

Stay Interview Quick Start Implementation Guide

A Practical Toolkit for
School and District Leaders

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GoTeachKY Ambassadors Dr. Tyler Saylor, Chrystel Blair, and Kaitlyn Kelly Hill present their Stay Interview findings to the Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board.



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Introduction

Much of our work on teacher retention focuses on understanding why educators leave. While exit interviews provide valuable insights, they are often considered "autopsy data" because they capture perspectives after a teacher has already made the decision to go. Stay Interviews shift the focus to the outstanding educators we already have and want to keep, helping us better understand what motivates teachers to remain in the classroom.

As part of the GoTeachKY Ambassador Program, in-service educators from across Kentucky conducted Stay Interviews with a diverse group of teachers, including early-career, mid-career, veteran, and non-core content educators. By December 2025, Ambassadors had collected more than 200 anonymous interviews, with no personally identifying information recorded. Participants were interviewed again in the spring of 2026, providing a deeper look at the factors that influence teachers' decisions to stay. This document is designed to help school and district leaders replicate these efforts in their own schools and use Stay Interviews as a proactive strategy for retaining great teachers.



Purpose

Stay interviews are structured conversations with current teachers designed to determine the key factors that teachers most value and potential items that may be addressed in order to improve retention. The goal is not simply to collect feedback. The goal is to listen impartially, plan purposefully, and act resolutely.

Desired Outcomes

1. Identify the beliefs, experiences, and supports that influence teacher retention.
 2. Discern school strengths that should be protected, celebrated, and scaled.
 3. Curate stories that can be shared with families and the community.
 4. Select 2–4 short-term improvement actions and 1–3 long-term priorities.
 5. Share a clear action plan with staff and monitor progress
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The Four-Step Process

STEP	ACTION	KEY PRODUCT
1	Collect Staff Feedback	Completed surveys or interview notes
2	Analyze Feedback	Themes organized into four categories
3	Develop an Action Plan	Short-term actions and long-term priorities
4	Communicate and Follow Through on Action Plan	Staff update and progress monitoring

Guiding Principles

1. Protect confidentiality whenever possible.
2. Keep the process conversational and respectful.
3. Focus on growth, not blame.
4. Prioritize actions that are achievable and visible to staff.
5. Throughout the process, communicate:
 - a. what was heard.
 - b. what actions will be taken.
 - c. when updates will be shared.





Recommended Stay Interview Questions

1. Why do you stay in education?
 2. When did you know you wanted to become a teacher?
 3. What's a moment that you'll never forget from your classroom?
 4. What is something you wish people in your community knew about teaching in your school?
 5. If you could tell that future teacher in your classroom one thing, what would it be?
 6. What do you look forward to when you come to work each day?
 7. What aspect of the job would you change to make it more satisfying if you could?
 8. What is a support that your leadership team or administration could provide to make this the best place to work?
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Select Your Implementation Model

MODEL	BEST FOR	ADVANTAGES	CONSIDERATIONS
Online Survey	Large schools or quick implementation	Most efficient Least planning Provides the greatest level of anonymity	Feels less personal Doesn't allow for follow-up questions Lowest response rate
Administrator One-on-One Interviews	Small to medium schools	Allows for follow up questions to provide clarification Receive direct feedback Fosters a shared professional relationship between administrator and staff	Provides teachers the least anonymity of the models Requires leaders to create a space in which teachers feel comfortable to provide open feedback to administrator Requires administrator to receive critical feedback well
Teacher-Led Interviews	Schools with strong teacher leadership	Builds trust and ownership with teachers Often produces deeper responses Empowers teachers	Most time consuming as it requires more: • Planning • Scheduling • Training than the other models.





Model 1: Online Survey

1. Choose the interview questions and create a survey in Google Forms, Microsoft Forms, SurveyMonkey, or another district-approved tool.
2. Set a clear response window and communicate the purpose, deadline, and how results will be used.
3. Analyze responses using the four feedback categories.
4. Develop and share the school action plan.

Model 2: Administrator Interviews

1. Schedule 15–30 minutes per teacher during planning time, before or after school, or through coverage support.
2. Begin with brief rapport-building, then ask the stay interview questions conversationally.
3. Record responses in a consistent digital tool.
4. Analyze themes, develop the action plan, and share next steps with staff.

Model 3: Teacher-Led Interviews

1. Select trusted teacher leaders who do not supervise the staff they interview.
 2. Provide a short training on confidentiality, rapport-building, questioning, and response logging.
 3. Pair interviewers with staff and schedule interviews during the workday whenever possible.
 4. Use a representative team to analyze data and recommend action steps.
 5. Share the final plan with the administrative team and then with all staff.
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Analyzing Feedback

Organize the responses into four categories, looking for:

- recurring themes.
- patterns across grade levels or departments.
- items leaders can realistically address.

CATEGORY	PURPOSE	QUESTIONS TO ASK
1. Teacher Core Beliefs	Understand motivation and retention factors	• Why do you stay in education? • When did you know you wanted to become a teacher? • What’s a moment that you’ll never forget from your classroom? • What gives teachers purpose? • What relationships, supports, or experiences keep them engaged?
2. Stories Worth Sharing	Identify positive stories to promote	What is something you wish people in your community knew about teaching in your school? If you could tell that future teacher in your classroom one thing, what would it be? What should families and the community know about the work happening in this school?
3. School Strengths	Name practices to continue and expand	What do you look forward to when you come to work each day? What is working well? Can it be protected, strengthened, or replicated?
4. Opportunities for Improvement	Prioritize actions leaders can take	What aspect of the job would you change to make it more satisfying if you could? What is a support that your leadership team or administration could provide to make this the best place to work? What barriers can be reduced? What can be addressed now, and what requires longer-term planning?





Prioritizing Action Items

TYPE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
Short-Term Actions	Items that can be addressed within 30-90 days	Staff recognition, communication routines, meeting efficiency, planning support, clearer expectations
Long-Term Priorities	Items requiring additional planning, resources, or district support	Scheduling, staffing, professional learning, facilities, compensation advocacy

Important Reminders

Take Action!

If staff provide feedback and see no action, trust will decrease. Schools do not need to fix everything at once. Select a few meaningful items, communicate clearly, and follow through.

Suggested Communication Language

"Thank you for taking time to participate in our stay interview process. The purpose was to better understand what helps educators stay, what makes this an appealing place to work, and what improvements would strengthen our school culture and retention. We have reviewed the feedback, identified key themes, and developed an action plan. We will continue communicating progress and inviting staff input as we implement next steps."





Resources You Can Use

When you click the following links, you'll be forced to make a copy of the selected tool.

[Data Analysis Tool Template](#)– This document will help you sort through your Stay Interview Responses.

[Stay Interview Action Plan Template](#)– This document will help you figure out your next steps after conducting the interviews.

[Progress Monitoring Template](#)– This document is useful to help you use the feedback you receive and adjust accordingly.

[Retention Tool](#)– This spreadsheet helps you calculate your school's retention numbers, including determining reasons for leaving.

[Principal Quick Start Checklist](#)– Stay organized throughout the Stay Interview process with this handy tool!

[Survey Template](#)– If you choose to use Google Forms as a survey mode, you can simply make a copy of this template.

[Recommended Stay Interview Question List](#)– The questions we suggest you ask in your Stay Interviews.

Research on Stay Interviews for you to read:

- [Lessons From Stay Interviews of Early Career Teachers in Four Utah School Districts](#) (REL West)
- [Stay Interview Guide](#) from Maricopa County, AZ

Questions?

Contact Justin Edwards at justin.edwards@education.ky.gov.

