

**Family First- Employee Retention through Competitive Benefits**  
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**Research Question**

How would paid parental leave influence employee retention in the educational sector?

**Rationale**

Educators commit to their profession because they are dedicated to our youth, their futures and the ambition of continued learning. Incontrovertibly then, family benefits are an appealing incentive for educators when considering their place of employment. It is currently the expectation that medical, dental and vision benefits be provided to spouses, partners and family members as well as some form of mental health support. However, there remains a significant deficit in the majority of school districts across this country with the absence of paid parental leave. While educators will always be advocating for raises to appropriately compensate our highly trained and dedicated employees, this is a long overdue consideration that needs to be implemented nationwide as a way of showing educators that their families matter too.

**Literature Review**

Literature and current research on employee retention is partially incomplete due to the neoteric pandemic however, statistics in recent years show recurring trends. This trending data shows that the majority of employees who can easily access their benefits said they feel loyal to their employer (2). This information can be further reiterated through analyzing data such as The Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) 2018 employee benefits survey that found that 92% of employees feel that benefits are important to their overall job satisfaction. However, nearly one third cited their current benefits package as a top reason to look for a new position with a different employer in the next 12 months (7). This is cause for significant concern in the education sector as there is nationally an average annual turnover rate for education services of 27.2% (4).

Further investigation shows that employers providing paid family leave report that it's both good for their workers and good for their businesses: morale is higher, productivity increases, and the company is better able to attract talent and engage and retain employees (3). While compensation is typically the biggest expense for a company, it is also what keeps employees. Therefore, a competitive wage plus the relevant benefits are a necessary sacrifice companies can make to retain employees (8). A study done at Rutgers University in 2012 showed that women who took paid leave are 93 percent more likely to be in the workforce 9 to 12 months after a child's birth than women who take no leave. Another study showed that mothers who were able to take paid family leave then increased their work hours, and likely their wages, by 10 to 17 percent one to three years later (3). Companies are starting to recognize and adapt the fiscally responsible decision of offering paid family leave for employee retention. When Google extended its paid leave from 12 weeks to 18 weeks, attrition among young

mothers dropped by 50 percent (10). When Accenture extended its paid maternity leave from 8 weeks to 16 weeks, attrition among mothers dropped by 40 percent. And when Aetna expanded its maternity leave, the share of women returning to work jumped from 77 to 91 percent (9).

As previously explored, it is apparent that the United States is significantly lacking in their support of parental leave. Currently, the United States, on a federal level, only has the protections of the Family and Medical Leave Act, (FMLA) which was passed in 1993. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides certain employees with up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave per year. While this does apply to all public agencies, all public and private elementary and secondary schools, and companies with 50 or more employees, there are numerous individuals who do not meet the required qualifications for eligibility. There are also additional stipulations in place such as longevity at the company, or the fact that any time off needed prior to birth, for example pregnancy complications would also count against these 12 weeks (5). This rudimentary safeguard pales in comparison to what other countries, such as Finland, has to offer. In Finland, maternity leave begins at the earliest 50 working days, and at the latest 30 working days, before the estimated due date. When maternity leave begins, Kela (Finnish Social Insurance Institution) will pay maternity allowance (*äitiysraha*) for a duration of 105 working days. Fathers are also allotted 54 working days of leave after the birth of a child during which Kela will pay the paternity allowance to cover wages. Upon completion of maternity leave, either parent may elect to take paternity leave. This is an additional 158 days of paid leave available to either parent on top of the maternity/paternity leave already completed and is also funded by the Finnish Social Insurance Institution, Kela (6).

### **Study Design**

In order to measure the importance of paid parental leave, data collection from the education sector on a national level was essential. It was relevant to not only inquire as to what benefits were being provided, but additionally the individual's knowledge of their benefit packages. Further, the presence or lack of financial burden to employees was imperative to assess. A collection of questions were compiled to accumulate this information into a digital multiple choice survey. This survey was shared with individuals locally and nationally and I received 82 responses. I first began by sharing with local constituents and requested that they share it with other educators nationally to acquire multifarious representations.

### **Data Analysis Summary**

The targeted population for data collection was anyone within the education sector on a national level. Responses were received from 82 individuals and included 57 teachers, 14 assistants, 3 administration, 2 custodial, and 6 other. Of these 82 individuals, participants were asked how long they have worked for their current district with the following response options provided: 0-3 years, 4-10 years, 11-15 years and 16+. 75% of responses were in the 4-10 year bracket, 12% were 0-3 years, 8% were 11-15 years and 4% were 16+ years. They were then asked if their current district provided paid parental leave and were able to respond with yes, no or unsure. In response to this question, 90% of participants stated that their current district did not provide paid maternal/paternal leave. 8% stated that they were

unsure and 2% said that their district did provide paid leave. As a follow-up question, participants were then asked whether receiving paid parental leave as a benefit would be beneficial to them at any point in their career. 84% of respondents stated that they would benefit from paid family leave. 9% responded that it would not have affected them and 7% chose the option unsure for their response. The individuals who responded yes to the previous question, were then asked to what extent they were affected financially. 68% responded that they were significantly affected by a lack of paid leave, 23% were moderately affected, 8% were minimally affected and 1% selected that they were not financially affected. Finally, participants were asked if at any point they had considered other employment options due to parental leave benefits to which 62% responded yes and 38% responded no.

### **Findings**

Based on the results from this survey as well as data collected from reviewing other literature and sources, it is palpable that family leave is essential in employee retention in the educational sector.

### **Recommendations**

By making strategic choices in budgeting for employee compensation, paid parental leave could easily be implemented in districts nation-wide and have a significant impact on the lives and families of many educators. Primarily, these advancements need to be materialized at the local level with consistent efforts being made for state and then federal law as the ultimate result. Nominally, districts on a local level should provide 7 weeks of paid parental leave at 100% of an employee's current salary followed by an additional 7 weeks allowed regardless of what if any pay is provided by the employer. This consideration would at least meet recommendations put forth from The International Labour Organization(ILO) that recommends a minimum of 14 weeks leave. The ILO also states in their recommendation that employees should be paid for the entire 14 week period in which they are on leave (1). Ultimately, all companies in the United States should be required to accommodate employees with paid parental leave for 6 months following birth or adoption. This proposition is in accord with the World Health Organization's resolution of 6 months in order to support healing mothers, parent/child bonding and encourage breastfeeding.

### **Bibliography**

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**Appendix**

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## Paid Parental Leave for Educators Survey

1. What is your current role in your district?

*Mark only one oval.*

- teacher  
 classroom assistant  
 administration  
 custodial  
 other

2. How long have you been in your current district?

*Mark only one oval.*

- 0-3 years  
 4-10 years  
 11-15 years  
 16+ years

3. Does your district offer paid parental leave?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No  
 I don't know
-

4. Would paid parental leave benefit you or your family at any point in your career?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No  
 I'm not sure

5. If you answered yes in the question above, did you or would you find yourself in financial stress due to unavailable paid leave?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Significantly  
 Moderately  
 Minimally  
 No

6. At any point during your career in education, have you considered other employment options due to parental leave benefits?

*Mark only one oval.*

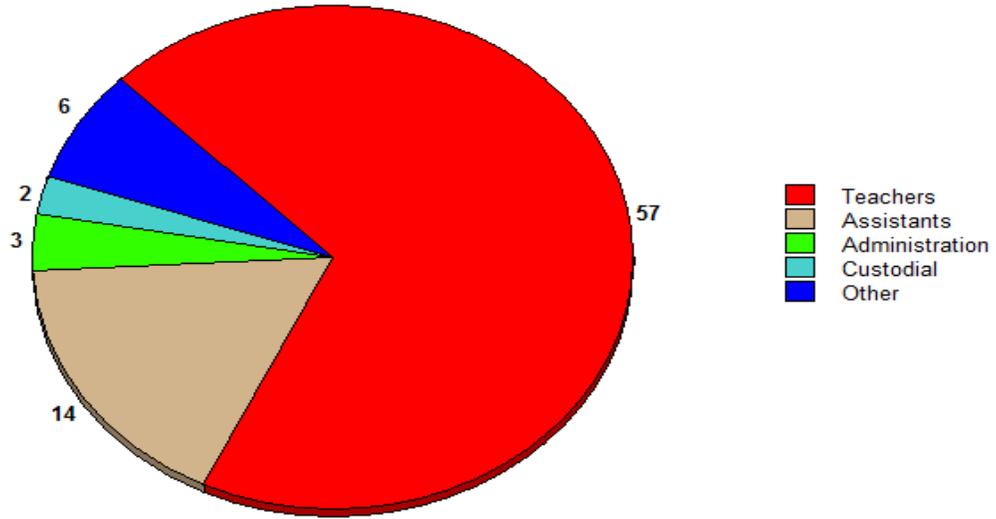
- Yes  
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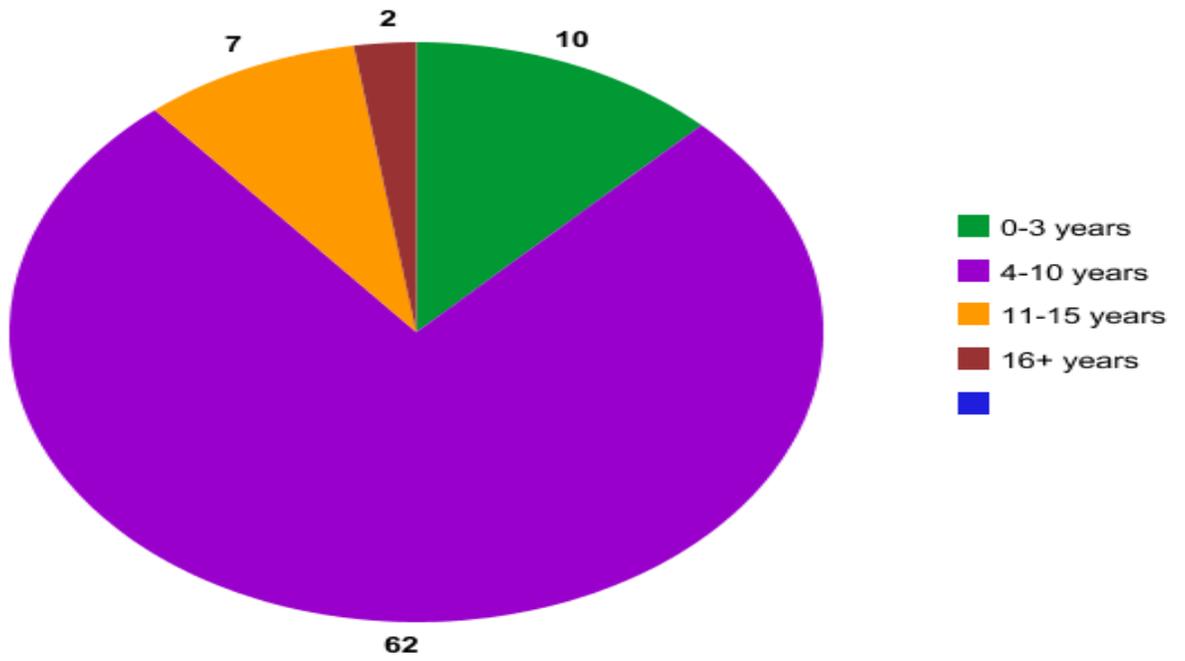
Google Forms

**Results**

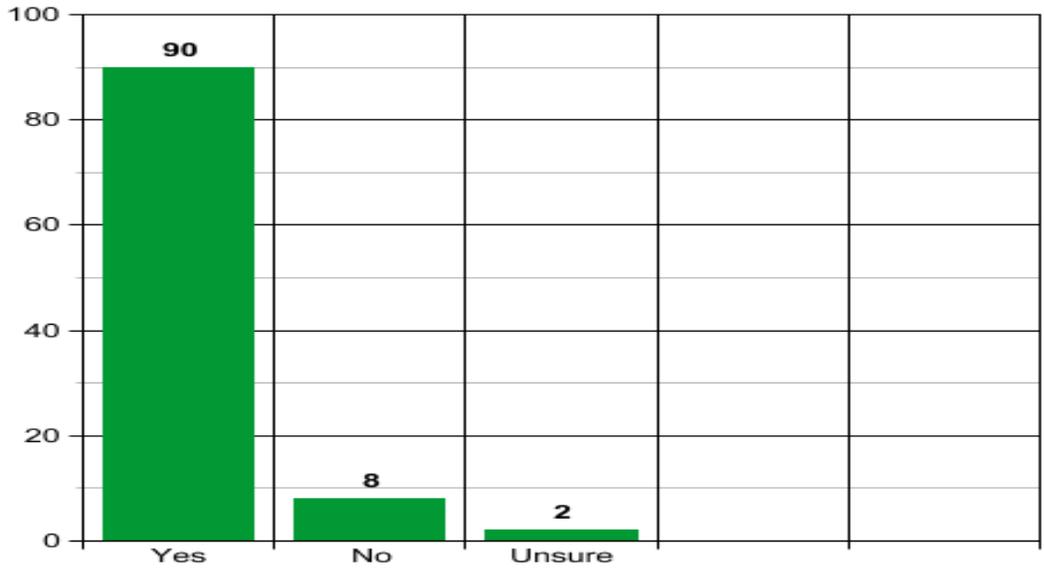
**Position in District**



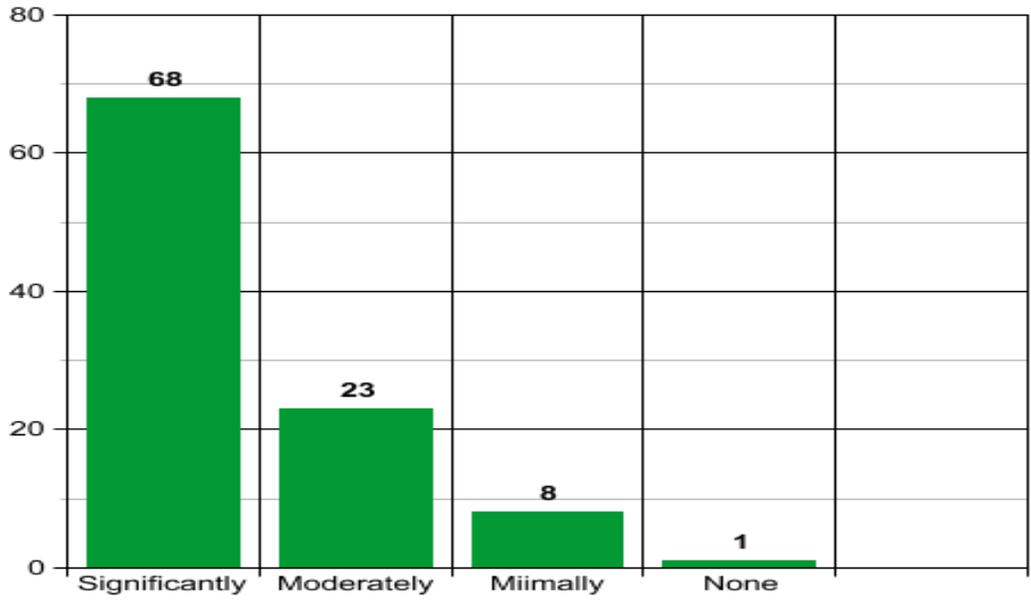
**Years of Service**



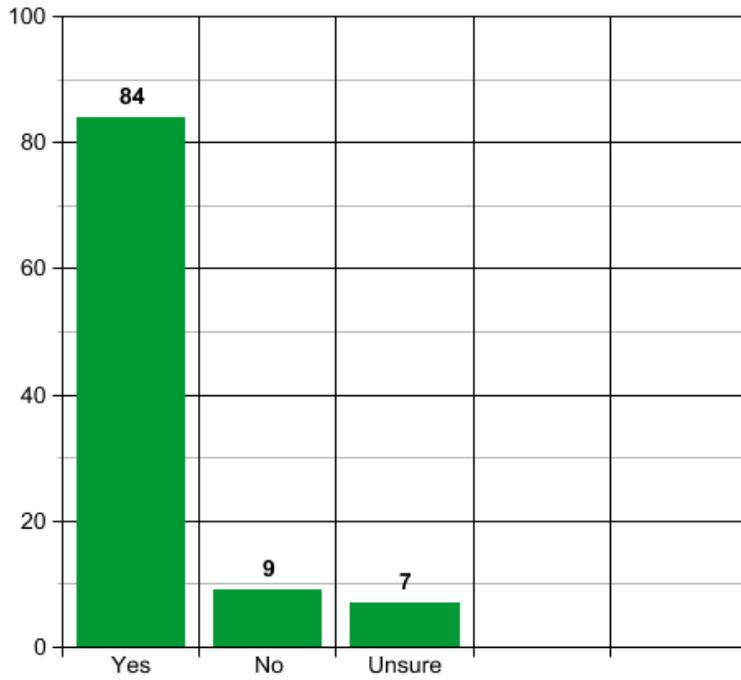
Paid Parental Leave



Financial Stress Due to Unpaid Leave



Would paid leave benefit you?



At any point during your career in education have you considered other employment options due to parental leave benefits?

