



DAILY

SEL LEADER

Teacher Retention Model: A Playbook for School Leaders

As teacher attrition surges, leaders can benefit from a mental model that provides concrete, accessible, and actionable guidance to stem the tide.

Introduction

Thousands of educators each year quietly assess whether or not this year will be their last in the field. Estimates suggest each year, over 760,000 educators leave their current position, with some moving to other schools, some moving to different industries, and some retiring for good (Bieber & Kraft, 2022). Experts in the United States estimate K12 pre-Covid turnover-related costs as ~\$8 billion annually (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Turnover is increasing and intensifying, so what can education leaders do over the long term to retain more of their teachers?

This playbook aims to provide educational leaders like you with specific research-based strategies that we've woven into **The Daily SEL Leader's Teacher Retention Model** (TRM). The model illustrates an approach to improving educator satisfaction and well-being and in turn, *decreasing teacher attrition*.

Local Costs of Teacher Attrition

Before we detail the TRM, you can quickly estimate the yearly cost to your budget, student achievement, and culture. The local costs for schools and districts are also extremely high. To get a sense of what your own costs might be, consider that:

- The cost of replacing teachers averages between \$9,000 (rural) to \$17,000 (urban) per teacher (Learning Policy Institute)
- The estimated number of hours it takes to replace each teacher is 20-25 personnel hours (Daily SEL estimates)
- The cost of training new teachers within their first five years of experience is estimated at between \$10,000- \$25,000 (Daily SEL estimates)
- The estimated medical costs of people showing signs of burnout is \$23,000 (Pfeffer, 2019)
- Student learning gains with a new teacher in a school or system are estimated to be two to three months less than with an experienced teacher in that same school (Sorenson & Ladd, 2020)

The Teacher Attrition Problem

In many parts of the country, teacher attrition reaches crisis levels, with teacher demand far outstripping supply, especially in critical areas. For example, many districts in high-needs areas hire teachers with substandard credentials and permits, relying on underprepared teachers that fuel yearly turnover rates due to

lack of skills. In addition, a recent scoping review (Agyapong, et al., 2022) concerning teacher mental health described the prevalence of teacher stress and burnout can lead to more intense mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and eventual attrition. We note key findings from the review with regard to:

- **Stress:** Studies on teacher stress find a median of 32.5% of teachers report high stress levels
- **Burnout:** The overall prevalence of burnout among teachers ranged from a low of 2.81% to a high of 70.9%, with a median of 28.8% indicating signs of burnout.
- **Anxiety, Depression, and Mental Health Issues:** Studies on anxiety in teachers find prevalence ranging between 4.9% to 68%, with a median prevalence of 26%. Studies on depression in teachers have found ranges between 0.6% to 85.7%, with a median prevalence of 30.7%.
- **Overlap:** Across the 70 studies included in the scoping review, overlaps occur across the prevalence of stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression. For example, correlations were found between burnout and depression, burnout and anxiety, stress and anxiety, stress and depression, anxiety, stress and major depression, and burnout and depression. A 2023 survey revealed 42% of teachers reported a negative impact on their work due to mental health issues (Merrimack College, 2023).

In short, stress and burnout levels are highly evident in K-12 education, leading to decreases in job satisfaction, the potential for mental health issues, and eventual educator attrition and shortages. Sucher, et al. (2016) suggested:

High levels of attrition, estimated to be nearly 8% of the workforce annually, are responsible for the largest share of annual demand. The teaching workforce continues to be a leaky bucket, losing

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hundreds of thousands of teachers each year—the majority of them before retirement age. Changing attrition would reduce the projected shortages more than any other single factor.

Without quality teachers in the classroom and quality leaders working to improve our schools and districts, education quality will continue to deteriorate, disproportionately impacting schools with high poverty and students of color.

\$8B

Estimated Annual Teacher Turnover Cost

(Carver-Thomas & Darlina-Hammond. 2017)

760K

Estimated Annual Teacher Turnover

(Bleiber & Kraft. 2022)

44%

Secondary Schools Reporting Hiring Difficulty

(Ingersoll & Tran, 2023)

A Different Perspective on Teacher Attrition

To date, most attempts to solve the teacher attrition issue focus on economic incentives. However, given the prevalence of stress and burnout, leaders might make use of a different perspective, focusing on educators' health, well-being and flourishing, and the health of their schools. If educators are healthier and flourishing, they will have more energy to focus on the needs of their students and each other. While policy may work to increase incentives for teachers, we submit leaders have much more control over impacting the social determinants of well-being and flourishing known to increase teacher retention. According to Sartain & Estrera (2023), "teachers' perceptions of the quality of their school leadership and the level of support they receive from their principals are associated with reductions in both intended teacher turnover and actual teacher turnover". As we lay out below, focusing on those issues more within leaders' control is actually more likely to address the root causes of teacher attrition.

To that end, the TRM synthesizes concepts from the Job-Demands and Resources model (Bakker & Derouti, 2007, 2016; McCarthy, et al., 2016; Granziera, et al., 2022) and Leithwood's Emotional Path concept (Leithwood, et al., 2017) (Figure 1 below). The TRM helps educational leaders understand the necessary balance needed between demands and resources that can enhance educator well-being and flourishing and the role of adult social-emotional learning as a critical resource in pursuing that balance.

The TRM presents eight key ideas. More detailed descriptions follow the table.

Key Idea #1	Biopsychosocial Processes
Key Idea #2	The Energy Intensity of the Teaching Profession
Key Idea #3	Job Demands
Key Idea #4	Health Impairment Processes
Key Idea #5	Job Resources
Key Idea #6	Motivational Processes
Key Idea #7	Teacher Emotions & the Emotional Path
Key Idea #8	Adult SEL Skills

Key Idea #1: A part of the continuum of well-being ranges from little stress to a great deal of stress and is considered a **biopsychosocial process** (Hase, et al., 2020) and defines how educators psychologically process the social world in which they live and work, and how that processing can have a direct impact on their energy and well-being.

Key Idea #2: Teaching and leading schools is an **energy-intensive** profession. Intentionally seeking to balance the demands on educators with the right resources can increase and maintain the necessary energy required to maximize student outcomes.

Key Idea #3: Working in schools presents specific risk factors for energy depletion and stress. These risks are caused by **job demands**, or "physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that require sustained physical and psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skill, and are therefore associated with certain physiological or psychological costs" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Key Idea #4: The **health impairment process** initiates when excess demands or continuing high-level demands exhaust resources and deplete energy toward exhaustion, which can lead to burnout and potential health problems. **High or increasing job demands can uniquely predict burnout** (Granziera, 2021).

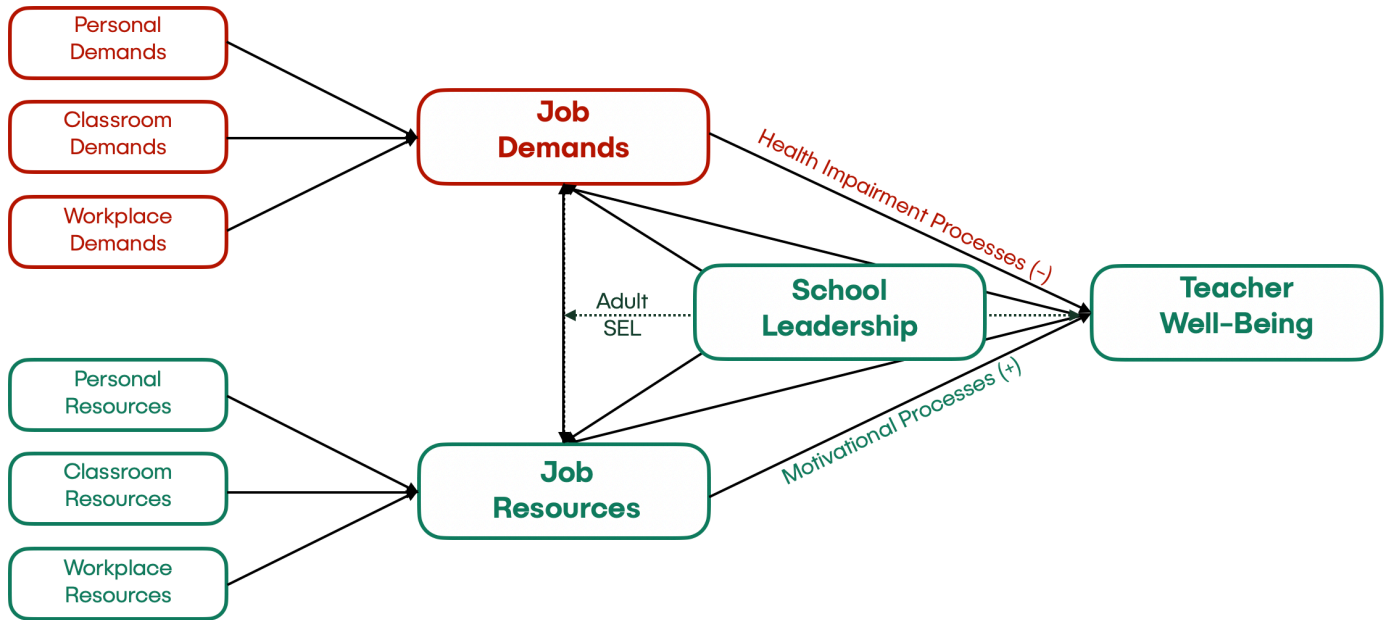
Key Idea #5: Job resources are "the physical, psychological, social, or organizational elements of the job that either help to achieve work goals, reduce the demands associated with the physiological or psychological costs from demands, or stimulate personal growth, learning and development" (Granziera, et al., 2021).

Key Idea # 6: The **motivational process** initiates when resources are high, leading to more work engagement, enjoyment, and satisfaction even when demands are high (Granziera, et al., 2021). Job resources can act as a buffer to demands as physical, social, psychological, or organizational resources can help diminish the impact of demands over time (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

Key Idea #7: Teacher emotions are central to the biopsychosocial energy equation, with emotional energy being a major driver of the physical energy necessary to accomplish the daily work of teaching (Baker, 2019). However, human relationships in schools strongly impact teachers' emotions and stress levels, and unhealthy levels can inhibit the availability of necessary daily energy. Leithwood et al. (nd) argue school leaders can support teachers' social and emotional well-being through the **Emotional Path**, a form of influence directing teachers' attention, cognition, and school perceptions.

Key Idea #8: Extensive research (Ladd, 2011; Da'as, 2021; Ford, et al., 2019; Gui, 2019; Tran, 2022) shows school **leaders' SEL competencies** and demonstrated support for teachers emerge as the most salient resource for teachers and are highly associated with teachers' career decisions. Self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, social awareness, and decision-making skills can contribute greatly to teacher satisfaction and commitment. Leader SEL skills build the Emotional Path (Barsade and O'Neil, 2016; Barsade & Knight, 2015), which teachers can experience as a powerful stress-mitigating resource.

Figure 1: The Daily SEL Leader Teacher Retention Model



Using this model as the foundation for understanding teacher attrition and retention, The Daily SEL Leader employs three strategies to help schools retain more teachers.

Strategy 1: Reduce Demands

Demands are those requirements and expectations requiring physical, psychological, and/or emotional energy to perform. Demands can also be seen as an opportunity cost: meeting or attempting to meet will consume energy that would have otherwise been spent on a different demand. For example, a request for an extra meeting might consume energy that would have otherwise gone into lesson planning. An essential implication here is that leadership strategies that assume or expect a teacher's battery to be impervious to increasing demands is likely to accelerate a teacher's departure. The TRM identifies three categories of demands that cause the most distress to educators:

- **Personal Demands:** teachers lead lives outside of work that contribute to their time and energy demands. For instance, young teachers who are parents manage the care of their own children. Similarly, educators' personal health status can create a demand on time and energy, especially if the educator is dealing with an issue or having trouble sleeping (an essential time for recovery from the day's stresses)
- **Classroom Demands:** The classroom drains most of a teachers' energy. Primary among these demands is how students respond to instruction, student behaviors, and varying levels of student engagement. Likewise, the diversity of student needs and determining ways to meet them without the right materials or support may cause extensive teacher stress. Moreover, the increased use of technology and new curricula –without the right supports– can diminish a teacher's self-efficacy, leading to increased stress.
- **Workplace Demands:** the workplace or school environment itself is another primary category that can drain educators' energy. The urgent push to help all students meet higher standards amidst constant change intensifies the work, requiring energy levels often unavailable throughout an educator's busy day. The lack of time is commonly reported as a fundamental issue for most educators. For instance, having to fill in for missing teachers due to a lack of substitutes leaves little recovery time during the day. Increasing parent conflicts, rather than supports from families, burns teachers' energy reserves. Finally, and most important, school leader support is often the critical element for teachers in deciding to stay or go, but many leaders themselves are over-stressed and may fail to provide the necessary emotional support for teachers.

Given the plethora of demands in each of these categories, what can educational leaders do to remove excess demands from their teachers? The Daily SEL Leader recommends the following steps and tools.

Strategy 1: Removing Demands: What excessive physical, psychological, social, or organizational demands school are creating extra stress or psychological costs for teachers?

Steps	Tools	Frequency
1. Measure stress and energy levels every one to two week	Daily SEL Leader Two-Question Flash Survey	Every one to two weeks
2. Manage stress and energy trends	Daily SEL Leader training and consulting	Ongoing
3. Measure staff perceptions of demands	Daily SEL Leader JDR Survey	Three times/year
4. Use an improvement science process to reduce demands	Daily SEL Leader training and coaching	Ongoing

Strategy 2: Increase Resources

Resources are supports to help teachers reduce demands and stress, achieve goals, and grow. The TRM suggests identifies three resource categories:

- **Personal Resources:** All teachers have some amount of internal and external support to address work demands. A supportive family, good health habits, and/or outside interests can relieve stress. Increasing personal agency, social-emotional skills, and a sense of purpose can also mitigate demands.
- **Class Resources:** Teachers typically require the most resources in the classroom. Beyond physical resources such as curriculum or technology, teachers need good personal relationships with students and strong social-emotional skills. Supporting resources must be readily available when teachers struggle with curriculum, behavior, language or learning challenges.
- **Workplace Resources:** Educators we have worked with across the US repeatedly cite time as the most important resource, requiring more of it to meet their demands. In addition, resources like good working relationships and collaborative professionalism with other teachers, a sense of self-determination and autonomy, involvement with decisions, and a sense of safety help teachers decide to stay. Most important, supportive leaders who engage personally and professionally are the most important resource teachers consider when determining whether to continue in the field.

Given these resource categories, what can leaders do to increase resources for their teachers? The Daily SEL Leader recommends the following steps and tools.

Strategy 2: Increase Resources: What physical, psychological, social, or organizational elements are needed to help teachers achieve work goals, reduce the demands, or stimulate personal growth to help reduce stress and maintain energy?

Steps	Tools	Frequency
1. Measure stress and energy levels every one to two weeks	Two-Question Flash Survey	Every 1 to 2 weeks
2. Use specific SEL tools to increase personal resources	Daily SEL Leader training & consulting	Ongoing
3. Review daily, weekly, and yearly schedule to help maximize time	Daily SEL Leader Time Audit	1 to 2 times/year
4. Measure staff perceptions of resources available	Daily SEL Leader JDR Survey	Three times/year
5. Use improvement science to increase resources	Daily SEL Leader training & coaching	Ongoing

Strategy 3: Develop Adult SEL Skills

Leithwood et al. (2017) describes that leaders can only indirectly impact student outcomes through influence along four distinct paths: the rational path (curriculum and instruction), the organizational path (how schools organize the work of the schools), the family path (how schools engage parents), and the emotional path. According to Leithwood et al. (2017), the Emotional Path may be the least utilized and most underdeveloped path of leadership influence on teachers due to a lack of knowledge regarding how to lead this path in schools. It may, however, be the most promising approach to increasing teacher commitment and well-being. In a review of over 90 empirical studies of teacher emotions and their impact on teaching and learning, Leithwood and Beatty (2009) found a significant relationship between teachers' thoughts and feelings - their internal emotional states- and classroom practice, engagement, and student learning. Other research by Leithwood, et al. (2010; 2020), shows the emotional states of teachers seep into or impact other paths, like the Rational Path, which includes classroom instruction.

Beyond the impact on student achievement, recent research also points to the impact principals can have on working conditions, job satisfaction, and lower turnover (Grissom, Egalite & Lindsay, 2021). School leaders who fail to adopt leadership practices that directly address teachers' emotional states may fundamentally fail to account for the outsized impact emotional states have on teachers' overall productivity and efficacy.

However, given how the school leader's job is currently structured and the increasing demands placed on school leaders, principals also continue to face their own chronic stress, and physical and mental health issues, leading to decreased job satisfaction. In the current environment, too few supports exist to help reduce the stress and burnout of school leaders, which in turn impacts how principals can support and lead the emotional path for teachers. As one principal we interviewed shared, "There's no real institutional structure or support for leaders to develop their social-emotional skills."

The Daily SEL Leader's third strategy centers on developing the SEL skills of school leaders who, in turn, can better lead and influence the Emotional Path in their schools.

- **Basic Practices:** These practices focus on supporting leaders and teachers to understand and develop foundational SEL skills shown to help them better

support themselves and others by developing a structured practice plan. These skills are grounded in the CASEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and decision making. Four simple practices of breathing, naming emotions, reflecting on an SEL prompt, and showing gratitude are designed to take less than five minutes. These short practices are accessible and doable, even for an overworked educator, and help instantiate a simple yet effective SEL practice as a personal resource.

- **Intermediate Practices:** These practices focus on supporting leaders and teachers to develop five specific practices (one for each CASEL competency) derived from extensive research on the type of social and emotional skills most beneficial for educators. These skills include:
 - Mindfulness
 - Emotional regulation
 - Positive communication
 - Relational energy
 - Psychological flexibility

- **Advanced Practices:** This level addresses how leaders and teachers can understand and develop the SEL skills to help develop or create common emotional states on the emotional path in a school that have been shown to relate to teacher flourishing and student growth. These emotional states include:
 - Trust
 - Efficacy
 - Satisfaction
 - Motivation
 - Recovering from stress and burnout

Strategy 3: Develop Adult SEL Skills: What social-emotional skills need developed to act as a supporting resource for teachers?		
Steps	Tools	Frequency
1. Use Foundational Diagnostic to determine individual and collective focus to develop	The Daily SEL Leader: A Guided Journal Foundational Diagnostic	Two times in Year 1
2. Use structured training and practice to build foundational skills	<i>The Daily SEL Leader: A Guided Journal</i> & training and consulting	Custom schedule
3. Use Specific Practice Diagnostic to determine individual and collective focus to develop	The Daily SEL Leader Intermediate Practice Diagnostic & Daily SEL training and consulting	Two times in Year 1 or 2

4. Use structured training practice to build specific skills	Daily SEL Leader training and consulting	Custom schedule
5. Use Advanced Practice Diagnostic to determine individual and collective focus to develop	Daily SEL Leader Advanced Practice Diagnostic & training and consulting	Two times in Year 2 or 3
6. Use structured training and practice to build advanced skills	Daily SEL Leader training and consulting	Custom schedule

Conclusion

Over-worked, under-resourced leaders require a mental model associated with concrete, manageable actions in order to increase teacher retention. No matter how important this issue may be, the daily ups and downs and fast-paced, emotionally-draining leadership environment can place too many obstacles in leaders' way, preventing them from solving even an issue that matters to them as much as this one. The Daily SEL Leader offers up our model to meet that need, with a particular emphasis on feasible and small-sized actions taken consistently over a multi-year term.

We are here to help. If you would like to discuss how we can support you with increasing teacher retention in your district or school, please contact us at Info@dailysel.com.