



KANSAS
TEACHER RETENTION INITIATIVE
in partnership with



**KANSAS EDUCATOR ENGAGEMENT &
RETENTION STUDY
2025**

ABSTRACT

2025 Kansas Educator Engagement and Retention Initiative. Data Driven Insights to Inform the Future of Education in Kansas

Dr. Luke Simmering & Dr. Bret Church
EPIC



Contents

- Overview 4
 - Key Statewide Insights 4
 - The Purpose of KTRI 6
 - A Longitudinal Statewide Study (2021 → 2023 → 2025) 6
 - Why KTRI Matters Now..... 6
 - The Role of Kansas Education Partners..... 7
 - Methodology Overview 7
- KTRI Survey Background 8
 - Additional Survey Components 8
 - Respondent Profile 9
 - Survey Design & Structure 9
- 2025 KTRI Findings 11
 - Statewide Engagement & Retention Trends 11
 - Engagement & Retention Risk Groups 12
 - Educator Experience Factors – 2025 KTRI..... 13
 - Top Areas of Strength (Highest 2025 Satisfaction Scores) 13
 - Moderate Satisfaction Areas (3.4–3.9 range) 13
 - Persistently Low Satisfaction Areas (< 3.3 in 2025) 14
 - Largest Improvements (2021 → 2025) 15
 - Largest Declines (2021 → 2025) 15
 - Quantitative Summary Interpretation 16
- KTRI Qualitative Feedback – 2025..... 17
 - “Additional Feedback Regarding Your Teacher Experience” 19
 - THEME 1: Student Behavior, Safety, and Discipline Systems 19
 - THEME 2: Mental Health, Emotional Exhaustion, and Burnout 20
 - THEME 3: Workload, Planning Time, and Unmanageable Expectations 20
 - THEME 4: Compensation, Salary Growth, and Financial Pressure 20

THEME 5: Leadership Support, Consistency, and Follow-Through	21
THEME 6: Professional Development Quality (PD) — Irrelevance and Redundancy	21
THEME 7: Respect for the Teaching Profession & Community Support	22
THEME 8: Desire for More Autonomy, Voice, and Transparency	22
THEME 9: Resource Gaps and Operational Challenges	23
Cross-Theme Interpretation	23
“What Questions Do You Have About This Research?”	24
THEME 1: Anonymity, Data Security, and Fear of Retribution.....	24
THEME 2: Will Anything Change?.....	24
THEME 3: Questions About How the Data Will Be Used (District, State, and EPIC)	25
THEME 4: Requests for District- and School-Level Results	25
THEME 5: Requests for Summary Statistics, Averages, and Comparisons	25
THEME 6: Clarification Around Survey Content and Methodology	26
THEME 7: Questions About Data Integration and Improvements	26
Cross-Theme Synthesis	27
Key Drivers: Evaluate & Invest	28
Evaluate & Invest Summary Table	28
DRIVER 1: Society’s View of the Teaching Profession	29
DRIVER 2: Support for Handling Challenging Student Behaviors.....	30
DRIVER 3: District’s Attention to Teacher Mental & Emotional Health	32
DRIVER 4: Salary Growth Potential.....	33
DRIVER 5: Quality of Professional Development (PD).....	34
DRIVER 6: Vision & Leadership of the Board of Education	35
DRIVER 7: Current Salary	36
Key Drivers: Maintain & Leverage.....	36
Maintain & Leverage Summary Table.....	38
1. The Level of Safety You and Your Students Feel at School.....	39
2. Your Relationship with Colleagues within Your School	39
3. The Location of the District in Which You Teach	40

4. Your Principal’s Communication and Responsiveness to Your Questions.....	40
5. Your Opportunity to Work with a Diverse Student Population	41
6. The Quality of Your Principal	41
7. The Size of the District You Teach In.....	42
8. Your Relationship with Your Principal	42
9. Quality of Teacher Technology	43
Putting the Maintain & Leverage Drivers Together.....	43
Conclusion	44
Next Steps.....	46
Appendix A: KTRI Survey – Item Means (1-5 Likert).....	48
APPENDIX B: 2025 KTRI District Response Rates	50

Overview

The 2025 Kansas Teacher Retention Initiative (KTRI) marks the third statewide administration of a rigorous, research-based study designed to understand what drives teacher engagement, satisfaction, and long-term retention in Kansas public schools. Conducted in 2021, 2023, and now 2025, KTRI provides Kansas with one of the most comprehensive and longitudinal databases in the nation focused specifically on the educator experience.

KTRI Participation Indicators	2021 KTRI	2023 KTRI	2025 KTRI
Total Survey Responses	20,000 (50% Response Rate)	24,536 (60% Response Rate)	21,319 (54% Response Rate)
Qualified for Standard Report	143 (50% of Districts)	175 (61% of Districts)	138 (50% of Districts)
Over 50% Response Rate	48% of Districts	50% of Districts	33% Districts

This year's results reflect the voices of thousands of teachers representing urban, suburban, and rural districts across the state. The findings reveal:

Key Statewide Insights

- **Teacher engagement increased by 3%** since 2023.
- **Teacher disengagement dropped 6%**, since 2023
- Several satisfaction areas improved, particularly **principal quality, communication, collaboration time, resources, and substitute coverage.**
- Critical pressure points remain largely unchanged: **student behavior, workload, mental health strain, compensation, and societal respect for the profession.**
- Teachers with **4–11 years of experience**, those working a **second job**, or who have worked in **multiple districts**, represent the highest retention-risk group.

The Evaluate & Invest Drivers (Low Satisfaction Predictors of Engagement/Retention)

These seven factors, validated through KTRI analytics, significantly predict whether teachers feel engaged and whether they intend to remain in the profession:

1. **Society’s view of the teaching profession**
2. **Support for handling challenging student behaviors**
3. **District attention to teacher mental and emotional health**

4. **Salary growth potential**
5. **Quality of professional development**
6. **Vision and leadership of the Board of Education**
7. **Current salary**

Teacher Voice

Across two open-ended questions, teachers submitted thousands of comments.

Major themes include:

- Rising behavioral disruptions
- Excessive workload
- Compensation not aligned with expectations
- Need for stronger leadership consistency
- Emotional exhaustion and burnout
- Desire for high-quality, relevant PD
- Questions about how results are used and whether change will occur

Teachers' words are direct, passionate, and deeply aligned with the quantitative analysis.

Conclusion

KTRI continues to confirm a truth educators have expressed for years:

Retention is not strengthened through isolated programs. It is strengthened when school systems invest in the right drivers—those that shape a teacher's daily experience, wellbeing, sense of purpose, and long-term career viability.

The remainder of this report provides a detailed analysis of all findings, integrating quantitative data, longitudinal trends, and teacher voice.

The Purpose of KTRI

The Kansas Teacher Retention Initiative (KTRI) was established to answer a single, critical question:

What factors most powerfully influence whether Kansas teachers stay, engage, and thrive?

Before 2021, Kansas did not have a unified statewide mechanism to understand the educator experience across districts, roles, and years. Absent was a system that could capture:

- Teacher satisfaction across the full educator experience
- Key psychological drivers of engagement
- Clear indicators of retention risk and career intentions
- Thousands of qualitative comments that bring nuance and context
- Longitudinal trends showing change over time
- District-level insights to guide local strategy

The Educator Perceptions and Insights Center (EPIC), in collaboration with key Kansas education partners, developed KTRI to fill this gap and provide the state with a **rigorous, data-driven foundation for strengthening the educator workforce.**

A Longitudinal Statewide Study (2021 → 2023 → 2025)

The 2025 KTRI survey represents the third and most comprehensive iteration of this statewide study, now totaling **more than 100,000 educator responses** across three cycles. Through this dataset, Kansas can now access:

- Three-year trendlines showing improvement or decline across 34 satisfaction factors
- Predictive analytics identifying which teacher experience factors most influence engagement and retention
- A validated statewide Engagement Index measured consistently across all three cycles
- Thousands of open-ended comments that provide deep qualitative insight
- District-specific reporting to guide local policy, staffing, and leadership decisions
- A growing statewide narrative about what teachers need—and what keeps them in the profession

Very few states have a workforce study this extensive, this methodologically consistent, or this deeply grounded in teacher voice.

Why KTRI Matters Now

Teacher workforce instability has moved from a distant concern to a pressing reality—both nationally and in Kansas:

- National teacher preparation program enrollment has declined by more than one-third over the past decade.
- Roughly one-third of U.S. teachers report intentions to leave the profession within two years.
- Districts increasingly rely on emergency and restricted licensure pathways.
- Student behavioral challenges and educator mental health concerns continue to rise.

Kansas mirrors these national patterns, but the state is taking a uniquely **proactive, transparent, and data-driven approach** through KTRI. By consistently measuring the educator experience and its connection to engagement and retention, Kansas is building one of the strongest educator workforce datasets in the country—and using it to guide systemwide improvement.

The Role of Kansas Education Partners

KTRI is possible only through the collaboration of organizations representing educators, leadership, governance, and research across the state:

- **Kansas National Education Association (KNEA)** – Elevating and amplifying educator voice
- **Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB)** – Supporting governance and system-level action
- **USA-Kansas** – Equipping building and district leaders to apply insights
- **Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE)** – Aligning KTRI with statewide priorities
- **Emporia State University** – Providing methodological and research support

Together, these partners help legitimize the research, ensure high participation, and promote widespread use of findings in service of teacher engagement and retention.

Methodology Overview

The 2025 KTRI survey, designed by EPIC, is a comprehensive instrument built to holistically evaluate the educator experience and its relationship to engagement and retention. All survey items were developed through:

- A review of national educator workforce research
- Collaboration with subject matter experts in educational leadership
- Adaptation of principles from corporate employee engagement frameworks
- Extensive cognitive testing and refinement over three survey cycles

The survey aligns with the same structure and items used in 2021 and 2023 to ensure reliable longitudinal benchmarking.

KTRI Survey Background

Teachers respond to items reflecting several core components of their professional experience:

Educator Experience Factor	Example Item
School Environment Factors	<i>Your opportunity to work with a diverse student population.</i>
Job-Specific Factors	<i>Total number of leave days you have (personal, sick, non-categorical, etc.).</i>
Principal Perceptions	<i>Your principal’s communication and responsiveness to your questions.</i>
Professional Growth	<i>Opportunities to receive feedback to assist your professional growth.</i>
School-Specific Factors	<i>The amount of plan time you are provided.</i>
Teacher Support Factors	<i>The responsiveness and support of district office staff.</i>

Additional Survey Components

Engagement Index

A validated index of 11 items measuring four core psychological conditions:

- **Am I connected?** (belonging, relationships, influence)
- **Am I growing?** (development, feedback, learning)
- **Am I heard?** (voice, respect, psychological safety)
- **Am I motivated?** (purpose, commitment, willingness to invest effort)

The Engagement Index serves as a key **dependent variable** in analysis, identifying which teacher experience factors most strongly predict whether educators remain committed and energized.

Teacher Retention Items

Rather than a single “likelihood to stay” question, KTRI uses four distinct retention indicators to differentiate:

1. Teachers planning to retire
2. Teachers planning to leave their district but continue teaching
3. Teachers planning to leave the profession entirely
4. Teachers planning to pursue administrative roles

This allows a nuanced understanding of mobility and attrition patterns.

Qualitative Feedback

Teachers also responded to two open-ended prompts:

1. **“What additional feedback or aspects of your experience should be considered as part of understanding teacher engagement and retention?”**
2. **“What questions do you have regarding this research?”**

More than 30,000 comments were analyzed to extract common themes, contextualize quantitative findings, and elevate teacher voice.

Respondent Profile

The 2025 sample includes educators representing a wide range of:

The KTRI survey collects a comprehensive set of demographic variables that allow for nuanced analysis of teacher experience, engagement, and retention across Kansas. Key demographic variables include:

- **Years of experience (tenure)**
- **Grade level taught**
- **Role/position type** (e.g., classroom teacher, special education, specialist, support roles)
- **School type**
- **Certification and credential level**
- **Years in current district**
- **Employment status** (full-time/part-time, itinerant/multi-building)
- **Highest education level**
- **Additional endorsements or specializations**
- **Demographic background characteristics**

This breadth ensures results are **representative, reliable, and actionable** for statewide and district-level strategy.

Survey Design & Structure

The survey consists of roughly **60 items** and takes teachers an average of **nine minutes** to complete. It uses a 1–5 Likert scale to measure:

- Satisfaction
- Agreement
- Likelihood (retention indicators)

The survey captures the full ecosystem of teacher experience—including:

- In-class and instructional conditions
- School leadership

- District leadership
- Professional growth
- Culture and climate
- Community and societal factors
- Compensation and benefits
- Emotional and mental health

KTRI provides not just a snapshot, but a **deep, integrated portrait** of the factors influencing teacher engagement and retention across Kansas.

2025 KTRI Findings

This section provides a detailed breakdown of teacher **engagement, disengagement, satisfaction across 34 experience factors**, and **three-year longitudinal shifts (2021 → 2023 → 2025)**. These quantitative insights form the structural backbone of the KTRI analysis.

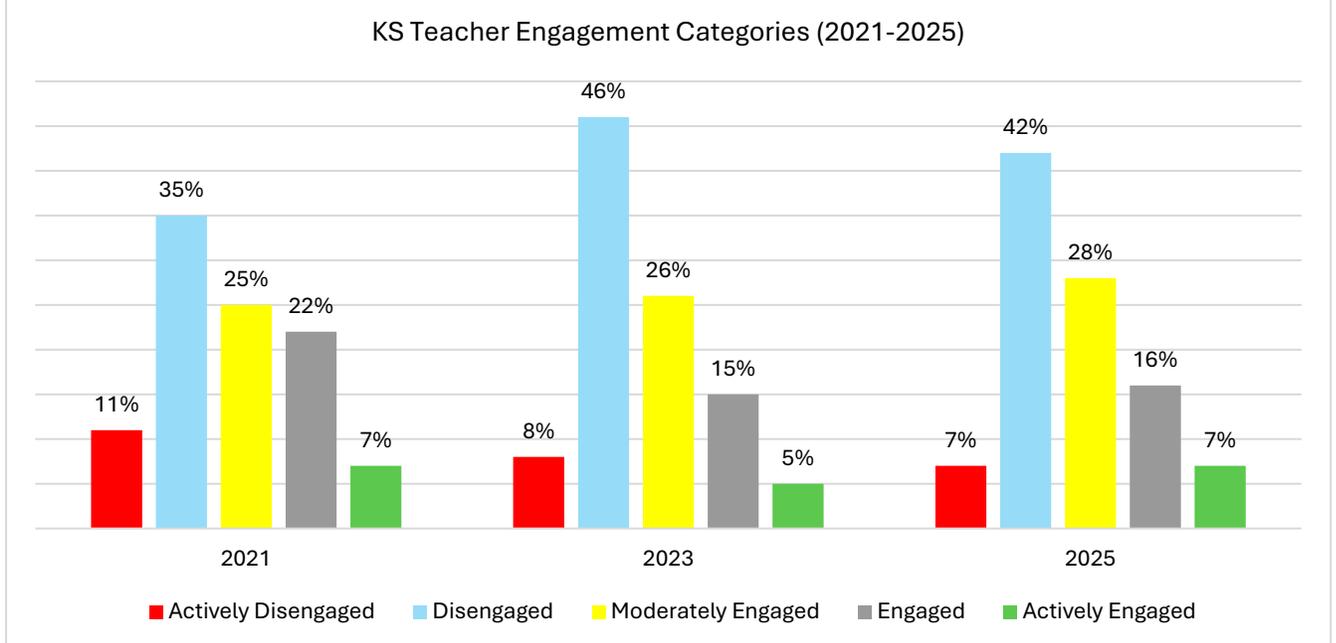
Statewide Engagement & Retention Trends

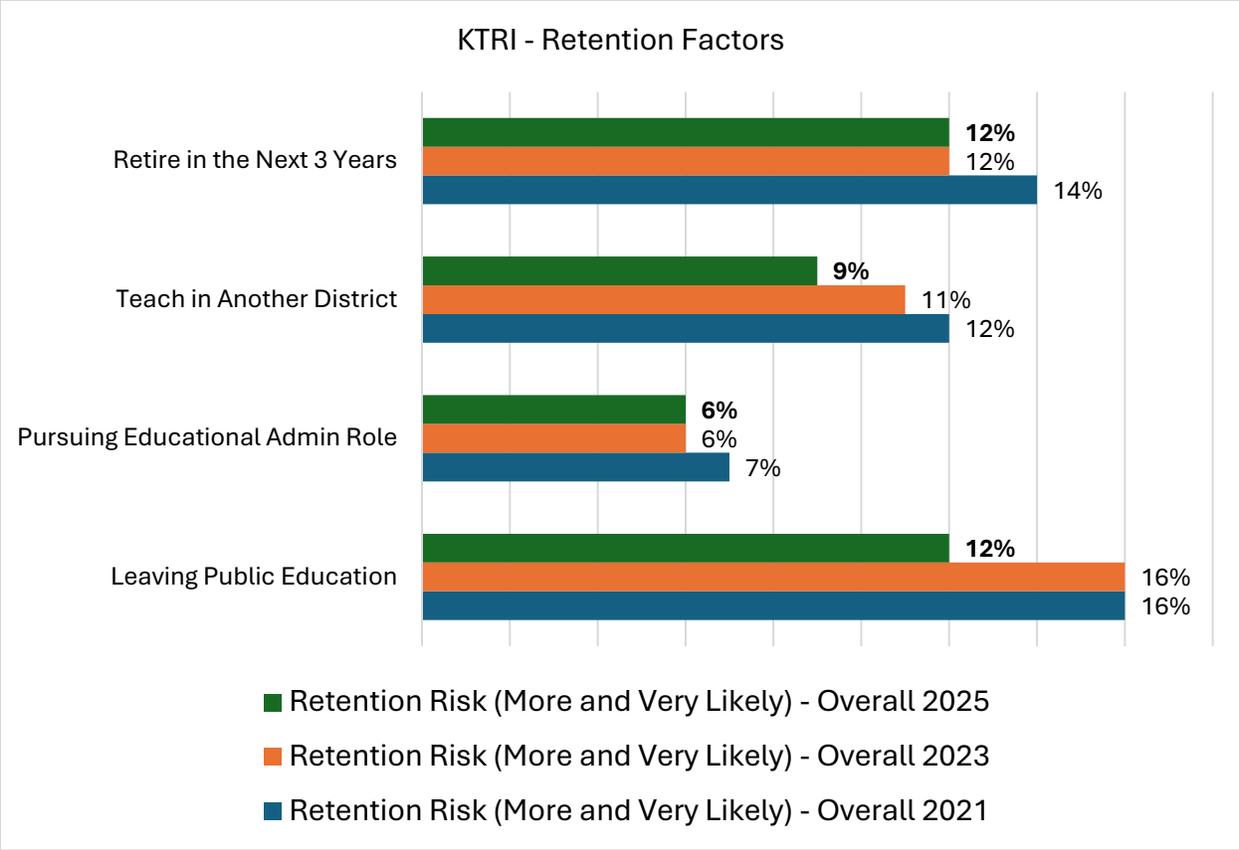
The KTRI Engagement Index consists of 11 validated psychological items measuring motivation, connection, pride, purpose, and organizational alignment. Engagement reflects *how teachers feel about teaching*—not just job satisfaction.

2025 Key Findings

- **Teacher Engagement ↑ 3% statewide**
- **Teacher Disengagement ↓ 6% statewide**
- Retention Risk Factor (i.e., leave teaching or retire) decrease of 4%

Level of Engagement	Description
Actively Disengaged	Likely dissatisfied with current educator experience and work environment. May tend to withdraw from work and possibly spreads negativity across their school/district.
Disengaged	Likely to be negatively impact the learning environment and is likely delivering well below their potential and capability.
Moderately Engaged	Pursues goals as an educator and delivers consistently. May not consistently go ‘above and beyond’ expectations to enhance the learning environment for students and to improve the broader school and/or district
Engaged	Seeks out and consistently delivers an impactful learning environment for students while encouraging others to do the same. Models’ positive behaviors and attitudes for others
Actively Engaged	Consistently goes above and beyond to create a positive learning environment for students, advocating for their school/district, and encouraging other educators to do the same.





Engagement & Retention Risk Groups

The following groups exhibited significantly higher disengagement and lower intentions to stay:

1. Teachers with 4–11 years of experience

This segment—early-mid career educators—is the **highest turnover risk statewide**.

2. Teachers working a second job

About 35% reported holding a second job, primarily for financial reasons. This group shows elevated burnout, fatigue, and turnover intention.

3. Teachers who have worked in four or more districts

High mobility correlates with dissatisfaction and lower organizational attachment.

4. Teachers whose children attend school outside their district

Often a signal of teacher distrust in district culture or leadership.

5. Social workers, ELL teachers, and media specialists

These specialized roles encounter high emotional load and chronic understaffing.

Educator Experience Factors – 2025 KTRS

Below is a structured interpretation of the satisfaction items you provided. Each item is rated on a 1–5 Likert scale.

Top Areas of Strength (Highest 2025 Satisfaction Scores)

These factors reflect areas where Kansas teachers feel positive about their experience.

Scores ≥ 4.0 in 2025

Experience Factor	2025	2023	2021
Location of district	4.2	4.2	4.2
Relationship with colleagues	4.1	4.1	4.1
Relationship with principal	4.1	4.1	3.9
Quality of principal	4.1	4.0	3.6
District size	4.1	4.0	4.1
Opportunity to work with diverse students	4.0	4.0	4.0

Themes of these high scores:

- Strong relational culture
- Positive views of building-level leadership
- Stability in district size and location attractiveness
- Appreciation for diverse student populations

Moderate Satisfaction Areas (3.4–3.9 range)

Items here show general satisfaction but room for continued improvement.

Examples:

- Principal communication (3.9)
- Instructional leadership (3.8)
- Technology quality (3.8)
- Access to resources (3.7)
- Collaboration time (3.4)
- Parent support (3.4)

Persistently Low Satisfaction Areas (< 3.3 in 2025)

These represent the most acute friction points for Kansas teachers.

Experience Factor	2025	2023	2021	Trend
<i>Society’s view of the profession</i>	2.2	2.1	2.0	↓ Persistently low
<i>Current salary</i>	2.9	2.6	2.8	Slight recovery
<i>Health insurance quality/cost</i>	2.8	2.9	3.0	Declining
<i>Behavior support</i>	2.8	2.7	2.7	Slight ↑ but still low
<i>PD quality</i>	3.2	3.1	3.0	Slow but positive movement
<i>Mental/emotional health support</i>	3.2	3.1	2.8	Improving but still low

Many of these items are in the **7 Evaluate & Invest Drivers**, which explains why they are tightly predictive of engagement and retention.

Largest Improvements (2021 → 2025)

Using the data, we identify the largest positive changes:

Item	Change	Interpretation
Ability to request a substitute	+0.9	Recovery from crisis-level shortages in 2021.
Quality of principal	+0.5	Evidence of leadership investment or turnover.
Principal communication	+0.3	Stronger building-level engagement.
Collaboration time	+0.3	More structured planning or PLC time.
Mental/emotional health support	+0.4	Still low, but movement in right direction.
Feedback for professional growth	+0.3	More coaching or feedback in evaluation models.
Salary growth potential	+0.3	Reflects modest statewide compensation adjustments.

These gains suggest Kansas is making progress in **leadership, systems, and organizational structures**—though they remain insufficient to counteract the larger systemic stressors.

Largest Declines (2021 → 2025)

Items showing meaningful decrease

Item	Change	Interpretation
Quality/cost of health insurance	-0.2	Rising premiums and limited options.
Safety at school	-0.1	Increased behavioral and societal concerns.
Board leadership	-0.2 (from 3.2 → 3.0 but mixed historically)	Variable performance across districts.
Parent support	-0.2	Reflects shifting community dynamics.

Most declines are modest but align with teacher voice expressing frustration about **financial strain, community pressure, and behavioral challenges**.

Quantitative Summary Interpretation

Kansas is improving in many operational and leadership areas, particularly:

- Building-level leadership quality
- Communication and responsiveness
- Resource access
- Collaboration time
- Sub coverage

However, **systemic, high-stakes issues continue to deteriorate or remain deeply concerning**:

- Public respect for teaching
- Behavioral disruption
- Mental health demand
- Salary and insurance
- Workload pressure

Many of these issues map onto the **7 Evaluate & Invest Drivers**, confirming the strength of the predictive model.

KTRI Qualitative Feedback – 2025

The open-ended responses from the 2025 Kansas Teacher Retention Initiative provide powerful insight into educators’ lived experiences, complementing and reinforcing the quantitative findings. Thousands of teachers shared candid reflections about the realities of teaching today, as well as thoughtful questions about how this research will be used. The summary tables below highlight the most prominent statewide themes across each question, providing a clear, high-level understanding of what teachers are experiencing and what they need to see moving forward.

Question 1:

“Additional Feedback Regarding Your Teacher Experience” — Summary of Key Themes

Theme	Core Idea	What Teachers Are Experiencing	Implication for Retention/Engagement
Student Behavior, Safety & Discipline	Most dominant theme statewide	Severe disruptive/unsafe behaviors; lack of consequences or systems	Teachers feel unsafe and unable to teach; major driver of exits
Mental Health & Burnout	Widespread emotional exhaustion	Stress, overwhelm, crying, unsustainable pressure	Emotional well-being declining; risk of burnout-driven attrition
Workload & Planning Time	Chronic overload	Work beyond contract hours; constant initiative piling	Unsustainable expectations reduce performance & longevity
Compensation & Salary Growth	Financial strain	Pay not aligned to workload or cost of living; limited growth	Financial unsustainability threatens long-term retention
Leadership Support & Consistency	Leadership is either buffer or stressor	Inconsistent follow-through; variable building vs. district leadership	Stability and support depend heavily on leadership quality
Professional Development Quality	PD misaligned to needs	Redundant, irrelevant, lacks autonomy or practicality	PD viewed as time loss rather than investment
Respect for Profession	Feeling undervalued socially	Declining parent/community respect; politicized scrutiny	Morale erosion; contributes to disengagement
Autonomy, Voice & Transparency	Desire for inclusion in decisions	Limited voice; poor communication; top-down mandates	Teachers want partnership, not compliance
Resources & Operational Support	Lack of capacity and tools	Staffing shortages; lack of materials; large class sizes	Operational strain makes job harder and less sustainable

Question 2:

“What Questions Do You Have About This Research?” — Summary of Key Themes

Theme	Core Idea	What Teachers Are Asking	Implication for Trust & Engagement
Anonymity & Safety	Fear of retaliation	Is this truly anonymous? Can we be identified?	Psychological safety determines honesty & participation
Will Anything Change?	Deep skepticism	Will results lead to real action? Or be ignored?	Trust depends on visible follow-through
How Will the Data Be Used?	Desire for transparency	Who receives it? How will it inform decisions?	Teachers want accountability at district & state levels
Access to Local Results	Want meaningful local insight	Can we see school/district results? Comparisons?	Teachers want to use data for improvement, not just be surveyed
Desire for Clear Summaries	Want usable information	Percentages, averages, trends, visuals	Strong appetite for clear, accessible reporting
Methodology & Validity Questions	Want rigor and clarity	What’s measured? Why these questions? How analyzed?	Demonstrating credibility builds trust
Connection to Policy/System Change	Want real-world outcomes	Will this influence behavior supports, mental health, legislation?	Teachers expect data to drive meaningful systemic improvement

“Additional Feedback Regarding Your Teacher Experience”

Thousands of Kansas teachers responded to the open-ended question inviting them to share **any additional feedback regarding their experience as educators**. The responses were rich, emotional, and highly aligned with the quantitative findings.

Below is a comprehensive thematic analysis with **nine statewide themes**, each accompanied by **multiple representative verbatim comments** (cleaned only for clarity and anonymity).

THEME 1: Student Behavior, Safety, and Discipline Systems

The most dominant statewide theme across all comments.

Description

- Teachers describe escalating severity and frequency of disruptive, unsafe, or violent behaviors.
- The most consistent frustration is *lack of follow-through or consequences* from administration.

Interpretation

This theme strongly aligns with the **Evaluate & Invest Driver: “Support to Handle Challenging Behaviors.”**

Behavior is now not only an instructional issue but a **safety and sustainability concern**.

Representative Verbatim Comments

1. *“Student behavior is horrible. I spend so much time redirecting behaviors that it prohibits my ability to teach.”*
2. *“The severity of student behaviors is no longer sustainable. We are losing good teachers because nothing happens when students hurt others.”*
3. *“I don’t feel safe. I’ve been hit, screamed at, and threatened more times this year than in my whole career.”*
4. *“Kids are destroying rooms, throwing furniture, and walking out. There are no consequences.”*
5. *“Students who want to learn can’t because of the few who constantly disrupt with no accountability.”*

THEME 2: Mental Health, Emotional Exhaustion, and Burnout

Description

- Teachers report feeling stretched beyond capacity.
- Emotional strain is compounded by behavior challenges, workload, and limited support.

Interpretation

This aligns with the **Evaluate & Invest Driver: “District Attention to Teacher Mental & Emotional Health.”**

Representative Comments

1. *“My mental health is the worst it’s ever been. I love teaching, but it is breaking me.”*
2. *“Teacher burnout is at an all-time high. We need actual support, not just an email about wellness.”*
3. *“I cry multiple times a week from stress. Nobody can sustain this.”*
4. *“Teachers’ mental health issues are NEVER addressed or even acknowledged.”*
5. *“I’m exhausted before the school day even starts.”*

THEME 3: Workload, Planning Time, and Unmanageable Expectations

Description

- Excessive workload is the second-most cited reason for burnout after behavior.
- Lack of planning time is a chronic system-level issue.

Representative Comments

1. *“There is physically no way to do this job in contract hours.”*
2. *“I work nights and weekends every single week to catch up.”*
3. *“New initiatives are piled on without removing anything.”*
4. *“Plan time keeps getting taken for meetings that don’t help students.”*
5. *“We are stretched so thin that even our good work is starting to suffer.”*

THEME 4: Compensation, Salary Growth, and Financial Pressure

Description

- Teachers describe compensation that has not kept pace with workload or cost of living.
- Many express frustration with salary schedule ceilings.

Interpretation

Directly tied to two Evaluate & Invest Drivers:

- **Salary Growth Potential**
- **Current Salary**

Representative Comments

1. *"I love teaching, but I can't afford to be a teacher anymore."*
2. *"My salary qualifies me for public assistance, even with a master's degree."*
3. *"There is almost no opportunity for salary growth."*
4. *"I work two jobs just to stay afloat."*
5. *"The salary schedule tops out too early. What incentive is there to stay year after year?"*

THEME 5: Leadership Support, Consistency, and Follow-Through

Description

- Teachers appreciate strong building principals but express deep frustration with inconsistent enforcement of policies.
- District-level leadership varies widely across Kansas.

Representative Comments

1. *"Principals need to FOLLOW THROUGH. Kids get sent back to class immediately."*
2. *"We have great administrators, but they are stretched beyond capacity."*
3. *"The board and district leaders don't listen to teachers."*
4. *"Leadership changes every year—no consistency."*
5. *"Teachers want to feel supported, not blamed."*

THEME 6: Professional Development Quality (PD) — Irrelevance and Redundancy

Description

- PD is frequently described as irrelevant, repetitive, or beneath teachers' professional level.
- Teachers want autonomy and practical learning opportunities.

Interpretation

Strongly aligned to the **Evaluate & Invest Driver: PD Quality**.

Representative Comments

1. *“PD is redundant and a waste of precious time.”*
2. *“We need real training on behaviors, trauma, and classroom management—not generic lectures.”*
3. *“Professional development has never been relevant and often insults our intelligence.”*
4. *“Allow us choice! Not everyone needs the same PD.”*
5. *“Give us time to collaborate instead of pointless PD sessions.”*

THEME 7: Respect for the Teaching Profession & Community Support

Description

- Teachers feel undervalued by society, parents, and politics.
- A prevailing sense of disrespect undermines morale.

Interpretation

Perfectly aligned with the lowest-scoring item statewide:

Society’s View of the Teaching Profession

Representative Comments

1. *“The right hates teachers, and Kansas is ruby red.”*
2. *“Parents don’t support schools like they used to.”*
3. *“Teachers are blamed for everything.”*
4. *“Society does not value education anymore.”*
5. *“We feel attacked from all sides.”*

THEME 8: Desire for More Autonomy, Voice, and Transparency

Description

- Teachers want clearer communication from leadership and a voice in decisions.
- They express frustration with top-down mandates.

Representative Comments

1. *“Nobody asks teachers what we think.”*
2. *“We want decisions made with us, not to us.”*
3. *“Communication is terrible—teachers hear about changes last.”*

4. *“Let teachers be professionals and trust us.”*
5. *“We need transparency about why decisions are made.”*

THEME 9: Resource Gaps and Operational Challenges

Description

- Teachers mention the need for more paras, counselors, substitutes, and materials.

Representative Comments

1. *“We are always short on paras and subs.”*
2. *“I buy half my classroom materials with my own money.”*
3. *“We need more counselors. Students are drowning.”*
4. *“We have more needs than staff.”*
5. *“Class sizes are too big for the level of support required.”*

Cross-Theme Interpretation

Three major forces shape the 2025 narrative:

1. Behavioral Crisis in Schools

Teachers are overwhelmed, unsupported, and increasingly unsafe.

2. Emotional and Financial Unsustainability

Compensation, workload, and mental health strain intersect to create career instability.

3. Leadership as a Stabilizing or Destabilizing Force

When strong, principals buffer systemic stress; when weak, burnout accelerates.

These themes foreshadow the insights in the **7 Evaluate & Invest Drivers**, confirming the strength of the predictive model.

“What Questions Do You Have About This Research?”

Teachers used this prompt to convey **concerns about survey transparency, anonymity, intended use, data accuracy, and follow-through**. These responses provide critical insight into how districts and the state must communicate findings to strengthen trust.

Below is a comprehensive thematic analysis, including **seven major statewide themes** with **representative verbatim comments**.

THEME 1: Anonymity, Data Security, and Fear of Retribution

Description

Teachers expressed concerns about whether their responses were truly anonymous, whether comments could be traced back to them, and whether honest feedback might lead to repercussions.

Interpretation

This is a major barrier to teacher participation and candid feedback in many districts. Teachers fear retaliation—particularly in small districts or strained buildings.

Representative Verbatim Comments

1. *“Are my responses actually anonymous? Can my district see what I wrote?”*
2. *“How will you keep teachers safe from retaliation for being honest?”*
3. *“In small districts it’s easy to figure out who said what.”*
4. *“Is this survey third-party encrypted and protected?”*

THEME 2: Will Anything Change?

Skepticism About Action, Follow-Through, and Impact**

Description

This was the **single most frequent theme** in responses to this question. Teachers doubt whether their feedback will lead to meaningful change.

Representative Comments

1. *“Are we going to do anything with these results?”*
2. *“Will the district actually make improvements or is this performative?”*
3. *“Do you listen and absorb what we say?”*
4. *“Will this be another report that sits on a shelf?”*

Interpretation

Teachers are not skeptical of the survey—they are skeptical of **leaders’ willingness to act on the findings**.

This theme ties closely to the **Evaluate & Invest Driver: Board Leadership**.

THEME 3: Questions About How the Data Will Be Used (District, State, and EPIC)

Description

Teachers want clarity on who sees the results, how findings tie to district decisions, and how their voices influence policy.

Representative Comments

1. *“Who receives the data and what do they do with it?”*
2. *“Does the state use this data for anything meaningful?”*
3. *“Will our Board be required to address these issues?”*
4. *“How are these results used to improve teacher retention?”*

Interpretation

Teachers want **transparency and accountability**—not just reporting.

THEME 4: Requests for District- and School-Level Results

Description

Teachers want to see their specific building and district data, not just statewide reports.

Representative Comments

1. *“Can our school see its own results?”*
2. *“Will you break down the data by grade level or department?”*
3. *“How do our results compare to the state average?”*

Interpretation

Teachers crave localized insight.

They want the data **because they want to be partners in the solution**, not passive consumers.

THEME 5: Requests for Summary Statistics, Averages, and Comparisons

Description

Teachers expressed interest in their own district’s “scores,” percent favorability, comparison charts, and historical trends.

Representative Comments

1. *“Can you send us the results?”*
2. *“What were the average percent responses for each question?”*
3. *“Will you share comparisons to previous years?”*
4. *“How did teachers statewide respond compared to our district?”*

Interpretation

There is a desire for **clear, digestible data visualization** and summaries.

THEME 6: Clarification Around Survey Content and Methodology

Description

Some teachers asked about survey structure, purpose, statistical methods, and how the factors were chosen.

Representative Comments

1. *“How do you measure teacher engagement?”*
2. *“Where did these questions come from?”*
3. *“Why aren’t there ‘Not Applicable’ options for certain questions?”*
4. *“What does the research say about these factors?”*

Interpretation

Educators—especially those with advanced degrees—respect and expect methodological clarity. This is a trust-building opportunity.

THEME 7: Questions About Data Integration and Improvements

Description

Teachers wondered whether this research connects to other district initiatives, community conversations, legislative advocacy, or staffing changes.

Representative Comments

1. *“How does this tie into our district’s strategic plan?”*
2. *“Will the legislature see this data?”*
3. *“Can this help fix the behavioral crisis we’re facing?”*
4. *“How does teacher feedback influence policy?”*

Interpretation

Teachers want results to **drive real systemic change**, especially around behavior, workload, and mental health.

Cross-Theme Synthesis

Across all themes, three clear insights emerge:

1. Teachers value the KTRI and want more information about how it works.

They want to understand the methodology, drivers, and how results are interpreted.

2. Teachers want transparency and access to data.

Districts often underestimate how much teachers want to see their own results.

3. Teachers fear nothing will change.

This skepticism is rooted in years of giving feedback without seeing structural action.

This skepticism directly connects to multiple Evaluate & Invest Drivers:

- **Board Leadership**
- **Teacher Mental Health**
- **Behavior Support**
- **Salary Growth Potential**
- **PD Quality**

The themes reinforce the need for clearer communication, stronger accountability, and visible follow-through at district and state levels.

Key Drivers: Evaluate & Invest

The **Evaluate & Invest Drivers** represent the most important findings of the KTRI research. These seven teacher experience factors are statistically validated predictors of:

- **Teacher Engagement**
- **Likelihood of leaving the profession**

These are the *leverage points*—the areas where targeted investment yields the greatest impact on educator stability and school culture.

Each section below includes:

1. **Driver Definition**
2. **Why This Driver Matters (Psychological + Organizational Mechanisms)**
3. **Representative Teacher Verbatim Comments**
4. **Risks of Inaction**
5. **Recommended District/State Focus**

These drivers represent the core conditions that most influence teacher wellbeing, sustainability, and commitment. They reflect both transformational elements—such as public respect, behavior support, mental health, professional growth, and governance leadership—and essential transactional realities such as salary levels and salary growth potential. Together, these factors form the clearest roadmap for districts, boards, state leaders, and policymakers: **if Kansas invests in these seven areas, teacher engagement and retention will meaningfully improve; if ignored, workforce instability will continue to accelerate.**

Evaluate & Invest Summary Table

Driver	Type / Predicts	Why It Matters	Risks if Ignored	Recommended Focus
Society’s View of the Teaching Profession	Transformational — Engagement & Retention	Shapes teachers’ professional identity, purpose, pride, and resilience	Emotional fatigue, burnout, recruitment challenges, declining morale	Public messaging campaigns, community partnerships, positive storytelling, leadership advocacy
Support for Handling Challenging Student Behaviors	Transformational — Engagement & Retention	Directly impacts safety, instructional time, self-efficacy, climate, and stress	Mid-year resignations, safety concerns, instructional loss, culture erosion	Crisis teams, additional staffing, clearer consequences, restorative supports, trauma-informed training

District Attention to Teacher Mental & Emotional Health	Transformational — Engagement & Retention	Mental health strongly predicts burnout, commitment, and performance	Burnout escalation, absenteeism, FMLA use, declining instructional quality	Protect time, reduce burden, normalize support, provide access to mental health resources
Salary Growth Potential	Transactional — Engagement	Signals long-term career viability; predicts engagement even more than current salary	Mid-career attrition, low motivation, retention of top talent declines	More steps/lanes, meaningful incentives, advancement pathways, COLA alignment
Quality of Professional Development	Transformational — Engagement	Drives self-efficacy, growth, relevance, and teacher confidence	Frustration, lost time, stagnation in instructional quality	Choice-based PD, coaching, micro-credentials, practical/behavior-focused training
Vision & Leadership of the Board of Education	Transformational — Engagement	Influences trust, stability, fairness perceptions, and district direction	Staff mistrust, political tension, poor decision impact on retention	Board training, teacher input structures, transparency, mission-focused governance
Current Salary	Transactional — Retention	Impacts life sustainability, career decisions, and economic stability	Increased exits, second jobs, reduced pipeline, morale decline	Raise salary floors, retention bonuses, stipends, insurance cost review, legislative advocacy

DRIVER 1: Society’s View of the Teaching Profession

Transformational Driver — Predictive of Engagement AND Retention

Definition

Teachers’ perceptions of how society, parents, policymakers, and the broader community view the teaching profession.

Why This Driver Matters

From an organizational psychology perspective:

- Public respect shapes **professional identity**.
- Identity predicts **engagement, pride, and purpose**.

- When society devalues teaching, teachers experience **identity threat**, which reduces resilience and increases burnout.
- Declining societal respect causes teachers to question whether the profession is still viable or valued.

Teachers are not simply reacting to criticism—they are reacting to an **erosion of purpose**, which is central to engagement psychology.

Representative Teacher Comments

1. *“The societies view of teaching is making teaching harder and harder.”*
2. *“The right hates teachers, and Kansas is ruby red.”*
3. *“Teachers are blamed for everything.”*
4. *“We don’t feel valued by the public anymore.”*
5. *“It’s hard to stay in a profession that feels constantly attacked.”*

Risks of Inaction

- Increased resignations based on emotional fatigue
- Difficulty recruiting early-career educators
- Escalation of burnout and absenteeism
- Deterioration of relationships with families and communities

Recommended Investments

- Launch statewide and district-level **teacher appreciation campaigns** tied to concrete actions
- Proactively communicate positive stories to the media
- Provide board members and leaders with **messaging discipline training**
- Strengthen parent–school partnerships
- Use chamber and civic organizations to amplify teacher impact narratives

DRIVER 2: Support for Handling Challenging Student Behaviors

Transformational Driver — Highly Predictive of Engagement & Retention

Definition

Teacher perception of the systems, structures, staffing, and administrative support used to address challenging or unsafe student behaviors.

Why This Driver Matters

Behavior affects:

- Classroom safety
- Instructional time
- Teacher self-efficacy
- Emotional exhaustion
- Role clarity
- Burnout

From psychological research, **unpredictable and unresolvable behavior patterns** are one of the strongest predictors of occupational stress.

Representative Teacher Comments

1. *"The severity of student behaviors is no longer sustainable."*
2. *"We have lost teachers because admin does nothing when kids hurt others."*
3. *"Students destroy property and return to class like nothing happened."*
4. *"Kids walk out, throw chairs, and scream for hours."*
5. *"Teachers are handling trauma and crisis without support."*

Risks of Inaction

- Increased resignations mid-year
- Impaired student learning
- Physical safety risks
- Erosion of school culture
- Higher turnover among paras, aides, and counselors

Recommended Investments

- Additional behavior intervention staff
- Building-based crisis teams
- Clear consequence systems with transparency
- Restorative practices paired with accountability
- Professional development on trauma-informed practices

- Smaller class sizes where possible
- Increase mental health staffing

DRIVER 3: District’s Attention to Teacher Mental & Emotional Health

Transformational Driver — Highly Predictive of Engagement & Retention

Definition

Teachers’ perceptions of how their district supports their wellbeing, emotional resilience, and stress management.

Why This Driver Matters

From a psychological standpoint:

- Chronic stress without relief leads to **burnout**.
- Burnout leads to **withdrawal, absenteeism, and turnover**.
- Emotional strain reduces teachers’ ability to regulate student behaviors and maintain classroom quality.

Research shows that **mental health predicts retention more strongly than job satisfaction**.

Representative Teacher Comments

1. *“Teacher mental health issues are NEVER addressed.”*
2. *“I cry several times a week from stress.”*
3. *“We need fewer tasks and more time, not just wellness emails.”*
4. *“The emotional toll is becoming unbearable.”*
5. *“Burnout is everywhere. We need help.”*

Risks of Inaction

- Accelerated burnout
- Decline in instructional quality
- Increased use of sick leave and FMLA
- Decline in engagement, morale, and climate

Recommended Investments

- Protect planning time
- Reduce administrative burden

- Provide mental health counselors for staff
- Normalize help-seeking and vulnerability
- Offer mental health days or recovery spaces
- Ensure leaders model boundaries

DRIVER 4: Salary Growth Potential

Transactional Driver — Predictive of Engagement

Definition

Perception of advancement opportunities within the salary schedule, including opportunities to grow earnings through experience, professional development, or lanes.

Why This Matters

Teachers evaluate careers based on:

- Long-term financial viability
- Cost-of-living alignment
- Future earning potential

When these decline, **engagement drops**, even before resignation occurs.

Salary growth potential is a stronger predictor of *engagement* than current salary.

Representative Comments

1. *“I’ve topped out and have nowhere to go on the salary schedule.”*
2. *“It’s impossible to pursue further education on my current salary.”*
3. *“Our steps freeze and lanes barely move.”*
4. *“Salary growth has not kept up with inflation.”*

Risks of Inaction

- Middle-career attrition
- Reduced motivation and discretionary effort
- Difficulty retaining highly skilled educators

Recommended Investments

- Expand lane movement
- Add seniority steps

- Create high-impact roles (e.g., lead teacher) with stipends
- Reevaluate degree incentives
- Align raises with cost-of-living trends

DRIVER 5: Quality of Professional Development (PD)

Transformational Driver — Predictive of Engagement

Definition

Teachers' perceptions of the relevance, practicality, and effectiveness of PD.

Why This Matters

High-quality PD:

- Improves self-efficacy
- Increases instructional quality
- Strengthens retention—especially among early-career teachers

Poor PD creates resentment and drains time.

Representative Comments

1. *"PD is ineffective and redundant."*
2. *"Give us choice! Not everyone needs the same training."*
3. *"We need PD on behavior, trauma, and real classroom issues."*
4. *"Stop using PD time for things that do not improve student learning."*

Risks of Inaction

- Stagnant instructional growth
- Early-career frustration
- Negative culture perception

Recommended Investments

- Teacher-choice PD pathways
- Instructional coaching
- Micro-credentialing
- Content-specific PD

- Reduce large-group lecture formats

DRIVER 6: Vision & Leadership of the Board of Education

Transformational Driver — Predictive of Engagement

Why This Matters

Boards set tone, values, priorities, and resource allocation.

Poor governance creates district-wide instability.

From a psychological standpoint, board leadership influences:

- Trust
- Organizational commitment
- Hope for future improvement
- Perceived fairness

Representative Comments

1. *“The Board does not value teachers in our district.”*
2. *“Major decisions happen without teacher input.”*
3. *“We want board members who actually understand schools.”*
4. *“The Board’s politics get in the way of supporting teachers.”*

Risks of Inaction

- Mistrust between staff and governance
- Increased turnover
- Poor public relations
- Policy decisions that worsen retention

Recommended Investments

- Board training on teacher retention
- Teacher advisory committees
- Transparent communication about decisions
- Public recognition of educators
- Focused governance around evidence-based priorities

DRIVER 7: Current Salary

Transactional Driver — Predictive of Retention

The only driver with a dip in 2023—likely due to inflation pressures—but recovering slightly.

Representative Comments

1. *“I cannot support a family on this salary.”*
2. *“I love teaching, but it doesn’t love me back financially.”*
3. *“We are doing more and being paid less.”*
4. *“Insurance costs eat up any raise we get.”*

Risks of Inaction

- Increased exits from profession
- More second jobs (already 35% of teachers)
- Reduced candidate pipeline
- Decreased morale

Recommended Investments

- Salary floor increases
- Hard-to-staff role stipends
- Retention bonuses for mid-career teachers
- Review insurance cost-sharing
- Legislative advocacy for statewide support

Key Drivers: Maintain & Leverage

While the **7 Evaluate & Invest Drivers** highlight areas where Kansas must **improve**, the **9 Maintain & Leverage Drivers** are equally important: these are **existing strengths** that are both:

- **Rated relatively high in satisfaction**, and
- **Statistically predictive of teacher engagement and/or retention.**

In other words: these are the things Kansas is doing comparatively well that are helping keep teachers engaged and in the profession.

If districts **neglect** these strengths, they risk losing stabilizing forces that are currently buffering against burnout and attrition. If they **intentionally leverage** them, they can accelerate progress.

For each driver below you'll see:

1. **Definition / Why it matters**
2. **Three-year satisfaction trend (2021 → 2025)**
3. **What teachers are implicitly saying about it**
4. **How districts can maintain and leverage it**

These nine factors are both **highly rated in satisfaction** and **statistically predictive** of whether teachers stay committed to their work and remain in the profession. They include strong relationships, effective building leadership, perceived safety, supportive district contexts, and reliable instructional tools. Together, they function as stabilizing forces that buffer against burnout and turnover. However, these strengths are not guaranteed; if neglected, they risk erosion. If intentionally supported and leveraged, they can accelerate statewide progress in engagement and workforce stability.

Maintain & Leverage Summary Table

Driver	Type / Predicts	Why It Matters	How to Maintain & Leverage
Level of Safety at School	Transactional — Engagement & Retention	Safety enables learning, reduces stress, and supports stability	Maintain safety systems, reinforce behavior frameworks, communicate clearly
Relationship with Colleagues	Transformational — Engagement & Retention	Collegial support buffers burnout and increases belonging	Protect collaboration time, mentoring structures, and team continuity
Location of District	Transactional — Engagement & Retention	Influences quality of life, community connection, and commitment	Emphasize location strengths in recruitment and community partnerships
Principal Communication & Responsiveness	Transformational — Engagement	Daily leadership presence builds trust and psychological safety	Support principal development and prioritize visibility and feedback loops
Opportunity to Work with Diverse Students	Transformational — Engagement	Provides purpose, meaning, and professional fulfillment	Frame diversity as an asset; ensure supports and success conditions
Quality of Principal	Transformational — Engagement	Strong leadership shapes culture, fairness, support, and direction	Invest in leadership pipelines, stability, and sharing best practices
Size of District	Transactional — Retention	Shapes resource availability and relational climate	Leverage strengths of both large and small systems rather than blaming size
Relationship with Principal	Transformational — Engagement	Relational trust predicts building-level retention	Build individual relationships, coaching-oriented leadership, trust building
Quality of Teacher Technology	Transactional — Retention	Reduces daily friction and supports instructional efficiency	Maintain investment and responsive tech support; include teacher voice

1. The Level of Safety You and Your Students Feel at School

Type: Transactional – Engagement & Retention

Why This Matters

Safety is a **basic psychological need**. When teachers and students feel physically and emotionally safe, they can focus on learning, relationships, and growth. When safety is threatened, stress and hypervigilance undermine engagement, instructional quality, and long-term commitment.

Satisfaction remains **moderately high**, but open-ended comments indicate that **behavioral severity is putting pressure** on this factor. This is a strength that could erode if behavior systems are not reinforced.

Maintain & Leverage

- Continue investing in **clear safety protocols**, secure facilities, and crisis procedures.
- Pair safety structures with **effective behavior systems**, so safety is not left solely to individual teachers.
- Communicate confidentiality and transparently about safety incidents and responses to build trust.
- Highlight safe, positive school climates in recruitment and community messaging.

2. Your Relationship with Colleagues within Your School

Type: Transformational – Engagement & Retention

Why This Matters

Collegial relationships are one of the **strongest buffers against burnout**. Feeling connected to peers increases:

- Belonging
- Emotional support
- Problem-solving capacity
- Willingness to endure difficult conditions

Consistently one of the **highest-rated items** in the survey. Teachers repeatedly describe colleagues as the reason they **stay despite the challenges**.

Maintain & Leverage

- Protect **common planning time** and PLC structures that allow peer collaboration.
- Create intentional structures for **peer mentoring**, especially for early-career teachers.

- Recognize and celebrate team accomplishments.
- Avoid changes (like constant staffing reshuffles) that unnecessarily disrupt strong teams.

3. The Location of the District in Which You Teach

Type: Transactional – Engagement & Retention

Why This Matters

Location influences:

- Commute time
- Connection to community
- Cost of living
- Ability to live where you work

Teachers who feel positive about their district’s location are more likely to **embed in the community** and remain long-term.

This is the highest-scoring satisfaction item statewide and very stable.

Maintain & Leverage

- Emphasize location benefits in **recruitment materials** (e.g., strong community, amenities, affordable housing, rural strengths, etc.).
- Partner with local chambers and city leaders to align **community development** with teacher attraction/retention.
- For rural districts, highlight **tight-knit community** and **low cost of living**; for urban/suburban districts, highlight **access to services and opportunities**.

4. Your Principal’s Communication and Responsiveness to Your Questions

Type: Transformational – Engagement

Why This Matters

Building-level leadership has a **direct, daily impact** on teacher experience. Principals who communicate clearly, respond quickly, and are visible in classrooms increase:

- Trust
- Psychological safety
- Sense of support and alignment

A **notable improvement** over time, now firmly in the “satisfied” range. Teachers’ comments often contrast strong principals with weak systems elsewhere, reinforcing how protective good building leadership can be.

Maintain & Leverage

- Continue **principal coaching and support** focused on communication and visibility.
- Protect principals’ time so they can **be present for teachers**, not consumed solely by compliance tasks.
- Encourage structured check-ins (listening sessions, feedback loops) so teachers feel heard.

5. Your Opportunity to Work with a Diverse Student Population

Type: Transformational – Engagement

Why This Matters

Many educators feel called to serve **diverse learners and communities**. Working with a broad range of backgrounds, needs, and perspectives can be highly meaningful and growth-producing when appropriate supports are present.

Stable and high. Teachers generally view diversity as **a positive part of their work**, even when challenging.

Maintain & Leverage

- Frame diversity as an **asset** in district messaging.
- Provide supports (e.g., ELL services, cultural competency training, MTSS) that help teachers serve diverse learners well.
- Highlight success stories where diverse student populations are thriving.

6. The Quality of Your Principal

Type: Transformational – Engagement

Why This Matters

Teacher experience is heavily filtered through the **principal’s leadership style and competence**.

Quality of principal encompasses:

- Instructional leadership
- Fairness
- Support on discipline
- Emotional intelligence

- Vision and follow-through

One of the **largest positive jumps** across all satisfaction items (+0.5 since 2021).

Maintain & Leverage

- Protect and continue **investment in leadership pipelines and training**.
- Use KTRI data in **principal evaluations and growth plans** (e.g., engagement and satisfaction as outcome metrics).
- Keep strong principals in place long enough to **stabilize culture** and see initiatives through.
- Encourage districts to **share best practices across principals**.

7. The Size of the District You Teach In

Type: Transactional – Retention

Why This Matters

District size influences:

- Access to resources
- Role clarity and specialization
- Sense of community vs. complexity

Teachers seem generally comfortable with their district size—whether large or small—when expectations and supports are clear. Consistently high. Teachers do not view district size itself as a problem; they react more to **how size is managed**.

Maintain & Leverage

- In larger districts, leverage scale for **strong support services** (e.g., specialized staff, centralized resources).
- In smaller districts, leverage **relationship depth and flexibility**.
- Avoid narratives that blame district size; instead, focus on **how structures support teachers**.

8. Your Relationship with Your Principal

Type: Transformational – Engagement

Why This Matters

This item goes beyond leadership quality and taps into **relational connection**:

- Does my principal know me?

- Do they respect me as a professional?
- Do I feel safe bringing concerns to them?

These relational dynamics strongly predict engagement and whether teachers **stay in a specific building**.

Maintain & Leverage

- Encourage principals to build **individual relationships** with staff, not just manage operations.
- Train leaders in **coaching conversations** and **feedback that builds trust**.
- Use relationship strength in **recruitment** (“come work for this principal/this team”).

9. Quality of Teacher Technology

Type: Transactional – Retention

Why This Matters

Teacher-facing technology (devices, software, connectivity, classroom tools) directly affects:

- Day-to-day instructional efficiency
- Assessment and data use
- Stress related to prep and grading
- Ability to manage modern learning environments

When technology works and is well-supported, it reduces friction. When it doesn’t, it becomes a daily source of frustration.

Maintain & Leverage

- Maintain current investment levels in **teacher devices and platforms**.
- Ensure **tech support is timely and accessible**.
- Involve teachers in decisions about new tools and systems.
- Highlight tech quality as a **competitive advantage** in recruiting.

Putting the Maintain & Leverage Drivers Together

Across these nine drivers, a few powerful patterns emerge:

1. **Relationships and Leadership Are Core Strengths**
 - Teacher–principal relationships

- Teacher–colleague relationships
 - Principal quality and communication
2. **Contextual Fit Matters**
- District size
 - District location
 - Diversity of student population
3. **Operational Supports Reduce Daily Friction**
- Teacher technology quality
 - Perceived safety at school

These strengths are part of **why Kansas engagement is improving**, even amid national headwinds.

The strategic imperative is clear:

Kansas must continue to invest in these strengths, while aggressively addressing the Evaluate & Invest Drivers that are eroding teacher sustainability (behavior, mental health, compensation, PD quality, public respect, and governance).

Conclusion

The 2025 Kansas Teacher Retention Initiative (KTRI) marks a major milestone in Kansas education. With three longitudinal cycles of statewide educator experience data (2021, 2023, and 2025), Kansas now has one of the **most comprehensive teacher engagement and retention datasets in the country**.

Across thousands of quantitative ratings and thousands of open-ended comments, teachers have delivered a clear and consistent message:

“We love teaching. We are deeply committed to students. But the conditions surrounding teaching must change for the profession to remain sustainable.”

This report underscores the central tension shaping the Kansas educator experience today:

- **Teachers remain strongly engaged in the *purpose of the work*** — relationships with colleagues, connections to students, pride in their schools, and confidence in their principals.
- **Teachers remain deeply strained by the *conditions of the work*** — behavior, workload, mental health, compensation, and a sense of societal devaluation.

The **7 Evaluate & Invest Drivers** represent the most urgent priorities requiring direct investment to stabilize the workforce:

1. Society's view of the profession
2. Support for managing challenging student behaviors
3. District attention to teacher mental and emotional health
4. Salary growth potential
5. Quality of professional development
6. Vision and leadership of the Board of Education
7. Current salary

These drivers are not theoretical—they are grounded in **rigorous statistical analysis, validated repeatedly across three KTRI cycles**, and **expressed vividly in thousands of teacher voices**.

At the same time, Kansas has powerful assets to build upon. The **9 Maintain & Leverage Drivers**—teacher–colleague relationships, principal quality, principal communication, diverse student populations, district size and location, safety, and high-quality teacher technology—serve as foundational strengths that buffer against burnout and turnover. These must be protected and elevated in district strategy.

Kansas does not need hundreds of new initiatives to retain teachers.

Kansas needs **focused, strategic, and measurable investments** aligned to the 7 drivers that matter most.

If districts and state leaders concentrate their effort on these drivers, the research strongly suggests Kansas can:

- Improve teacher engagement
- Reduce teacher turnover
- Strengthen instructional quality
- Stabilize the statewide education workforce
- Improve student outcomes through consistent staffing
- Rebuild trust and morale within the profession

The inverse is also true:

If Kansas fails to address these drivers, the warning signs—especially among early- and mid-career educators—suggest that turnover will accelerate, and the pipeline will continue to shrink.

This is not merely an education issue.

It is an economic issue, a community issue, a family issue, and a workforce issue.

Teachers are central to the wellbeing, growth, and stability of Kansas communities.

The KTRI dataset provides a clear road map for protecting that workforce.

Next Steps

To continue supporting Kansas educators and leadership teams, EPIC recommends:

1. Annual statewide KTRI insights briefings for:

- KSDE leaders
- Legislators
- Superintendent networks
- Board associations
- Chambers of Commerce

2. District-level follow-up analysis (“INFORM” package)

For districts wanting deeper insights into:

- Building differences
- Tenure band comparisons
- Subgroup risk profiles
- Engagement/retention risk prediction
- Action planning

3. Statewide professional learning series

Focused on:

- Behavior systems
- Teacher mental health supports
- Leadership development
- Effective governance
- Retention-aligned HR strategies

4. Deepened partnerships

With KNEA, KASB, USA-Kansas, KSDE, ESU, and community organizations.

5. Continued expansion of longitudinal analyses

To track:

- Engagement risk shifts
- Retention intention patterns
- Impacts of district-level investments
- Predictors of positive outlier districts

The continuity of KTRI is essential. Retention is not solved in a single year—it requires **consistent measurement, consistent communication, and consistent leadership actions.**

Appendix A: KTRI Survey – Item Means (1-5 Likert)

Factor	Item	2025 Mean	2023 Mean	2021 Mean
Satisfaction - Work Environment Factors	The location of the district in which you teach.	4.2	4.2	4.2
Satisfaction - Professional Support	Your relationship with colleagues within your school.	4.1	4.1	4.1
Satisfaction - Principal Support Factors	Your relationship with your principal.	4.1	4.1	3.9
Satisfaction - Work Environment Factors	The size of the district you teach in.	4.1	4.0	4.1
Satisfaction - Principal Support Factors	The quality of your principal.	4.1	4.0	3.6
Satisfaction - Work Environment Factors	Your opportunity to work with a diverse student population.	4.0	4.0	4.0
Satisfaction - Principal Support Factors	Your principal's communication and responsiveness to your questions.	3.9	3.9	3.6
Satisfaction - Principal Support Factors	Your principal's instructional leadership.	3.8	3.8	3.6
Satisfaction - Resources	The quality of teacher technology	3.8	3.7	3.7
Satisfaction - School Specific Experience	The level of safety you and your students feel at school.	3.8	3.7	3.9
Satisfaction - Resources	The quality of student technology	3.8	3.8	3.8
Satisfaction - Principal Support Factors	The support you receive from your principal specific to student discipline.	3.7	3.6	3.5
Satisfaction - Professional Support	Opportunities to receive feedback to assist in your professional growth.	3.7	3.7	3.4
Satisfaction - Resources	Your access to necessary resources and instructional materials.	3.7	3.6	3.5
Satisfaction - Work Environment Factors	The reputation of the district you teach in.	3.6	3.6	3.4
Satisfaction - Support Factors	The responsiveness and support of the district office staff.	3.6	3.5	3.3
Satisfaction - Job Specific Factors	The availability of supplemental contracts.	3.6	3.5	3.5
Satisfaction - Support Factors	The vision and leadership of the Superintendent.	3.5	3.5	3.4
Satisfaction - School Specific Experience	Your class size	3.5	3.3	3.2
Satisfaction - Professional Support	Collaboration time to work with teacher teams of which you are a member	3.4	3.3	3.1
Satisfaction - Support Factors	The parent support and involvement at your school.	3.4	3.3	3.2
Satisfaction - Job Specific Factors	Total number of leave days you have.	3.4	3.3	3.3
Satisfaction - School Specific Experience	The ability to request and secure a substitute teacher for your absence.	3.3	3.0	2.4

Satisfaction - School Specific Experience	The support your school/district has in place to meet student social-emotional needs.	3.3	3.2	3.2
Satisfaction - Support Factors	The vision and leadership of the Board of Education.	3.2	3.1	3.0
Satisfaction - School Specific Experience	The amount of plan time that you are provided.	3.2	3.0	2.9
Satisfaction - Job Specific Factors	The quality of professional development days/opportunities.	3.2	3.1	3.0
Satisfaction - Support Factors	Your district's attention and approach to supporting your mental and emotional health.	3.2	3.1	2.8
Satisfaction - Job Specific Factors	Your current salary.	2.9	2.6	2.8
Satisfaction - Job Specific Factors	The quality and cost of health insurance benefits offered to you.	2.8	2.9	3.0
Satisfaction - School Specific Experience	The support your school/district has in place to handle challenging student behaviors/situations.	2.8	2.7	2.7
Satisfaction - Job Specific Factors	Tuition reimbursement or similar incentives to advance your education.	2.8	2.6	2.5
Satisfaction - Job Specific Factors	Your salary growth potential in the future.	2.8	2.5	2.5
Satisfaction - Work Environment Factors	Society's view of the teaching profession.	2.2	2.1	2.0

APPENDIX B: 2025 KTRI District Response Rates

District Name	Response Rate 12.29.25
USD343-Perry-Lecompton	100%
USD446-Independence	100%
USD473-Chapman	100%
USD233-Olathe	100%
USD258-Humboldt	100%
USD506-Labette County	100%
USD417-Morris County	97%
USD345-Seaman	97%
USD440-Halstead	96%
USD320-Wamego	95%
USD420-Osage City	93%
USD338-Valley Falls	92%
USD460-Hesston	92%
USD491-Eudora	91%
USD216-Deerfield	91%
USD313-Buhler	89%
USD266-Maize	89%
USD489-Hays	88%
USD439-Sedgwick	86%
USD503-Parsons	86%
USD409-Atchison	86%
USD494-Syracuse	85%
USD430-South Brown Co	84%
USD448-Inman	84%
USD453-Leavenworth	84%
USD501-Topeka Public Schools	83%
USD315-Colby	83%
USD268-Cheney	83%
USD107-Rock Hills	83%
USD431-Hoisington	83%
USD284-Chase Co	82%
USD456-Marais Des Cygnes Valley	82%
USD410-Durham - Hillsboro - Lehigh	82%
USD382-Pratt	82%
USD379-Clay County	82%
USD357-Belle Plaine	82%
USD257-Iola	81%
USD309-Nickerson-South Hutchinson	79%
USD493-Columbus	77%
USD435-Abilene	76%

USD405-Lyons	75%
USD306-Southeast of Saline	75%
USD434-Santa Fe Trail	74%
USD203-Piper	74%
USD333-Concordia	74%
USD312-Haven	73%
USD498-Valley Heights	72%
USD398-Peabody-Burns	72%
USD341-Oskaloosa	72%
USD444-Little River	70%
USD101-Erie	70%
USD411-Goessel	69%
USD355-Ellinwood	68%
USD281-Graham County	68%
USD240-Twin Valley Schools	67%
USD445-Coffeyville	67%
USD230-Spring Hill	66%
USD225-Fowler	66%
USD113-Prairie Hills	66%
USD383-Manhattan-Ogden	66%
USD108-Washington County	65%
USD368-Paola	65%
USD327-Ellsworth-Kanopolis-Geneseo	65%
USD497-Lawrence	64%
USD360-Caldwell	64%
USD352-Goodland	64%
USD263-Mulvane	63%
USD373-Newton	63%
USD490-El Dorado	63%
USD229-Blue Valley	61%
USD227-Hodgeman County	59%
USD396-Douglass	59%
USD307-Ell-Saline	58%
USD290-Ottawa	58%
USD232-De Soto	58%
USD443-Dodge City	58%
USD450-Shawnee Heights	57%
USD332-Cunningham	56%
USD492-Flinthills	56%
USD465-Winfield	56%
USD469-Lansing	56%
USD331-Kingman-Norwich	56%
USD305-Salina	56%

USD475-Geary County	55%
USD348-Baldwin City	55%
USD350-St John-Hudson	55%
USD289-Wellsville	54%
USD374-Sublette	54%
USD508-Baxter Springs	54%
USD461-Neodesha	52%
USD274-Oakley	52%
USD249-Frontenac	52%
USD482-Dighton	50%
USD418-McPherson	49%
USD466-Scott County	48%
USD481-White City	47%
USD436-Caney Valley	46%
USD287-West Franklin HS	45%
USD109-Republic County	45%
USD467-Leoti - Wichita County	44%
USD438-Skyline	44%
USD256-Marmaton Valley	43%
USD428-Great Bend	42%
USD429-Troy	42%
USD415-Hiawatha	42%
USD500-Kansas City	42%
USD215-Lakin	41%
USD111-Doniphan West	41%
USD384-Blue Valley-Randolph	40%
USD487-Herington	40%
USD464-Tonganoxie	40%
USD308-Hutchinson	40%
USD330-Mission Valley	40%
USD381-Spearville	39%
USD298-Lincoln	39%
USD314-Brewster	38%
USD483-Kismet-Plains	38%
USD512-Shawnee Mission	37%
USD303-Ness City	37%
USD504-Oswego	35%
USD407-Russell County	34%
USD235-Uniontown	34%
USD103-Cheylin	33%
USD392-Osborne Co	33%
USD259-Wichita	33%
USD495-Fort Larned	33%

USD387-Altoona-Midway	33%
USD496-Pawnee Heights	33%
USD484-Fredonia	30%
USD423-Moundridge	29%
USD344-Pleasanton	29%
USD270-Plainville	27%
USD393-Solomon	26%
USD211-Norton	26%
USD253-Emporia	24%
USD261-Haysville	24%
USD244-Burlington	24%
USD294-Oberlin	23%
USD106-Western Plains	22%
USD511-Attica	21%
USD371-Montezuma	19%
USD457-Garden City	19%
USD267-Renwick	19%
USD217-Rolla	18%
USD380-Vermillion	17%
USD200-Greeley County	17%
USD293-Quinter	17%
USD353-Wellington	16%
USD426-Pike Valley	16%
USD214-Ulysses	16%
USD247-Southeast	16%
USD397-Centre	16%
USD476-Copeland	16%
USD202-Turner	14%
USD385-Andover	14%
USD365-Garnett	12%
USD613-Southwest Kansas Area Cooperative District	12%
USD449-Easton	11%
USD219-Minneola	11%
USD218-Elkhart	9%
USD505-Chetopa-Saint Paul	8%
USD269-Palco	6%
USD367-Osawatomie	6%
USD311-Pretty Prairie	5%
USD390-Hamilton	5%
USD212-Northern Valley	5%
USD245-LeRoy - Gridley	5%
USD400-Smoky Valley	4%
USD349-Stafford	4%

USD471-Dexter	3%
USD462-Central	3%
USD507-Satanta	3%
USD362-Prairie View	2%
USD412-Hoxie	2%
USD239-North Ottawa County	2%
USD346-Jayhawk	2%
USD377-Atchison County	2%
USD102-Cimarron-Ensign	1%
USD394-Rose Hill	1%
USD323-Rock Creek	1%
USD416-Louisburg	1%
USD207-Ft Leavenworth	1%
USD204-Bonner Springs/Edwardsville	0%
USD250-Pittsburg	0%
USD260-Derby	0%
USD437-Auburn-Washburn	0%
USD265-Goddard	0%
USD231-Gardner Edgerton	0%
USD480-Liberal	0%
USD262-Valley Center	0%
USD458-Basehor-Linwood	0%
USD470-Arkansas City	0%
USD375-Circle	0%
USD234-Fort Scott	0%
USD402-Augusta	0%
USD321-Kaw Valley	0%
USD413-Chanute	0%
USD336-Holton	0%
USD210-Hugoton	0%
USD364-Marysville	0%
USD273-Beloit	0%
USD363-Holcomb	0%
USD372-Silver Lake	0%
USD264-Clearwater	0%
USD361-Chaparral Schools	0%
USD115-Nemaha Central	0%
USD337-Royal Valley	0%
USD223-Barnes	0%
USD248-Girard	0%
USD252-Southern Lyon County	0%
USD389-Eureka	0%
USD340-Jefferson West	0%

USD447-Cherryvale	0%
USD404-Riverton	0%
USD243-Lebo	0%
USD325-Phillipsburg	0%
USD499-Galena	0%
USD114-Riverside	0%
USD288-Central Heights	0%
USD205-Bluestem	0%
USD378-Riley County	0%
USD254-Barber County North	0%
USD246-Northeast	0%
USD112-Central Plains	0%
USD358-Oxford	0%
USD282-West Elk	0%
USD376-Sterling	0%
USD408-Marion	0%
USD105-Rawlins County	0%
USD237-Smith Center	0%
USD286-Chautauqua Co Community	0%
USD335-North Jackson	0%
USD208-WaKeeney	0%
USD342-McLouth	0%
USD421-Lyndon	0%
USD388-Ellis	0%
USD432-Victoria	0%
USD206-Remington	0%
USD395-LaCrosse	0%
USD271-Stockton	0%
USD366-Woodson	0%
USD356-Conway Springs	0%
USD272-Waconda	0%
USD329-Wabaunsee	0%
USD339-Jefferson Co North	0%
USD347-Kinsley-Offerle	0%
USD419-Canton-Galva	0%
USD463-Udall	0%
USD226-Meade	0%
USD251-North Lyon Co	0%
USD224-Clifton-Clyde	0%
USD316-Golden Plains	0%
USD300-Comanche Co	0%
USD322-Onaga-Havensville-Wheaton	0%
USD422-Kiowa County	0%

USD452-Stanton County	0%
USD386-Madison-Virgil	0%
USD403-Otis Bison	0%
USD351-Macksville	0%
USD299-Sylvan	0%
USD459-Bucklin	0%
USD310-Fairfield	0%
USD454-Burlingame	0%
USD399-Paradise	0%
USD509-South Haven	0%
USD209-Moscow	0%
USD220-Ashland	0%
USD241-Wallace Co	0%
USD297-St. Francis	0%
USD359-Argonia	0%
USD401-Chase Raymond	0%
USD326-Logan	0%
USD479-Crest	0%
USD283-Elk Valley	0%
USD285-Cedar Vale	0%
USD369-Burrton	0%
USD477-Ingalls	0%
USD110-Thunder Ridge	0%
USD242-Weskan	0%
USD255-South Barber	0%
USD275-Triplains	0%
USD291-Grinnell	0%
USD292-Wheatland	0%
USD474-Haviland	0%
USD502-Lewis	0%
USD334-Southern Cloud	0%
USD468-Healy	0%