead transformative change. As a superintendent, you sit at the intersection of policy, practice, and people. Your decisions set the tone, allocate resources, and shape the experience of every educator and student in your district.

And while not every solution is within immediate reach, there are high-impact steps you can take now to stabilize, support, and strengthen your workforce.

Five Strategic Actions for the Next Six Months

1. Reevaluate Your Workforce Data

Ensure your HR, finance, and instructional leaders are aligned on key metrics—vacancy rates, retention risk, staffing vs. enrollment trends. Use this data to inform hiring priorities and budget discussions.

2. Strengthen Your Recruitment Message

Audit your district's online presence. Does it reflect your culture? Are job descriptions clear and compelling? Consider spotlighting teacher testimonials, classroom innovation, and support systems.

3. Invest in Principal and Staff Wellbeing

If you haven't already, create space for staff wellness. That might mean offering mental health resources, reducing non-instructional burdens, or launching recognition initiatives that rebuild morale.

4. Review Onboarding and Retention Systems

Look for friction points. Are new hires welcomed effectively? Do staff have clear growth paths? Even small changes—like peer mentorship or early wage access—can improve retention outcomes.

5. Set a Vision for Workforce Planning

Don't wait for the next crisis. Bring your cabinet together to set a proactive workforce strategy that ties staffing decisions to district goals, student needs, and equity commitments.

Questions to Ask Your Team

To start the conversation, consider these prompts in your next leadership meeting:

1. What trends are we seeing in staff attrition—and why are people leaving?

2. How are we supporting principals and building leaders to manage and motivate teams?

3. Where can we automate or streamline systems to free up staff time and reduce burnout?

4. What stories are we telling prospective employees—and how can we improve our messaging?

5. Do we have the tools we need to forecast, plan, and act with confidence?

Leading With Intention

The state of the K-12 workforce may be challenging—but it is not hopeless. Across the country, district leaders are finding creative, people-centered ways to adapt. By aligning data, technology, and culture, you can create an environment where educators want to work—and where students thrive because of it.

At Frontline, we believe strong leadership and smart systems go hand-in-hand. And we're here to support superintendents like you every step of the way.

To learn more, [talk to a Frontliner](#)

About Frontline Education

Frontline Education is a leading provider of school administration software, connecting solutions for student and special programs, business operations and human capital management with powerful data and analytics to empower educators. Frontline partners with school systems to deliver tools, data and insights that support greater efficiency and productivity, enabling school leaders to spend more time and resources executing strategies that drive educator effectiveness, student success and district excellence. Frontline's broad portfolio includes solutions for proactive recruiting and hiring, absence and time management, professional growth, student information systems, special education, special programs, Medicaid reimbursement, school health management, inventory control and asset management, payroll, benefits, and financial management. Over 9,500 school districts representing millions of educators, administrators and support personnel have partnered with Frontline Education in their efforts to develop the next generation of learners.