

Retaining Teacher Talent:  
**The View From Generation Y**

Video Insights Facilitator's Guide



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## Introduction

Although the teacher workforce in schools and districts can be viewed through many different lenses, viewing teachers through a generational lens allows school and district leaders to better understand how teacher attitudes, dispositions, and perspectives about the profession might change as a result of shifting demographics.

Understanding the next generation of teachers (Generation Y teachers) and knowing how to integrate them into and manage a multi-generational workforce—comprised of Generation X, Baby Boomers, and the Mature Generation—is critical for recruiting, retaining, and motivating excellent teachers for all students.

Generation	Born Between <sup>1</sup>
The Mature Generation	1925–1945
Baby Boomers	1946–1964
Generation X	1965–1976
Generation Y	1977–1995

Gen Y teachers have the following characteristics:

- Technological natives
- Confident, energetic, and eager to contribute
- Attracted to greater social purposes
- Eager to receive feedback on their performance
- Currently comprise 1/5 of the teaching force and are growing

This generation promises to be an essential component of a systemic solution to today’s public education challenges. Armed with knowledge about this incoming generation, school and district leaders can develop new policies and make improvements in their everyday educator talent management practices that better support effective teaching and learning and reflect the expectations and career preferences of teachers.

In an effort to obtain a better understanding of Gen Y teachers, Public Agenda and Learning Point Associates included an oversample of 241 Gen Y teachers in the national survey that they conducted as part of the Retaining Teacher Talent study. In addition, focus groups were conducted with Gen Y teachers.

<sup>1</sup> Year range for the Mature Generation is from Carter and Carter (2001). Year ranges for Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y are from Shaffer (2008). Other sources may use varying year ranges.

The accompanying video segments are taken from focus groups with Gen Y teachers as part of the study. Participants were asked to provide candid opinions on how they would change the profession and describe the greatest challenges they face as new teachers. This video chronicle highlights the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of young teachers as they navigate the toughest years of their career and explore how they can fit into the profession. More information about the Retaining Teacher Talent study and additional resources can be found at [www.retainingteachertalent.org](http://www.retainingteachertalent.org).

## Instructions for Using This Facilitator's Guide

This facilitator's guide is intended to be used to spark reflection and discussion about how principals, human resources officers, district policymakers, and other school and district leaders can better respond to members of Gen Y in ways that will effectively nurture and develop them as professionals. The facilitator's guide and accompanying video segments are designed for use during professional development workshops. Each section of the guide includes the following:

- Questions for a facilitated discussion about specific aspects of the teaching profession
- Perspectives of current Gen Y teachers on those topics

The facilitator's guide begins with a pre-video discussion that poses questions about how Gen Y differs from other generations. This discussion will allow school and district leadership to reflect on today's challenges and the approaches districts are taking to address them.

This guide is based on the survey questions asked of Gen Y teachers on the following topics:

- **Topic 1. Gen Y Views on Improving Teacher Effectiveness**  
This topic focuses on principal support, professional development, structures for collaboration and feedback, and evaluation systems as means of improving the effectiveness and retention of teachers.
- **Topic 2. Gen Y Views on the Future of the Teaching Profession**  
This topic focuses on giving Gen Y teachers a voice, improving the financial incentives to teach, and offering teachers ongoing growth opportunities to advance the teaching profession.

These topics allow districts to consider their systemic framework for managing educator talent and how today's models must change to respond to this generation while continuing to support a multi-generational workforce.

*Note to Facilitator: Video segments vary in length and are meant to be viewed and considered individually. Background information and discussion questions are presented for each video segment. It is recommended that the facilitator read the background information before showing the video segment and the discussion questions afterwards. However, the facilitator should use his or her discretion and present the material as deemed most appropriate for the audience.*

## **Pre-Video Discussion: The Talent Management Response to Today's Education Challenges**

Sometimes teachers from different generations view student needs differently and advocate competing solutions. School is now a high-stakes environment. Teamwork is essential to meeting today's unique challenges, and teamwork goes beyond congeniality and getting along. Teachers must address tough questions about the nature of teaching and learning, but everyone will have their own point of view—shaped in part by generational experiences. And just as previous generations have shaped the profession, Gen Y will do the same. Understanding Gen Y teachers and how the four generations interact with each other helps school and district leaders to better support their entire staff, benefiting school/district culture and ultimately student learning.

### **Discussion Questions**

- What education reform strategies and initiatives are being undertaken in your school/district to improve teacher recruitment, retention, and effectiveness? What do you see as the most important changes that need to be made to improve teacher quality?
- Are Gen Y teachers a help or a hindrance to improving the profession?
- What types of conversations, if any, have already taken place in your school or district about generational issues and ways that generations can work together to improve teaching and learning?

## Introductory Video: Who Are Our Gen Y Teachers?

As shown in this video segment, Gen Y will comprise nearly half of the workforce by 2020 (Shaffer, 2008). This demographic change will undoubtedly have an impact on the teaching profession and the strategies that leaders at schools and districts must adopt to successfully recruit, retain, and develop teachers. At the same time, Gen Y teachers share many of the same values and priorities with teachers of all ages. With their optimism and eagerness to improve teaching and the world around them, Gen Y offers a window of opportunity to advance aspects of the profession that have concerned teachers for many years.

### Discussion Questions

- Have you noticed an influx of younger teachers in your school or district that reflects this demographic change?
- Do the Gen Y teachers in your school or district seem different from other teachers in terms of their attitudes, personalities, or work styles? If so, how? How are Gen Y teachers similar to teachers of other generations?
- Have you experienced inter-generational conflicts or differences of opinion about teacher leadership, student assessment, use of technology, or other issues in your school or district?
- How do you get the greatest value out of different generations teaching together?
- How should school and district leaders (i.e., human resources personnel, principals, policymakers) change their organizational structure and processes to be attractive, responsive, and supportive of both Gen Y teachers and a multi-generation workforce? How should policies change to achieve the greatest benefit, commitment, and retention of Gen Y and employees of other generations?

## TOPIC 1. Gen Y Views on Improving Teacher Effectiveness

### Question 1. What do Gen Y teachers want from principals?

According to the survey conducted by Public Agenda and Learning Point Associates, two thirds of teachers who say they have effective principals also say their school has excellent working conditions; just one fourth of teachers with ineffective principals say the same. What types of principal supports are most important to Gen Y?

In this video segment, Gen Y teachers talk about the importance of principals being regularly present in their classrooms, making teachers feel appreciated, ensuring that new teachers are not loaded with unrealistic responsibilities, and supporting and championing teachers.

*Note to Facilitator: Before playing the video segment, ask the audience to reflect on these various supports that principals can provide and think about whether they agree with what is said in the video segment.*

#### Discussion Questions

- What did you hear in this video segment that you strongly agreed or disagreed with?
- Gen Y teachers say that they want principals present in their classrooms and at other school events. In what ways can you increase your visibility?
- Gen Y teachers want to know they are making a difference. When are the best opportunities to provide deserved praise to teachers? What types of signs of appreciation mean the most to you as a principal?
- Are the newer teachers in your school sometimes loaded with the types of responsibilities mentioned in the video segment? If so, how can this be resolved without upsetting veteran teachers?
- The Gen Y teachers in this segment indicate that principals must present a unified front when teachers are confronted by parents or misbehaving students. Have you noticed a difference in responses when a unified front is or is not presented? What are the challenges as a principal taking this approach? Can changes be implemented to your school or district disciplinary procedures to better support teachers?

## Question 2. What opportunities for growth and collaboration appeal to Gen Y teachers?

### 2a. How do Gen Y teachers think professional development could be improved?

Ninety-four percent of the Gen Y teachers surveyed think that teacher effectiveness would be improved by enhancing *professional development* opportunities. High-quality professional development is job-embedded, ongoing, and differentiated. Meanwhile, 70 percent of the Gen Y teachers surveyed prefer regular, detailed feedback from their principals to general feedback in formal observations. This video segment presents some Gen Y teachers' perspectives on the professional development and feedback that they think would make them more effective.

#### Discussion Questions

- Are the professional development topic areas that Gen Y teachers discuss in this video segment (e.g., professional development on classroom management, cooperative learning, incorporating higher order thinking, and subject-specific professional development) available in your school or district?
- If not, do you think they should be? What types of professional development would be most beneficial and cost-effective?
- Do you perceive greater openness to constructive feedback among Gen Y teachers in your school or district? In what ways can additional opportunities be created for offering and receiving feedback?

## 2b. How do Gen Y teachers think collaboration and planning time could be improved?

Teachers of all generations like to collaborate with their peers. Gen Y teachers want to collaborate with more experienced colleagues as well as other novices so that they can share instructional strategies, align their lessons with one another, and deal more effectively with student discipline or motivational issues.

### **Discussion Questions**

- What types of structures for collaboration are in place in your school or district, and do you believe they are adequate?
- How can the principal or other leaders in the school help to ensure that the time teachers spend collaborating is constructive and does not disintegrate into a gossip or complaining session?
- What actions could you take to increase the amount of time that teachers have in their day for planning and collaboration?

### Question 3. What do Gen Y teachers want out of their evaluation process?

According to the survey conducted by Public Agenda and Learning Point Associates, 10 percent of Gen Y teachers think that student performance on standardized tests is an excellent measure of their performance as a teacher, and 19 percent think feedback from the principal and other administrators is an excellent performance measure. Student engagement in their coursework was identified as an excellent performance measure by 41 percent of respondents.

In this video segment, Gen Y teachers discuss the following:

- Whether a combination of formal observations, peer reviews by other teachers, and growth-based testing is a fair basis for evaluations
- How often they wish to be observed
- Who they wish to evaluate them
- The type of communication with evaluators that they value

*Note to Facilitator: Before playing this video segment, ask those in the audience who are responsible for conducting evaluations or hiring/training evaluators to reflect on how they might change future evaluations based on what they hear.*

#### Discussion Questions

- Are evaluations in your school or district based on multiple measures of performance (e.g., formal observations, peer reviews by other teachers, and growth-based testing)?
- Would the teachers in your school or district wish to be observed by the principal every two weeks or even every day at first?
- To what extent are teachers in your school or district evaluated by people with recent teaching experience? To what extent are teachers evaluated by people with a background in their subject area?
- How might the training of evaluators be improved based on what you heard?

## **TOPIC 2. Gen Y Views on the Future of the Teaching Profession**

### **Question 4. How important is it to give teachers a voice?**

Like many teachers from all generations, Gen Y teachers want to do all they can to help students learn and have ideas for improving the teaching profession to better meet students' needs. Gen Y teachers are energetic and eager to be at the center of such change and, as such, represent a tremendous opportunity for the education field to move forward.

In this video segment, Gen Y teachers express that having a voice is important, but only a few feel they have a voice at their school or district.

#### **Discussion Questions**

- In what ways are Gen Y teachers included in decision making at your school or district?
- Think of an important decision that was made recently in your school or district. How could the voice of Gen Y teachers have been more effectively brought to the table?

## Question 5. What financial incentives appeal to Gen Y teachers?

Ninety-two percent of the Gen Y teachers surveyed think that teacher effectiveness would be improved if teachers were paid more like doctors or lawyers. Forty-nine percent of Gen Y teachers (compared with only 29 percent of teachers of other generations) think that teacher effectiveness would be improved by tying teacher rewards to student performance. This video segment sheds light on the Gen Y perspective on financial rewards as a means of motivating and retaining teachers.

### 5a. How important are improved salaries?

In this video segment, the teachers are emphatic about the need for higher pay. This has been a longstanding issue in many districts.

#### Discussion Questions

- To what extent is the need for higher pay a problem in your district?
- What would improving teacher salaries in your district take?

### 5b. How important are incentives for teaching in hard-to-staff schools and subjects?

Nationally, 68 percent of the Gen Y teachers surveyed support financial incentives for teachers in classes with hard-to-reach students or high-need schools, whereas only 44 percent of Gen Y teachers support financial incentives for teachers in hard-to-staff subject areas. The video segment depicts both sides of the story.

#### Discussion Questions

- In light of the comments from Gen Y teachers in this video segment, to what extent would you push for such differential pay to fill shortage areas in your district?
- How would you communicate the reform to encourage teacher buy-in?

### 5c. How important are performance-based bonuses?

In this video segment, Gen Y teachers discuss the merits of performance-based bonuses as well as their concerns about being denied a salary bonus for reasons that seem out of their control.

#### Discussion Questions

- If your school implemented performance-based bonuses, what could you do to ease the concerns of teachers?
- What if your own pay was based on student performance? Would you feel the same way as these teachers?

### 5d. How important are flexible pension options?

Although more Gen Y teachers prefer a districtwide pension that guarantees retirement benefits to investing a portion of their salary into their own account (e.g., a 401K) (52 percent versus 39 percent), Gen Y teachers are less supportive of districtwide pension plans than are teachers of other generations (69 percent of whom favor this option). This video segment sheds light on the Gen Y attitude toward pensions.

#### Discussion Questions

- Do you think the pension options available in your district help to recruit and retain Gen Y teachers (only 56 percent of whom anticipate remaining as a classroom teacher for life)?
- What type of changes to pension policy do you think would be most welcome by the Gen Y teachers in your district?

## Question 6. How do Gen Y teachers see the profession advancing to allow for continuing professional growth?

Gen Y teachers want to continually grow and learn and will not be satisfied in a profession where they stagnate or are ill-prepared to be effective. This video segment conveys how Gen Y teachers are not seeking a silver-bullet solution but rather a whole host of advancements in the ways teachers are prepared, supported, evaluated, and provided professional development and opportunities to learn from one another. They also share future career aspirations. The video segment concludes with a discussion of the role of technology in the future of the profession.

### Discussion Questions

- Preparation, professional development, and opportunities for collaboration with and observation of other teachers are mentioned as important ways to advance the profession. Which can most easily be changed at your school or district?
- What are some changes that you can make immediately to advance teaching as a learning profession? What are some long-term changes that you can make?
- For teachers who want to eventually partake in curriculum development, teacher training, or other leadership activities, are there opportunities in your school or district to help them explore their interests?
- How can hesitant or resistant teachers be encouraged to embrace technology to help their students learn what they need to know in the 21st century?

## Conclusion

These video segments shed light on what some Gen Y teachers are hoping that leaders in their schools and districts will change to improve teacher retention and effectiveness. Although teachers may not necessarily agree on each of the topics raised in the video segments, hopefully the call for reform by these Gen Y teachers will inspire discussion among teachers and school and district leaders that will lead to improvements in the profession.

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## About Learning Point Associates

Learning Point Associates is a nonprofit educational consulting organization with 25 years of direct experience working with and for educators and policymakers across the country to transform education systems and student learning. Our vision is an education system that works for all learners, and our mission is to deliver the knowledge, strategies, and results so educators will make research-based decisions that produce sustained improvements throughout the education system.

Learning Point Associates manages a diversified portfolio of work ranging from direct consulting assignments to major federal contracts and grants. Since 1984, Learning Point Associates has operated the regional educational laboratory serving the Midwest—initially known as the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory® (NCREL®) and now known as REL Midwest. Learning Point Associates also operates the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, National Charter School Resource Center, Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center, and Great Lakes West Comprehensive Center.

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