THE STAKES ARE HIGHER FOR BOARDING SCHOOLS

How to Leverage Your Professional Growth System to Drive Retention

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TABS

Presenters



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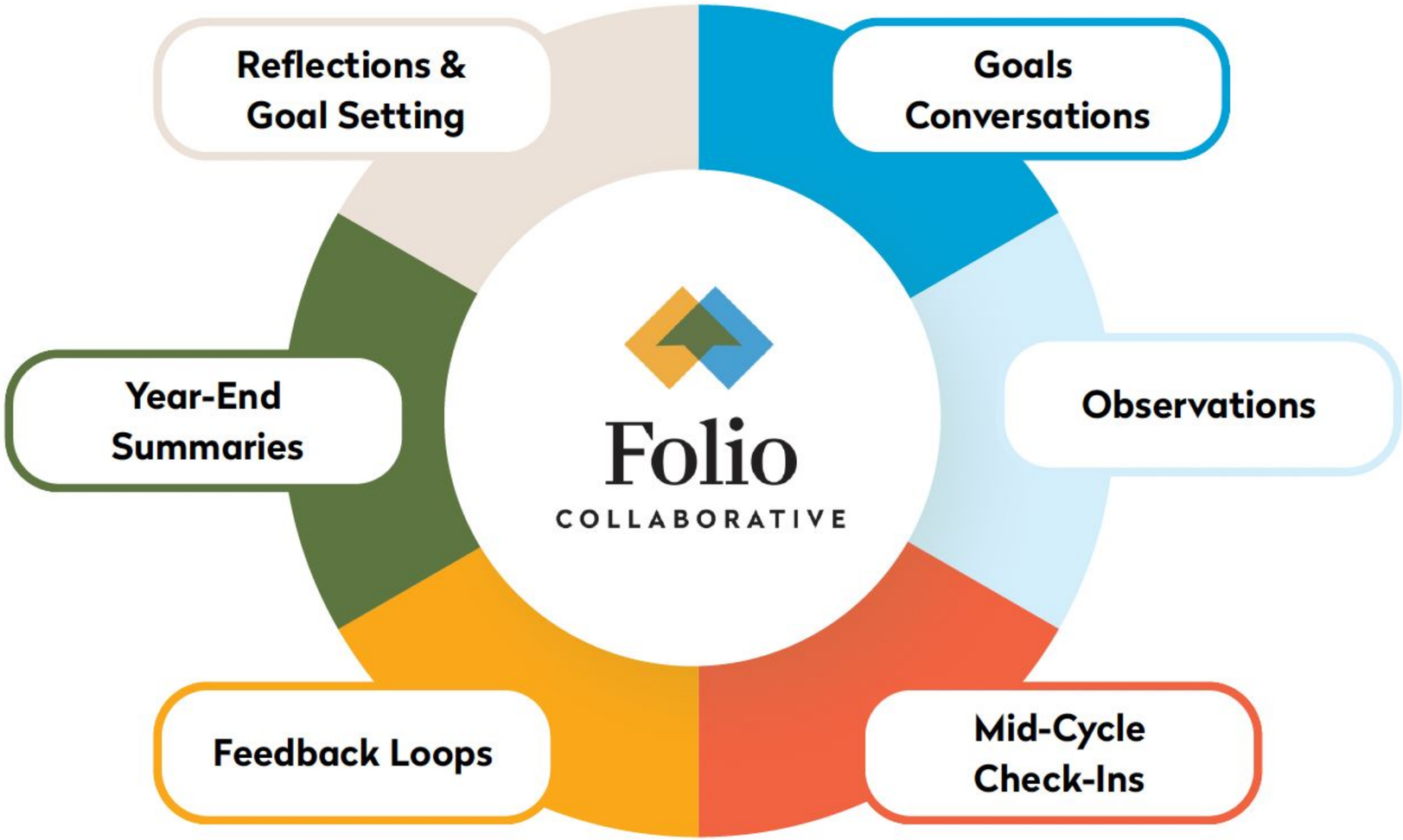
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Folio
COLLABORATIVE

Folio Growth Process



Why retention matters...

The value proposition for any school is providing an exceptional educational experience for students.

Faculty and staff are the ones who deliver it.

Professional growth is core to your mission,

not an add-on.

Why retention matters...

58%

Heads of School reporting fewer applicants than the year before

(NAIS, 2023)

41%

Heads of School saying candidate quality had gotten worse

(NAIS, 2023)

"NAIS Snapshot on Staff and Faculty Turnover" February 2023

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Why professional growth matters for retention...

1 in 3

Educators who see a clear path to advance

(SAIS, 2026)

9 in 10

Educators who want more learning and growth opportunities

(SAIS, 2026)

SAIS, "Designed to Last: Reimagining the Employee Value Proposition in Independent Schools." 2026

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2025 NAIS Faculty Survey on Reward and Recognition

40%

of faculty feel recognized by supervisors

21.7%

believed their school had a real culture of recognition

78%

said recognition impacted their commitment to remain at their school

NAIS Research: Executive Summary of "Keeping the Charge: The Energizing Effect of Rewards and Recognition on Faculty in Independent Schools" 2025

Leadership support was the single strongest predictor of teacher morale and retention

81%

Teachers who view professional development as one of the most meaningful forms of recognition

77%

Teachers who view a personal note from a supervisor as one of the most meaningful forms of recognition

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NAIS Research: Executive Summary of "Keeping the Charge: The Energizing Effect of Rewards and Recognition on Faculty in Independent Schools" 2025

“Turnover is not just costly; it’s destabilizing. It interrupts relationships, disrupts programs, and can erode trust in the institution.

In this context, recognition is more than a kind gesture—it is a strategy.”

Excerpt from “Keeping the Charge: The Energizing Effect of Rewards & Recognition on Faculty in Independent Schools”

Peabody Vanderbilt University & NAIS, 2025.

What's at Stake for Boarding Schools?

INDIVIDUALLY

Take a minute and make a list of all the "hats" you wear currently at your school.

TURN AND TALK

How many teams or groups do you regularly meet with across your roles?

In boarding schools, you can't be great at every role...

1

How can you improve your systems that support professional growth?

2

How can you build in more regular feedback to support and celebrate your faculty?

3

How can you leverage coaching to improve practice and expand skills?

4

How can you create more opportunities for teacher leadership?

Millbrook School

- Located in Millbrook, NY.
- Millbrook is an independent, coeducational, college preparatory boarding school serving students in grades 9-12.
- Folio member since 2021.

MILLBROOK

NON SIBI SED CUNCTIS

1931

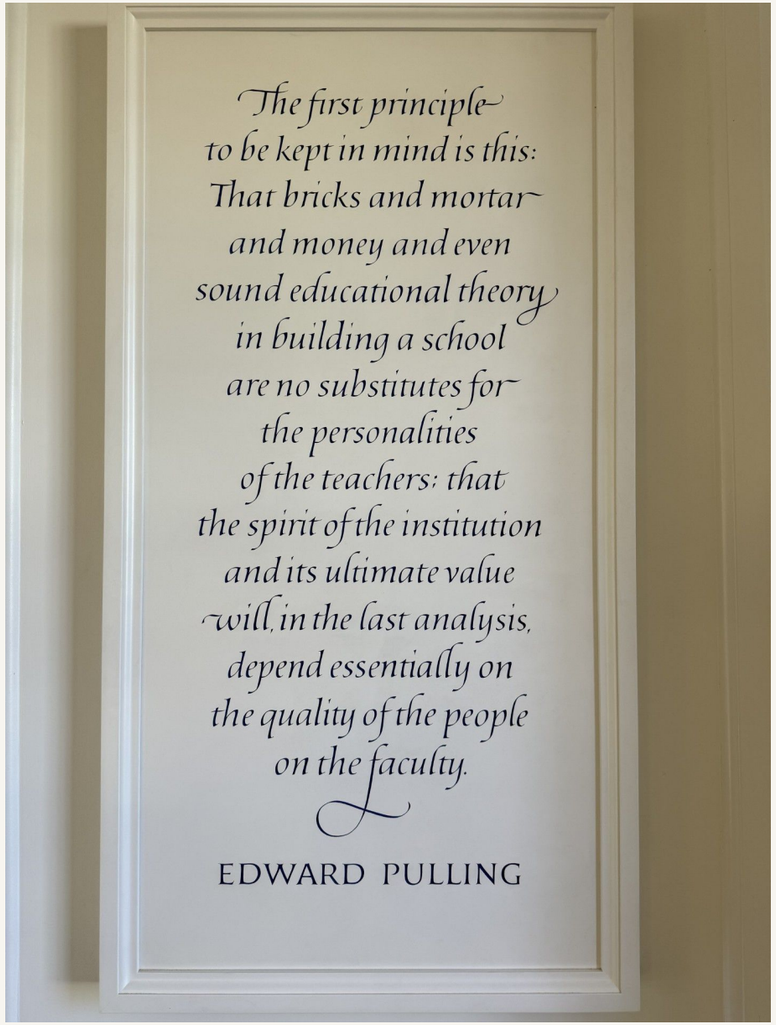
This is water.

David Foster Wallace, Kenyon College, 2005

MILLBROOK'S FIRST PRINCIPLE · 1928

"Bricks and mortar and money and even sound educational theory in building a school are no substitutes for the personalities of the teachers; the spirit of the institution and its ultimate value will, in the last analysis, depend essentially on the quality of the faculty."

Edward Pulling's proposal for a new school



NON SIBI SED CUNCTIS 1931

TRACK 1 · NEW FACULTY

Survive, jive, thrive

Survive

- Week-long orientation that builds culture, not policy
- 4–5 cohort meetings through the year
- Mentor groups of 2–3, off campus
- Co-advisory

Jive

- Know colleagues by first and last name
- See the cadence of the year
- Know students' stories and who to go to
- Serve as an advisor and welcome new faculty

Thrive

- Bring an idea to make us better
- Test a new approach
- Work with colleagues to rethink curriculum and programs
- Pilot an initiative
- PD
- Formal feedback

OUR STUDENT MISSION, EXTENDED TO FACULTY

Every adult, known and needed

Noticed

We see adults' work clearly and name it out loud, on purpose rather than by chance.

Summer faculty read: John Mason, The Discipline of Noticing

Mattering

Feeling valued and adding value: knowing your work shapes the community, with real agency in it.

Jennifer Breheny Wallace, Mattering

Voice

Every adult is heard and helps shape what comes next.

Quaker-style Temperature Check in faculty meetings; think tanks on big ideas at meetings and in-service days

Growth

Feedback and feedforward, anchored in each teacher's own goals: a path forward we build together.

Goal-setting, observation and conversation, every year

Three tracks for adult growth

1

New faculty

The first three years: getting oriented, connected and contributing

2

In the cycle

Annual goals and observations, plus a deeper review in years 3, 6 and every five years

3

The “99% list”

Improvement and offboarding plans. Kept completely separate from growth and Folio, on purpose.

TRACK 2 · IN THE CYCLE

Teachers set the goals; observers use them as the lens

Every year

- Teachers set their own goals
- Department chairs make short, frequent, unannounced visits
- At least two observations per semester; usually many more followed by conversations

Years 3 and 6, then every five years

- Self-assessment and a goal-setting conversation
- Team: department chair, dean of faculty or academics and a colleague the teacher picks
- At least 9 observations and can include areas outside the classroom
- Student survey, artifacts, written summary and conversation

“Robust enough to feel meaningful, flexible enough to adapt, and realistic enough to sustain.”

Frequent, low-stakes feedback becomes routine

When colleagues work and live together, routine feedback takes the anxiety out of being observed.

Goal-anchored observation

The teacher's own goals are the lens

Teacher agency

Short and frequent visits

Kim Marshall's model: a truer picture of daily practice

Lessens anxiety

Notice and wonder framework

Hallway follow-up/planned conversations

"Did you get my notes? I wanted to commend you on..."

Spotlights

Scheduled conversations and Mid year check-ins

Temperature Check

Faculty meetings: concerns with recommendations, stories, closing appreciations

Building a common vocabulary

2025–26 STAY INTERVIEWS

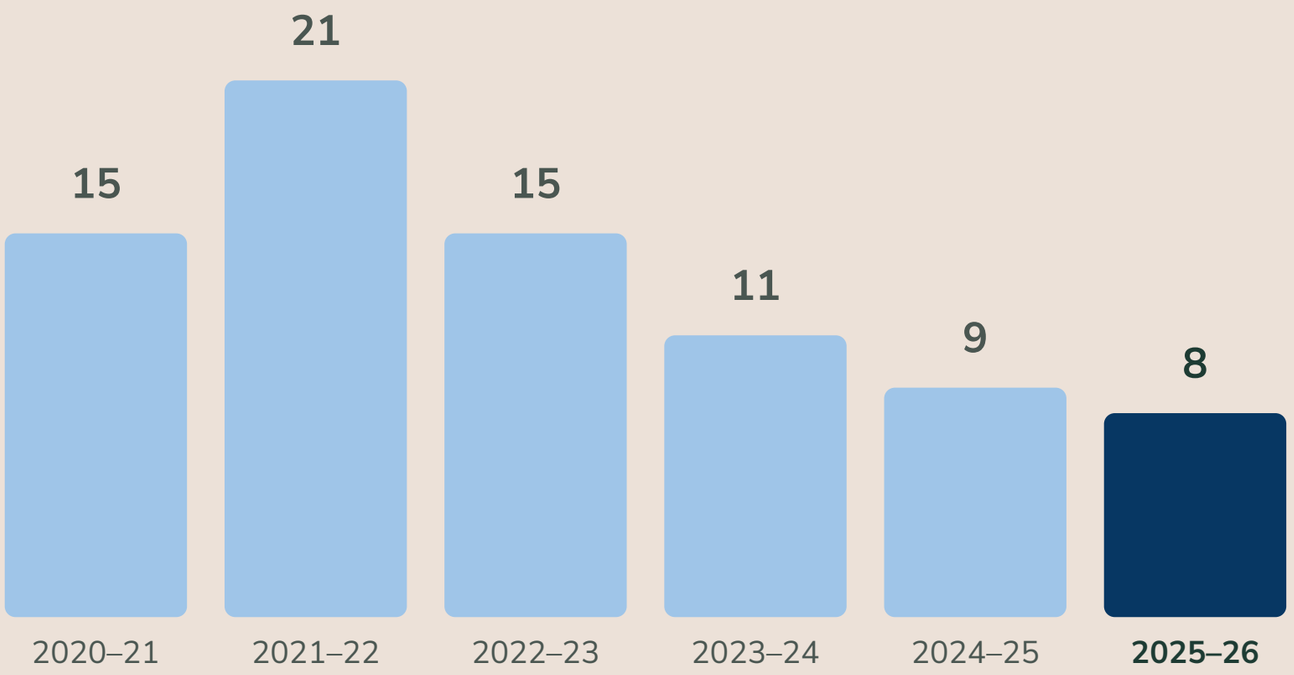
Faculty love the work and feel the load

> “I love it here.”
>
> Said unprompted

- The work is meaningful, and the cumulative load of boarding life is heavy
- Advising high-need students is the most taxing/unpredictable part of the job
- Faculty want more proactive support for newer colleagues and more comprehensive feedback for their many roles
- Strong appetite for cross-department talk about teaching

We sent the themes back to the whole faculty.

New faculty hires fell from 21 to 8



1 in 4 → 1 in 11

Share of our roughly 85–90 faculty who were new that year, 2021–22 vs. 2025–26

Onboarding takes about three years, so every teacher who stays past year 3 is an investment kept.

Next: feedback loops for dorms and athletics

Residential life

- Dorm parents and dorm heads hold structured conversations with Student Life
- Likely next step: every dorm parent meets with Student Life
- Constraint: dorm heads get extra pay, not extra time

Athletics

- Head varsity coaches already ran student surveys
- New: structured check-ins with the athletic department
- Now documented in Folio, not just informal

TURN AND TALK · 60 SECONDS

Where do the adults at your school go unnoticed?

This is water.

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Pomfret School

- Located in Pomfret, CT.
- Pomfret is an independent, coeducational, college preparatory boarding and day school serving students in grades 9-12 and post-graduates.
- Folio member since 2015.

POMFRET
SCHOOL

At Pomfret, retention starts with “stay conversations”...

1

What gives you the most energy during the week, and what drains it the most?

2

What does support look like for you?

3

What tools, resources, or facility fixes would make your daily work easier?

4

If you could change one thing about your role or our campus culture tomorrow, what would it be?

POMFRET
SCHOOL

Formal Holistic Evaluation

POMFRET SCHOOL

YEAR ONE AT POMFRET

ONE TIME IN YEAR 2-3

ONE TIME IN YEAR 4-6

EVERY FOUR YEARS AFTER YEAR 6

Key Times for Added Support

POMFRET SCHOOL

YEAR ONE

- Twice-monthly meetings with DoF and key administrators
- Focus on culture and logistics

YEARS 2-4

- Monthly cohort meetings
- Work with peer coaches
- Focus on building self-efficacy

YEARS 7-10

- We have a few ideas…

Proposal for Supporting Faculty in Years 7-10

YEAR 7

Community
Host a social event for colleagues on the school's dime.

YEAR 8

Growth
Engage in an off-site PD experience in an area of greatest interest.

YEAR 9

Time
Reduce responsibilities by one (a section, a season, or dorm duty) for one year.

YEAR 10

Support
Receive coaching from a senior administrator of your choice.

POMFRET
SCHOOL

Activity: Retaining Faculty in Years 7-10

INDIVIDUALLY

Brainstorm some ideas you could try at your school

TURN AND TALK

What is resonating?

What is a next step you could take for planning?

Oregon Episcopal School

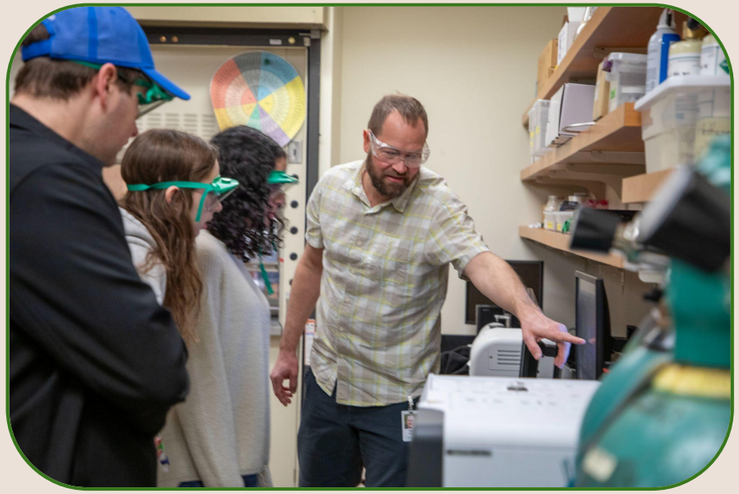
- Located in Portland, OR.
- Oregon Episcopal School is an independent Episcopal school serving nearly 880 students from Pre-K through Grade 12, including approximately 60 boarding students from around the world in Grades 9-12.
- Folio member since 2025.



Asha Appel
All School Director of
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Systems that Support the Beliefs

- Faculty Growth and Development Cycle
- Teacher Accountability for Continuous Growth
- Separation of Growth and Evaluation
- Common language for mission-aligned instructional goals
- A bespoke tool that centers the craft at learner-centered teaching at OES
- Goal-setting that allows for for autonomy
- Coaching that provide support and creates a culture where teachers see themselves as learners
- Recursive and continuous iteration





OES

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Our Tool—The CET Characteristics of Effective Teaching

- Cultivate Student Agency
- Make Learning Visible
- Model Lifelong Learning
- Be a Warm Demander
- Differentiate Instruction
- Cultivate Belonging



Cultivate Student Agency



− Scaffold learning with a goal of independence

- How do students in my classroom engage in questioning, exploration, and reflection to deepen their understanding?
- In what ways do I create opportunities for students to make meaningful choices in their learning?
- Where and how do I observe students actively exploring ideas, materials, or processes with curiosity and purpose?
- How do my classroom routines and structures promote independence, ownership, and shared responsibility for learning?

+ Assess in service of ongoing learning

+ Equip students with strategies that allow them to overcome challenges independently

OES

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Collaborating as a Community of Learners

- Scrappy Innovators—the best PD is right here!
- Teacher leaders as Coaches
- Cross divisional cohorts as part of the Faculty Growth Cycle
- Matching up (and scheduling!) peer partners with those with similar goals OR those whose practice might support your goals
- Template of how to observe:
  - Which CET reflective questions do you want to use to observe your partner's class?
  - Through the lens of your current goal, what did you notice the teacher doing? The students?
  - What teacher moves or strategy do you think you could try tomorrow?
  - What about what the teacher did do you want to learn more about?



OES

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Key Takeaways

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1. Growth and retention are the same conversation
2. You're already doing the work, so make it count
3. Feedback should be frequent, low-stakes, and shoulder-to-shoulder
4. Nobody is great at everything, so support growth in each role
5. Build a system that outlasts any one leader

Is your growth process keeping your best educators?

Reflection Tool

Strong educator retention rarely comes from one initiative alone, but grows out of a professional growth process that gives people clarity, support, belonging, and room to grow over time.
Use this quick reflection to assess where your current approach is strong and where it may need more intentional support.

Section 1: Alignment

	Rating
Faculty goals are clearly connected to the school's mission, priorities, or annual themes.	----------
Teachers understand how their growth work contributes to a larger, shared direction.	----------
School leaders can explain how professional growth supports long-term school goals.	----------

Section 2: Support & Culture

	Rating
Faculty experience professional growth as supportive rather than performative.	----------
Teachers receive meaningful feedback multiple times throughout the year to support growth.	----------
The adults in our school feel seen, supported, and encouraged in their development.	----------

Use this quick reflection tool to assess where your current approach is strong and where it may need more intentional support

Folio Signature Workshop

Integrating SEL Competencies in Faculty Growth & Classroom Practice

- Date: January 27, 2027
- Time: 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM ET



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TABSVIP

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Please take a moment to evaluate this session

TABS

Thank you!

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