



Designed to Last

Reimagining the Employee Value
Proposition in Independent Schools



Purpose of Study



What are the top 5 challenges you are confronting within your school community?

2025

- 47.4% Annual fund & capital campaign support
- 44.6% Balancing daily demands with strategy
- 42.9% Retention & recruitment of qualified staff
- 30.9% Tuition & affordability
- 24.0% Deferred facility maintenance projects

2024

- 51.8% Retention & recruitment of qualified staff
- 49.2% Annual fund & capital campaign support
- 42.9% Balancing daily demands with strategy
- 38.2% Tuition & affordability
- 31.4% Deferred facility maintenance projects



What do you believe are the top 5 barriers to faculty/staff retention and recruitment?

2025

91.4%

Compensation & benefits

51.7%

Workload, wearing multiple hats

47.1%

Qualifications & pool of candidates

37.9%

Generational expectations

36.2%

Affordable housing

2024

93.1% Compensation & benefits

68.5% Workload, wearing multiple hats

43.4% Qualifications & pool of candidates

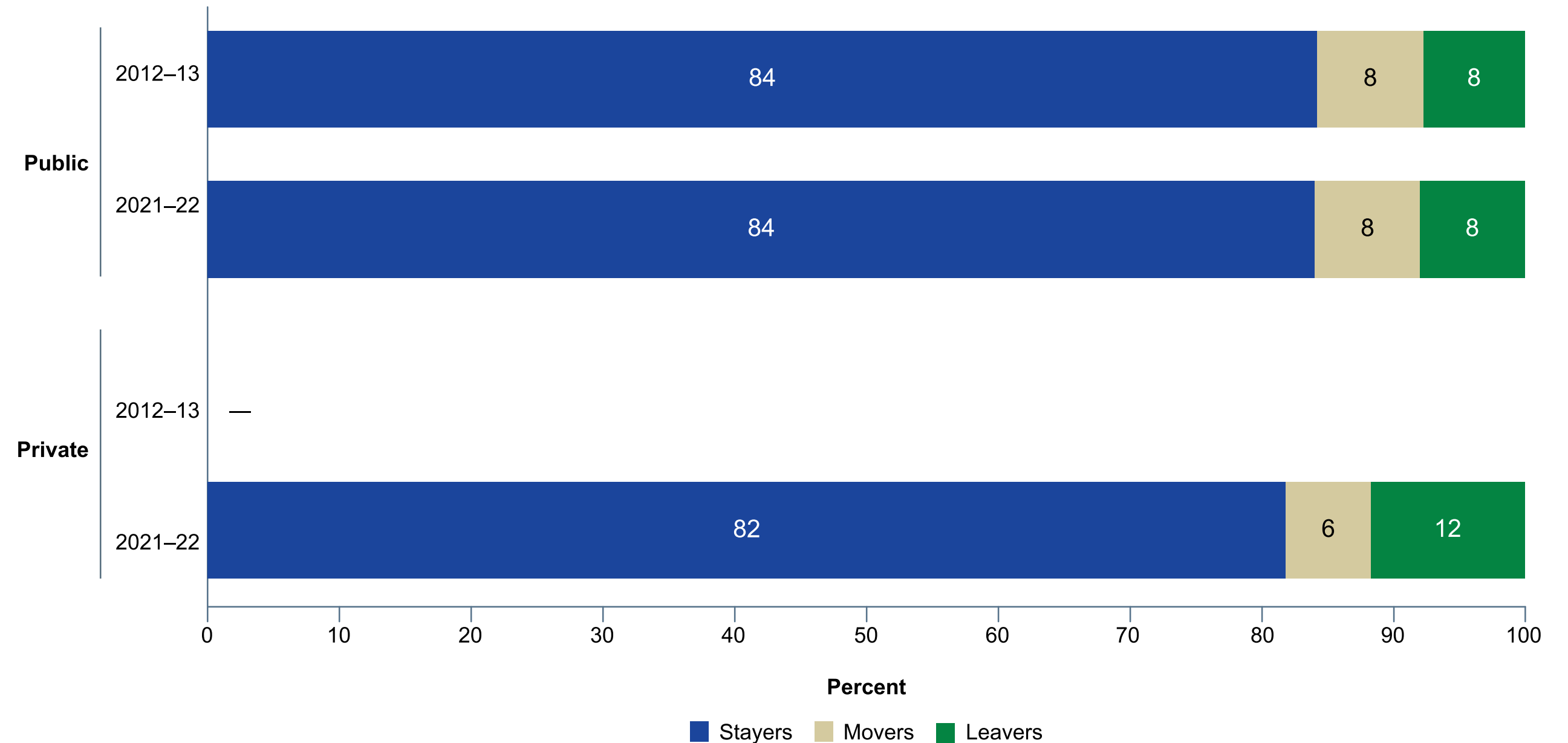
37.4% Parent encroachment in school life

30.0% Work-place well-being & care



Why This Research Matters: The Challenge

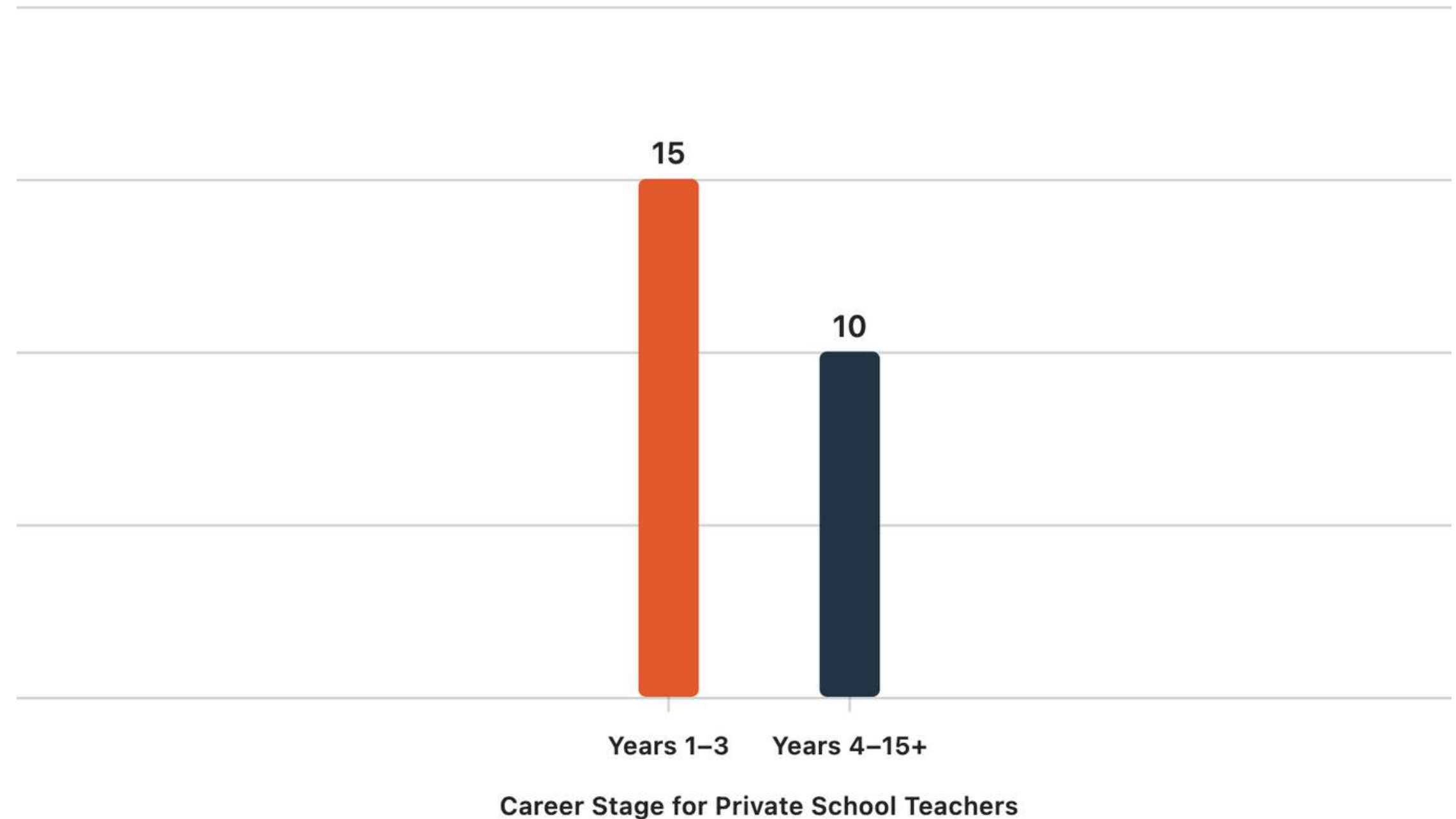
Relative to public schools (8%) more private school teachers are leaving the profession (12%).



Why This Research Matters: The Challenge

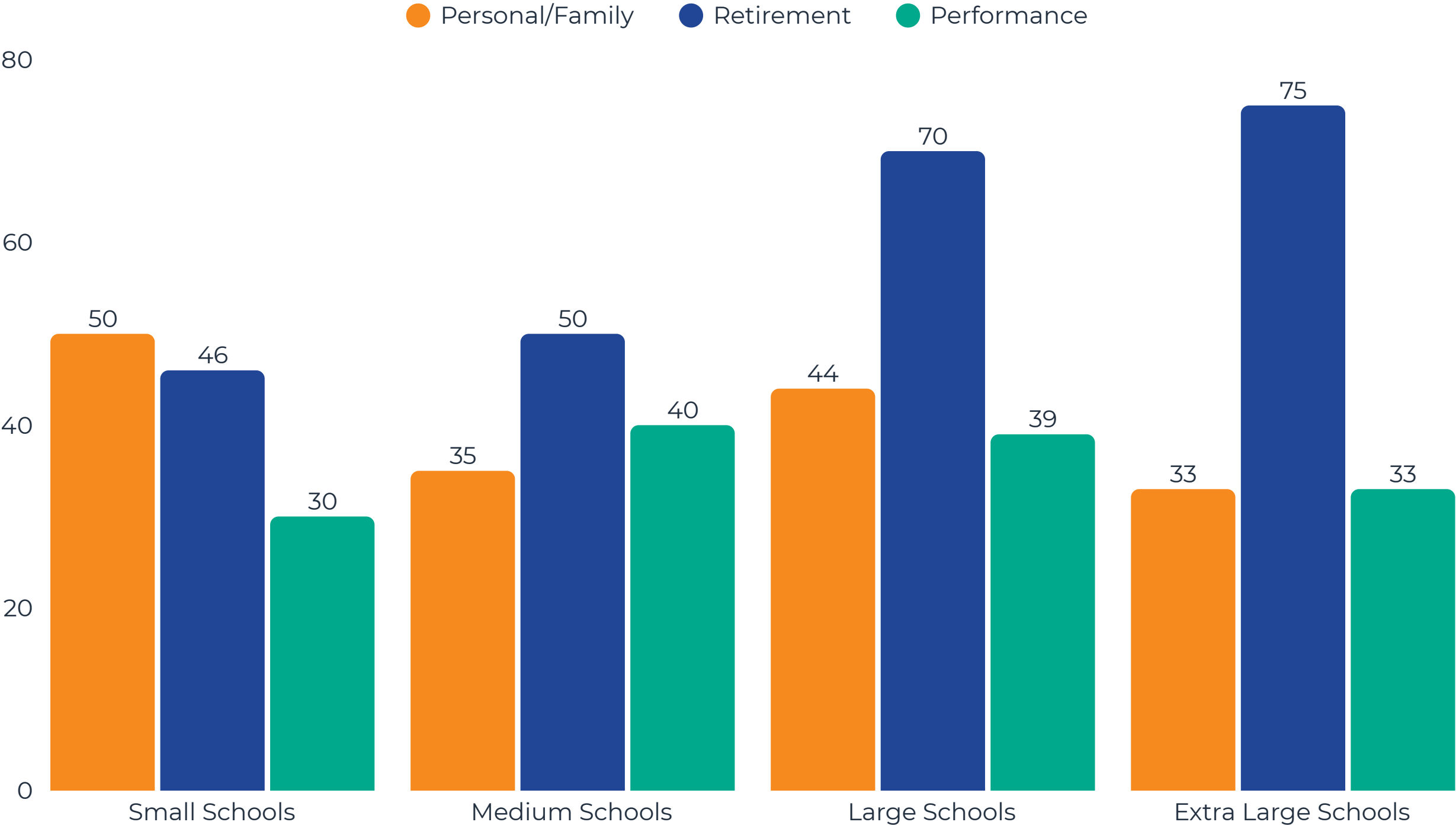
The percentages of private school teachers who **leave** the profession in **years 1-3** is **significantly higher** than those who leave in years 4-15.

Private school teachers are **50% more likely** to leave during this period than at any other time in their careers.



Faculty Attrition

What were the primary reasons for any faculty or staff departures over the past two years? Select up to three.



New Job Opportunities

According to a recent Gallup study, “Employees are watching for or actively seeking **new job opportunities** at the highest rate since 2015, with **51% exploring** their options. The desire for greater work-life balance and well-being as well as better pay and benefits has increased in importance since the pandemic. Together, this set of priorities shows how employees define a better job today.” -The Top Four Reasons for Taking a New Job, *Gallup*

What is attracting employees to new opportunities?

Reasons for Taking Next Job	Baby Boomers	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
1. It allows me to have greater work-life balance and better personal wellbeing.	49%	56%	65%	59%
2. It significantly increases my income or improves my benefits package.	40%	54%	59%	56%
3. It provides greater stability and job security.	43%	55%	58%	54%
4. It allows me to do what I do best.	53%	48%	46%	45%
Key Differentiator for Gen Z				
5. It accelerates my professional or career development.	17%	22%	31%	43%



● Percentage

Building a life that makes you happy

Making enough money to live comfortably

Having close relationships with family and friends

Having time for your hobbies and personal interests

Having a good education

Getting married

Having your dream job

Buying a house

Having a good spiritual life

Having children

Becoming wealthy

How important are each of the following to you, personally, when you think about the future and having a great life?

Gallup | Walton Family Foundation,
Voices of Gen Z Study, 2024

0 20 40 60 80 100





Methodology & Participants



Research Question

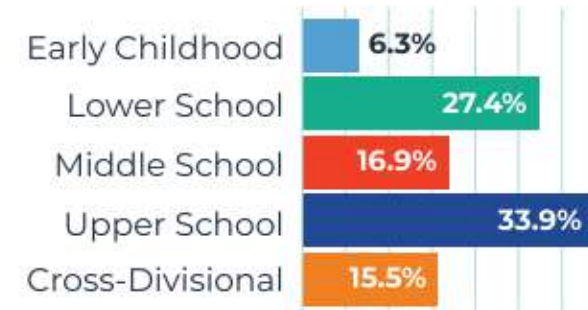
What factors most influence independent school educators' motivation, engagement, and sense of purpose—and how do they impact retention, well-being, and workplace culture?

Survey items were structured to examine dimensions closely aligned with observed pulse patterns, including

- educators' sense of connection and belonging within their school community;
- the clarity, intensity, and sustainability of workload and role expectations;
- perceptions of leadership support, trust, and recognition;
- alignment between personal values, professional purpose, and institutional mission;
- early signals associated with fatigue, disengagement, or reduced commitment.



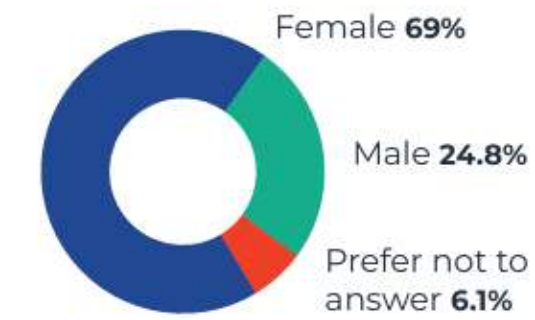
Division



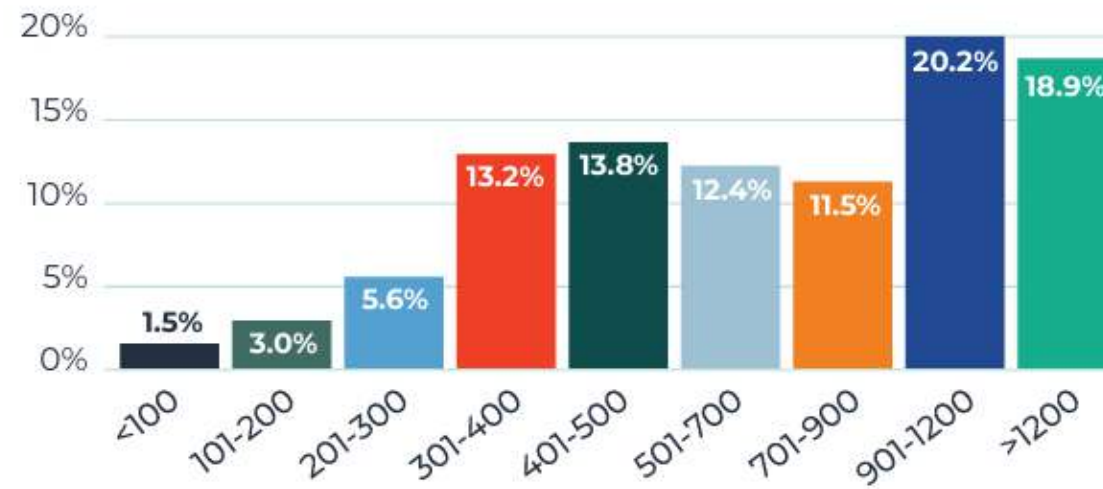
Tenure



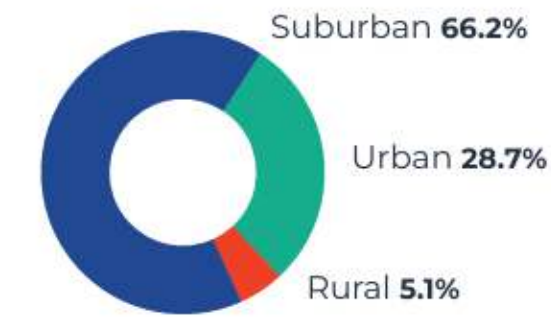
Gender



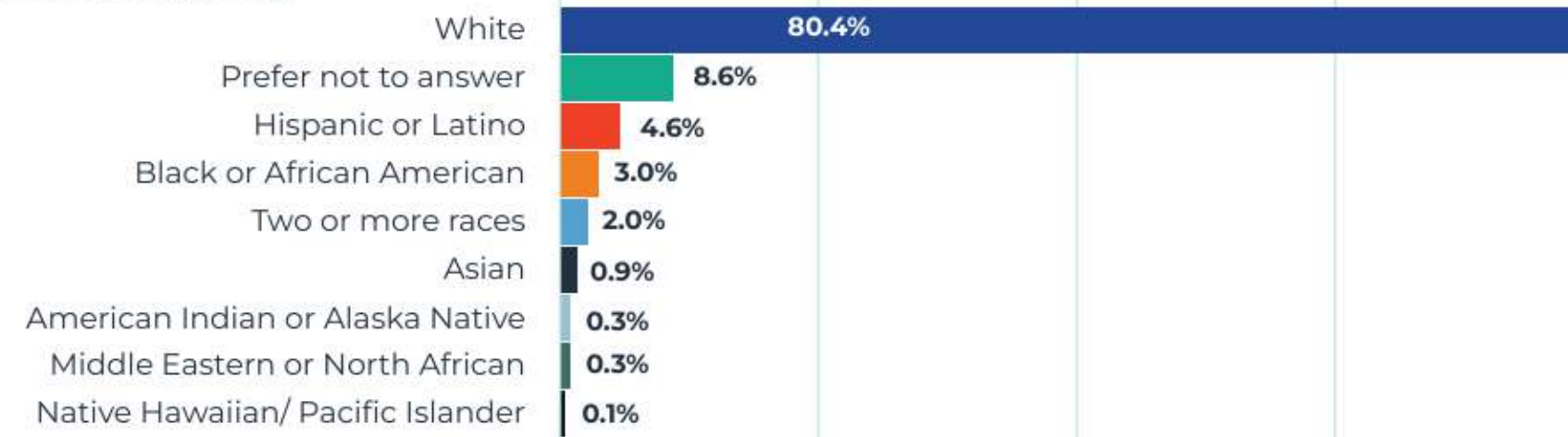
School Size



Setting



Race/Ethnicity



**Data Collected:
September 9 –
October 10**

1558

Survey Responses

499

Comments Received

36

Questions

6

Sorting
Demographics

12+

Responses from 12
states and Mexico





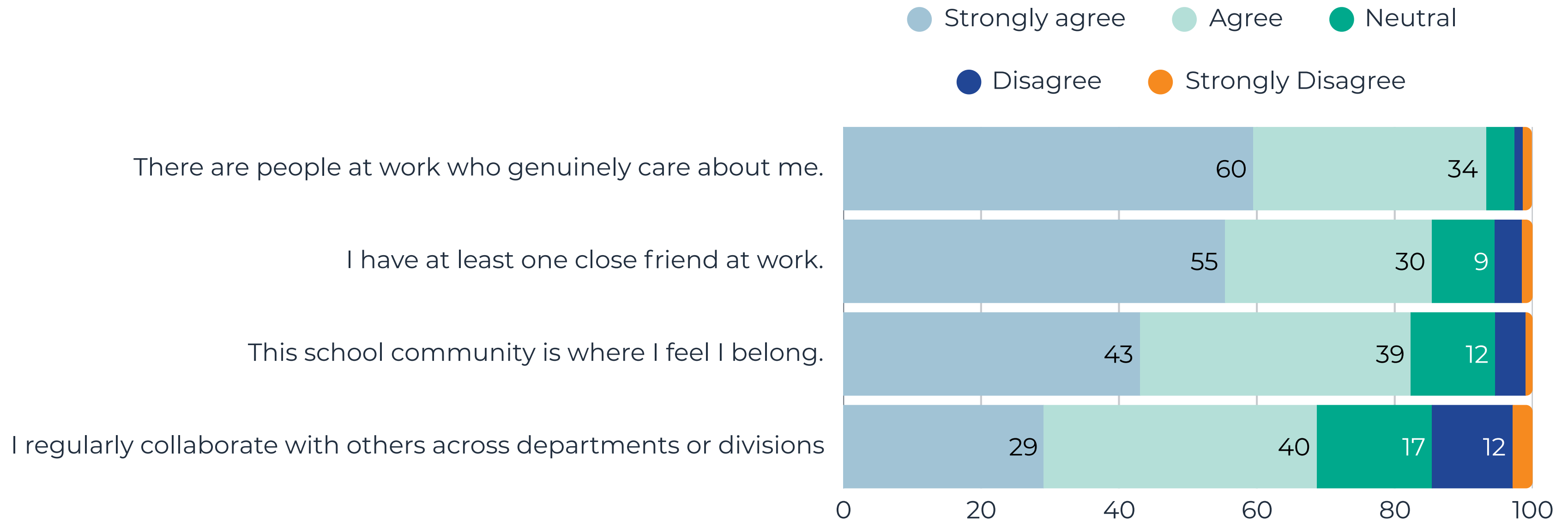
Key Findings Overview



01

Interpersonal Connections & Relationships

The relational bonds within independent schools are notably strong. Survey results show that educators are able to form genuine friendships and experience a meaningful sense of belonging. When individuals feel known, valued, and connected, the decision to leave the community carries greater weight.



**What would you say
are the top reasons
you remain employed
at this school?**



Interpersonal Connections & Relationships

"I love working at my school. I feel supported and am able to create strong and lasting impacts on students in a way I could not in public school. I am happy every day that I come to work!"

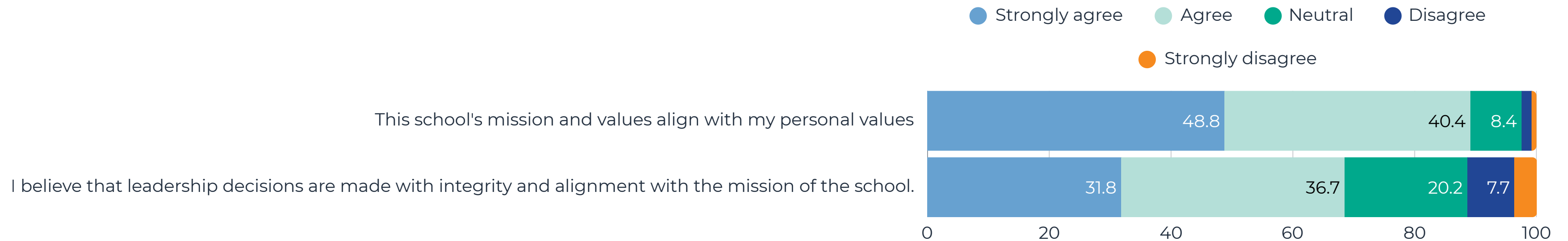
"[The school] has reinvigorated my passion as an educator with their commitment to me as a human being and an educator."



Organizational Suitability & Job Alignment

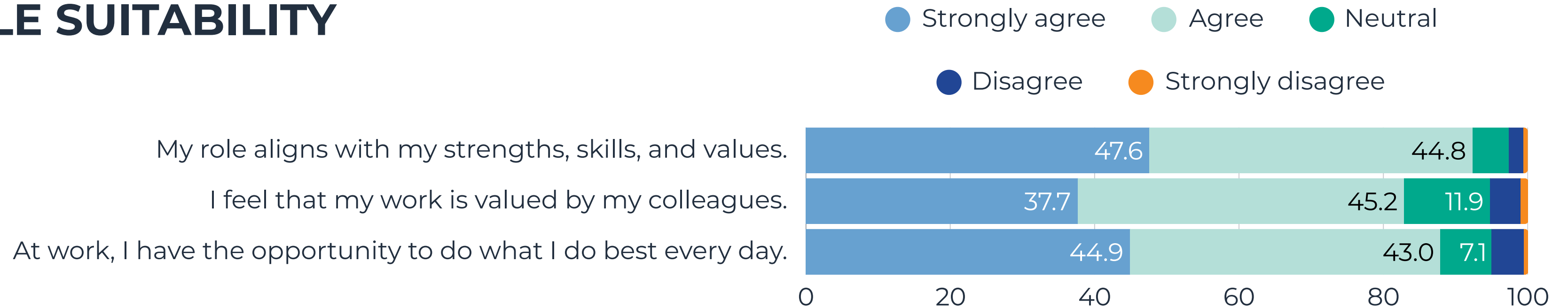
Educators participating in the study report a strong alignment with their school's mission and describe their daily work as both meaningful and well matched to their skills. However, the absence of clearly articulated career pathways introduces a structural risk that may weaken long-term retention, particularly for ambitious educators in the middle stages of their careers.

MISSION AND VALUES ALIGNMENT



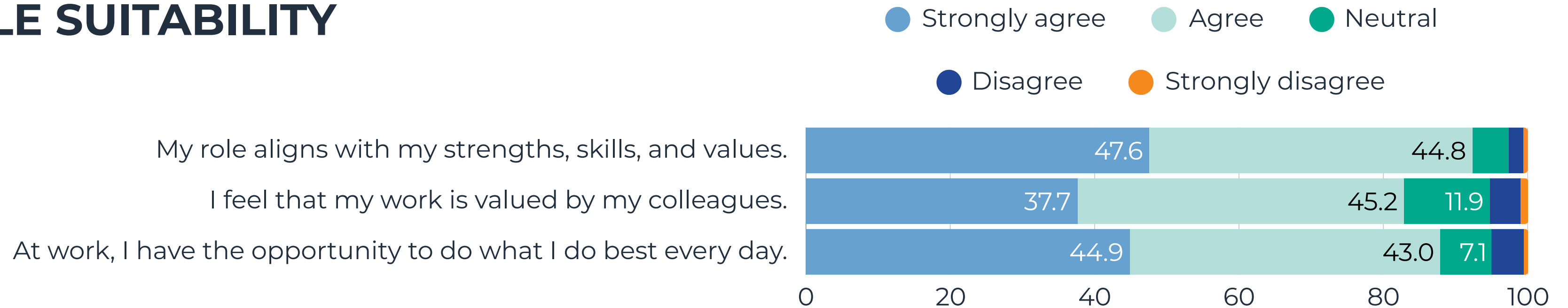
Organizational Suitability & Job Alignment

ROLE SUITABILITY

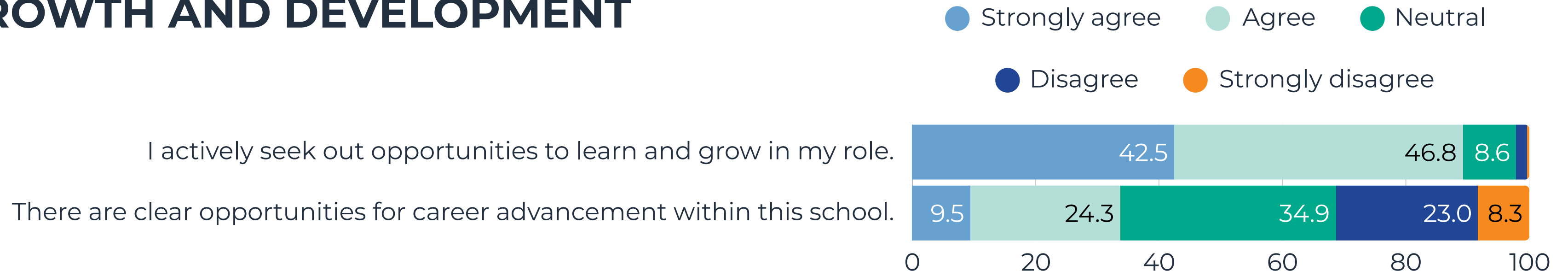


Organizational Suitability & Job Alignment

ROLE SUITABILITY



GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT



Organizational Suitability & Job Alignment

"I would not remain long at my current school if my values did not align with its mission; if my colleagues were not supportive, collaborative, and talented; or if I felt I was not allowed to educate students as well as possible."

"I truly love being a teacher at [the school]. However, lately I've felt that the pop-in visits from administration haven't been as helpful as I hoped. These visits often happen in the middle of instruction without context about what part of the lesson students are in. Afterwards, we receive emails with observations, vocabulary heard, and suggestions—even though the first part of the lesson, where those elements may have already been addressed, wasn't seen. This has been disheartening and has caused some anxiety, as the random timing of the visits makes it unclear what feedback will follow."



Perceived Cost of Leaving

Educators remain in their schools in part because leaving would require relinquishing significant relational capital, professional autonomy, and opportunities for meaningful impact. However, this sense of community is not reinforced by competitive compensation or robust recognition systems and is further strained by persistent workload pressures. As workload demands intensify and external opportunities become more accessible, this approach appears increasingly fragile. Among all factors examined, the intersection of compensation and workload emerges as the study's most significant vulnerability.

Professional Sacrifice



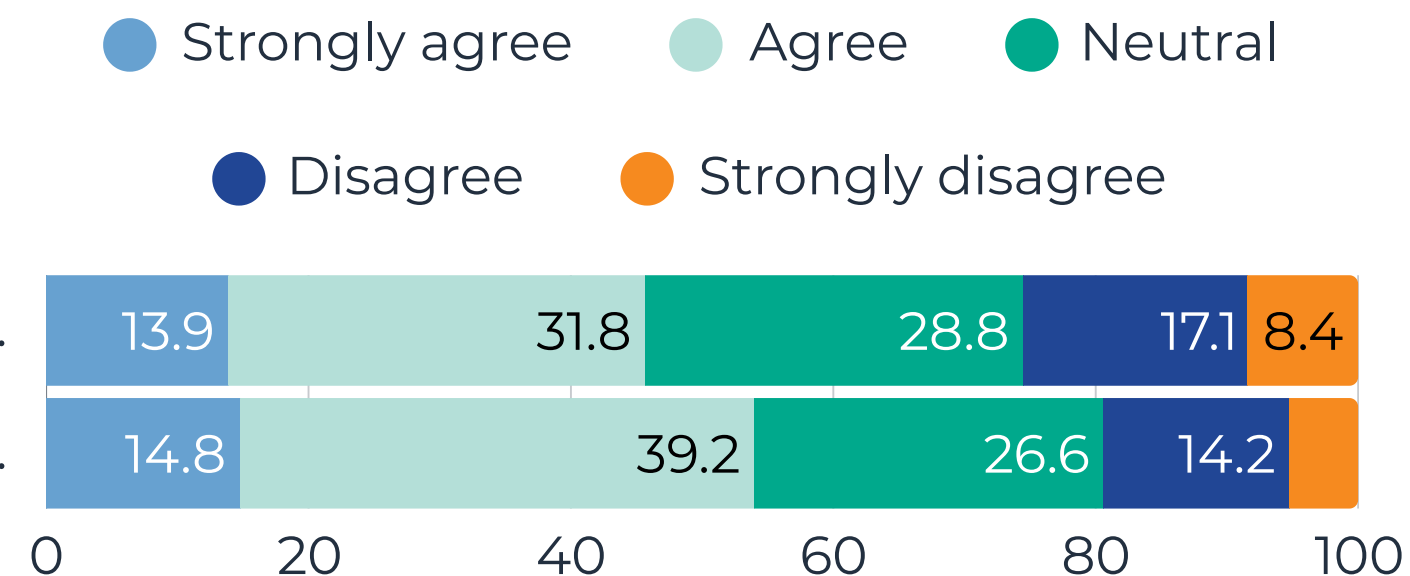
03

Perceived Cost of Leaving

Compensation and Recognition

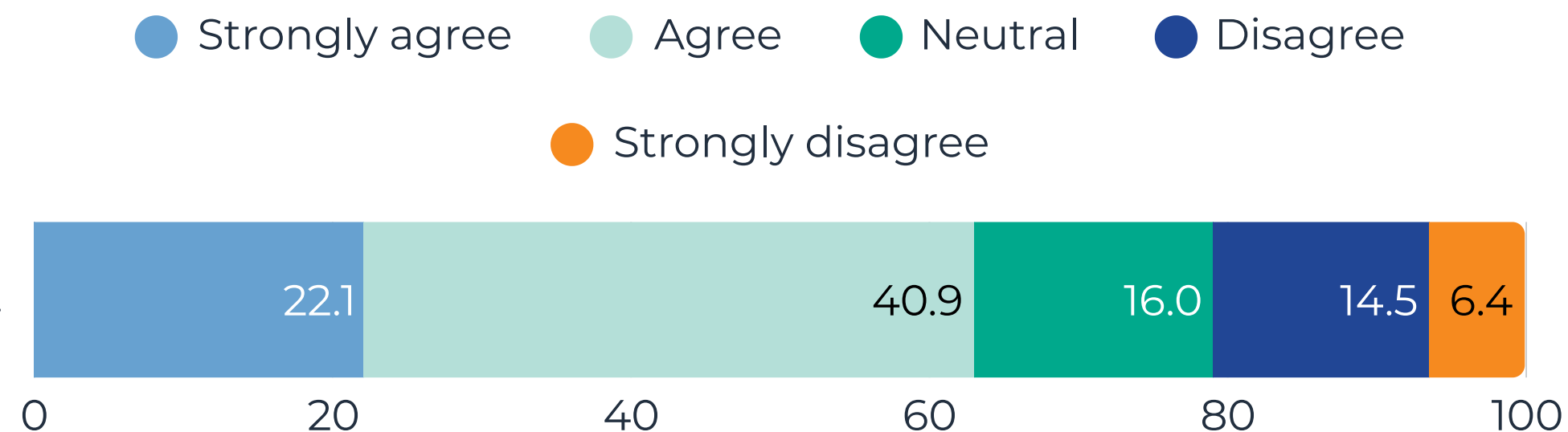
My compensation is competitive compared to similar roles in other schools.

When I work hard, my efforts are recognized and rewarded.



Workload Sacrifice

My workload is manageable and sustainable over time.

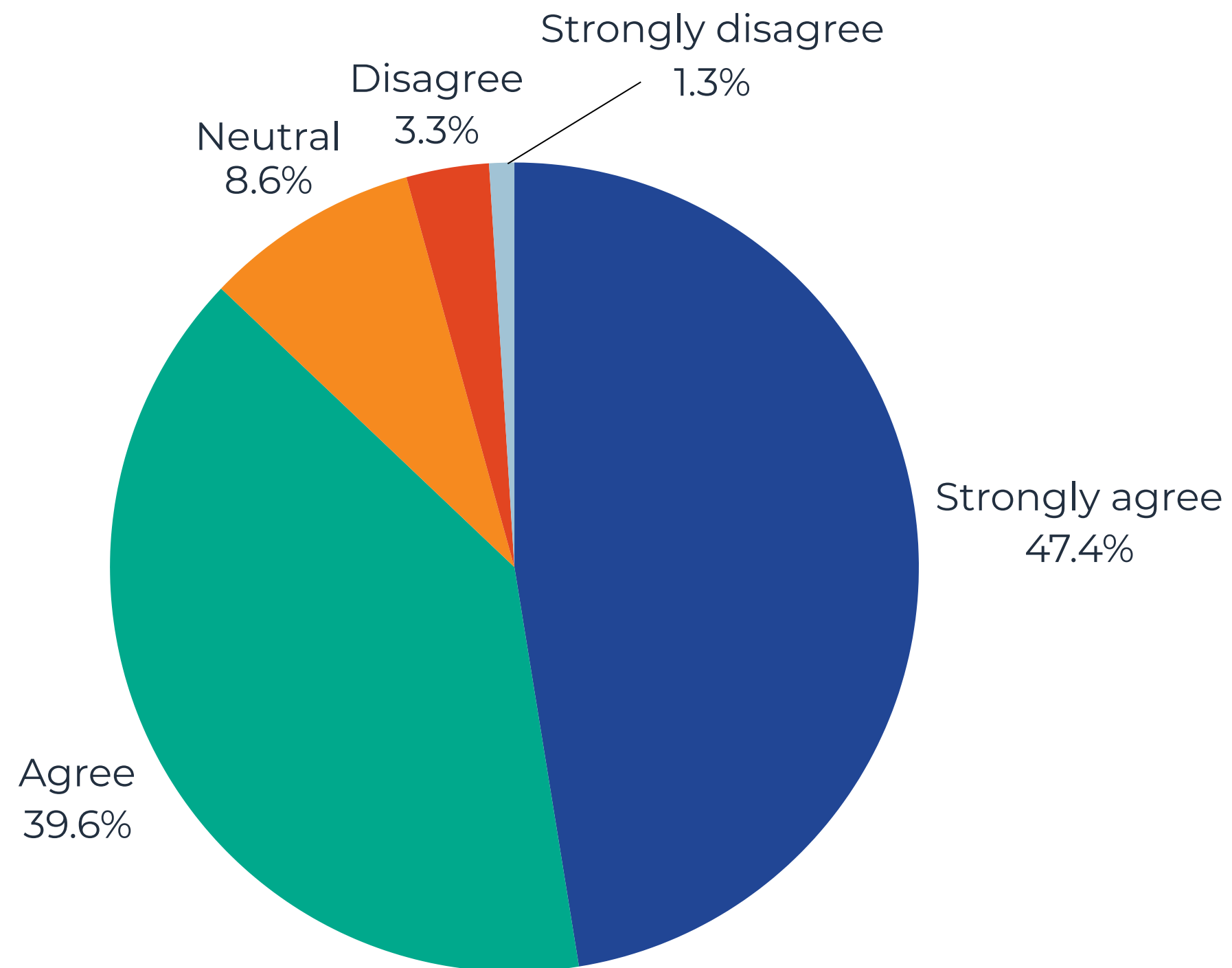


03

Perceived Cost of Leaving

Role Clarity

I take on tasks that are not officially part of my job description.



Perceived Cost of Leaving

"I truly feel like I have found a place where decisions are made for what's best for the students, and adults are treated with respect and given the autonomy to practice their craft."

"I am passionate and love my job, but my pay does not cover living expenses. Teacher pay has not kept up with inflation."

"I do not have enough time to adequately complete all the side tasks I am asked to complete and prepare excellent classes for every class I am assigned."

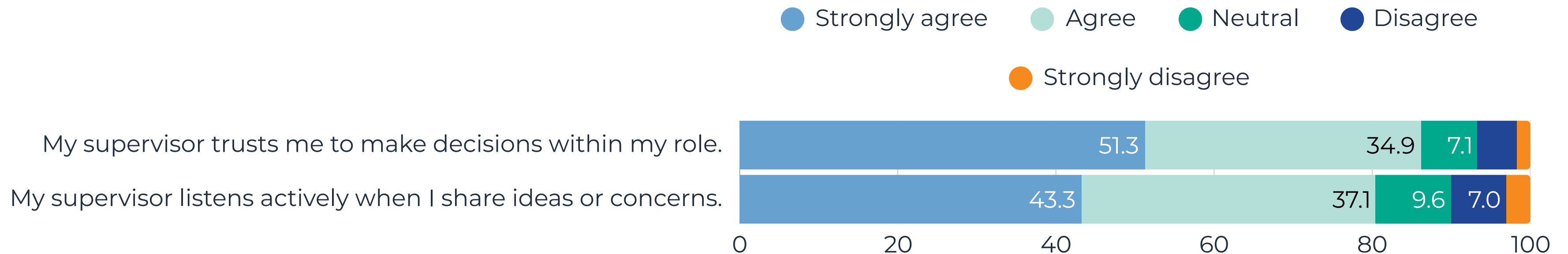
"I think I am at a wonderful school and would probably not be teaching anymore if I was not where I am. I do feel like teaching as a whole profession is becoming unsustainable. You can't provide for a family, and there is so much mental workload that it is hard to balance family life."



Leadership & Management Quality

Leadership quality presents a mixed profile. Supervisory relationships are generally strong, marked by high levels of trust and professional autonomy. However, key leadership practices, particularly regular, actionable feedback, show meaningful gaps that likely contribute to faculty frustration and limit professional growth. The contrast between high reported trust (86.2%) and relatively low feedback frequency (54.2%) points to a leadership culture that empowers educators but does not consistently support their development.

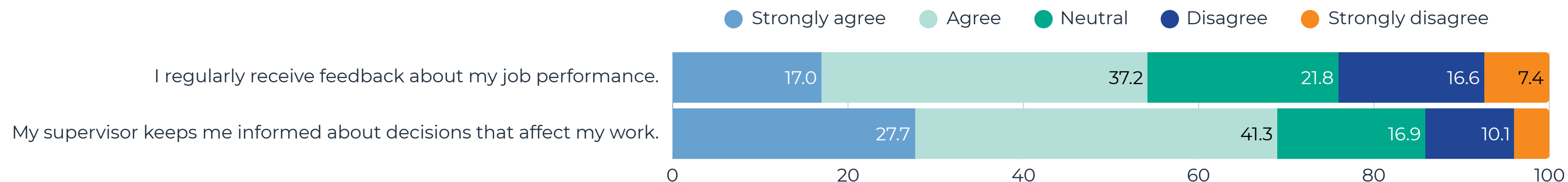
Supervisor Trust and Competence



04

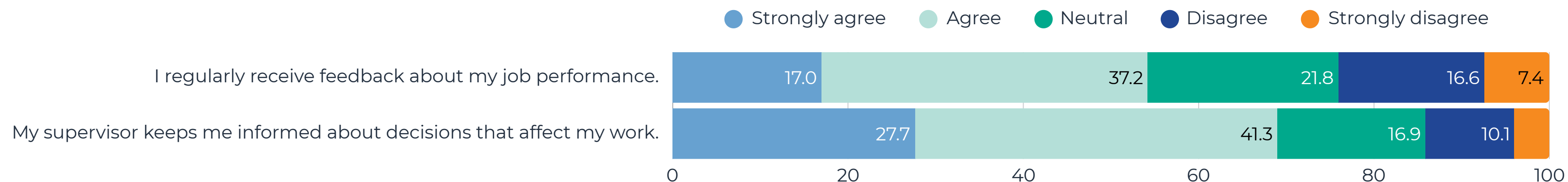
Leadership & Management Quality

Feedback and Performance Management

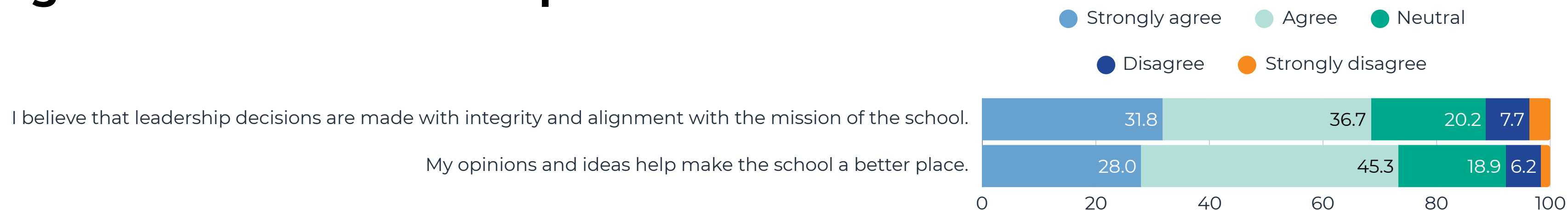


Leadership & Management Quality

Feedback and Performance Management

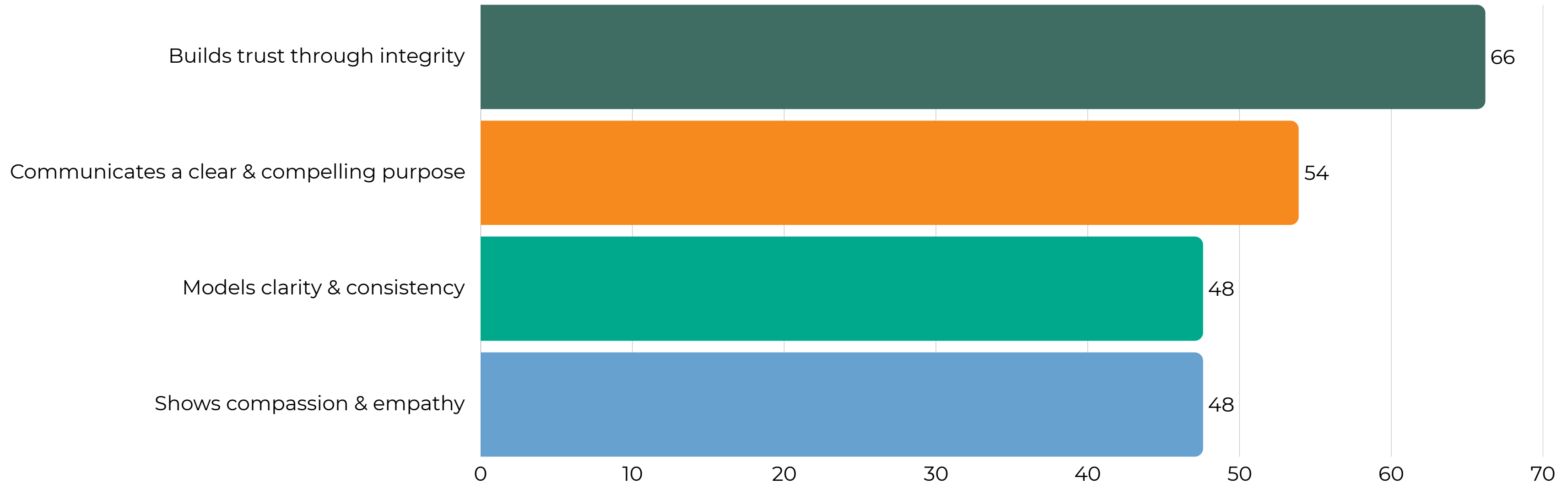


Organizational Leadership



04

Leadership & Management Quality



Leadership & Management Quality

"Admin support, especially with difficult parents/students, is the absolute most important element of creating a working environment in which I am willing to stay."

"Fundamentally, I'm frustrated and have been for years now. We have excellent faculty, and I truly enjoy time with my students. But the division leadership is unkind, difficult to work with, not interested in collaborating, and generally to be avoided. So every day is a dichotomy; I'm here to support my colleagues and students, but I'm anxious about any interactions with or mandates from division leadership."

"I am micromanaged and feel that my hard work is never acknowledged. I have so much to do all the time that I constantly have a feeling of being behind."

Professional Development & Growth Engagement

Independent school faculty demonstrate broad and sustained engagement in professional learning, reflecting a strong culture of self-directed growth. This commitment represents a significant organizational strength. However, the gap between faculty learning engagement and perceived institutional support indicates that many schools may be relying on individual initiative rather than intentionally reinforcing professional growth through protected time, visible encouragement, and dedicated financial investment.

- » **High Overall Engagement:** 94.4% of faculty engaged in at least one learning experience during the past year, indicating a culture that values continuous professional growth. The average faculty member participated in 2-3 different activities.



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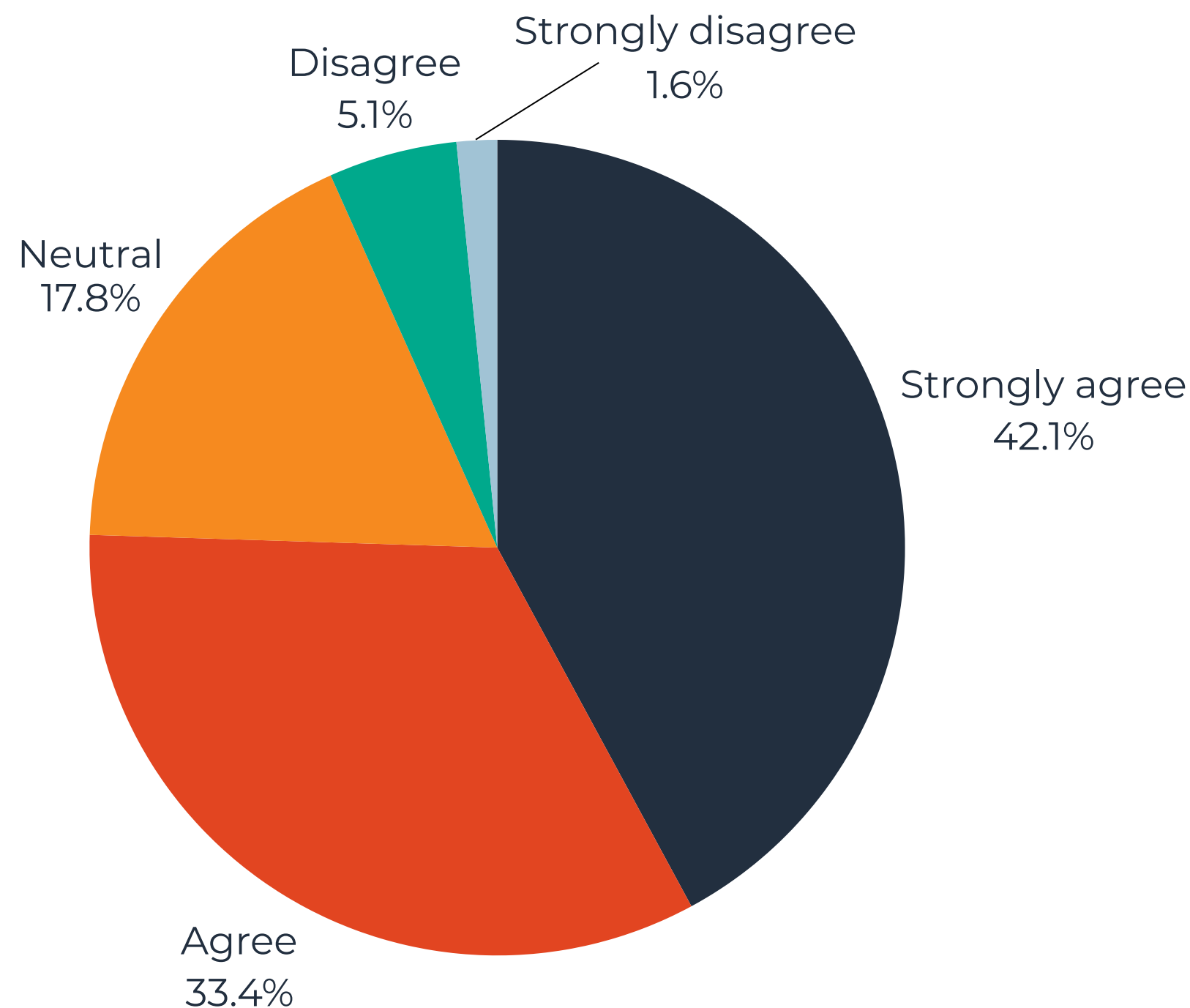
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- » **Formal Degree Completion Rare:** Only 5.8% completed graduate coursework or an advanced degree in the past year, likely reflecting the time and financial constraints of pursuing advanced degrees while teaching full-time.
- » **Leadership Development Emerging:** Nearly 30% led professional development for others and 41.5% participated in school-wide strategic initiatives, suggesting a substantial cohort developing leadership capabilities.



05

Professional Development & Growth Engagement

The school actively supports my professional development.



Professional Development & Growth Engagement

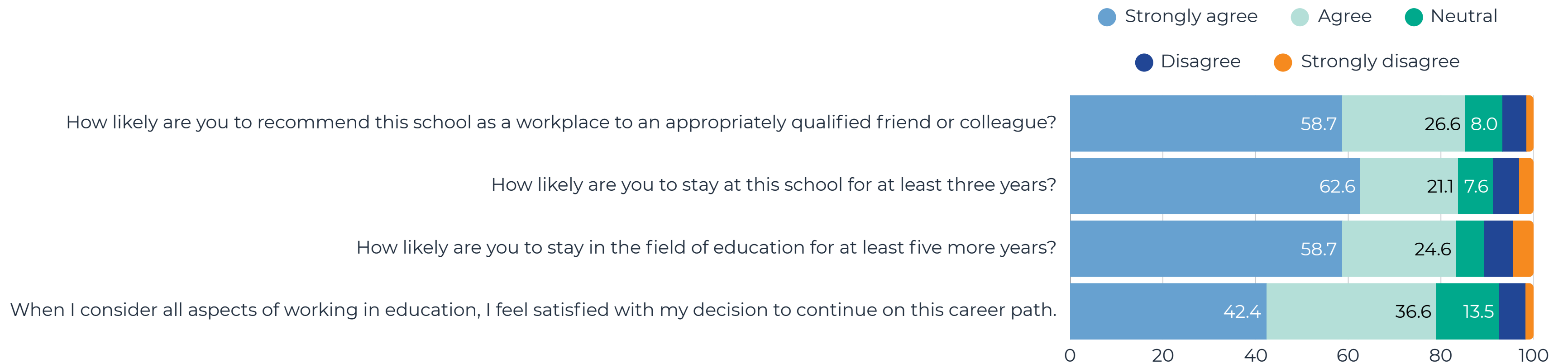
"I am an educator who has always seen [myself] as a continuing learner, so having opportunities for professional development and specialized certifications is very appealing."

"The hours and extra requirements we have to complete outside of normal operation are exhausting! I have also asked several times to attend professional development conferences but was told the 'funds aren't there' to support me going."



Retention Intentions & Commitments

Retention indicators suggest that commitment is strongly shaped by relational ties, alignment with mission, and the perceived costs of leaving. At the same time, the findings reveal a critical vulnerability. Even faculty who feel deeply connected to their schools, find their work meaningful, and are strongly aligned with the mission show increased openness to departure when faced with unsustainable workloads and non-competitive compensation.



Retention Intentions & Commitments

"I am compelled to stay at my school because I completely trust the headmaster and principal to act and lead with integrity, provide me with continuing ed opportunities, and support me if I encounter difficult situations with students or parents."

"I love educating young people, and it's exciting to think about all of the ways the field of education will be changing in the coming years. My responses about being unsure about staying are due to financial stress."

"I revisit my commitment to this school every spring, seriously considering leaving the profession. The work community is wonderful, the freedom to innovate is encouraged, and the feeling that I make a difference gives me a sense of purpose. However, inconsistent/unavailable leadership are all reasons that I will likely leave the profession altogether in the next 5 years."



Shared Purpose

What the research is saying...

- Teachers love the work.
- They believe in the mission.
- They care deeply about students and community.



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Structural Risks

But many are quietly asking:

- “Can I keep doing this and still have a life?”
- The data show that people aren’t leaving because they’ve lost purpose, but they’re leaving because the conditions no longer make the calling sustainable.



SHARED PURPOSE: TOP 5

Survey Statement	Small (0–400)	Medium (401–700)	Large (701–1200)	XLarge (1200+)
There are people at work who genuinely care about me.	4.51	4.47	4.50	4.48
My role aligns with my strengths, skills, and values.	4.39	4.37	4.37	4.35
How likely are you to recommend this school as a workplace to an appropriate candidate?	4.42	4.36	4.32	4.33
How likely are you to stay at this school for at least three years?	4.38	4.29	4.34	4.38
This school's mission and values align with my personal values.	4.35	4.40	4.33	4.32



Structural Risks: Top 5

Survey Statement	Small	Medium	Large	XLarge
My workload is manageable and sustainable over time.	3.67	3.62	3.53	3.48
When I work hard, my efforts are recognized and rewarded.	3.5	3.48	3.43	3.34
I regularly receive feedback about my job performance.	3.48	3.49	3.33	3.28
My compensation is competitive compared to similar roles in other schools.	3.23	3.21	3.15	3.54
There are clear opportunities for career advancement within this school.	3.07	3.04	2.97	3.11





8 EVP Reflections





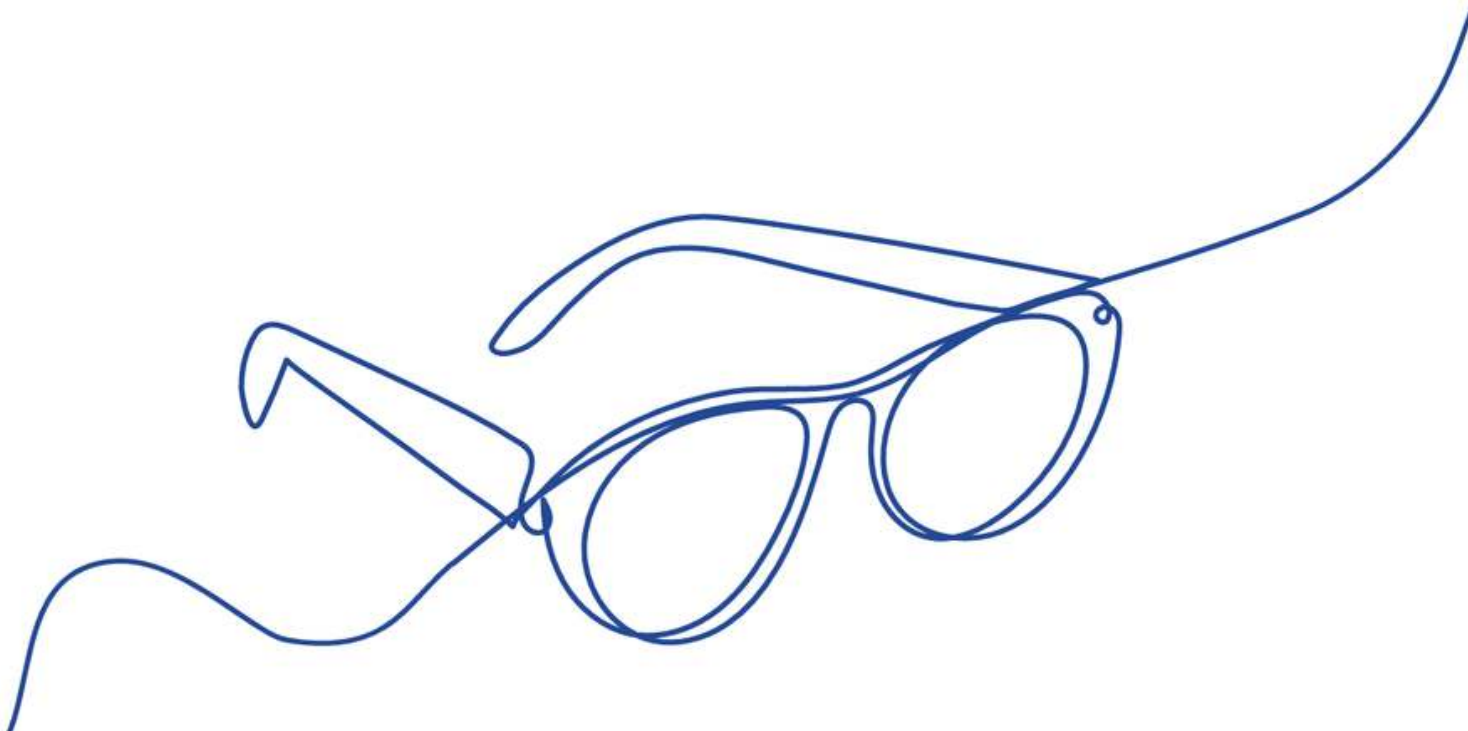
Make Expectations Match Reality.

Educators stay engaged when their roles, environment, and expectations align with their strengths, values, and capacity.

In practice:

- Clarify what success actually looks like in the role not just what's written in the job description.
- Revisit role scope as responsibilities grow or shift over time.
- Conduct a workload audit to map every obligation (teaching, duties, meetings, committees, extracurriculars, etc.).
- Ensure workload, schedule, and expectations are sustainable.
- Establish essential vs. important prioritization role and responsibilities. Conduct review of all non-teaching obligations. Eliminate or streamline items that are not mission-critical. Align evaluation and feedback with what educators are truly being asked to do.

When expectations and reality drift apart, engagement erodes long before someone decides to leave.





Protect Educators' Time Like It Matters...Because It Does.

If everything is important, nothing is.

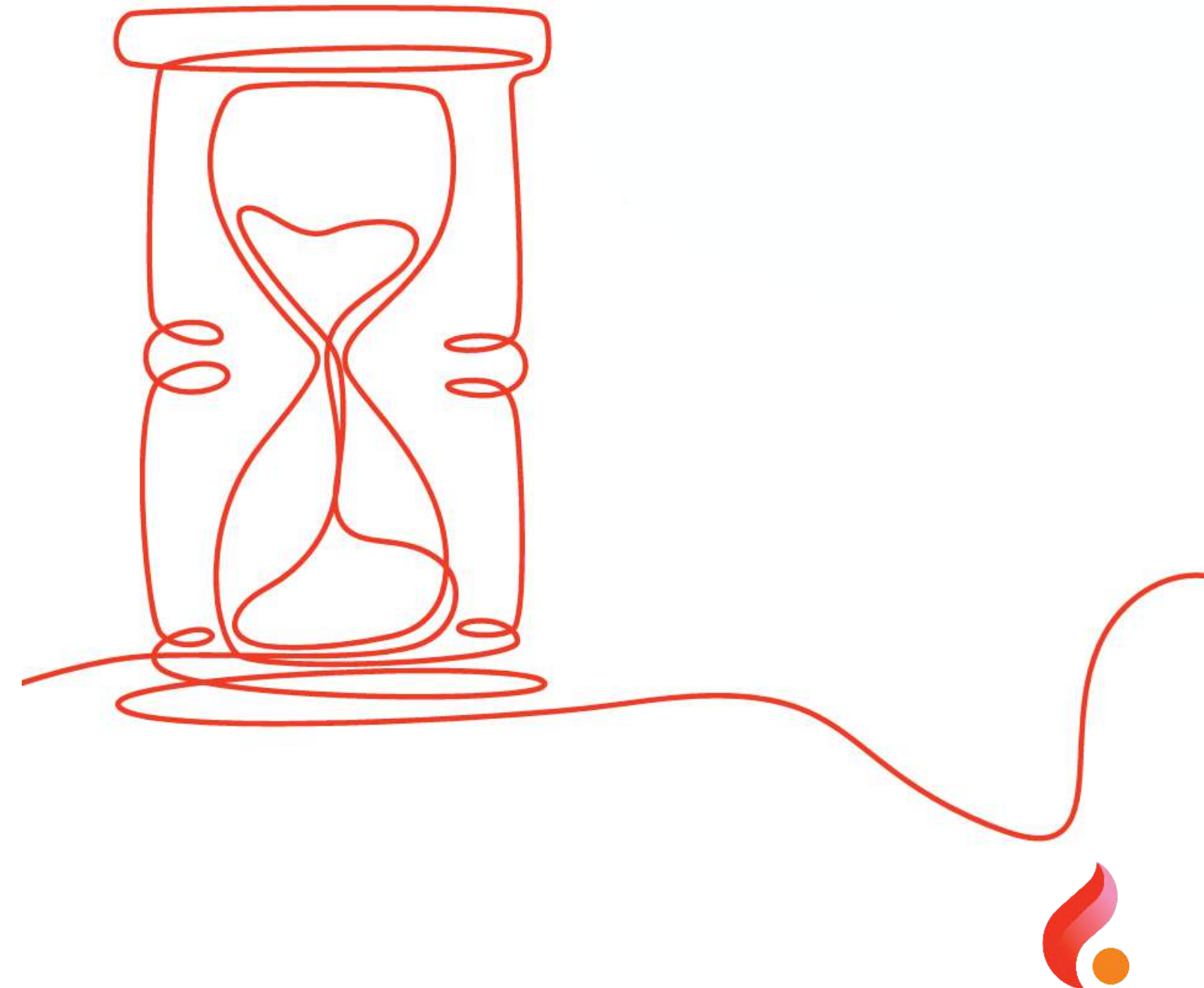
In practice:

- Implement protected time policies.
- Fewer meetings. Shorter meetings. Clear agendas.
- Fewer “extra” duties that quietly pile up.
- Real planning time built into the day.
- Model sustainable work boundaries as leaders.

Teachers are not asking for less care.

They are asking for less chaos.

Workload creep is one of the biggest drivers of burnout, especially for early-career educators.





Show People How They Can Grow (Without Leaving the Classroom).

Not everyone wants to become an administrator, but everyone wants to grow. People want to grow differently—at different life stages, in different directions.

In practice:

- Create multiple pathways: mentor teacher, instructional lead, program coordinator.
- Publish these pathways so educators can see how their current role connects to future opportunities.
- Create leadership pipeline programs, identifying high-potential educators for leadership development experiences.
- Be clear about how people move forward and what it pays.
- Talk about growth early, not after frustration sets in.
- Have career conversations annually.
- Develop career maps.

When career paths feel vague, people disengage. When growth is visible and valued, commitment deepens, especially in years 3–7, when attrition risk is highest.





Normalize Recognition and Feedback.

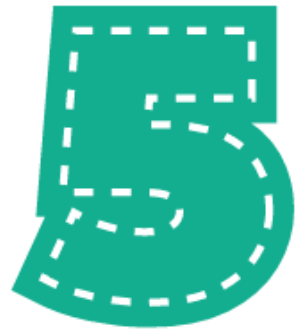
Recognition shouldn't be rare or performative.

In practice:

- Weekly call-outs of real, specific work.
- Regular check-ins (not just annual evaluations).
- Feedback that answers: “Am I doing well? What matters most?”
- Train supervisors in developmental feedback (balance appreciation vs coaching, managing difficult conversations).
- Separate development from evaluation.
- Establish peer observation and feedback systems.
- Build a recognition infrastructure.

Nearly half of educators don't feel their effort is noticed. Recognition costs little, but its absence costs people.





Name the Reality of Compensation.

Faculty don't expect miracles. They do expect clarity.

In practice:

- Conduct comprehensive compensation benchmarking.
- Target improvements where gaps are most acute.
- Expand non-salary compensation (retirement, professional development, housing assistance).
- Say plainly where compensation falls short.
- Share a multi-year plan, even if it's gradual.
- Make raises predictable, not mysterious.
- Reimagine compensation scale (step/lane, merit, bands).

Teachers can love their job and still be unable to afford to stay. When leaders name the reality and the roadmap, trust goes up, even before pay does.



Enrollment-Based Salary Considerations

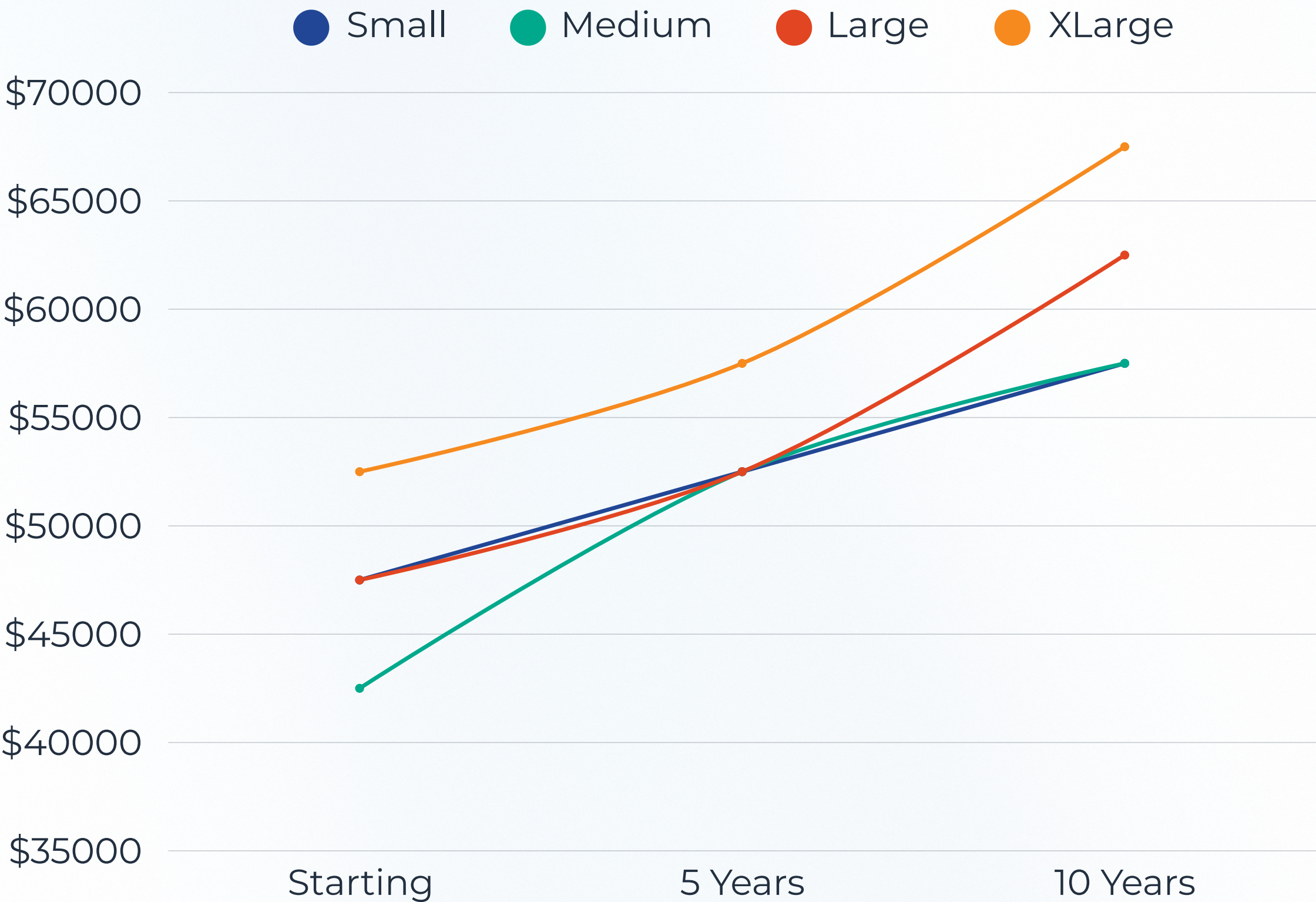
Xlarge 1200+	76%	76%	64%	58%	40%	33%	36%	36%	18%	27%	11%
Large 701-1200	87%	73%	76%	68%	47%	46%	37%	32%	37%	24%	26%
Medium 401-700	78%	72%	74%	56%	36%	38%	39%	28%	38%	21%	28%
Small 0-400	80%	70%	66%	47%	37%	25%	25%	34%	29%	25%	25%
	Years of teaching experience	Cost of living / inflation adjustment	Level of college degree	Stipends for coaching, curriculum development	Local public school salary scale	Performance or competency based pay	Teaching load or numbers of students in class	Established school-based salary step system	Discretionary or negotiated pay	Range within a banded salary system	Tuition level or increase

Enrollment-Based Salary Insights

Extra large schools (1200+) offer a median starting salary of \$52,500—that's \$5,000 more than large schools (701-1200) at \$47,500.

At 5 years, the gap narrows significantly. Small, medium, and large schools all have a median of \$52,500.

At 10 years with a master's, the advantage of larger schools becomes clear again. XLarge schools pay \$10,000 more than small and medium schools.





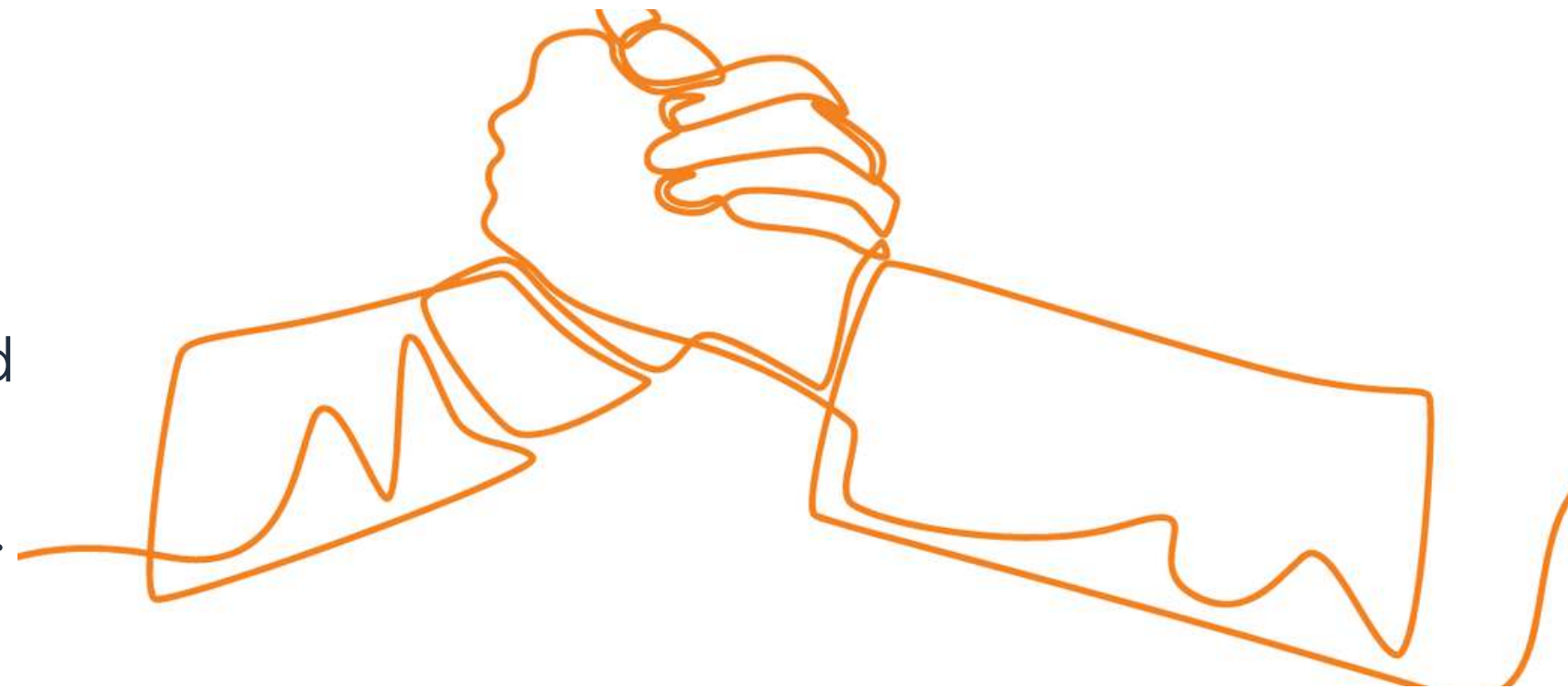
Make Leadership Visible, Supportive, and Human.

People stay where they feel seen and protected.

In practice:

- Leaders show up.
- Establish a leadership visibility standard.
- No surprises: explain decisions before and after they're made.
- Back teachers when parents push too far.
- Build capacity for middle-level leaders (attributes, immersion, modules, mentorship, self-management).

Leadership quality is the single biggest variable in whether teachers stay or go. Trust isn't built in announcements. It's built in everyday presence and follow-through.





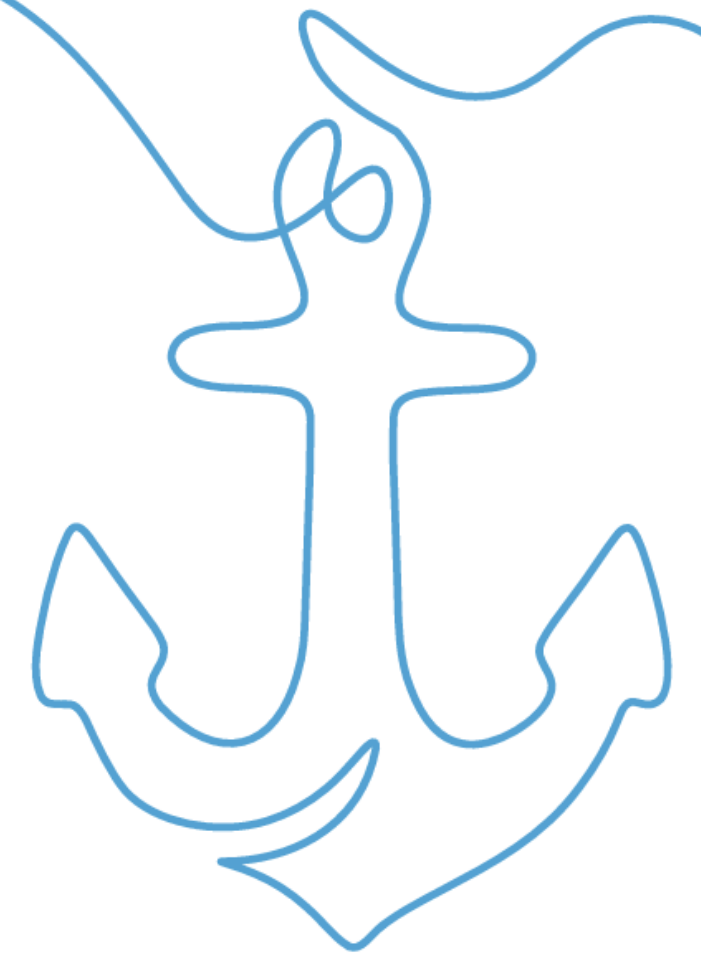
Strengthen the Relationships That Anchor People.

Connection to colleagues, teams, and leaders is one of the strongest predictors of engagement and retention.

In practice:

- Create intentional structures for collaboration, not just meetings.
- Invest in team norms that build trust, belonging, and psychological safety.
- Ensure new educators are socially integrated, not left to “figure it out.”
- Encourage leaders to be present, visible, and relational, not just operational.

People are far more likely to stay when they feel known, supported, and connected.





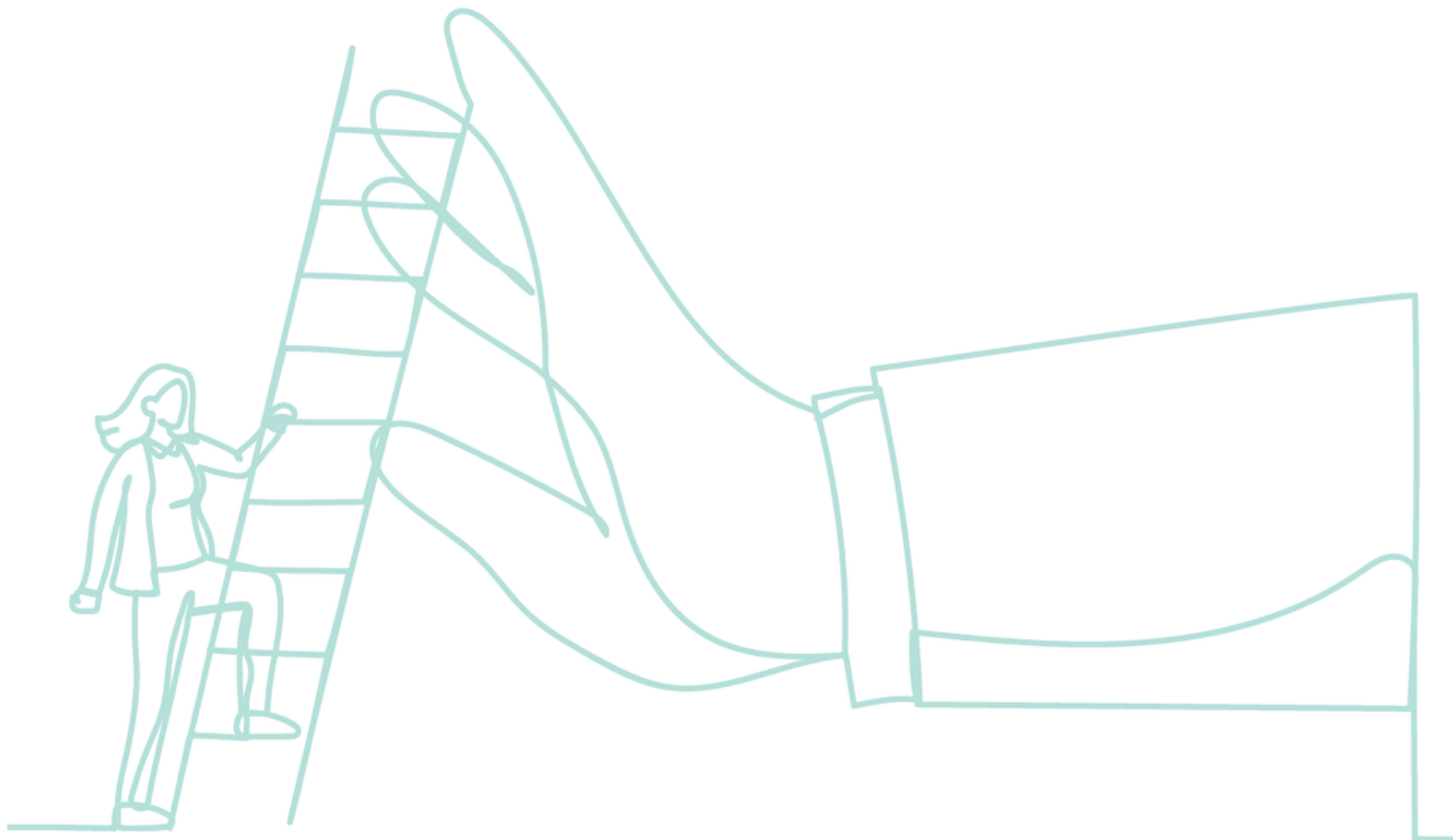
Acknowledge What the Job Asks of People.

Educators routinely make time, financial, and emotional sacrifices often without them being named or addressed.

In practice:

- Be honest about the personal tradeoffs the role requires.
- Examine where sacrifice has become normalized rather than intentional.
- Balance commitment with care by protecting time and energy.
- Recognize effort consistently, not only during moments of crisis.

Unacknowledged sacrifice leads to quiet burnout. Acknowledged sacrifice can build trust.





Questions & Discussion

