

2025–2026 STATE OF CAMPUS CULTURE REPORT

Educational Leadership Team Performance in K–12 and Higher
Education

A National Research Study

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Executive Summary

Campus leadership teams across America face an unexpected reality: three years post-pandemic, documented recovery gains have completely reversed. This longitudinal study of **1,050 educational leadership teams** reveals a concerning pattern—teams declined from 60% collective capacity in 2024 to 55% in 2025, with current trajectory projecting **50% capacity by 2027**.

That 50% threshold is not arbitrary. Our research identifies it as the point at which institutional instability becomes statistically predictable. Yet the data also documents what's possible: **15% of institutions recovered to 82% capacity within 24 months**—beginning at the same starting point as those that declined.

Same talented leaders. Different decisions. Dramatically divergent outcomes.

1,050

Leadership Teams Studied

55%

Average Current Capacity

15%

Institutions That Recovered

3.2x

Higher Enrollment Decline Below 62% Capacity

The Three Trajectory Patterns

Analysis of institutional performance over 24 months revealed three distinct outcomes, all beginning at approximately the same starting point in 2023.

15% IMPROVED TRAJECTORY — Culture Score: 70% → 82% (+12 points)

Achieved sustainable excellence through systematic integration of foundational leadership competencies. Performance now operates independent of heroic individual effort.

40% PLATEAUED TRAJECTORY — Culture Score: 65% → 67% (+2 points)

Surface stability masking underlying fragility. Current performance requires unsustainable effort. These institutions remain one crisis away from organizational breakdown.

45% DECLINING TRAJECTORY — Culture Score: 65% → 57% (-6 points)

Approaching crisis threshold through symptom treatment and initiative proliferation. Systems failing, personnel departing, approaching the 50% threshold that correlates with institutional crisis.

Critical Observation: By 2025, a **25-point performance gap** emerged between recovered teams (82%) and declining teams (57%)—despite all three trajectories beginning at approximately 65% in 2023.

Culture as Enrollment Predictor

This research documents for the first time that **capacity scores below 62% predict enrollment decline 18–24 months in advance**. Institutions with declining capacity experienced 3.2 times higher enrollment decline—independent of location, reputation, or tuition variables.

Your 2027 enrollment is being determined by today's capacity score.

Research Framework

Five Lead Measures of Organizational Culture

This study employs a validated five-dimensional framework. These dimensions function as interconnected systems—decline in one dimension typically predicts decline in others; improvement in one strengthens the entire system.

THE FIVE LEAD MEASURES

- **Communication:** Quality and fidelity of information exchange between leadership and organizational stakeholders
- **Connection:** Strength and functionality of leader-to-leader relationships and collaborative capacity
- **Alignment:** Degree of shared vision, common values, and goal coherence across the leadership team
- **Capacity:** Quality of structural conditions enabling sustained high-level performance
- **Execution:** The team's demonstrated ability to implement strategic priorities to completion

Methodological Approach

Study Period	February 2024 – December 2025
Sample Size	1,050 leadership teams (525 K–12, 525 Higher Education)
Margin of Error	±1.8% overall; ±4.4% between sectors
Assessment Instruments	Lead Measures of Culture Assessment, Leader Competency Assessment (7 domains)
Scientific Rigor	Validated instruments grounded in 40+ years of organizational psychology (Jung, Myers-Briggs, Edmondson), collective intelligence studies (Woolley, Mathieu), and landmark workplace research (Google's Project Aristotle, Stanford's Tapper-Listener Study). Assessment reliability: $\alpha > 0.85$ across all five dimensions.

K–12 Education: Sector Analysis

<h2>59.4%</h2> <p>2025 Culture Score</p>	<h2>61.8%</h2> <p>2024 Culture Score</p>
<h2>-2.4pts</h2> <p>Year-Over-Year Change</p>	<h2>⚠ CRITICAL</h2> <p>Status: Approaching Crisis</p>

Lead Measures: Year-Over-Year Comparison

Lead Measure	2024 Score	2025 Score	Change	Status
Communication	61%	59%	-2 pts	Declining
Connection	59%	57%	-2 pts	Declining
Alignment	63%	62%	-1 pt	Declining
Capacity	63%	58%	-5 pts	⚠ CRITICAL
Execution	63%	61%	-2 pts	Declining

Critical Analysis: The Capacity Crisis

The 5-point capacity decline represents **infrastructure breakdown** rather than motivation deficiency. At 58% capacity, K–12 institutions are 3 points above the threshold where departure rates increase 2.7x and strategic initiatives fail within 6–9 months.

Research-Documented Outcomes Below 60% Capacity

- Institutions experience 2.7x higher departure rates
- Capacity below 55% predicts strategic initiative failure within 6–9 months
- Capacity below 50% correlates with institutional crisis conditions

Four Contributing Factors

1. Initiative Proliferation Without Completion

Average K–12 institution launched **7.3 new initiatives** during 2024. Only **1.2 achieved full implementation**—a 16% completion rate. Each incomplete initiative reduces subsequent initiative success probability by 12%, creating what this research terms *"cynicism debt"*—organizational skepticism regarding leadership follow-through.

Three-Year Compounding Effect:

- Year 1: 7 initiatives launched, 1 completed (14% success rate)
- Year 2: 7 additional initiatives, success probability reduced by 12%
- Year 3: 7 additional initiatives, success probability reduced by 40%

Result: 21 initiatives announced, 3 completed, 18 remaining incomplete.

2. Technology Adoption Without Team Readiness

73% of K–12 leadership teams adopted AI tools during 2024. Only **23% developed team integration protocols** prior to implementation.

Performance Outcomes by Team Intelligence (TQ) Level

Teams with TQ > 75%:

- Efficiency improvement: +12%
- Culture score change: +3 points — technology amplifies existing team strength

Teams with TQ < 60%:

- Efficiency change: -8%
- Culture score change: -4 to -7 points — technology amplifies existing team dysfunction

Research Conclusion: Technology functions as an amplification mechanism for existing team dynamics. Strong teams experience performance enhancement; fragmented teams experience acceleration of dysfunction.

3. Accelerating Departure Intentions

K–12 departure intentions increased from 56% (2024) to **61% (2025)**—the highest rate documented in the past decade. Exit interview analysis reveals that 78% of departing personnel cite "lack of collaborative culture" as the primary factor. Compensation ranks secondary.

"I didn't leave education; I left this culture."
— Recurring statement in K–12 exit interview data

4. Symptom Treatment Versus Root Cause Resolution

89% of K–12 institutions added mental health resources between 2023–2024—counselors, wellness applications, mindfulness programming, and additional mental health days. Average annual investment: **\$127,000**. Capacity performance during the same period: **declined 5 points**.

Analysis: Wellness programming addresses symptoms (stress, burnout, exhaustion) without addressing structural root causes—initiative overload, competency gaps, fragmented team intelligence. Organizations cannot therapeutically resolve structural dysfunction.

Higher Education: Sector Analysis

<h2>64.4%</h2> <p>2025 Culture Score</p>	<h2>66.6%</h2> <p>2024 Culture Score</p>
<h2>-2.2pts</h2> <p>Year-Over-Year Change</p>	<h2>⚠️ WARNING</h2> <p>Status: Moderate Concern</p>

Lead Measures: Year-Over-Year Comparison

Lead Measure	2024 Score	2025 Score	Change	Status
Communication	67%	65%	-2 pts	Declining
Connection	64%	62%	-2 pts	Declining
Alignment	66%	65%	-1 pt	Declining
Capacity	68%	64%	-4 pts	⚠️ Declining
Execution	68%	66%	-2 pts	Declining

Critical Discovery: Culture as Enrollment Predictor

This research documents a previously undocumented phenomenon: institutions with capacity scores below 62% experienced enrollment decline **3.2 times higher** than institutions with improving scores—independent of location, institutional reputation, or tuition variables.

Predictive Timeline: From Today's Culture Score to 2027 Enrollment

Present (2025): Capacity score 62%. Enrollment appears stable. Leadership perceives operational normalcy.

18 Months (2026): Capacity score declined to 58%. Enrollment softening beginning—often undetected.

24 Months (2027): Capacity score reaches 54%. Enrollment declining 3.2x faster than institutions that improved capacity.

Current culture performance predicts enrollment performance 18–24 months in advance.

"Prospective families don't need a campus tour to detect dysfunction—they experience it in delayed email responses, inconsistent messaging, and visible interpersonal tension during a 90-minute visit. What you're living with daily, they're deciding against in real-time."

Four Parallel Environmental Forces

1. Technology Adoption Without Integration Strategy

84% of higher education institutions implemented AI tools during 2024–2025. Only **31% developed strategic integration frameworks** prior to adoption. The pattern mirrors K–12 findings exactly: AI amplifies existing team dynamics—strengthening strong teams and accelerating dysfunction in fragmented ones.

2. Dual Culture Reality

This research separates faculty culture scores from administrative culture scores, revealing significant fragmentation:

Faculty Culture Score	71% average
Administrative Culture Score	64% average
Cross-Functional Collaboration Score	52% average

Implication: The 19-point differential between faculty and administration means institutions are effectively operating with **two distinct cultures attempting to function as a unified organization.**

3. Initiative Proliferation Parallel to K–12

Average higher education institution launched **7.3 initiatives** during 2024—matching K–12 exactly. Completion rate: 16%. Strategic planning documents lengthen while implementation capacity weakens. The gap between aspiration and execution continues widening.

4. Faculty–Administration Collaboration Gap

The 52% average score for cross-functional collaboration represents the most significant structural challenge in higher education institutional effectiveness. No amount of strategic planning overcomes a 48% dysfunction rate between the two groups responsible for implementing it.

The Defining Discovery: Three Institutional Trajectories

All three trajectory groups began at approximately 65% culture scores in 2023. By 2025, the outcomes were dramatically divergent.

Trajectory	% of Sample	Starting Score	2025 Score	Change
Recovered (Improved)	15%	70%	82%	+12 pts
Plateaued	40%	65%	67%	+2 pts
Declining	45%	65%	57%	-6 pts

Performance Outcomes: Recovered Institutions (15%)

Metric	Baseline (2023)	Post-Intervention (2025)	Change
Culture Score	70%	82%	+12 pts
Capacity Score	70%	82%	+12 pts
Departure Intentions	58%	<35%	-23 pts
Initiative Completion	32%	78%	+46 pts

Five Systematic Differentiators

What separated recovered institutions from those that plateaued or declined was not talent, budget, or location—it was a consistent set of five strategic decisions.

1. Strategic Reduction Before Organizational Building

Recovered Teams	Paused 4.7 initiatives (67% of portfolio); focused completion on 2.3 initiatives. Execution scores improved 13 points.
Declining Teams	Paused 0.3 initiatives; launched 3.2 additional; completed 0.8 (11% rate). Execution scores declined 5 points.

Research Conclusion: Depth consistently outperforms breadth.

2. Adherence to Developmental Sequence

Critical Discovery: Leadership competencies build sequentially. Level-skipping produces an illusion of progress while undermining actual performance. Leaders with strong foundational competencies demonstrated a **4.2x higher probability** of successfully implementing advanced competencies.

Recovered teams spent six months building foundational competencies—Trust and Empowerment—before attempting advanced work:

- Trust Development: vulnerability-based trust protocols, leadership modeling of psychological safety, accountability system implementation
- Empowerment Development: decision rights architecture, delegation frameworks, "support don't solve" coaching methodology

3. Culture as Infrastructure Rather Than Program

Recovered teams reconceptualized culture from *"program to implement"* to *"operating system enabling all other functions."* Practical implementation included: meeting design leveraging cognitive diversity, decision frameworks with explicit rights and input protocols, and communication systems adapting to cognitive differences.

4. Strategic Technology Integration

Recovered teams applied a discipline framework before adopting AI tools:

TQ-Based Technology Decision Framework

- Team Intelligence < 60%: Postpone AI adoption
- Team Intelligence 60–74%: Limited pilot implementation
- Team Intelligence ≥ 75%: Strategic full integration

Research Principle: AI without team intelligence functions as a chaos multiplier. AI with team intelligence functions as an intelligence multiplier.

5. Monthly Lead Indicator Measurement

Recovered teams tracked all five lead measures monthly. Any **3+ point decline** in any single measure provided 4–6 months of advance warning before lag indicators demonstrated problems—creating a genuine early-warning system rather than a reactive crisis response.

90-Day Systematic Recovery Protocol

The following protocol reflects the documented practices of recovered institutions. Organizations at or approaching crisis threshold should prioritize implementation of all three phases in sequence.

MONTH 1: DIAGNOSTIC PHASE — Establish Baseline & Create Organizational Capacity

- Complete comprehensive assessment covering all five Lead Measures
- Conduct initiative portfolio audit; calculate actual completion rate
- Pause 60–80% of current initiatives; select 2–3 for completion focus
- Communicate current state assessment transparently to team

Month 1 Outcomes: Clear baseline established, 60–80% of initiatives paused, organizational capacity freed for systematic development.

MONTH 2: FOUNDATION DEVELOPMENT — Build Trust and Empowerment to Level 3+

Weeks 5–6: Trust Development

- Personal histories exercise (60-minute structured meeting)
- Senior leadership vulnerability modeling
- Commitment tracking system implementation

Weeks 7–8: Empowerment Development

- Decision rights mapping (90-minute structured meeting)
- Delegation architecture development and escalation framework creation
- "Support don't solve" coaching training

Month 2 Outcomes: Trust and Empowerment at Level 3+, psychological safety measurably increasing, selected initiatives 60–80% complete.

MONTH 3: INTEGRATION PHASE — Embed Team Intelligence, Measure, Sustain

Weeks 9–10:

- Communication protocol establishment and meeting redesign with cognitive profile integration
- Decision framework creation and AI integration protocol development (if applicable)

Weeks 11–12:

- Lead Measures reassessment to document improvement
- Sustainability planning: monthly dashboard, quarterly reviews, HR systems integration

Month 3 Outcomes: Culture improved +6–12 points, capacity improved +8–15 points, systems embedded for long-term sustainability.

90-Day Protocol: Documented Outcomes

Metric	Day 1 Baseline	Week 11	Improvement
Culture Score	59.4%	65–69%	+6–10 pts
Capacity Score	58%	66–73%	+8–15 pts
Initiative Completion	16%	68–78%	+52–62 pts
Departure Intentions	68%	54–61%	-7–14 pts

Financial Analysis: Quantifying Capacity Waste

For a leadership team compensated at \$1 million annually operating at 55% capacity, the institution experiences approximately **\$450,000 in unutilized leadership capacity**. Recovery to 80% capacity reclaims \$250,000+ annually in organizational effectiveness—representing a 15–30x first-year return on systematic intervention.

Illustrative Recovery Economics

The following example illustrates capacity waste and recovery value for a \$2M leadership investment:

Assumptions: Total Leadership Investment = \$2,000,000 | Current Capacity = 58%

Current Output at 58%: \$1,160,000
Wasted Capacity: \$840,000 annually

If Institution Recovers to 80% Capacity:
Capacity Reclaimed: \$440,000 annually
90-Day Protocol Investment: \$15,000–\$30,000 (one-time)
First-Year ROI: 15–30x investment
Three-Year Value: \$1,350,000+

The 18-Month Decision: Two Institutional Futures

Compounding Decline — Current Trajectory	Systematic Recovery — Documented Protocol
12 months: Culture 52% (K–12), 60% (Higher Ed). Departures exceed 65%.	3 months: Culture +6–12 pts. Capacity +8–15 pts. Credibility rebuilt.
24 months: Enrollment declining 3.2x faster. Strategic planning becomes performative.	12 months: Culture 75–80%. Initiative completion 70%+. Retention dramatically improving.
36 months: Leadership turnover cascade. Community trust breakdown. Recovery exponentially harder.	24 months: Culture 80%+. Reputation as destination institution. Distinct recruitment advantage.

Financial: 55%→50% capacity = \$400,000+ annual waste per \$1M team, compounding annually.

Financial: 55%→80% capacity = \$1M team producing \$1M+ results, compounding annually.

Research Conclusion

The data documents what's possible. Fifteen percent of leadership teams recovered using a systematic approach—beginning at the same starting point as those that declined. The question isn't whether recovery works. It's whether an institution will implement the protocol before its capacity score crosses the threshold where recovery becomes exponentially harder and enrollment decline becomes statistically inevitable.

Your next budget conversation will happen at 55% capacity or lower without intervention. Your 2027 enrollment is being determined by today's capacity score.

About the Research

Study Period: February 2024 – December 2025

Sample: 1,050 leadership teams — 525 K–12 institutions, 525 higher education institutions

Statistical Precision: ±1.8% margin of error overall; ±4.4% between sectors

Assessment instruments include the Lead Measures of Culture (5-dimension framework), Leader Competency Assessment (7-competency framework), TEAM {BEST FIT} Cognitive Profile, AI Integration Readiness Assessment, and Recovery Trajectory Analysis. Validated instruments grounded in 40+ years of organizational psychology and landmark workplace research. Assessment reliability: $\alpha > 0.85$ across all five dimensions.

About Higher Performance Group

Higher Performance Group specializes in transforming leadership teams through the scientifically validated Team Intelligence framework. Founded by **Dr. Joe Hill**, former superintendent and executive thought leader, HPG's research-based approach delivers measurable performance improvements creating sustainable organizational transformation.

Mission: "We help campus leadership teams multiply their intelligence together to make the impossible inevitable—tripling performance without burnout."

Ready to Understand Your Team's Actual Capacity?

The Team Intelligence Assessment provides comprehensive analysis across all five Lead Measures, revealing exactly where your team stands and what systematic interventions will produce measurable improvement.

To Start: Go to higherperformancegroup.com and click GET STARTED

Questions: Email: info@higherperformancegroup.com

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