

The Staff Retention Edge: How Charter Schools Are Keeping Their Best Teachers



Peter Anderson

Head of Schools & CEO
Washington Latin Public Charter Schools



Evan Rudall

Partner & Co-Founder
Attuned Education Partners



John Trevino

Head of Growth
Attuned Education Partners

Today's Speakers



Evan Rudall

Partner & Co-Founder
Attuned Education Partners

- Started career as a teacher and Summerbridge/Breakthrough Director, more than 30 years ago
- Founded and led Roxbury Prep CS in the late 1990s
- Worked at the NYC DOE before attending law school
- Served as founding COO, then CEO, of Uncommon Schools for 7 years
- Became founding CEO of Zearn, a nonprofit that builds digital math content
- Co-founded Attuned 10 years ago, a team of 30+ practitioners working with CMOs and districts nationwide on strategic planning, curriculum adoption and instructional support, and leadership development and talent work

Today's Speakers



Peter Anderson

Head of Schools & CEO

Washington Latin Public Charter Schools

- Worked, studied and lived in Jamaica, U.K. and U.S.
- Started career as middle school math and history teacher
- Has taught students from Kindergarten through college
- School leader for more than 30 years (in NJ, Harlem, the Bronx and DC)
- Has been Head of Schools/CEO for Washington Latin PCS for the past 10 years
- Has led and served on accreditation teams (including for Middle States)
- Current DC board service includes: Chair, DC Charter School Action; Governance chair for Cesar Chavez PCS for Public Policy in DC; member of the citywide Common Lottery Board and member of the DC Special Education Cooperative
- Also serves on other regional and national boards

Today's Speakers



John Trevino

Head of Growth
Attuned Education Partners

- Former classroom teacher (Teach For America, Twin Cities)
- Assistant Principal (K-4), Founding Principal (6-8)
- At Attuned, I connect PK-12 system leaders with the software and services that build their capacity to transform scattered data points into coherent action that delivers breakthrough outcomes for students

Today's Objectives

Identify the key drivers of charter staff retention based on survey data from the sector.

Identify what schools making progress on retention are doing differently.

Leave with concrete and practical recommendations and tools that can be adopted and adapted immediately.



The answer is clear



Higher teacher
satisfaction

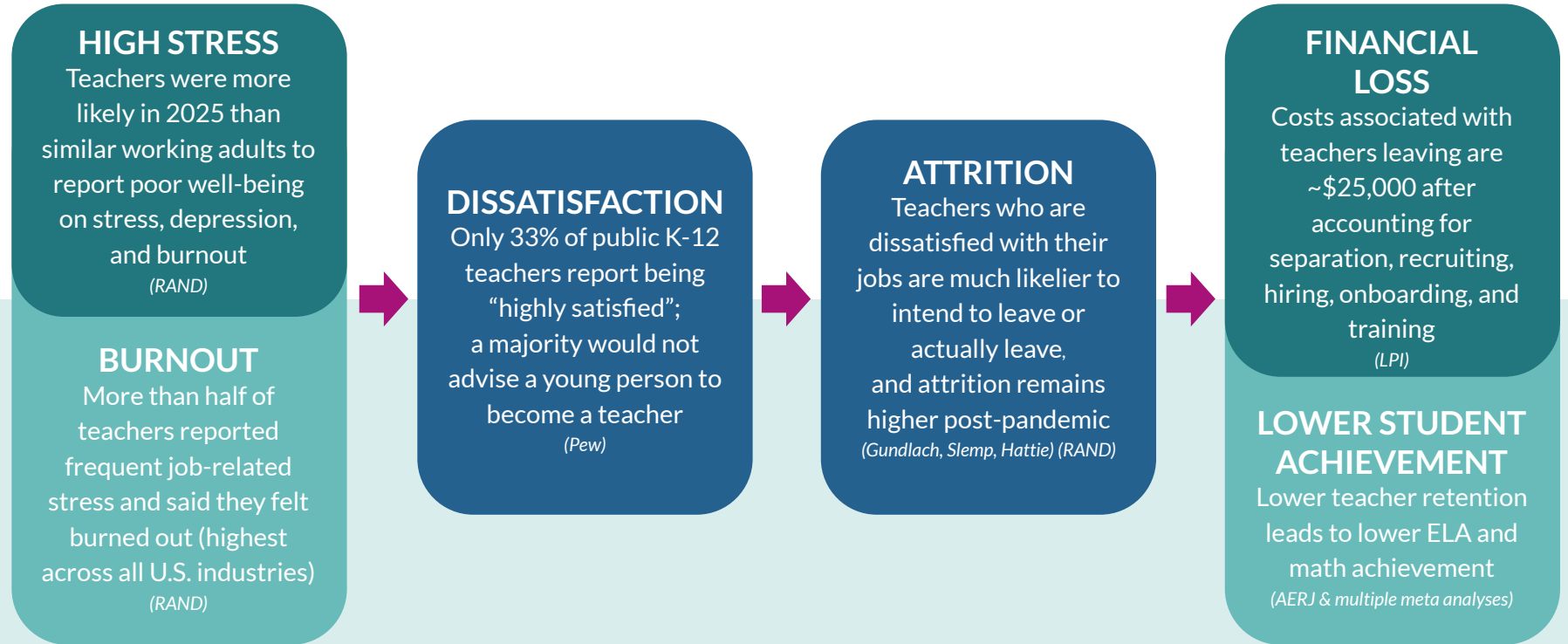


Higher teacher
retention



Lower turnover
costs and higher
student outcomes

Why we're here today: high rates of educator stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction lead to attrition, financial loss, and lower student achievement



Staff retention post-pandemic

Charter School Growth Fund (CSGF) and Attuned started to see the following warning signs:



Teacher retention

Fewer teachers staying year to year



Mid-year departures

More teachers leaving mid-year



Open vacancies

Larger numbers of vacancies that were lasting longer



Union organizing

Rising activity across networks

And yet so many orgs lack actionable data about staff satisfaction

✗ **Homegrown surveys:** time consuming, not research-based, no comparative data, lack anonymity

✗ **Non-K-12 Surveys:** long wait for data, no K-12 expertise/support, too long

✗ **Most surveys:** lack the right data visualization, data is not tied to actual staff retention, data isn't actionable

The schools making real progress on retention have figured out how to get the right information early enough with enough specificity to act on it.

Ideal characteristics of staff survey according to our charter working group

Seamless administration

- ✓ Third party administration to preserve anonymity, increase candor, and increase survey completion rates
- ✓ Survey length that provides sufficient data AND avoids contributing to survey fatigue (40-50 multiple choice Qs, ~15 mins to complete)
- ✓ Downloadable presentation slides for the full org and each school
- ✓ Expert support for data debrief and action planning

Insightful data

- ✓ Grounded in research
- ✓ Data available within 24 hours
- ✓ Intuitive dashboard that elegantly visualizes data, disaggregates by school and subgroups, benchmarks against other orgs
- ✓ Thematic analysis of the open-ended Qs
- ✓ *Actual* responses from prior year correlated with *actual* staff retention

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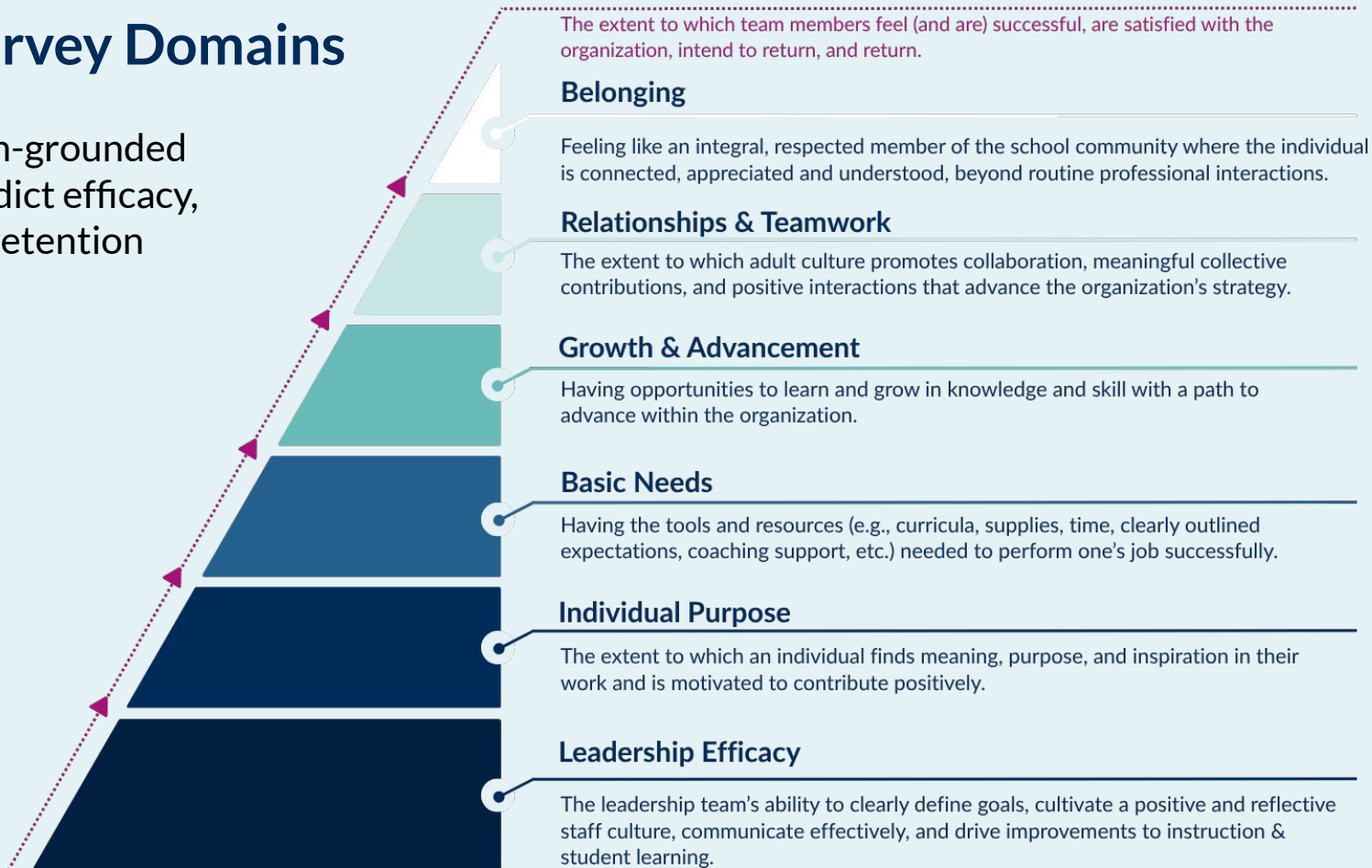
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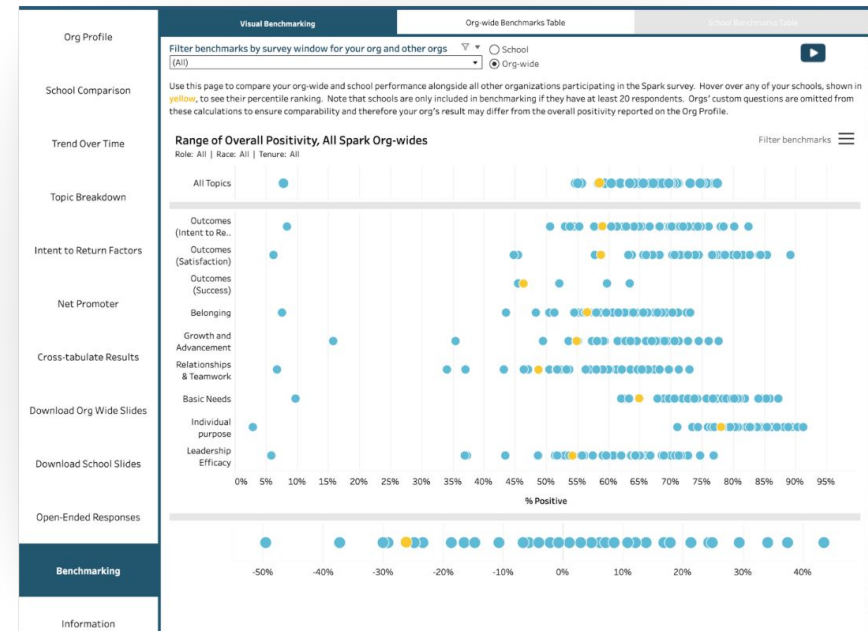
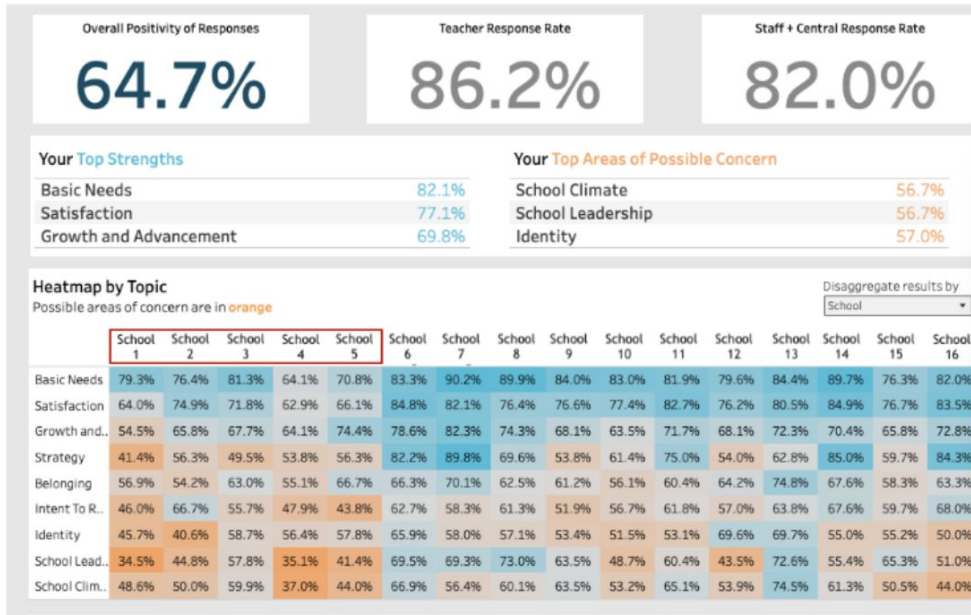


Spark's 6 Survey Domains

Spark's 6 research-grounded domains help predict efficacy, satisfaction, and retention outcomes.



Spark's elegant, disaggregated, benchmarked data is available 24 hours after survey close and sparks you to take targeted action (link [here](#))



Results from SY24-25 and SY25-26

We analyzed results from the Spark Staff Satisfaction Survey to identify trends in staff retention in the past 2 years.



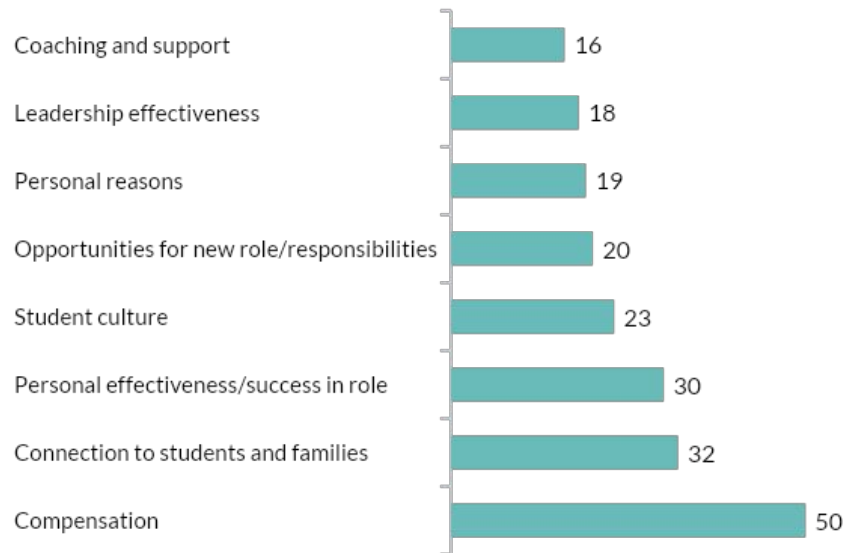
Across this sample, staff experience measurably predicts who stays. The most dissatisfied respondents left at roughly 3x the rate than those who were very satisfied.

The signals that affect retention are visible long before a teacher decides to leave.

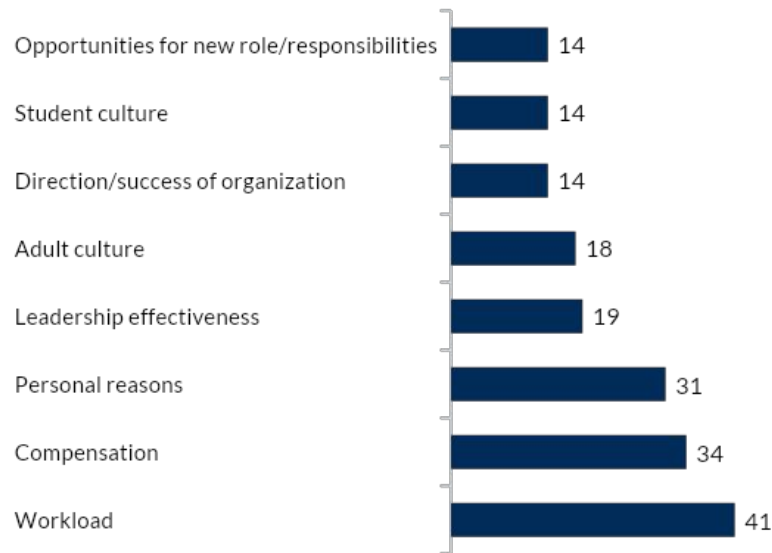
Asked directly, staff name compensation and students as reasons to stay, and workload and compensation as reasons to leave

Share of staff selecting each factor when asked what makes them more / less likely to stay, SY25-26 (multi-select).

MORE likely to stay



LESS likely to stay



Note: Multi-select questions, SY25-26 (≈20,897 / 20,889 respondents). Bars = % of respondents selecting each factor; respondents may pick several, so columns exceed 100%. 'Other' suppressed. Compensation appears prominently on both sides — it both anchors and threatens retention.

Compensation is important.

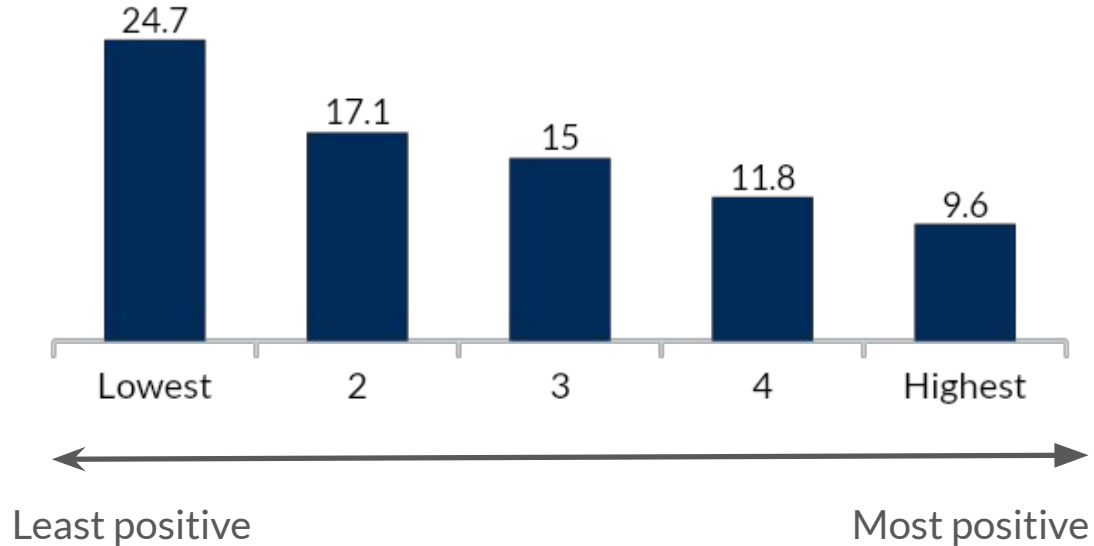
But, a teacher's decision to stay is so much more complex than pay alone.



Spark measures predict attrition

% attrition, by positivity quintile

Teachers who responded least positively were nearly 3x more likely to leave than the most positive teachers

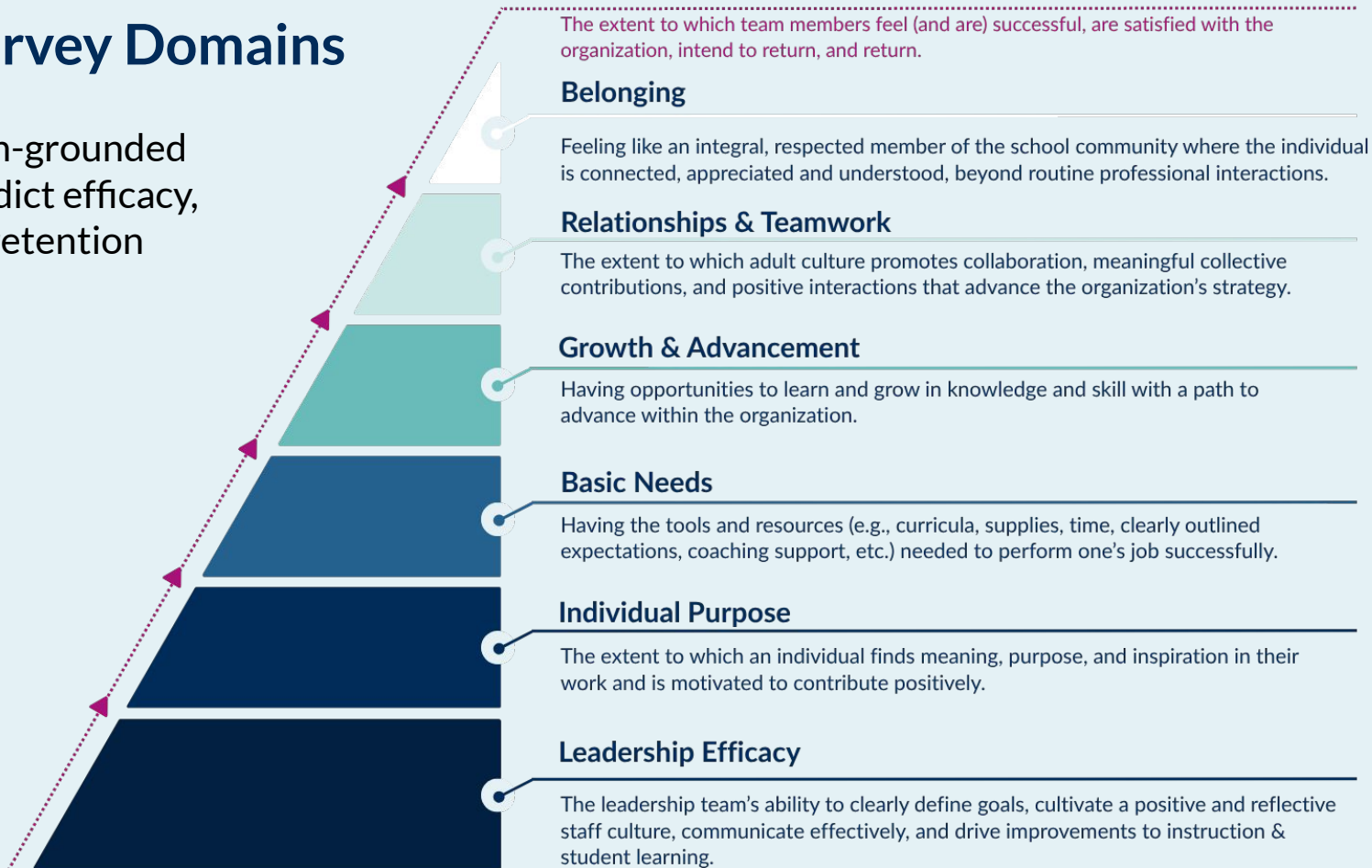


Note: SY24-25 respondents (N=12,869) with known return status; one record per person. 'Left' = did not appear in an SY25-26 staff survey; Δ = returner - leaver mean. Overall = mean of the six experience domains. Discrimination AUC=0.61 (0.50=chance); odds of leaving rise 1.46x per SD (Cohen's $d=0.4$). R^2 is omitted as it understates discrimination for an imbalanced (84/16) binary outcome.

**What actually drives
staff retention?**

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Intent to return is best predicted by **individual purpose and basic needs**

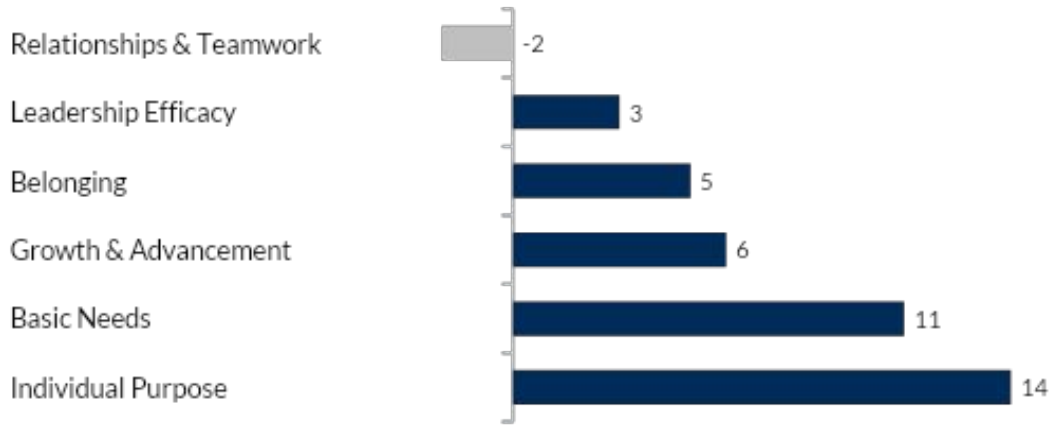
Individual purpose: The extent to which an individual finds meaning, purpose, and inspiration in their work and is motivated to contribute positively.

*How inspired are you by your work?
How proud are you of the work you do?*

Basic Needs: Having the tools and resources (e.g. curricula, supplies, time, clearly outlined expectations, coaching support, etc.) needed to perform one's job successfully.

*How sustainable is your workload over the long term?
To what degree do you have the materials and resources you need to do your work well?*

Change in probability of intending to return per 1-point higher domain score



+14 points.

A 1-point higher score on Individual Purpose is associated with a 14-point higher probability of intending to return.

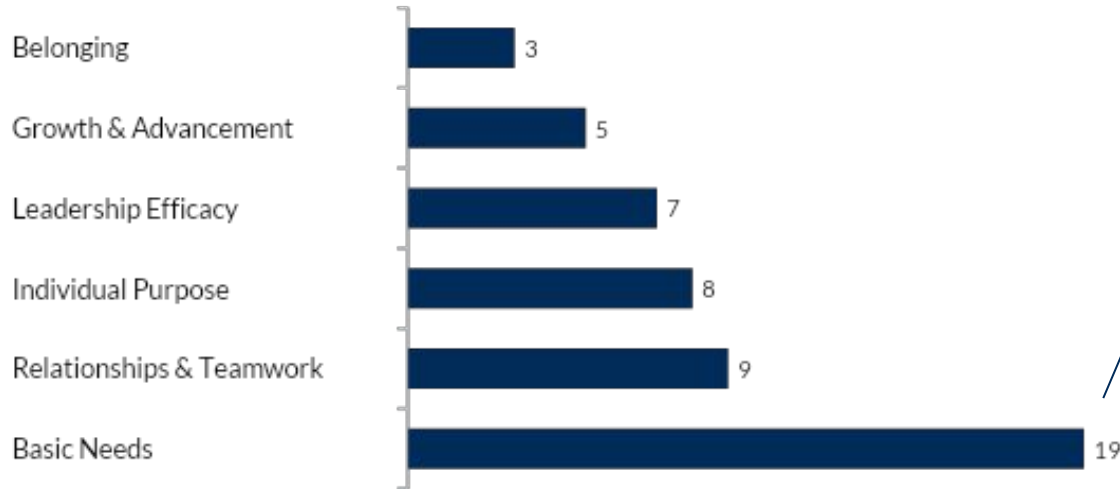
These domains together explain 26% of the variation in intent.

Note: Linear probability model, SY25-26 (N=20,879). Outcome = intends to return (top-2 box). Coefficients in percentage points; $R^2=0.26$. Satisfaction/Success outcomes omitted as predictors. Bars in grey are practically small effects: because the domains are so highly correlated, the model assigns their shared influence to the strongest predictors, leaving these with little independent effect, and occasionally a flipped (negative) sign that reflects this statistical overlap, not a real negative impact.

Satisfaction is driven most by Basic Needs: having the time, tools, and manageable workload to do the job

Day-to-day satisfaction rests overwhelmingly on Basic Needs: workload, time, resources, and safety. Leaders move satisfaction most by protecting/improving these working conditions because they make the job feel more sustainable over time.

Change in probability of being satisfied per 1-point higher domain score



+19 points.

A 1-point higher score on Basic Needs is associated with a 19-point higher probability of being satisfied with the job, holding the other domains constant.

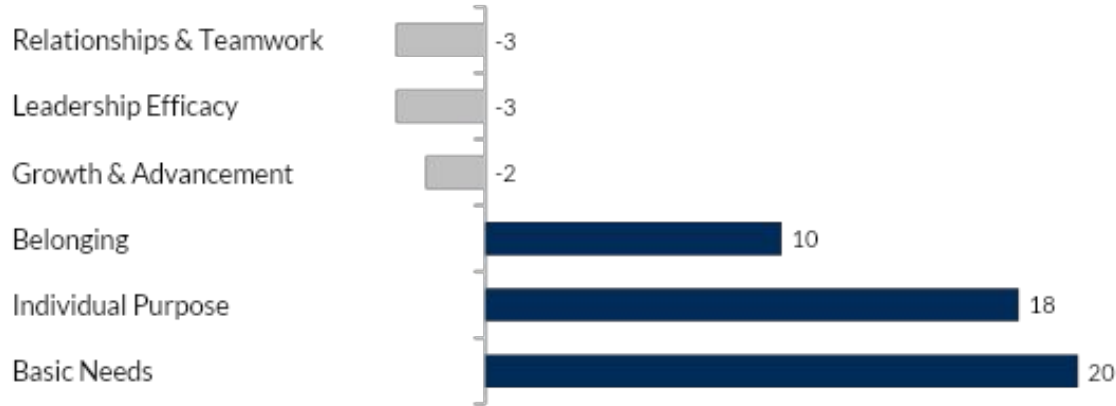
Together the domains explain 43% of the variation.

Note: Linear probability model, SY25-26 (N=20,879). Outcome = satisfied (top-2 box). Coefficients in percentage points; $R^2=0.432$. Other outcome domains omitted as predictors.

Basic Needs and Individual Purpose Fuel Perceptions of Success

Feeling effective in the role comes from having what you need to succeed and a clear sense of purpose.

Change in probability of feeling successful per 1-point higher domain score



+20 points.

A 1-point higher score on Basic Needs is associated with a 20-point higher probability of feeling successful in the role, holding the other domains constant.

Together the domains explain 30% of the variation.

Note: Linear probability model, SY25-26 (N=20,876). Outcome = feels successful (top-2 box). Coefficients in percentage points; $R^2=0.3$. Other outcome domains omitted as predictors. Bars in grey are practically small effects: because the domains are so highly correlated, the model assigns their shared influence to the strongest predictors, leaving these with little independent effect, and occasionally a flipped (negative) sign that reflects this statistical overlap, not a real negative impact.

So, what?

MORE THAN COMPENSATION

Compensation matters, but alone, it is insufficient to explain why teachers choose to stay or leave. The reality is much more complex.

ATTRITION IS PREDICTABLE

The more positively a teacher responds to each of the six domains, the more likely they are to stay.

TWO DOMAINS STRONGLY PREDICT INTENT

Two domains in particular are the strongest predictors of intent to return: basic needs and individual purpose. When those are strong, so is retention.

LEADERSHIP IS ESSENTIAL, BUT INDIRECT

Leadership efficacy is the most central of all domains, but its impact on intent to return is indirect and felt through progress on other domains.

Said another way, strong leadership is essential to strengthening retention, but only if that leadership is focused on the conditions that matter most to teachers (i.e. individual purpose and basic needs).

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The LISTEN Cycle



PANELIST QUESTIONS

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Can you share what your leadership team did with the data related to staff satisfaction?

In other words, when the group met, how did it approach the conversation and how did it decide what to prioritize?

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How, if at all, did you share back what you learned and/or what you planned to do about it with the larger organization?

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What did you decide to prioritize and why?

For each domain or issue that you prioritized, what specific actions did you take?

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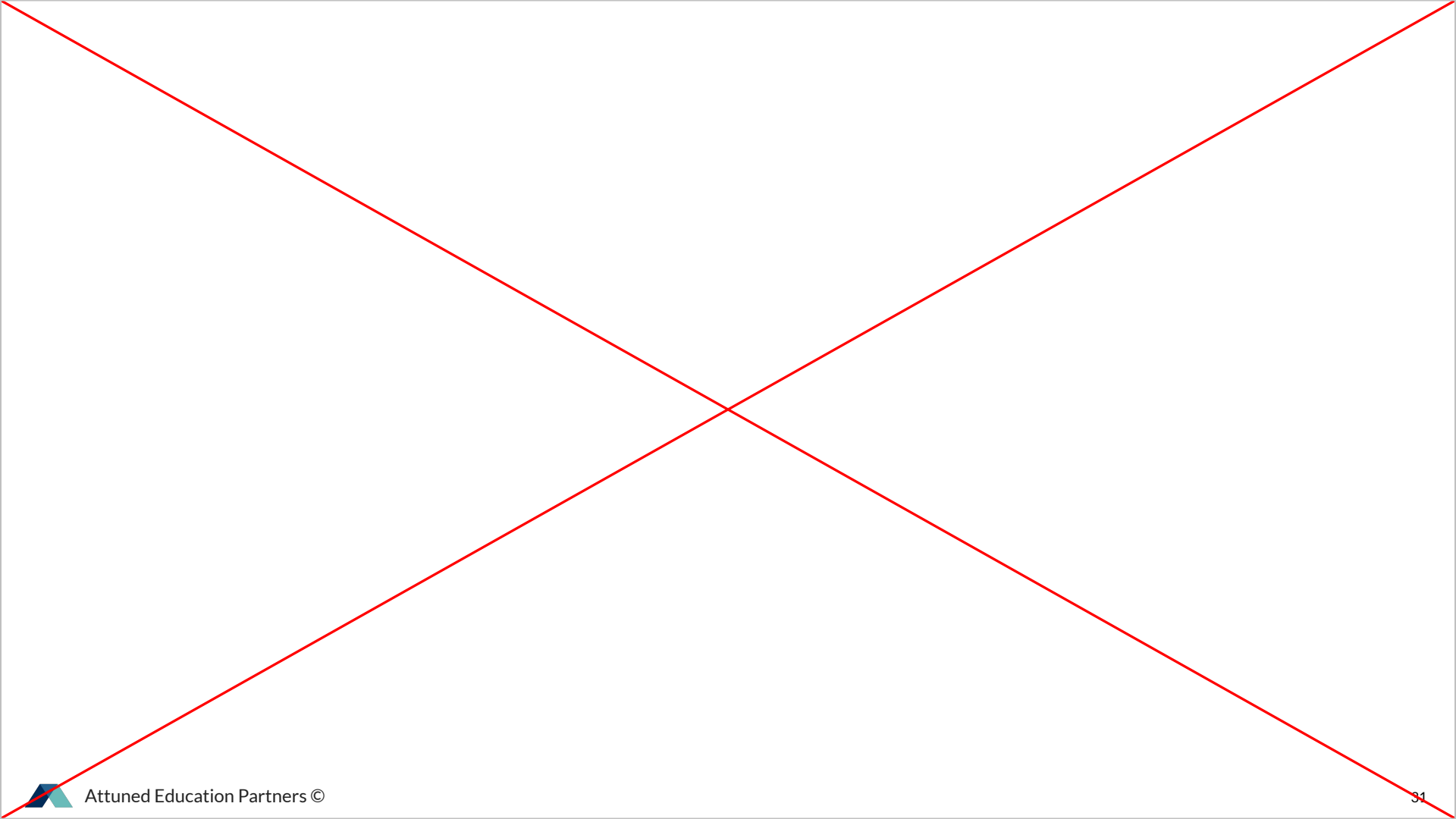
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What is the biggest change/shift/transformation your network experienced as a result of this work?



Q&A

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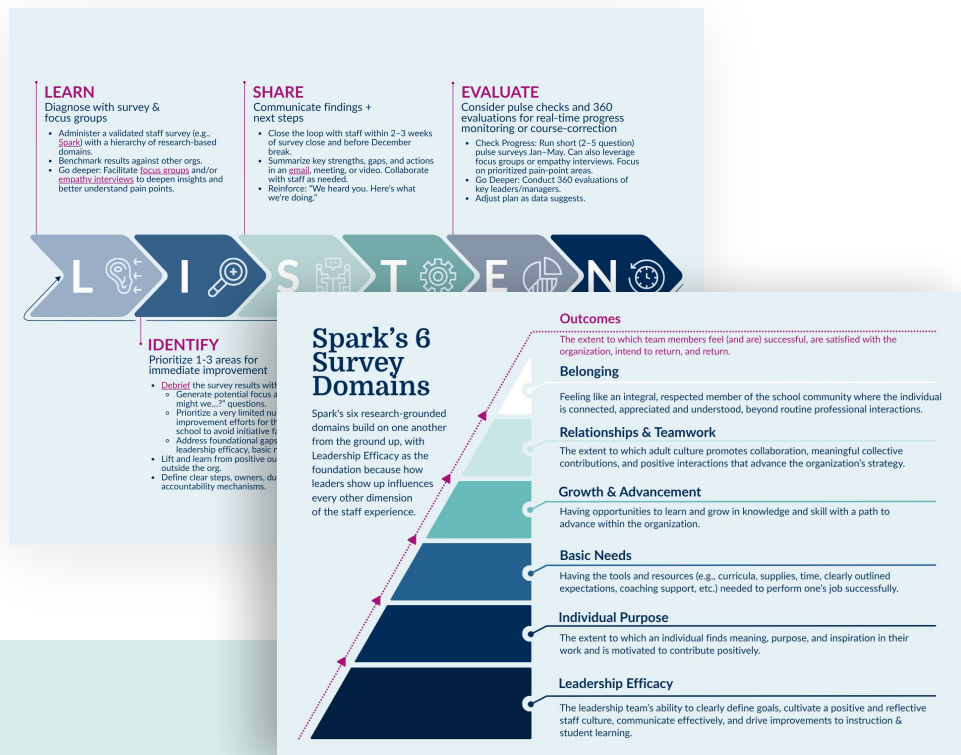
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At Your Seat: A Two-Sided Reference Sheet

One side has the **LISTEN** Cycle. Flip it over and you'll find **Spark's 6 Survey Domains**.

The QR code links to these frameworks and additional practical resources that you can bring back and immediately use with your team.



Email evan@attunedpartners.com with follow-up questions or interest.



Please complete a session evaluation in the app
(expand the session description).



<https://conference.publiccharters.org/2026/program/eval/?sessionid=29637848>

Thank you.

