

THE IRREPLACEABLES

5 WAYS PRINCIPALS CAN KEEP MORE IRREPLACEABLE TEACHERS

1. START THE SCHOOL YEAR WITH GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The best teachers want clarity. Use meeting or orientation time at the start of the year to rally teachers around a clear and specific definition of excellent teaching and a set of goals for making the school a better place for learning. Then set individual goals aligned to that vision. Tell teachers that you will observe them frequently and that you will be honest when they are falling short. Be clear that ineffective teaching is not an option.

2. RECOGNIZE EXCELLENCE PUBLICLY AND FREQUENTLY

Don't let success be a secret. Set aside 5 to 10 minutes in regular meetings to publicly celebrate teachers who have done exceptional work in the classroom or achieved a notable milestone with their students. Congratulate them and tie what they're doing to the school's goals and vision of great teaching. Don't praise everyone every time; nothing demoralizes Irreplaceables more than false praise for mediocre or poor performance.

3. TREAT YOUR IRREPLACEABLES LIKE THEY ARE IRREPLACEABLE

Make it hard to leave your school. List the teachers who are most critical to your school's academic success and spend time with them. Observe them at work and offer regular feedback. Get to know their interests and development needs, help them access resources, and give them opportunities to grow their careers and increase their impact. Invest them in the school by involving them in decision-making, and make sure other school leaders treat them well, too.

4. START HAVING "STAY CONVERSATIONS" BY THANKSGIVING

Many teachers use the winter holidays to think about what's next. Block off time after Thanksgiving to talk to your Irreplaceables and rising-star teachers about continuing to teach at the school next year. Tell them how important they are and how much you want them to return. Ask them about their own interests and concerns, and if they are considering other options, ask what you can do to convince them to stay.

5. HOLD THE LINE ON GOOD TEACHING

Schools that refuse to tolerate poor teaching keep more of their top teachers. Inevitably, some teachers will struggle, despite good intentions and hard work. Be honest with them about their weaknesses, give them regular feedback and support, and set reasonable limits on how long they have to show significant improvement (months, not years). Make sure they don't get mixed messages from other school administrators or coaches. However difficult it may be, do not allow unsuccessful teachers to linger.

Top teachers who experience multiple high impact retention strategies plan to remain teaching at their schools for nearly twice as long (2 to 6 more years).