The State of Ed-tech Leadership Development:

Executive Insights on Cultivating
a Leadership Culture

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Introduction

Five years after the COVID-19 pandemic, the K–12 education industry has experienced some of the most dramatic ebbs and flows in its history. Many companies had bet on their ability to maintain multiple years of hypergrowth—fueled heavily by COVID-related surges in demand—only to find they had overinvested and over-hired. Those unrealistic growth expectations have led to the reality of layoffs and strategic shifts for many companies.

In contrast, the industry is also seeing multiple examples of companies succeeding through steady, moderate growth. Although not without their own set of challenges, these companies continue to grind and persevere through obstacles.

It's a dynamic period for K–12 education executives. Whether one's company is expanding, restructuring, or going through a merger and acquisition process, these changes to their organization present opportunities for executives to step up and lead. In many cases, they find themselves in unfamiliar territory, and the need for mentorship and support has never been greater. However, as this report will detail, many companies struggle to effectively develop leadership talent.

In order to uncover the common obstacles to cultivating stronger leadership depth, the Ed-tech Leadership Collective conducted its third annual national **State of Ed-tech Leadership Development** survey. This report highlights the results of that survey and provides some comparisons to the data gathered in the surveys conducted in prior years.

The analysis looks closely at how the current corporate environment and market landscape are affecting leaders, and the ways in which companies cultivate and support their future leaders—or fail to do so. This report also looks at the mental and physical aspects of a dynamic industry and how it affects leaders in terms of burnout and imposter syndrome. As the industry strives for greater parity in opportunity for women and individuals from historically marginalized groups, it is important to examine the differences in how individuals are supported throughout their leadership journey and how organizations can be more effective when creating pathways to advancement.

Ultimately, the data and recommendations in this report are intended to provide organizations, managers, mentors, and aspiring leaders with a candid look at how effective they are at creating a culture of leadership, while providing them with some essential guideposts on how to continue to improve leadership development equitably.

The State of Ed-tech Leadership Development (2025)
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About the Survey

In December 2024, the Ed-tech Leadership Collective developed and sent a survey to individuals in managerial roles at ed-tech companies. All respondents were based in the United States or Canada and work at companies providing products and services related to teaching and learning in the U.S. K–12 market. Respondents were asked to complete a survey regarding "leadership development within educational technology companies."

In total, there were 124 survey respondents who fell into the following categories:

C-LEVEL EXECUTIVES — This group included CEOs, C-level Executives, as well as those who reported directly to the CEO as part of the executive team. This group represented 39% of the respondents. Leaders with the title of CEO represented 6% of all respondents.

DEPARTMENT HEADS — This group included Vice Presidents and Senior Directors who were the head of a department (such as Sales, Marketing, Product, Engineering, Customer Success, HR, etc.), but were not a part of the executive management team. This group represented 35% of the respondents.

FUNCTIONAL LEADERS — This group included Directors and Senior Managers who led a functional team within a major department but were not the department head. (For example, a Product Marketing Director who was not the Head of Marketing). This group represented 23% of the respondents.

PEOPLE MANAGERS — Individuals who were managers but did not fit any of the descriptions above. This group represented 3% of the respondents.
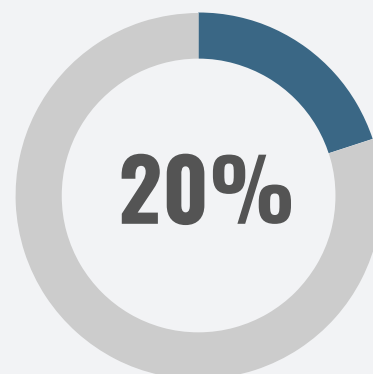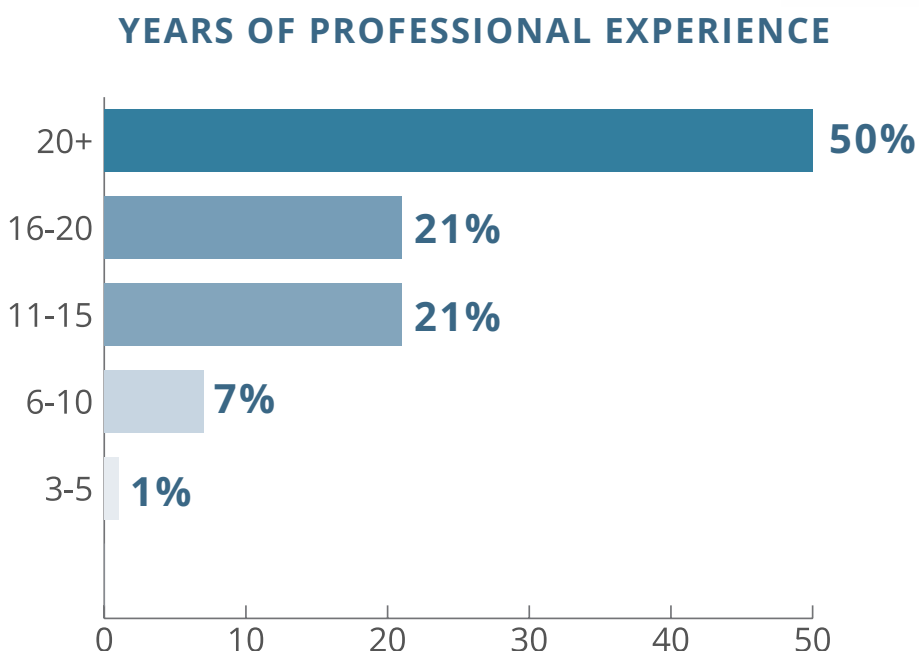
20%

of respondents indicated that they are a member of a historically marginalized group. This percentage was fairly similar across all levels of leadership.

71%

of respondents had more than 15 years of professional experience.
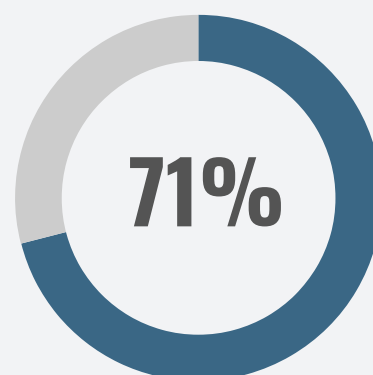
YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

The majority (71%) of respondents had more than 15 years of professional experience, with half (50%) of all respondents bringing more than 20 years of experience.

Years	Percent
20+	50%
16-20	21%
11-15	21%
6-10	7%
3-5	1%

There was a fairly even distribution of individuals from Marketing, Customer Experience, Product, and Executive Leadership (approximately 20% each), with a slightly smaller percentage of professionals from Sales, Operations, and Human Resources.

Fewer than a quarter (20%) of respondents indicated that they are a member of a historically marginalized group. This was fairly similar across all levels of leadership.

FUNCTIONAL AREAS REPRESENTED

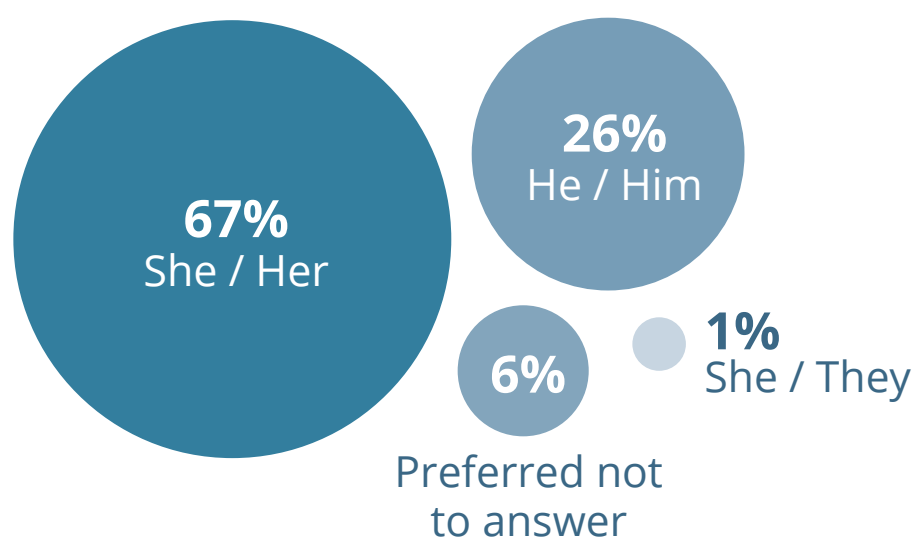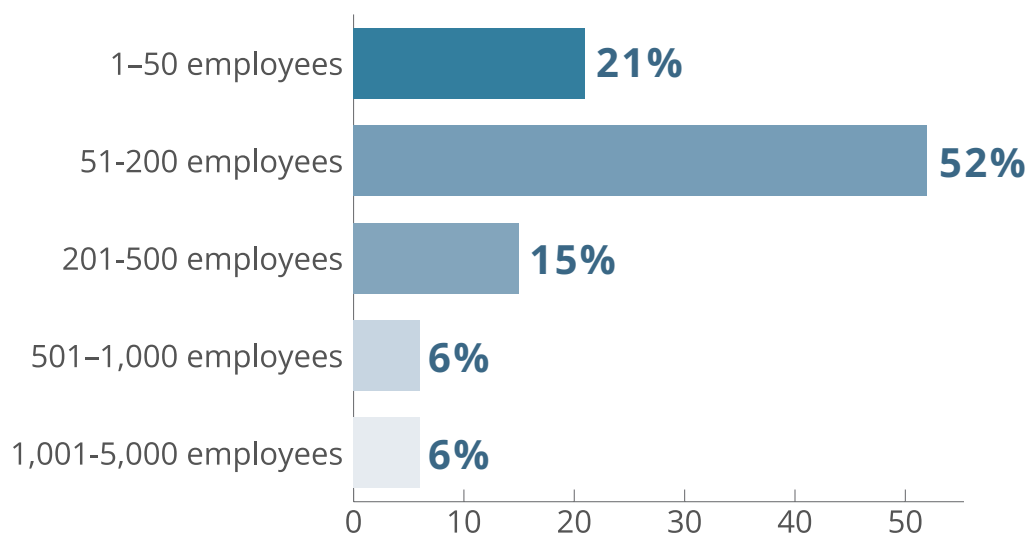| Functional Area	Percent
Customer Experience (including Customer Success, Implementation, and Customer Support)	22%
Product (including Curriculum, Engineering, Design, and Product Management)	20%
Executive Leadership	19%
Marketing	19%
Sales	12%
Operations, Human Resources, and "Other"	8%

Approximately two-thirds of respondents (67%) identified as female; this percentage was similar across all levels of seniority (C-level, Department Heads, and Functional Leaders. The percentage of female respondents across all C-level roles (39%) was similar to the percentage of male respondents in C-level roles (41%). However, among C-suite respondents, less than 1 out of 10 women were in the role of CEO, whereas male C-suite respondents were three times more likely to be in the CEO seat. This highlights significant disparities in access to C-suite and Chief Executive roles, particularly for women and individuals from historically marginalized groups. These findings underscore the importance of creating equitable and transparent pathways for leadership advancement, as detailed later in this report.

RESPONDENTS' GENDER

67%
She / Her

26%
He / Him

6%
Preferred not to answer

1%
She / They

COMPANY SIZE

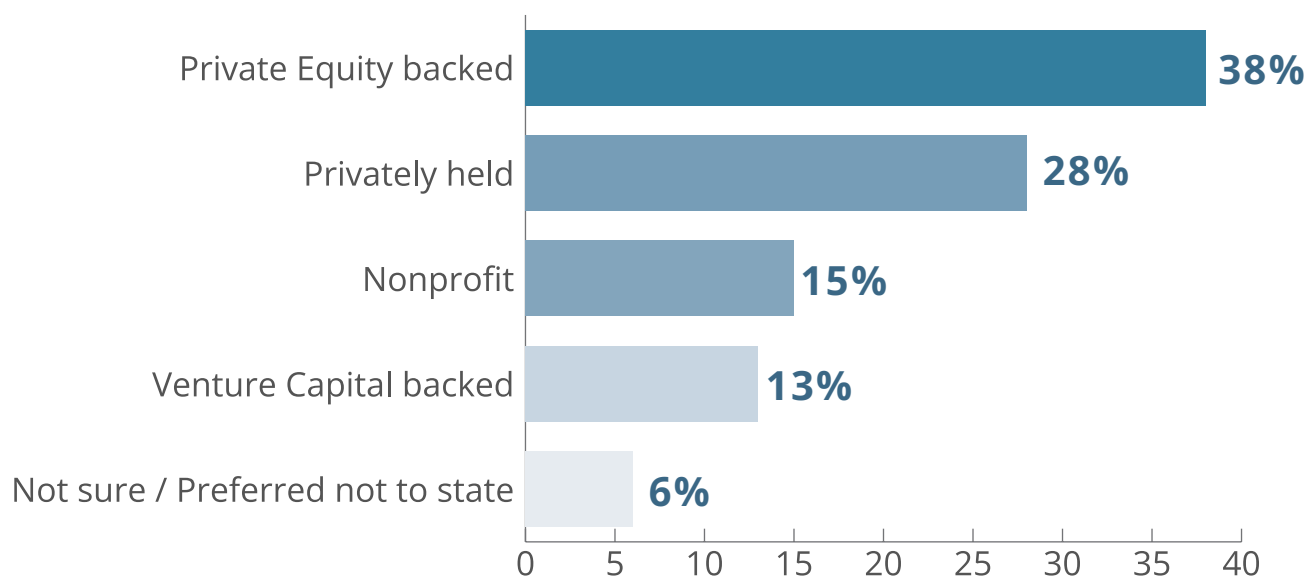| Company Size	Percentage
1–50 employees	21%
51-200 employees	52%
201-500 employees	15%
501–1,000 employees	6%
1,001-5,000 employees	6%

The investment community has made its mark on the ed-tech industry. More than half (52%) of respondents are in companies that are investor backed, while 43% of organizations remain privately held or are nonprofit. In some cases, there are some notable differences in how companies with these ownership structures approached leadership development.

OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE

| Category	Percentage
Private Equity backed	38%
Privately held	28%
Nonprofit	15%
Venture Capital backed	13%
Not sure / Preferred not to state	6%

Executive Summary

This analysis looks closely at the perceptions of C-level Executives relative to their Department Heads, Functional Leaders, and People Managers* regarding the major aspects and implications of leadership development in the K–12 education industry. Where appropriate, this report compares data in the most recent survey with the results of the surveys conducted in previous years.

Highlights of the 2025 findings include:

▸ Two thirds (67%) of C-level Executives identified a lack of leadership depth as the most significant concern regarding leadership capacity within their organization. Almost all C-level Executives and Department Heads (95%) indicated that their company would be investing in professional development for their leaders this year. Most (73%) reported that they are spending about the same amount or more this year than they did last year.

▸ The vast majority of C-level Executives (86%) said that their leaders' depth of experience related to scaling a business was creating obstacles to company growth, and a third (32%) believed that it is a major obstacle to growth. Improving company performance was one of the primary reasons why C-level Executives are investing in leadership development.

▸ Only 27% of C-level Executives indicated they had sufficient leadership depth to fill a seat on their executive team. Among investor-backed companies, only 11% were confident in their succession plans. Yet, 63% of Department Heads and Functional Leaders said they were confident they were ready for advancement. This gap in perception between the C-suite and aspiring leaders suggests significant breakdowns in the leadership development process.

* Note: Department Heads, Functional Leaders, and People Managers will sometimes be referred to collectively as "non-executive leaders."
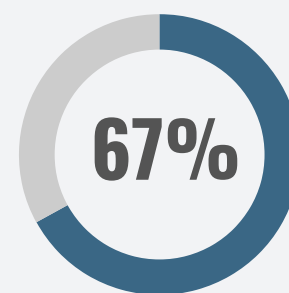
67%

of C-level Executives identified a lack of leadership depth as the most significant concern regarding leadership capacity within their organization.

11%
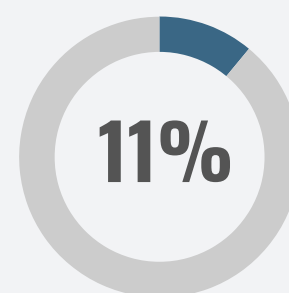
of C-level Executives at investor-backed companies were confident they can hire from within for executive-level vacancies.

9%
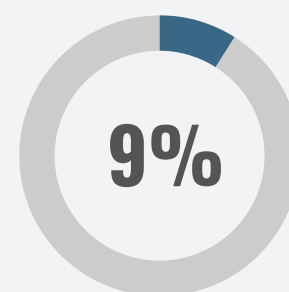
of aspiring executives have received clear guidance and support regarding their career development.

- Most C-level Executives (76%), as well as Non-executive Leaders (65%), agree that the C-suite doesn't consistently dedicate the amount of mentoring time necessary to support high-potential leaders. This is likely a key contributing factor to the gap in leadership depth and misalignment regarding readiness for advancement.

- Only 9% of aspiring executives reported receiving clear guidance and support from their managers to advance their career development. More than a quarter of female respondents (28%) shared that they had not received any career guidance or support, compared to 11% of male respondents who reported facing a similar challenge. Providing clear expectations and pathways for advancement is crucial but must also be provided equitably.

- Company strategies for leadership development should consider the organizational dynamics affecting leaders. Most (70%) Department Heads and Functional Leaders indicated they experience imposter syndrome at least occasionally. Nearly half of female respondents (47%) indicated being at a high risk of burnout, compared to one-third of male respondents (32%).

28%
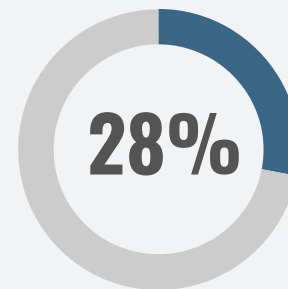
of women shared that they had not received any career guidance or support.

70%
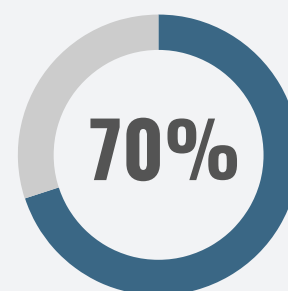
of Non-executive Leaders experience imposter syndrome at least occasionally.

83%
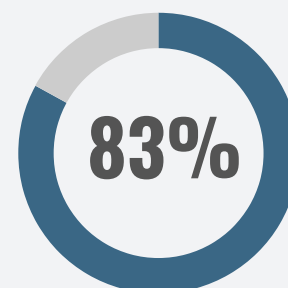
of respondents are at moderate to high risk of burnout.

Leadership Depth as a Growth Factor

As companies strive to scale their business—whether that means growing revenue, growing the number of active users, or growing the scope of impact—concerns regarding leadership depth are shared across investor-backed companies, privately held companies, and nonprofit organizations. Two thirds (67%) of C-level Executives identified a lack of leadership depth as the most significant concern regarding leadership capacity within their organization. This included concerns about succession planning, insufficient management experience, and mitigating the impacts of struggling leaders.

A sound succession plan is an indicator of company stability and long-term ability to scale the business successfully. As such, one of the key indicators the Ed-tech Leadership Collective monitors in its annual survey is C-level Executives' confidence level in being able to promote from within the organization.

C-level Executives were asked in the survey whether they had capable internal candidates to succeed current executive team members in the event of an unexpected vacancy. Approximately a quarter (27%) CEOs and C-level Executives were confident they had internal talent capable of stepping up to the C-suite. While this represents a meaningful level of risk for most companies, sentiments varied significantly between investor-backed companies compared to privately held companies and non-profit organizations.

> ## A sound succession plan is an indicator of company stability and long-term ability to scale the business successfully.

Companies backed by venture capital or private equity, which are often characterized by steep revenue growth expectations, had the lowest confidence in their succession plans, with only 11% of C-level Executives indicating they had sufficient leadership depth to fill a seat on their executive team. In comparison, 33% of respondents at privately held companies and non-profit organizations felt confident they could hire from within for C-suite vacancies.

The Complexities of Scaling a Business

Scaling an organization presents a unique set of challenges. As companies grow and expand, leaders must be more adept at establishing and evolving systems and processes, delegating and empowering team members, balancing strategic priorities, as well as overall change management. Leaders lacking this experience may find themselves sailing into unfamiliar waters and may struggle.

Less than half (47%) of C-level Executives felt that their key middle managers had sufficient experience scaling a business. This often results in C-level Executives getting pulled into the tactical aspects of problem-solving or untangling breakdowns that their Department Heads or Functional Leaders lack the ability to resolve.

The vast majority of C-level Executives (86%) said that their leaders' depth of experience related to scaling a business was creating obstacles to company growth, and a third (32%) considered it to be a major obstacle to growth. This was fairly consistent across all types of organizations, but slightly higher for companies backed by venture capital and private equity.

As organizations outline their strategic plans to grow the business, much of the leadership burden to execute those plans falls on the shoulders of the Functional Leaders across the business. Given the concerns that senior leaders have expressed regarding skill gaps in key areas of expertise, this presents a level of risk to the business. In fact, 74% of C-level Executives and Department Heads felt that the amount of mission-critical work that is in the hands of middle managers creates a potential company risk if they were to struggle.

Potential Impact When Middle Managers Struggle

Impact on customers (product quality, customer satisfaction, missed sales opportunities)

Disruption to company strategic goals

Poor productivity on the team they manage

In order to mitigate these risks, most companies are investing in professional development for their executives and emerging leaders with a particular focus on the skills and abilities essential for making and conveying decisions in a team setting—also known as managerial expertise.

Leadership Development Remains a Strategic Priority

K–12 education companies recognize the importance of cultivating leadership talent in order to accomplish their goals, grow the business, and have a positive impact on student outcomes. Despite resource constraints being felt across the industry, leadership development remains a priority.

Almost all C-level Executives and Department Heads (95%) indicated that their company would be investing in professional development for their leaders this year. Most (70%) reported that they are spending about the same amount this year on professional development as they did last year, with another 11% spending moderately less and 12% spending moderately more.
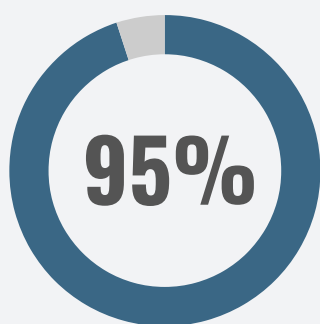
95% of C-level Executives and Department Heads will be investing in professional development for their leaders this year.

Respondents stated that their companies are prioritizing professional development in order to help new leaders succeed in their current role (e.g., address skill gaps), improve company performance, and retain key talent. However, the specific ways in which companies invest in leadership development can have an impact on the desired outcomes. This requires intentionality, consistency, and a keen focus on the right kinds of skills.

Essential Skills for Advancing to the C-Suite

The Ed-tech Leadership Collective examines leadership capacity and skill development in terms of three key competencies. This approach helps employees and their mentors to focus on the specific skill areas required for advancement within the organization and avoid over-indexing on the wrong skills.

The three competencies are:

1. **Functional Expertise** – Technical skills, knowledge, and abilities specific to the department in which you work (e.g., marketing, sales, product, etc.).

2. **Domain Expertise** – Skills and knowledge specific to the industry in which you work (e.g., K–12 education, healthcare, biotech, manufacturing).

3. **Managerial Expertise** – Skills and abilities essential for making, conveying, and executing decisions in a team setting.

Success at each level of leadership requires a balance between these three areas of competencies. However, as one progresses to higher levels of seniority in an organization, there is a much greater demand for managerial expertise.

Although sometimes described as "executive presence," managerial expertise comprises distinct skills and competencies such as managing-up and managing-across, delegating and empowering team members, managing metrics-based goals, and communication. While honing these skills may increase one's confidence and influence within the organization, defining this as "executive presence" runs the risk of implying that these are personality-based attributes, rather than distinct skills and abilities that leaders of all personality types can develop.

It's not surprising that when promoting team members to the executive level, 70% of C-level leaders look for essential skills, knowledge and competencies that demonstrate a depth of managerial expertise. Specific skills identified most frequently included:

Communication (listening, writing, speaking)	Strategic leadership / Strategic planning	Team leadership / Talent development
Problem analysis / Problem-solving / Decision-making	**Managing-across (ability to collaborate and influence)**	

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Non-executive Leaders who are striving to reach the C-suite have focused their energy on developing their managerial expertise. The underlying skills they identified most frequently are similar to those listed by C-level Executives (above), with the only major differences being that C-Level Executives valued problem analysis skills, while Non-executive Leaders seemed to over-emphasize financial acumen as a key to their advancement.

Only 10% of C-level Executives emphasized K–12 domain expertise, which includes skills related to customer empathy, the ability to spot trends, the ability to interpret legislation and funding models, or having prior experience in a K–12 district. Functional expertise, related to best practices and technical skills in one's department, was identified by only 5% of executives. Although strength in functional or domain expertise is often what leads to individuals being promoted early in their careers, succeeding in leadership roles requires greater strength in managerial expertise.

Considering how well aligned C-level leaders and aspiring executives are regarding the key skills required to advance, it begs the question as to why there is such lack of confidence when it comes to being able to hire from within for C-suite vacancies. Some of the reasons for this ongoing gap could be due to the consistency and quality of support that companies are providing to their Non-executive Leaders.

The Way Companies Prepare Leaders Matters

Cultivating talent requires clear expectations and ongoing communication between aspiring leaders and their manager. However, this is often lacking, and leads to misalignment and frustration.

Year-over-year survey data shows there is a persistent breakdown between C-level Executives' assessment of internal talent compared to the self-assessment of aspiring leaders. As noted earlier, only about a quarter of C-level Executives were confident they had internal talent capable of stepping up to the C-suite. However, those aspiring to reach the C-suite have a different perspective—which is indicative of the widespread breakdowns in leadership development.

Among those Department Heads and Functional Leaders who aspire to reach higher levels of leadership, 63% were confident or very confident that they had the skills and knowledge to meaningfully contribute and meet expectations at that next level if they were promoted.

This significant gap in confidence was especially true with investor-backed companies, where nearly two-thirds of aspiring executives felt they are ready to step up to the next level, yet only 1 in 10 C-level leaders said they have an adequate executive talent pool.

Clearly, there is a misalignment regarding the expectations for the depth of skills and expertise required in key areas to succeed at the next level. Therefore, it's important to examine the quality of mentoring that employees receive, as well as the clarity of expectations and feedback communicated to aspiring leaders.

Increasing the Amount of Time Spent Mentoring Aspiring Leaders

Cultivating leadership depth requires a meaningful investment of time and energy. Employees and C-Level Executives recognize that managers often face challenges in dedicating sufficient time for mentoring. Only a third (35%) of Non-executive Leaders reported that their manager consistently provided the mentoring necessary to support their leadership development. This gap was even more pronounced for women, with just 21% indicating they received adequate support and mentoring.

The C-suite seems to recognize this shortcoming, with less than a quarter (24%) of C-level Executives expressing confidence that their high-potential leaders are receiving the mentoring and support they need to develop and reach their full potential.

However, improving the company's ability to promote from within requires senior leaders to not only increase the amount of time supporting high-potential leaders, but also improve the quality of the mentoring provided.

Creating Clarity Regarding the Pathways to Advancement

Although many managers have the best intentions to support their employees' career growth, if they are not providing specific guidance and clear expectations of what is required at the next level, they may unintentionally hinder their employees' progress.

For those Department Heads and Functional Leaders striving to reach the next level, only 9% received clear guidance and support from their manager to help them with their career development. Nearly half (45%) said their manager was supportive but offered no specific guidance on how to advance, while another 27% received support and only vague guidance on how to advance. Surprisingly, one out of five aspiring leaders (18%) received no guidance or support whatsoever.

Ultimately, this lack of clarity regarding what's required at the next level is likely a major contributing factor to the disparity observed between aspiring leaders' self-assessment of their readiness for advancement compared to the C-suite's lack of confidence in their succession plans.

Oftentimes, managers are well-intentioned in terms of supporting the career growth among their team members, yet, when it comes to mapping out a specific career growth strategy, they don't know where to begin. Preparing the next level of leaders for advancement requires companies to set very explicit expectations regarding the skills, experiences, and behavioral competencies required. Ideally, companies should provide exemplars of what leadership readiness looks like.

28% of women indicated they had not received any career guidance or support.

It is important to acknowledge that the level of guidance and support employees receive is not consistent across groups. Male respondents (22%) were twice as likely as female respondents (10%) to report receiving clear guidance and support from their managers. Additionally, more than a quarter of female respondents (28%) indicated they had not received any career guidance or support, compared to 11% of male respondents who faced similar challenges.

Providing Frequent and Quality Feedback

Establishing clear expectations regarding performance and maintaining a consistent cadence of mentoring sessions is important for career development—and both are areas for improvement for most companies. In addition, organizations should be examining the frequency of constructive feedback provided to employees regarding their ability to meet expectations.

Fewer than a third (29%) of Department Heads and Functional Leaders reported receiving constructive feedback at least once per month. However, there were clear differences in the frequency of feedback received by male and female respondents. Nearly half of male respondents (46%) received feedback monthly, compared to only a quarter of female respondents (24%). These findings underscore the importance of ensuring equitable feedback practices, as differences in the frequency of feedback can influence employees' opportunities for advancement and their risk of burnout.

2X Male respondents were twice as likely as female respondents to report that the feedback they received was helpful.

When feedback is offered, it's not always as helpful as employees may expect. Fewer than half (47%) of respondents who received feedback from their manager found it helpful. Male respondents (82%) were twice as likely as female respondents (41%) to report that the feedback they received was helpful.

When respondents found the feedback wasn't helpful, some of the most common reasons were:

- ✔ Recipient of feedback was not sure how to put the feedback into practice
- ✔ Manager lacked knowledge or authority on the matter
- ✔ Manager had poor communication skills (listening / speaking)

- ✔ Manager provided feedback too infrequently
- ✔ Manager feedback and critique was inconsistent with goals and expectations

Aligning the Pieces

While it is encouraging that leadership development is an ongoing priority for K–12 education companies, the ways in which managers support their high-potential leaders is critically important. This requires that managers not only dedicate a consistent amount of time for mentoring their aspiring leaders, but also to ensure they've provided clear expectations, communicated a clear pathway, and are frequently providing quality feedback. When these elements are in place, companies will likely begin to see the kind of leadership depth that thrives when executing strategic goals and provides a strong succession plan.

The Landscape Affecting Leaders

"Leadership is a lonely job."

This is a common refrain for C-level Executives and Non-executive Leaders. In the K–12 education industry, leaders are facing frequent feelings of self-doubt, uncertainty following widespread layoffs, and high levels of burnout. Such warning signs are worth noting, especially given the critical role that these leaders play regarding overall company performance.

Imposter Syndrome is a Common Challenge

As leaders strive for advancement and make their path towards the C-suite, the lack of mentoring and feedback may be affecting their level of confidence and their feelings of "imposter syndrome."

Imposter syndrome is a sense of self-doubt and insecurity felt by many professionals. It is described as a feeling that—despite your knowledge, abilities, and accomplishments that have prepared you for your leadership role—you have somehow fooled your colleagues into thinking you are qualified to do the job.
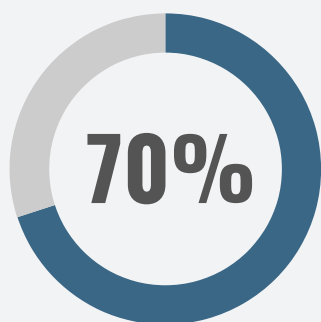
70% of Department Heads and Functional Leaders indicated they experience imposter syndrome.

Although many individuals may be reluctant to discuss these feelings openly, 70% of Department Heads and Functional Leaders indicated that they experience imposter syndrome at least occasionally. Additionally, 35% of respondents reported feeling self-doubt frequently or constantly, with similar rates observed among male and female respondents.

Those who are beginning their leadership journey may be impacted by imposter syndrome most significantly. Nearly half (48%) of Functional Leaders indicated that they experience imposter syndrome frequently or constantly. This could be due to leaders in these roles being expected to not only serve as people managers but also manage-up and manage-
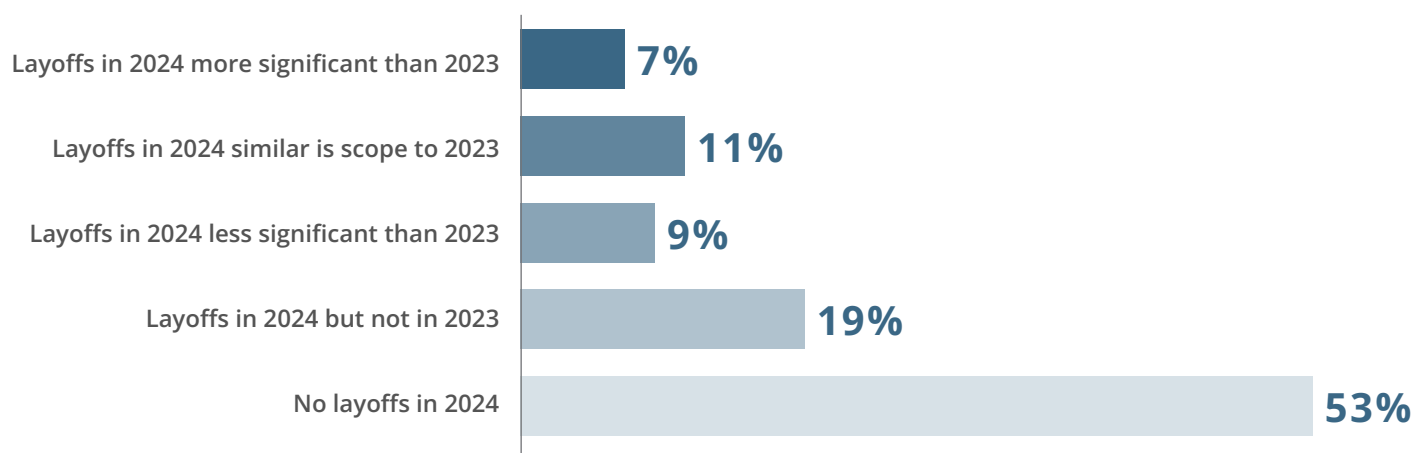
across in a way they hadn't been asked to do in the past. With many leaders not receiving the mentoring and guidance they require, it's not surprising that such a high percentage of Functional Leaders are experiencing these feelings.

The Impact of Layoffs on Leadership Capacity

As the post-COVID era evolved into the post-ESSER era, layoffs continued to affect K–12 ed-tech companies. Approximately half (47%) of respondents indicated that their company had conducted layoffs in the prior 12 months. This is down slightly from last year's survey, which saw 54% experiencing layoffs at their company. Also important to note, only 27% of companies conducted layoffs in both 2023 and 2024. This means that despite many companies being affected by layoffs, it does not appear to be a year-after-year trend for a significant percentage of organizations.

COMPANY LAYOFFS IN 2024 COMPARED TO 2023

Layoffs in 2024 more significant than 2023	7%
Layoffs in 2024 similar is scope to 2023	11%
Layoffs in 2024 less significant than 2023	9%
Layoffs in 2024 but not in 2023	19%
No layoffs in 2024	53%

Sixty percent (60%) of investor-backed companies conducted layoffs, compared to 18% of nonprofit organizations and 32% of privately held companies. This may be due to a number of factors, such as maintaining slimmer operating margins or possibly related to maneuvers in preparation for mergers and acquisitions.

In the wake of layoffs, many respondents (57%) experienced a reorganization at their company. This often entailed asking leaders to take on a larger scope of responsibility (62%) or manage additional areas of the business (55%). These scenarios can create business risk by spreading the company's Department Heads and Functional Leaders too thinly or requiring them to lean on some of their mid-level managers who are unprepared to step-up.

Perhaps the most concerning outcome of downsizing is that many companies have failed to adjust their strategies and expectations despite reduced resources. Rather than narrowing their
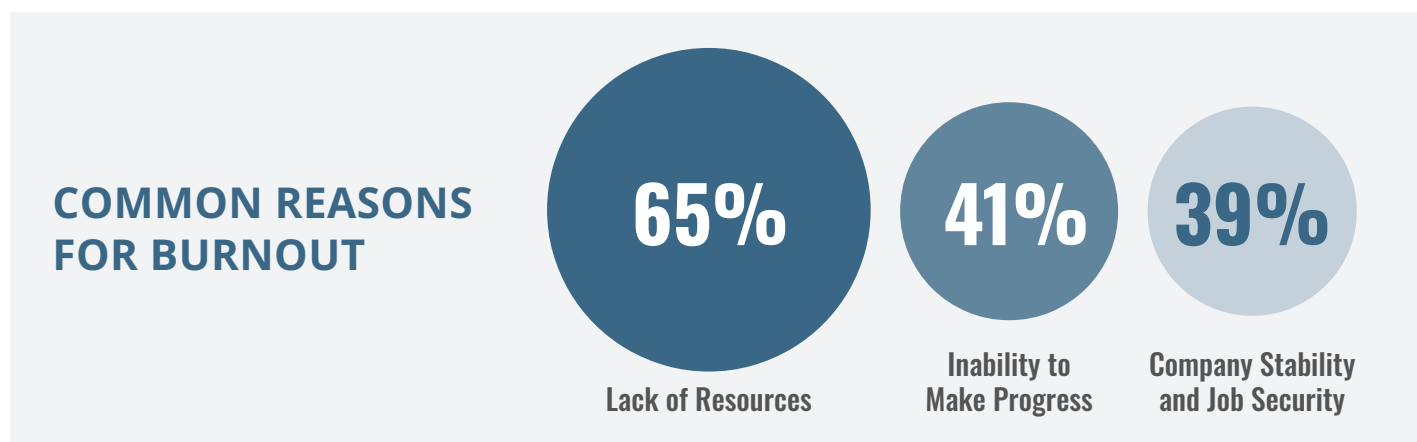
focus on their top strategic priorities and adjusting scope on lower priority initiatives, many companies try to continue with business as usual. Most respondents (71%) said their company had asked employees to maintain the same productivity with fewer people ("do more with less"), whereas only 14% said that they were asked to re-scope their work to align with reduced staff or resources. These perceptions were fairly consistent across all levels of seniority.

When companies reduce their workforce or reduce resources, it's important that the C-Level Executives, Department Heads and Functional Leaders are closely aligned on priorities and expectations. Difficult decisions will need to be made in order to ensure that mission-critical goals are accomplished. Under-communication or indecision can lead to burnout and misallocation of available time and resources.

Burnout Remains a Concern

Not surprisingly, the increased expectations, economic uncertainty and shifting organizational structures have led to a high number of K–12 ed-tech leaders experiencing burnout. Overall, 83% of respondents feel they are at moderate to high risk of burnout, with 41% of respondents indicating that they are at a high risk of burnout. This is down slightly from the prior year's survey, which showed nearly half (48%) were at high risk of burnout.

However, despite the modest decrease, not all individuals are experiencing burnout to the same extent. Companies' Non-Executive Leaders seem to be bearing the brunt of the burnout. Nearly half (47%) of Department Heads and Functional Leaders say they are at a high risk of burning out, compared to only 25% of C-level Executives who are at high risk.

COMMON REASONS FOR BURNOUT

65%
Lack of Resources

41%
Inability to Make Progress

39%
Company Stability and Job Security

Male respondents were much less likely to report being at high risk of burnout, with 32% indicating high-risk levels compared to 47% of female respondents. Similarly, 48% of respondents who identified as members of historically marginalized groups reported being at high risk of burnout, compared to 37% of all other respondents.

Lack of resources (time, staff, budget) was the most common cause of burnout, with nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents indicating this concern. In these situations, companies can help their leaders to navigate these resource challenges by helping them strengthen their managerial expertise so they can more effectively align available resources to priorities and manage cross-functionally to accomplish goals within those constraints.

The second most common reason for burnout (41%) was respondents' inability to feel that they were making progress in their role. This may be linked to a lack of communication and unclear expectations from managers, which the vast majority of respondents (91%) identified as a concern. Organizations should assess whether they have established equitable conditions for all employees. One-third (33%) of female respondents attributed burnout to unrealistic expectations in their role, compared to 12% of all other respondents. Similarly, one-third (33%) of respondents from historically marginalized groups cited unrealistic job expectations as a cause of burnout, compared to 22% of all other respondents.

Concerns about company and job stability were the third most common cause of burnout, cited by 39% of respondents. Female respondents (44%) were more likely to express unease about this issue compared to 29% of other respondents. One contributing factor may be the lower frequency and quality of feedback that female respondents reported receiving from their managers, compared to their peers.

Many of the reasons that employees are experiencing burnout can be addressed—to some extent—by the ways in which companies support their leaders at each level of the organization. Fostering leaders' depth of managerial expertise can help them to navigate scenarios when resources become limited. Meanwhile, providing clear expectations and explicit feedback on job performance can help leaders experiencing burnout due to uncertainty about their role or their progress towards achieving their goals.

Providing Equitable Support When Cultivating Leaders

Organizations committed to fostering an equitable work environment should carefully assess their leadership development strategies. Research shows that diverse leadership teams drive better decision-making and innovation, underscoring the strategic importance of equitable talent development.

However, current efforts may not be achieving their intended impact. While 42% of C-suite executives believed their company's talent development practices effectively support the needs of historically marginalized groups, only 25% of Department Heads and Functional Leaders shared this view. These findings suggest that company leaders should reflect on potential blind spots in their policies and practices to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness.

25% of Department Heads and Functional Leaders believed their company's talent development practices effectively support the needs of historically marginalized groups.

Overall, fewer than a third (31%) of respondents believed their company's talent development practices effectively support the needs of historically marginalized groups. Gender differences in perception were particularly notable: over half of male respondents (52%) felt that their company's practices provided adequate support, compared to only 21% of female respondents.

When reexamining these practices, it is important to consider that women and individuals from historically marginalized groups often face barriers to receiving specific and actionable feedback from their managers. Female respondents reported receiving less explicit guidance and support, fewer mentoring opportunities, and less constructive feedback. This aligns with research by Korn Ferry (2017) and McKinsey (2024), which highlights that women and individuals from historically marginalized groups are less likely to be assigned high-profile projects or opportunities that demonstrate their readiness for promotion.

Respondents to the Ed-tech Leadership Collective survey highlighted several ways in which they'd like to see their company strengthen leadership development for employees from historically marginalized groups.

These recommendations included:

- ✓ Focusing on talent development programs; allocating budget for training and helping managers improve their skills to support talent development.

- ✓ Being more intentional regarding the talent pools that the company targets and ensuring those sources include candidates from historically marginalized groups.

- ✓ Creating leadership pathways for individuals from historically marginalized groups.

- ✓ Examining hiring practices for bias.

Conclusion: How Companies Can Effectively Cultivate Leadership Talent

As K–12 education companies strive to grow revenue, increase their impact, and reach more students, most agree that their success hinges heavily on the leadership capacity within their organization. Although few companies are confident they have cultivated sufficient leadership depth yet, there is strong alignment on the importance of investing in leadership development and clarity on the skills required. Achieving the desired results, and establishing the level of leadership strength to propel organizational growth, requires a commitment and a focus on several key factors:

Developing the Right Skills

Advancing to higher levels of senior leadership within an organization requires depth of managerial expertise. This includes skills such as managing-up and managing-across, delegating and empowering team members, managing metrics-based goals, and communication. Companies should ensure that leadership development programs emphasize these skills, rather than investing in development focused on functional expertise or domain expertise.

Provide Clarity of Expectations

Companies should ensure that employees—and their managers— have a clear understanding of the skills, expertise and behavioral competencies required at each level of leadership. These explicit descriptions and concrete exemplars should guide the professional development objectives and the ongoing mentoring and feedback that employees receive.

### Hold Managers Accountable for Providing Support

The amount of time managers spend with high-potential employees, as well as the frequency and quality of feedback, is critically important. Companies that wish to cultivate deeper leadership capacity should set expectations and hold managers accountable for investing the necessary time into developing the next level of leadership in the organization.

Ensure Leadership Development Efforts are Intentional and Equitable

When cultivating the next level of leadership, executives should intentionally build management teams that represent diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and skill sets. Rather than relying solely on the most vocal team members to self-advocate, company leaders should proactively identify and support candidates for advancement. Mentors play a crucial role in this process by assigning meaningful projects and high-profile opportunities that prepare emerging leaders for future roles. To set mentees up for success, mentors should clearly communicate these assignments and their significance to peers, fostering broader support and recognition. This approach is especially critical for female employees and employees from historically marginalized groups, ensuring that they are empowered to lead and that they receive the necessary support to thrive.

The findings of the 2025 **State of Ed-tech Leadership Development** underscore the critical need for intentional leadership development within K–12 organizations. Companies taking deliberate steps now can cultivate the leadership depth required to navigate future challenges and drive meaningful outcomes for their organization and the school communities they serve.
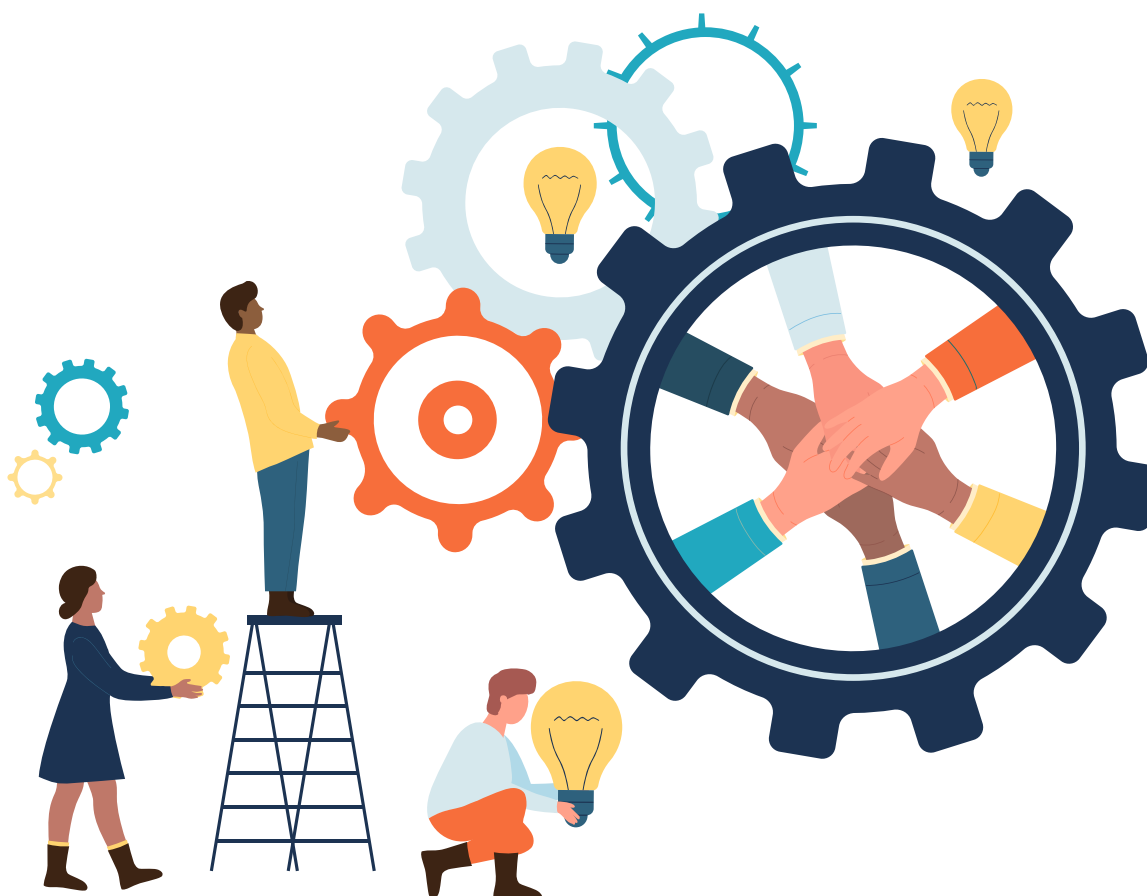
About the Ed-tech Leadership Collective

This survey report was developed by the Ed-tech Leadership Collective, a membership organization established to accelerate leadership capacity development in K–12 ed-tech companies.

The Ed-tech Leadership Collective is a membership organization focused solely on the K–12 education market, bringing together high-performing ed-tech executives in a collaborative environment that amplifies their impact and enriches their leadership journey.

With more than 50 ed-tech executives from dozens of the most esteemed companies in the industry, this professional community is a wide network of leaders with a sophisticated understanding of the nuances of the K–12 market and a mutual interest in one another's success.

The Collective offers an exclusive Leadership Accelerator program, professional peer groups, one-to-one executive coaching, and advisory services.

To learn more about the Ed-tech Leadership Collective, please visit www.edtechcollective.org.