**Stay Conversation Guide**

This document provides an overview of the best practices for implementing effective stay conversations and intent to return practices in service of improving staff retention. By using this document, you can start to consider how to create or refine and implement these structures within your own organization. This guide provides directives on how to have stay conversations and how to encourage someone to return. You will also find reflection questions that you might pose with your staff as you embark on these stay conversations.

Retention Mindset and Strategies

According to a [Gallup Study](https://www.gallup.com/workplace/357104/ways-managers-stop-employee-turnover.aspx), 52% of voluntarily exiting employees say their manager or organization could have done something to prevent them from leaving their job. The best leaders don’t wait for signs of trouble. Take preventative action to keep their talented people.

* Retention is meant to be an outcome, not a solution. → Create a preventative strategy.
* Effective retention work is driven by data. → Disseminate and analyze intent to return survey data.
* Match retention strategies to their root causes. → Engage in stay conversations.

## *Retention Strategies from a DEIA Lens*

Despite many leaders understanding the importance of working with a diverse set of staff members, numerous implicit and explicit barriers persist when it comes to recruitment and retention. Here are two key DEIA question to pose:

* Am I reviewing and interrogating my retention data sources with a DEIA lens?
* As I consider solutions, am I considering them through a DEIA lens? How might these decisions impact and/or be perceived by all different groups of staff?

## *Retention Planning Strategy*

The same Gallup study recommends preventative actions to keep talented people.

* **Connected managers** catch intent to leave long before it occurs
* **Empathetic managers** listen to problems, receive employee feedback and help prioritize the workload
* **Empowered managers** find creative solutions, personalize flexibility and advocate for people
* **Inspiring managers** offer regular employee recognition, encouragement and mission moments
* **Coaching managers** help struggling employees find their future within the organization

*Retention Strategy Spotlights*

| **Systems** | **Questions to Answer** |
| --- | --- |
| **Stay Conversations:** Ideally book end around winter break | * Who is not planning on returning? * Who seems less sure or likely to stay? * Who is unsatisfied and why? * What will keep them? |
| **Intent to return surveys:** Dependent on offer letter season; ideally sometime between February and April | * Are there trends around who leaves? * Are there trends around reasons for leaving? * Are there trends around reasons for staying? |

Small Group Reflection

**In small groups, discuss the following:**

* How would you rate your level of knowledge/awareness of staff members’ retention plans at this point in the year?
* Have you noticed differences in your levels of awareness during the last few years compared to prior to the pandemic?
* What has helped you to have more awareness?

The Role of Stay Conversations

Stay conversation are the #1 lever for retention. **The number one goal is to ensure a staff member feels valued.** The staff member should leave with complete certainty on where they stand and how much they are valued in the organization. You should walk away understanding the likelihood of the staff member

returning next year AND their blue-sky scenario for what they would ideally like to be true next year (meaning, you also understand what concerns they have or areas of dissatisfaction).

*Outline of Stay Conversation*

This conversation is specifically designed for **STRONG PERFORMERS.** This conversation will look different for low-performing individuals who you don’t want to return.



*Active Listening and Being Present*

* Consider the right person to have the conversation with each person
* Take in the information without judgment or quick response
* Now is not YET the time to bring solutions
* Take notes (if it feels authentic and appropriate to the conversation!)
* Confirm your key takeaways, understandings, and next step

Small Group Reflection

**In small groups, discuss the following:**

* Where have you seen success with stay conversations?
* What is challenging about implementing stay conversations? What barriers exist for you to execute on this strategy effectively?

Intent to Return Survey Logistics

* Approximately 5 survey questions, no more than 10
* Can be completed in 10 minutes or less
* A centralized survey sent to all staff
* Responses are not anonymous
* Timed to be sent after winter break (ideally no later than April)

*Architecture of Intent to Return Survey*

The starting question is: **What are your job plans for the next school year?** The remaining questions will be differentiated based on how the person responds to the starting question.

**Potential Responses:**

* “I am definitely returning next year.” → **Ask this question:** “What position are you interested in next year?”
* “I’m not sure if I’ll return next year.” → **Ask this question:** “Why are you considering leaving? What would make you stay?”
* “I am not returning next year.” → **Ask this question:** “What is your primary reason for leaving?”

*Turn a “Maybe” into a “Yes”*

* What would make it more likely for you to stay? (open response)
* What is the primary reason why you are considering leaving?
  + Geography
  + Commute
  + Curriculum/Instructional Methods
  + D & I Related
  + Hours/Schedule or Workload
  + Lack of Opportunity for Career Advancement
  + Salary
  + School Culture/ Classroom Management Methods
  + Adult Culture / Team or Management of Team
  + Wanted a Different Position
  + Other (please specify)
* Please provide an explanation on the primary reason selected. (open response)
* What else are you considering for next year? (open-response)