

Minnesota Educator Retention

Address Teacher Burnout to Protect Taxpayers & Students

Senate Education Finance Committee

March 10, 2026

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The Why

Retaining great teachers is the most strategic move we can make.

60% of K-12 teachers report experiencing burnout (Rand 2024)

What is burnout?

- **Emotional exhaustion:** feeling drained, overwhelmed, and unable to give more emotionally.
- **Depersonalization:** becoming detached, cynical, or less empathetic toward others.
- **Reduced personal accomplishment:** feeling ineffective or less successful in one's work.

Teacher Mental Health & Burnout Matters for Students

- **Direct Impact on Student Achievement**: Teacher burnout is directly linked to decreased student achievement, with affected teachers reporting lower levels of enthusiasm and dedication, which negatively impacts student motivation and learning.
- **Classroom Environment and Student Engagement**: Teacher burnout can lead to a less supportive and more cynical classroom environment, adversely affecting students' sense of belonging and engagement. Further, teacher stress and student cortisol levels are linked; stress is biologically contagious in the classroom.
- **Effect on Teaching Effectiveness**: Emotional exhaustion from burnout diminishes teachers' ability to implement effective teaching strategies, manage classrooms effectively, and provide necessary emotional support, negatively influencing student academic achievement and increasing student stress levels.
- **Social and Emotional Development of Students**: Teacher burnout adversely affects the classroom climate and, consequently, students' social and emotional development, potentially leading to increased student anxiety, decreased motivation, and poorer social skills.
- **Teacher-Student Relationships**: Burnout can result in negative perceptions of students by teachers, leading to lower expectations and reduced efforts to engage students, which may diminish students' academic performance and engagement.

Burnout Is High – and It Is Driving Educators Out

Educator Voice and Working Conditions are Key to Reversing It

K-12 workers have the **highest burnout rate** of any industry in America.

(Marken & Agrawal, 2022)

55% of teachers are thinking about leaving the profession earlier than planned.

(American Federation of Teachers, 2022)

Educators are less likely to leave the profession when they are **involved in decision-making and feel supported.**

(RAND Survey, 2022)

Educator
Shortage?



Retention
Problem

Vital Network is on a mission to ensure that every school is an **exceptional workplace** that **retains its talent** and contributes to a brighter future for the profession.

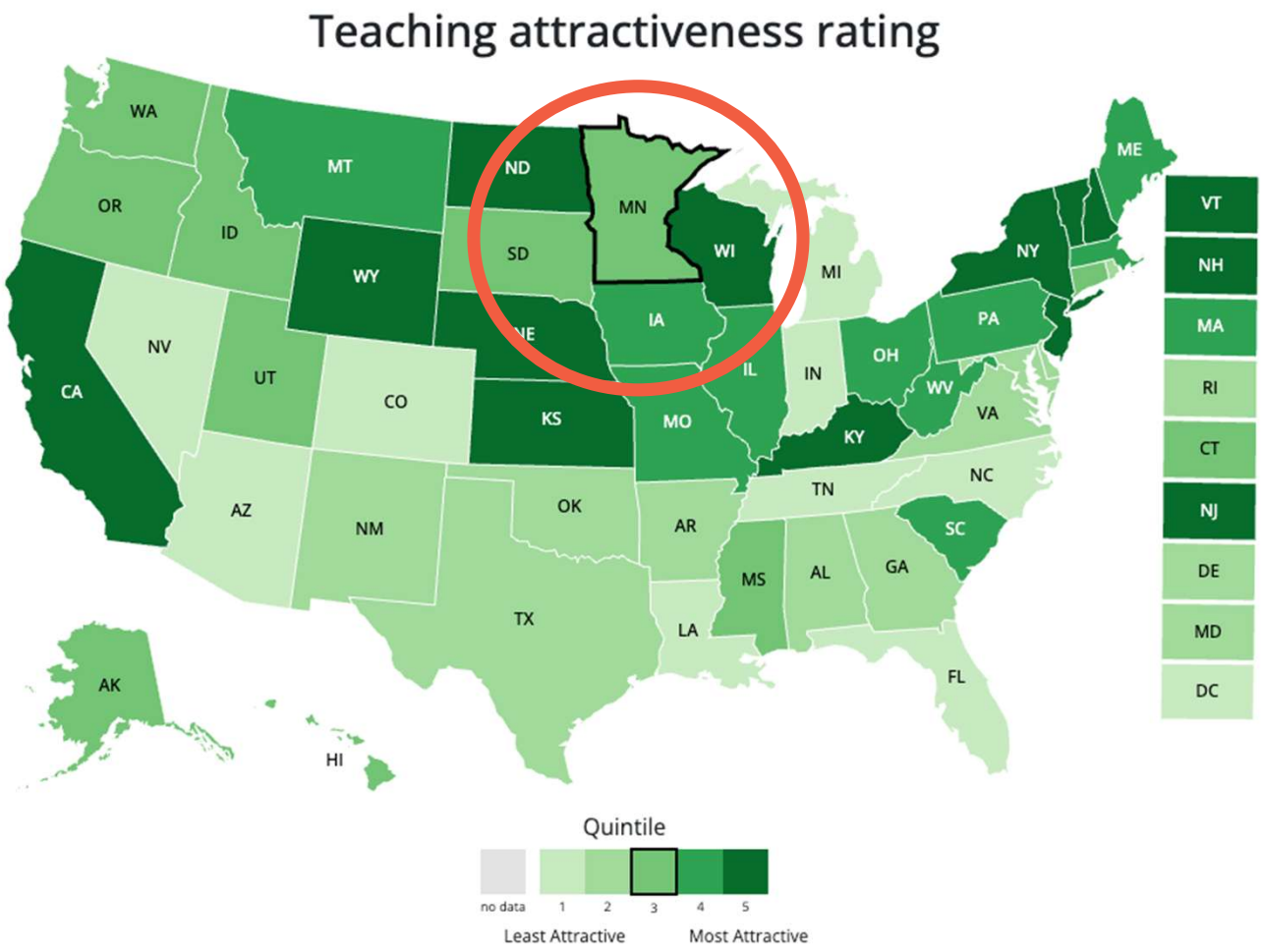
When schools are **great places to work**,
they are **excellent places for learning.**

Minnesota

The Educator Workforce Challenge Is Here.

Minnesota Falls in **the 3rd Quintile** Nationally for Teaching Attractiveness

(nearby states are more attractive, many in the 1st quintile)

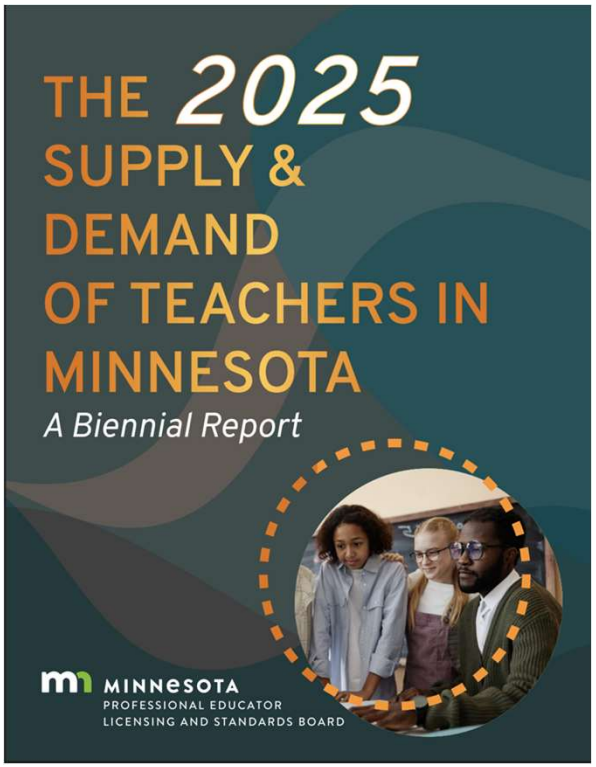


Learning Policy Institute - State of the teacher Workforce

Minnesota Educator Workforce Reality

This is a retention challenge.

- **20,846 positions (~15% of all positions) are open or filled by under-licensed staff.**
- **Minnesota has enough licensed educators to fill these roles. The shortage is driven by licensed educators leaving teaching:**
  - 109,000+ actively licensed teachers, of which 106,001 hold full professional Tier 3/4 licenses
  - 38,160 (36%) of Tier 3/4 educators aren't working in MN classrooms
  - 1 in 3 new teachers leave within 5 year
  - Retirement is only 16% of departures
- **Demand is high statewide.**
  - 7 in 10 districts report vacancies



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Losing Teachers is Costing Minnesota



A **student** will **lose up to ½ year** of learning for every one teacher turnover.



Turnover of one teacher costs Minnesota up to **$20,000.**



Estimated Minnesota **total cost** associated with educator turnover:

2024–25: $91M–$192M*



7 out of 10 MN School Districts report Vacancies.

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*https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/2024-whats-cost-teacher-turnover

** mn.gov/deed


MINNESOTA EDUCATION
STATE OF
STATE OF MN
NOTICE SCHOOL
SUPPORT MN TEACHERS
$200,000,000
MN's $200 MILLION INVESTMENT IN TEACHER RECRUITMENT
TRAINING LOSS
RECRUITMENT COSTS
SUBSTITUTE NEEDS
$190,000,000
COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH TEACHER ATTRITION (ROUGHLY $190M)
MINNESOTA'S BALANCING ACT

Moving Toward Recruitment *and* Retention

Making recruitment efforts stick by helping schools keep their teachers.

- Minnesota is working hard to recruit more teachers, investing ~200M in recruitment efforts since 2023.
- Vital makes sure new and experienced teachers want to stay by improving how it feels to work in schools.
- Keeping good teachers is one of the smartest ways to help schools and save money.

The How

How Do We Keep Great Teachers?
By Building Better Workplaces.

Educators are Workers. Schools are Workplaces.

Job Conditions Drive Retention: Not Just Passion and Purpose

- 52% of MN educators say that school climate, especially leadership support, drives teacher exits (MNSPIRE). Teachers with unsupportive administrators are more than twice as likely to leave their school (Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

- 66% of teachers who left the profession said work-life balance was better in their new job (NCES Teacher Follow-Up Survey, 2021–22).

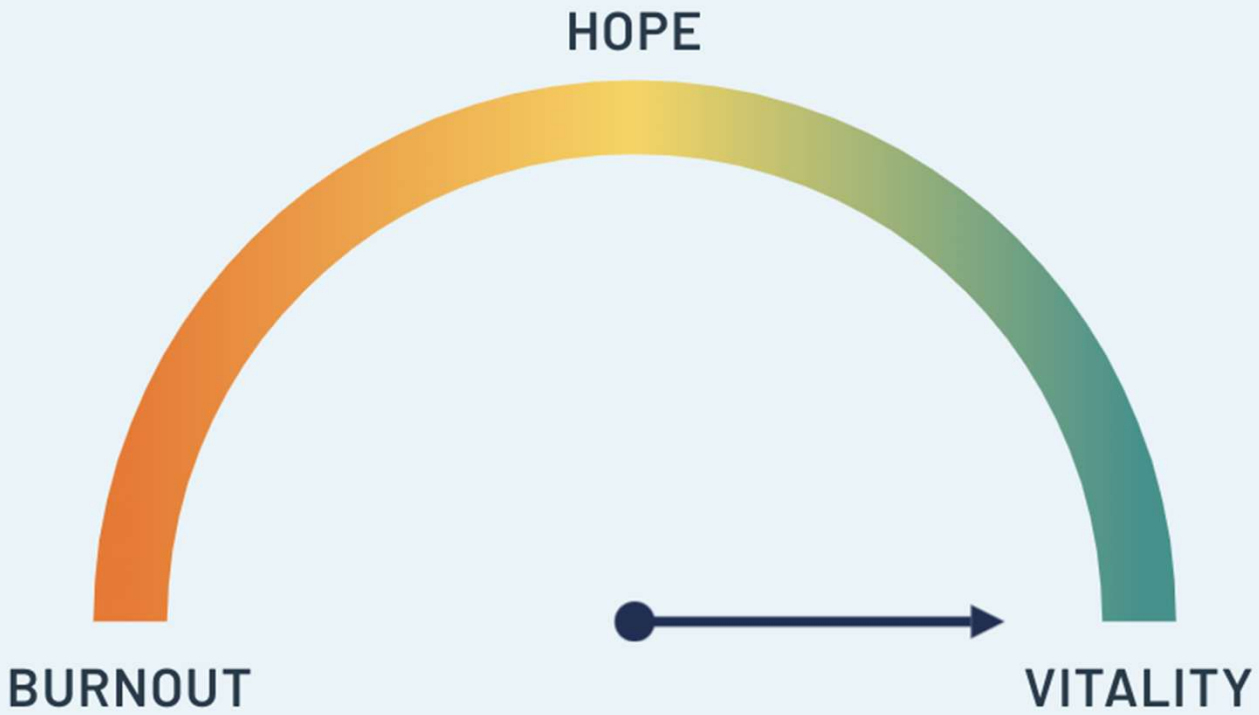
- 58% of teachers who left said their workload was more manageable in their new job (NCES Teacher Follow-Up Survey, 2021–22).

We help school systems move from burnout...



A state of prolonged exhaustion caused **by negative external conditions** that no level of self-care can overcome.

...to Vitality.



The **purpose and energy** experienced
when working in an empowering community.

Retention Is Driven by School Working Conditions

Why improving retention starts with improving daily work conditions

Working conditions (leadership, climate, time, collaboration, voice)

→ shape daily experience (satisfaction, belonging, energy, efficacy)

→ drive intentions (stay/leave)

→ predict actual retention.

Conditions for Vitality & **Retention**

Conditions for retention can be *measured* and ***changed***.



Vital Phases: How Change Happens

A simple process schools use to listen, try new ideas, and grow.



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School-Level Actions, Positive Changes

Care & Support

- Improve staff onboarding so new team members feel welcomed and equipped.
- Host family info + listening sessions on high-interest topics (e.g., classroom behavior, tech use, math support at home).
- Improve student movement and safety by adjusting systems—like making hallways one-way or locking doors after passing time.

Time Management

- Review all meetings: what's the goal, who needs to be there, how often?
- Respect time - especially for staff on multiple committees.
- Ask staff what feels like "one more thing" and look for ways to reduce or support.

Voice & Decision-Making

- Share info in one easy-to-find place (instead of lots of emails).
- Make it clear how staff can join committees and what's expected.
- Be clear: When asking for input, explain how decisions will be made.

Vital Network and North Dakota

What the data is showing.

It’s Already Working in North Dakota

Since 2023, Vital has partnered with ND Leaders to Create
Workplace Environments Where Educators Want to Stay

34	200	5 Regional
DISTRICTS	SCHOOLS	PARTNERS

50~% of ND
TEACHER VOICES ELEVATED

Workplace Conditions are Improving for Vital Partners

Cohort Performance from School Years 2024-25 to 2025-26

Locale	Care & Support	Time Management	Voice & Decision-Making	Well-Being
Urban	+1%	+6%	+5%	+3%
Rural	**+3%**	**+6%**	**+6%**	**+4%**

After year one, **schools saw growth in teachers' experiences of their workplace conditions across *all* themes**, with rural schools seeing even **greater increases** in experiences of care & support and overall well-being.

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Workplace Conditions are Improving for Vital Partners

Cohort Performance from School Years 2024-25 to 2025-26

The largest year-over-year shifts occurred in indicators tied to workload, balance, and confidence in improvement:

- **Subthemes:**
  - **Hope:** 58% → 68% (+10 points)
  - **Life balance:** 37% → 46% (+9 points)
  - **Communication clarity:** 44% → 51% (+7 points)
- **Individual Items:**
  - **Able to maintain well-being with workload:** 37% → 48% (+11 points)
  - **Work outside school hours is reasonable:** 37% → 45% (+8 points)
  - **Have time necessary to get work done:** 35% → 42% (+7 points)
  - **Confidence that the school is on the right path:** 54% → 61% (+7 points)

Taken together, these indicators describe whether the work feels sustainable day to day.

The concentration of gains in these areas is meaningful: they align with conditions leaders can see, measure, and redesign through practical changes to time use, communication routines, and feedback structures.

Systems Change Means Building Strong Statewide Ecosystem

In addition to supporting individual districts, we help statewide organizations build and run strategic retention efforts.



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Educator Workforce Sustainability

What the Data Says About Moving From Burnout to Vitality

Educators continue to feel high levels of purpose and commitment. But too many are feeling burned out and overwhelmed.

The data shows that **improving workplace conditions with educator voice at the center strengthens educator experience**: Hope increases, work-life balance improves, and educators are better able to stay well and teach well.

Together we can make teaching a profession of vitality as well as value.

The Next Chapter Starts Here

Investing in Minnesota Educators



Nathan Eklund
Founder &
Chief Executive Officer
nate@vitalnetwork.com



Dr. Erin Raab
Chief Strategy &
Impact Officer
erin@vitalnetwork.com

"As a rural school district that struggles with finding qualified teachers when we have openings, ***we know that teacher retention is important to our ability to have a quality school****.*

One of the aspects we appreciate so much about our work with Vital Network is that the work is focused on positivity and moving our school forward.

Vital Network is helping us become the best school we can be and that is very inspiring."

Phil Leitner, *Superintendent*
Montpelier Public School

Collaborative and systematized guardrails have been the centerpiece of Vital Network's work with **Grand Forks Public Schools**.

There is authenticity in their approach and infinite reflection from school-level to district-level alignment. **Vital Network's approach is open and honest and is a "walk with you" perspective that is refreshing and difference-making**.

Dr. Terry Brenner
Superintendent
Grand Forks Public Schools

Fargo Public Schools is pleased to continue our partnership with Vital Network for the second consecutive year.

Their expertise in administering the survey and supporting the implementation of the data has been instrumental in enhancing our staff's well-being. **We highly recommend Vital for their professionalism and dedication to improving organizational health.** They are more than a vendor; they are a true partner in the work!

Dr. Jeff McCanna, *Chief Human Capital Officer*
Fargo Public Schools

Vital has been instrumental in supporting Jamestown Public Schools' strategic goals by providing valuable insights into staff perceptions of care and support, time management, and voice in decision-making. What makes the Vital Network process different is the framework and consultation that is embedded into ensuring staff voice is heard and action plans are collaboratively developed with a focus on improving the working and learning environment. JPS saw **measurable increases in all key areas between our baseline survey in December 2023 and the October 2024 survey, and we attribute that to Vital Networks processes and supports.**

Furthermore, the **alignment of Vital Network's efforts with the North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force recommendations is evident**. By focusing on improving working conditions and fostering a supportive school culture through regular data collection and actionable insights, the JPS is proactively addressing key factors in teacher retention and recruitment, such as mentorship, workplace satisfaction, and professional development.

Dr. Rob Lech, *Superintendent*
Jamestown Public Schools

We are Responding to Partner Request for School Leader Retention

"Beyond their exceptional work with our educators, I am excited to share that our district is partnering with Vital Network to roll out our first survey designed specifically for building leaders. In a district as large as BPS, it's essential to ensure that our building leaders feel heard and valued, with a clear voice in shaping the direction of the district. This leader-focused process aims to break down barriers of isolation and provide a platform for our leaders to share their perspectives, fostering stronger connections and alignment across the district.

BPS and I remain steadfast in our support of Vital and their mission. Thank you for joining us in recognizing and supporting the incredible impact of their work."

Jeff Fastnacht, *Superintendent*
Bismarck Public Schools

"Our district, like many others, struggles with retention and recruitment of qualified educators and other key staff members. By making Vital Network a part of our district, ***our educators feel like they have a voice and are being heard, something they have not always felt before****.*

Our Vital partnership ***opens the door to meaningful conversations and collaboration between our administrators and educators to create strategies to improve all these areas****.*

In our time with Vital, ***we have already seen improvement in employee morale and well-being****. We are excited to continue our work with Vital Network."*

Amanda Denevan, *Assistant Human Resources Director*
Williston Basin School District

The work Vital has done thus far has exceeded our expectations. They are a true partner and fully understand a 'one size fits all' approach does not work for recruitment and retention of staff. *They recognize each organization has a unique culture and they have went above and beyond to understand our context.*

During the fall of 2024, Vital Network engaged Central Cass, Maple Valley, and our district in a cohort to do this work together. This cohort has provided us with thought partners and resources. We knew the districts before but now we are truly partners in this work. ***Before, we competed. Now, we work together to do what is best for our communities, educators, and learners. Vital Network was the catalyst for this unique partnership.***

Vital Network has helped us focus our attention on key areas to build a world class culture. ***With their vast resources, network of districts, and high quality staff, they are helping us to become the best version of ourselves****.*

Dr. Cory J. Steiner, *Superintendent*
Northern Cass School District

"Vital Network has created a system for North Dakota schools to understand and promote teachers' voices in our schools.

Having already customized support particularly well for larger districts, Vital developed and began implementing a plan to ***partner with the REAs to reach ND teachers in our smallest and most rural districts. Their presence in ND creates the opportunity for every teacher to be a part of the solutions in their school."***

Luke Schaefer, *CEO*
Central Regional Education Association

"Vital Network's work with schools ***leverages high-quality survey methods*** *and* ***objective teacher retention data to identify and foster the workplace factors that retain North Dakota's educators****.*

The collection of such ***high-quality data also enables strong evaluation*** *of Vital Network's programming and the reporting of outcomes to the legislature."*

Dr. Ellie Shockley, *NDUS Institutional Researcher*
Supporting NDDPI

The partnership between NDCEL and Vital Network has been instrumental in addressing the critical issue of teacher retention by aligning our shared commitment to supporting educators and school leaders.

With our established relationship and shared vision, there was an inherent level of trust from the start, which allowed administrators to confidently embrace the program. This trust not only facilitated a smoother implementation process but also created an environment where administrators felt supported in adopting new strategies to retain and empower their teachers.

Together, we are making meaningful strides in ensuring that North Dakota's schools remain strong and well-staffed for the future.

Dr. Aimee Copas, Executive Director
North Dakota Council of Education Leaders