



The 2023 Texas Teacher Poll:

# Listening to the Educator Experience



## Letter from the Foundation

As indicated by the title of the 2023 Texas Teacher Poll, the Charles Butt Foundation continues to ground our research in listening. The most effective way for us to understand and respond effectively to the needs of educators is by listening to a representative sample of Texas teachers and their unique perspectives.

What we are learning from this year's survey, the fourth consecutive, is that teachers are still struggling with the structural challenges of the profession, yet they know where the state should target resources, and for which students they need additional administrative support and training.

This year teachers shared staff shortages are a major source of stress. Educators also opened up about major stressors they are experiencing in the profession, including excessive workloads. Amongst these concerns, teachers recognize the needs of students in their classrooms. Second only to increasing teacher pay, Texas educators believe the next essential spending priority should be assisting students with their mental health needs.

Moreover, teachers understand the importance of retaining public education funding for the needs of public school students. Teachers overwhelmingly oppose school vouchers that would allow parents to use public funds to pay for private and religious schools that lack state educational oversight and would reduce the amount of funding distributed to local public schools.

Fortunately, the 2023 Texas Teacher Poll results provide a roadmap for strengthening teacher preparation, putting additional classroom resources where they will matter most, strengthening the campus culture and environment, and providing training and support for diverse student populations. This year, we also included quotes from an online forum of Texas teachers of color conducted in the summer of 2023, adding the words of our teachers into the narrative.

May we the changemakers, in the fields of school leadership, research, practice, and public policy, receive this data as a call to action to listen and learn from the educator experience. It is our responsibility to heed the call of Texas teachers to support the profession and strengthen our Texas classrooms for the future of our students and our state.



**Shari B. Albright**  
President

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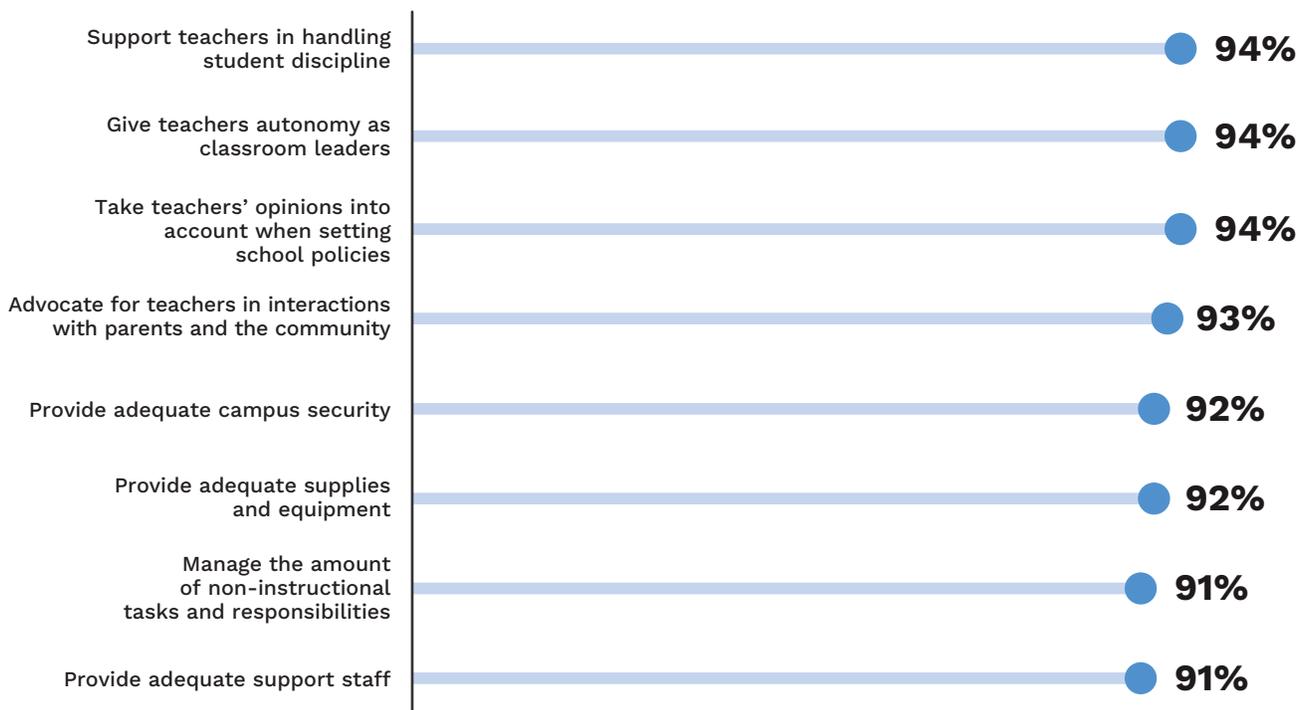
# Key findings

Shared experiences of teachers reveal that mental health is associated with their work environment. Most Texas public school teachers, 83% surveyed, rated their overall mental health positively. However, when asked to rate their mental health specifically in relation to their teaching jobs, 58% of teachers reported positively about their mental health. Various factors in 2023 are impacting teachers' mental health and emotional well-being.

Teachers' working conditions continue to raise concerns. Ninety-four percent of teachers cited poor pay and benefits, excessive workloads/long hours, and staff shortages as sources of personal stress. Many teachers reported feeling they need more training or support from their campus to respond to various school safety scenarios.

## Steps Campus Administrators Can Take to Create a Positive Work Culture and Environment

% Texas teachers who consider each step extremely/very important



Eighty-six percent of teachers expressed feelings of keeping students safe as a source of stress, and 91% of teachers cited feeling that they need to support students' mental health and emotional well-being as a source of stress.

Additionally, 50% of teachers reported not having adequate training and support from their campus to respond to a student mental health crisis, and a third feel they lack adequate training or support to respond to an active shooter or violent intruder. Reaffirming teachers' concerns about school safety and student mental health, when asked about their priorities for school spending, 86% of teachers identified assisting students with mental health needs as an extremely or very important spending priority. Eighty-three percent of teachers also cited improving building security in schools as a highly important spending priority.

In other results of this poll, 73% of teachers deemed that a school voucher program would harm Texas public schools generally, and 89% opposed such a program in their community if it reduced public school funding or if participating private and religious schools have no state educational oversight. In an open-ended question, teachers voiced concerns about a voucher program's impact on funding and the risk of increased racial, economic, and disability-based divisions.

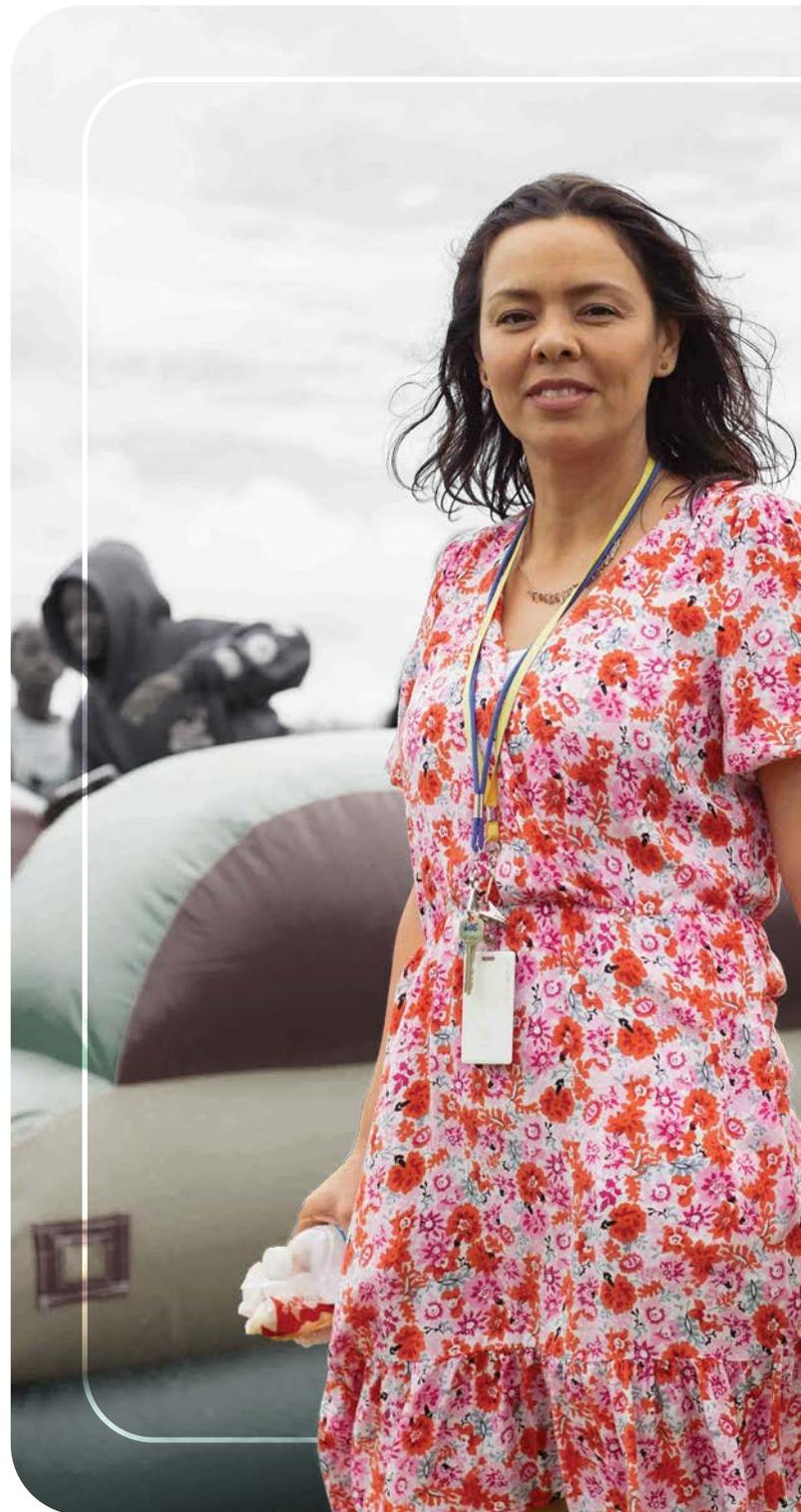
According to surveyed Texas public school teachers, when entering the teaching field, more than half planned on being pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (PK-12) teachers for the entirety of their careers. Despite their initial aspirations of remaining in the teaching profession for most, 75% of teachers overall reported seriously considering leaving their job in the classroom in the past year, 2023, essentially the same as in 2022, 77%, after increasing sharply from 58% in pre-pandemic 2020.

Previous poll findings from 2022 revealed that 97% of teachers surveyed identified having a positive work culture and environment as important to encouraging them to continue working as public school teachers. This year's 2023 poll looked into nine steps campus administrators can take to create a positive work culture and environment for teachers, including more robust support across various domains. At least eight in 10 teachers saw each step as highly important. The highest-ranking steps reported by teachers include campus administrators taking teachers' opinions into account when setting school policies, giving teachers autonomy as classroom leaders, and supporting teachers in handling student discipline, each reported as highly important by 94%.

Teachers who reported having a positive work culture and environment at their campus in 2023, 64%, are less likely than others, 89%, to have reported seriously considering leaving their position.

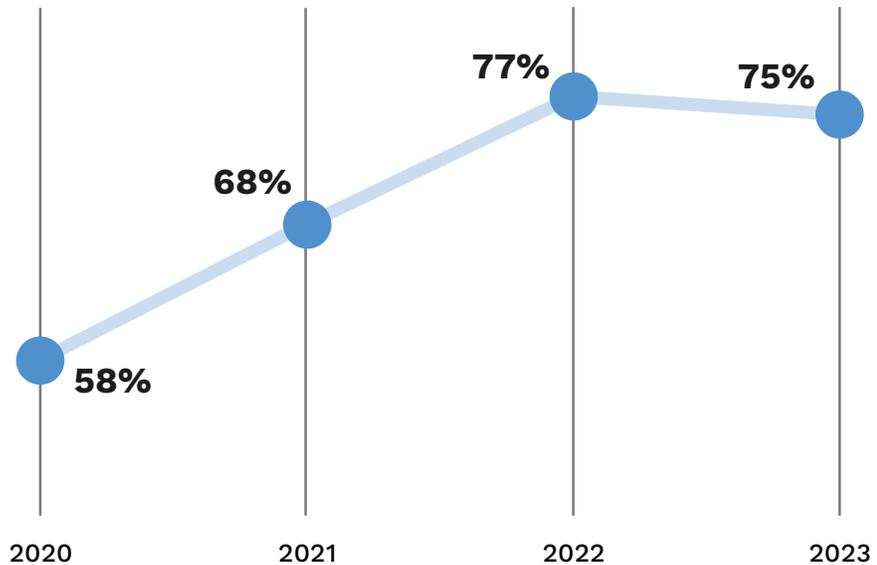
Findings also show that eight in 10 teachers feel they have adequate support from their campus to provide a classroom environment where all students can be their genuine selves, are empowered to participate, and have good relationships with other students. However, 19% of teachers lack support in these crucial areas. Overall, teachers feel they have support from their campuses to meet the diverse needs of students but not all students. Forty-one percent said they do not have adequate support to meet the needs of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and all other gender and sexual orientations (LGBTQ+); 31% for students with learning differences; and 26% for English-language learners. Slightly fewer teachers, 22%, said they lack support to meet the needs of students from low-income households, and 17% said the same for students of a different race or ethnicity than their own.

The poll also asked teachers about their ability to advocate for diverse student groups at their campus. About three-quarters of teachers feel they have the ability at their campus to advocate for students of a different race or ethnicity than theirs, English-language learners, students from low-income households, and students with learning differences.



## Teachers Considering Leaving the Classroom

% Texas teachers seriously considering leaving



Regarding teacher training and preparation, teachers expressed the importance of hands-on or direct experiences such as observing other teachers, field supervisor support, student teaching, and mentorship. Eighty-eight percent of teachers had a mentor during their preparation program or early teaching years.

The following sections of this report explore the findings of the poll in depth, highlighting the views of Texas teachers on a variety of topics.

When schools host special celebrations, teachers take on many different roles outside of their classrooms - like picking up trash during a campus field day.

## About the poll

The fourth annual Texas Teacher Poll report was produced for the Charles Butt Foundation by Langer Research Associates. The poll results are from a representative statewide survey of 1,029 Texas public school teachers randomly selected from the Texas Education Agency's 2021 roster of all teachers in the state. Data collection for the poll occurred via a secure online questionnaire from March 22, 2023 - June 15, 2023. The poll results have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.6 points for the full sample.<sup>1</sup> To add insights to the poll results, five days of moderated discussions in two asynchronous online forums among 24 additional teachers of color, who were not surveyed, were facilitated June 5, 2023 - June 9, 2023.

There are two sources of quotes from teachers included in the report. The quotes in *Career Plans* are responses from an open-ended survey question. All other quotes in the report are from teachers who participated in the online discussion forums.

The 2023 Texas Teacher Poll was directed by Jessica C. Enyioha, Ph.D., director of research, and Audrey Boklage, Ph.D., vice president of learning and impact; with Kendra Montejos Edwards, senior research associate, and Melissa Garza,

learning and impact fellow. The report and user interface were designed by John Jacob Moreno, multimedia designer, with Joel Goudeau, art director, and Lauren Reed, multimedia designer; with visualization support by Kurt Lockhart, senior program director of data insights; and web development support from Karen Wang, web developer. The lead analyst on this report is Allison De Jong, senior research analyst at Langer Research Associates, with Steven Sparks, Ph.D., research analyst; Lindsey Hendren, Ph.D., research associate; Jared Sousa, research associate; and Gary Langer, project director.

The Charles Butt Foundation expresses gratitude to the sample of teachers who participated in the poll, the group of teachers who were a part of the online forums, and to the teachers who allowed their photographs to be featured in this report. The photography included in this report was captured by Liz Moskowitz, Anne Bannister, Brian Diggs, and Joel Goudeau. Findings and quotes in the report are not attributable to any teachers in the photographs.

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This report can be found online at [CharlesButtFdn.org/2023TXTeacherPoll](https://CharlesButtFdn.org/2023TXTeacherPoll).

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<sup>1</sup> All differences described in this report have been tested for statistical significance. Those that are significant at the 95% confidence level (or higher) are reported without qualification. Those that are significant at 90-94% confidence are described as "slight" differences. Those that are significant at less than 90% confidence are not reported as differences.

# Teacher mental health and emotional well-being

**T**eachers were surveyed about their mental health and emotional well-being as a response to poor working conditions reported in our 2022 Texas Teacher Poll.

Eighty-three percent of Texas public school teachers rated their overall mental health and emotional well-being positively – as excellent (20%), very good (30%), or good (32%). That leaves 17% who rated this as only fair or poor.

These assessments are sharply lower when teachers were asked to consider their jobs. Fewer, 58%, rated their mental health or emotional well-being positively specifically in relation to their teaching job – excellent (12%), very good (20%), or good (27%). In this case, 41% described it as only fair or poor.

Self-assessed mental health and emotional well-being are highly related to the number of work stressors teachers face. Among those who cited six or more major work stressors (23% of all teachers), 58% rated their mental health or emotional well-being as it relates to their job as only fair or poor. Teachers in this group also rated their well-being more negatively than other teachers in terms of their overall well-being.

**“Yes, I feel overworked at times. I feel some things are needed to be done just to check off a box, but because I respect authority, I always do my job as instructed. When I hear about teacher shortages on the news, it truly breaks my heart. I can understand why many leave, but I also understand why many choose to remain.”**

— Middle/High school teacher

Teachers find brief moments throughout their day to connect with colleagues.



Among the stressors tested, excessive workloads and long hours, as well as a lack of communication and understanding from administrators, have the strongest associations with self-assessed mental health in relation to work. Fifty-three percent of teachers who called excessive workloads a major stressor rated their mental health and emotional well-being in relation to work as only fair or poor, compared with 20% of those who said this has been no more than a minor source of stress. There is a similar difference among these groups for a lack of communication and understanding from administrators, 57% versus 28%.

The impacts of these stressors on self-assessed mental health are larger when combined. For example, 65% of teachers who reported experiencing major stress from both administrators and interacting with parents rated their mental health as it relates to their job as only fair or poor. The additive impacts of supporting students' mental health, interacting with parents, a lack of communication and understanding from administrators, and excessive workloads and long hours are also notable. Negative overall mental health ratings peak, at 35%, among teachers who said both supporting students' mental health and interacting with parents are major stressors.

Work culture and environment also inform these results. Among teachers who do not feel that they have a positive work culture and environment, 72% described their mental health and emotional well-being in relation to their teaching job as only fair or poor, compared with 28% of those who reported a positive work culture and environment.

**Younger teachers are especially apt to have described their mental health or emotional well-being at work negatively.**

Sixty percent of 20-to-29-year-olds do so, dropping to 46% of those 30-to-49 years old and falling further to 24% of teachers of age 50 years and older.

These sharp differences subsided when teachers were asked about their mental and emotional health in general, not just in relation to their jobs, although younger teachers are still far less apt than their older colleagues to describe their overall mental health as strongly positive – either excellent or very good. That ranges from 35% among 20-to-29-year-old teachers to 69% of those age 50 years and older.

### Teachers’ Mental Health in Relation to Their Job Varies by Age

% Texas teachers describing their mental health and emotional well-being

	All teachers	Under 30 years old	30-39 years old	40-49 years old	50-59 years old	60 years and older
% excellent/very good	31%	11%	24%	32%	44%	51%
% good	27%	29%	26%	24%	30%	24%
% only fair/poor	41%	60%	50%	43%	25%	23%

Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

## Teachers' stress

Consistent with themes identified in the 2022 Texas Teacher Poll, Texas teachers are experiencing stress. Poor pay and benefits, staff shortages, and excessive workloads are at least minor sources of stress for a vast 94% of teachers in the past school year. Majorities in each case said these are major sources of stress, surpassing six other potential stressors tested.

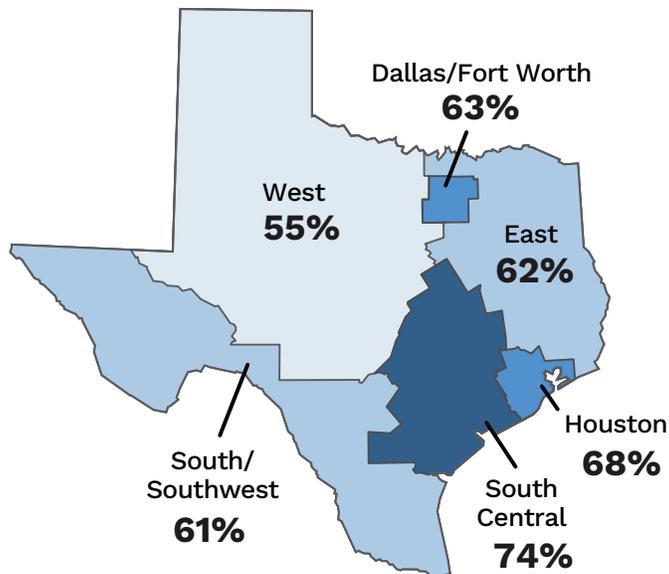
Other items scored nearly as high overall. Ninety-one percent of teachers said the feeling that they need to support students' mental health and emotional well-being is a source of stress in the past school year; 44% called this a major source of stress. Eighty to 86% said the same about the feeling that they need to keep their students safe, interacting with parents, pressure to have their students do well on standardized tests, and a lack of communication and understanding from administrators.

Some challenges are more acute than others. As mentioned, majorities said staff shortages (64%), poor pay and benefits (56%), and excessive workloads or long hours (also 56%) are major sources of stress. About half, 52%, said the same for the pressure to have their students do well on standardized tests. Forty-four percent called supporting students' mental health and emotional well-being a major source of stress, as do 35% for lack of communication and understanding from administrators and 33% for the need to keep their students safe. Last on the list is interacting with parents (a major source of stress for 24%). Overall, 23% cited six or more items as major stressors.

**“I never feel like I have as much time as I would like to foster a sense of belonging among my students. My time is often occupied by unnecessary tasks, meetings, etc., that take away from my main focus: my students.”**

— Elementary school teacher

## Staff Shortages are a Major Source of Teacher Stress Across Texas



**64%**  
of all Texas teachers, regardless of their region, **say staff shortages are a major source of stress**

**Stress is more prevalent at smaller schools.** Twenty-eight percent of teachers at schools with fewer than 500 students cited six or more major stressors, compared with 15% of those at schools with 1,000 or more students. **High stress is about twice as prevalent among Hispanic teachers compared with White teachers**, 35% versus 18%. It is 24% among Black teachers. Thirty-one percent of South/Southwest Texas teachers reported at least six major stressors in the past school year, more than double the rate in West Texas, with other regions in between. Women are 11 points more apt than men to have reported this many major stressors, 26% versus 15%.

Among teachers who experienced at least one item as a major stressor in the past year, the single biggest source of stress is poor pay and benefits, cited by 28%, followed by excessive workloads or long hours (18%), staff shortages (15%), lack of communication and understanding from administrators (12%), and standardized test pressure (11%).

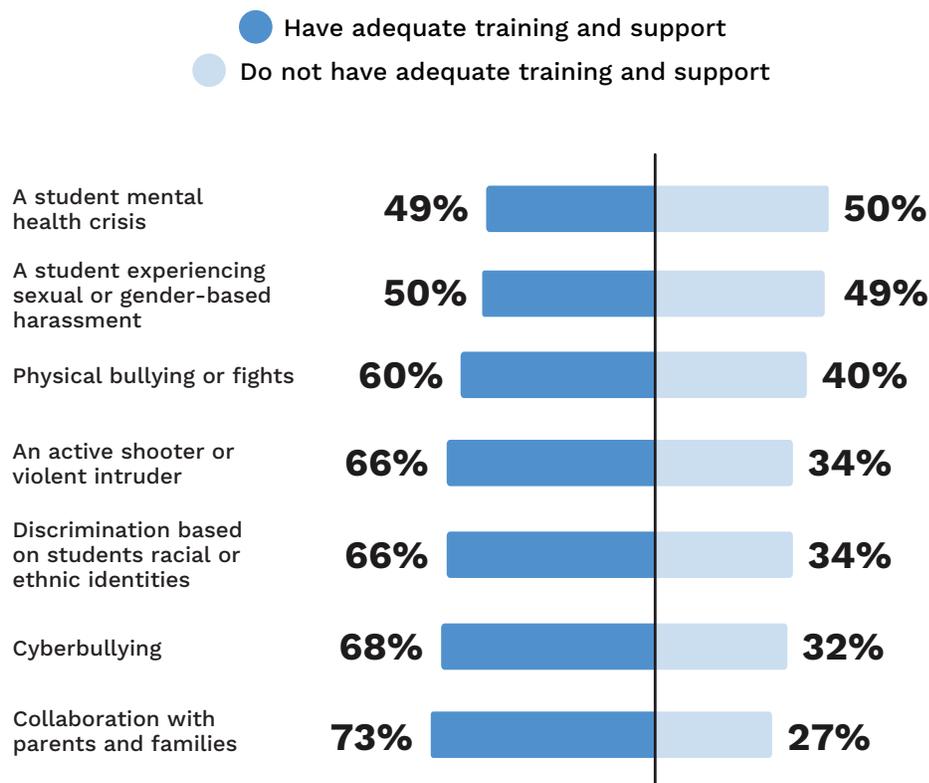
Poor pay and benefits are cited as the biggest stressor, peaking at 37% among teachers with young children of their own. It is lowest among teachers younger than 30, 16%, versus 30% among those 30 years and older. Teachers younger than 30, instead, are most apt to cite an excessive workload as their biggest stressor, at 27%.

## School safety

Teachers are not only stressed from feeling underpaid and overworked. Many teachers feel they do not have adequate training or support to respond to various school safety scenarios. Half said they do not have the training or support needed to respond to a student mental health crisis or a student experiencing sexual or gender-based harassment.

Fewer, but still 40%, said they lack the training or support needed to respond to physical bullying or fights. One in three teachers feel they do not have adequate training and support to respond to an active shooter or violent intruder. It is the same for responding to students experiencing racial or ethnic discrimination. Thirty-one percent feel they lack training and support to deal with cyberbullying.

### Teacher Training and Support for Situational Responses



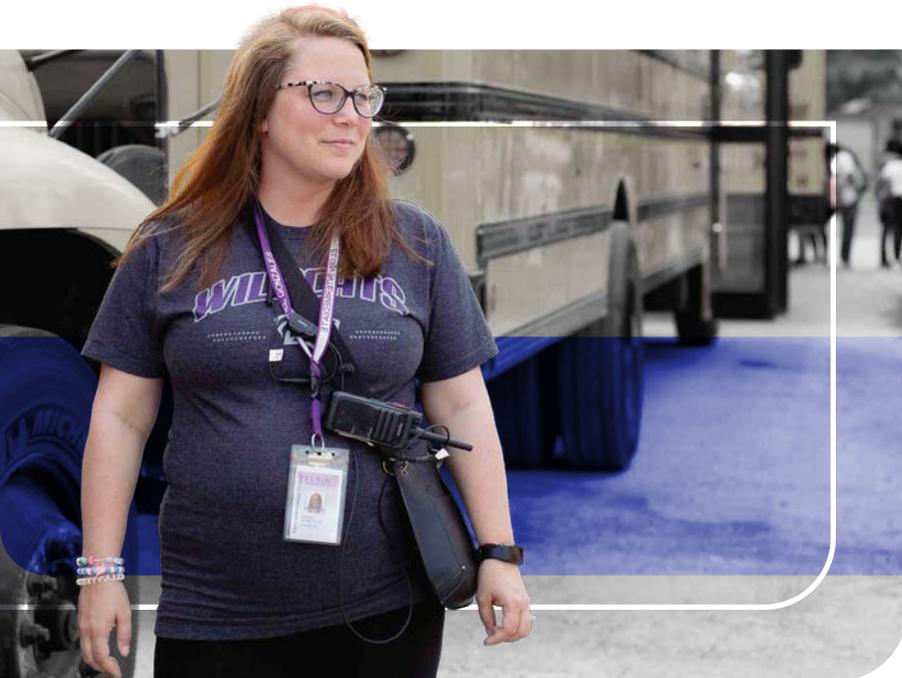
Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.



Adequate training and support interact with the stress teachers experience surrounding school safety and student mental health. Among those who said they lack adequate training and support to respond to a student's mental health crisis, 56% called supporting students' mental health and emotional well-being a major source of stress for them. That compares with 32% of those who do feel adequately trained and supported in this area.

Similarly, teachers who feel they lack training and support to respond to an active shooter or violent intruder are twice as apt as others to cite student safety as a major source of stress, 49% versus 25%. Related to school security, 83% of teachers said it is extremely or very important to improve building security in schools as a spending priority.

Teachers with less experience are more apt than their colleagues with more experience to feel they lack the training and support needed to respond to several scenarios. Fifty-one percent of teachers with five or fewer years of experience said they lack the training and support to respond to physical bullying, compared with 33% of teachers with more than 20 years of experience. Teachers with less experience are also 14 points more apt to feel they lack the training and support to respond to cyberbullying, 39% versus 25%; discrimination based on students' racial or ethnic identities, 41% versus 29%; and an active shooter or violent intruder, 44% versus 33%.



The end of the school day includes additional teacher duties, such as serving as a bus monitor.

# Spending priorities

**T**eachers were asked to assess the importance of 10 potential spending priorities because they are experts on their campus and in their classroom. Topping the list, nearly all (96%) called increasing teacher salaries extremely or very important. Priorities are also high for two other items: assisting students with mental health needs, 86%, and improving building security, 83%.

Three-quarters, 74%, said addressing pandemic-related learning gaps should be a highly important spending priority. Seventy-one percent said the same for providing free meals during school hours to any student who wants them, as do 69% for assisting students with physical health needs and 63% for helping students with material needs such as clothing or school supplies.

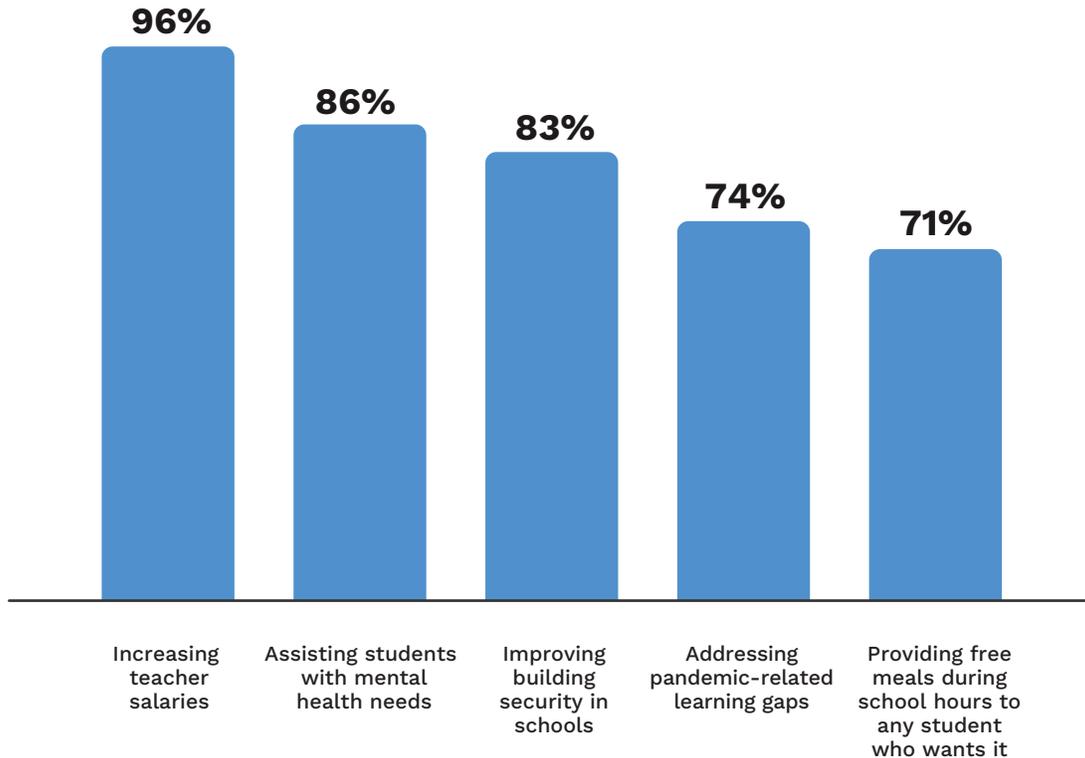
Fifty-seven to 62% called other items highly important as spending priorities: expanding career and technical training, offering professional development programs for teachers, and offering pre-kindergarten classes for any student whose family wants them.

Asked which of these spending priorities should be the single most important, 61% cited increasing teacher salaries. Assisting students with mental health needs is next, at a distant 13%. **Increasing teacher salaries is the top item across tenure, salary, age, region, education, race/ethnicity, and household income groups.** It peaks, at 76%, among teachers who said poor pay and benefits are a major source of stress for them.

On individual items, pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers are more apt than others to have said spending on universal pre-kindergarten should be a highly important priority, 65% versus 53% of middle school teachers and 49% of high school teachers. In another grade-level difference, 79% of pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade teachers specified spending to address pandemic-related learning gaps as a top priority, compared with 62% of grade 9-12 teachers.

## Public Education Spending Priorities From Teachers

% Texas teachers who consider each priority extremely/very important



Instead, grade 9-12 teachers are slightly more apt than those teaching pre-kindergarten through fifth grade to have said career and technical training should be a highly important priority, 66% versus 58%. Grade 6-8 teachers are in the middle, at 64%.

In most instances, Black teachers are more apt than White teachers to identify spending priorities as highly important, with Hispanic teachers in between. In one of the largest differences, 89% of Black teachers said spending to address pandemic-related learning gaps is highly important, falling to 80% of Hispanic teachers and further to 68% among White teachers. In another large gap, 84% of Black teachers said spending on assisting students with physical health needs should be highly important. Slightly fewer Hispanic teachers said so, 76%, dropping to 63% of White teachers.



Spending also generally received a higher priority among teachers in schools where more students come from low-income households. For example, in schools where three-quarters or more of the students come from low-income households, 81% of teachers indicated providing free meals during school hours as a high priority, versus 58% of teachers at schools where fewer than a quarter of students come from low-income households.

Teachers find moments to connect with students as they walk to class during passing periods.

**“I attended a brief training while student teaching related to school safety. The training was put on by the district police department, and we were briefed on the various terms and procedures for lockdowns, holds, shelter in place, etc. I found it useful to hear the police be honest with us, what to expect during drills, and what to anticipate in the event of real emergencies.”**

— Elementary school teacher

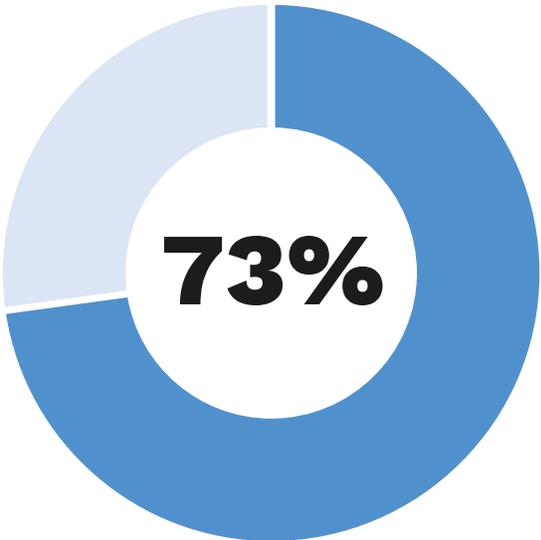
# School vouchers

**S**chool vouchers are at the forefront of policy and political debates and the opinions of teachers should be considered. Seventy-three percent of Texas public school teachers said implementing a voucher program to allow parents to partly pay for tuition at private and religious schools would be harmful to the state’s public schools. Fifteen percent think a voucher program would be helpful, and a similar 12% think it would not have an impact.

New teachers are less skeptical than their longer-tenured peers. Among those in their first five years of teaching, 55% view voucher programs as harmful, compared with 78% of longer-tenured teachers. Teachers at charter schools are less apt than traditional public school teachers to view voucher programs as harmful, 55% versus 76%.

Eighty-five percent of public school teachers overall opposed implementing a voucher program in their own community if it means reducing the amount of funds distributed to their local public schools; 15% support this. Eighty percent oppose implementing a voucher program if participating private and religious schools do not have state educational oversight and 19% expressed support. Eleven percent support a voucher program in both cases, while 89% oppose a voucher program if at least one condition is true.

## Texas Teachers Think Vouchers Would be Harmful



# Teacher attrition

**T**eacher attrition refers to the percentage of teachers exiting the profession in a given school year. The 2023 poll data confirms that attrition remains a major concern for the teaching profession. Seventy-five percent of Texas teachers have seriously considered leaving their position as a public school teacher in the past year, essentially the same as a year ago, after rising from 68% in 2021 and 58% in 2020.

That sentiment tracks with actual year-over-year attrition. Teacher attrition reached 13.4% in the 2022-23 school year, according to the Texas Education Agency, up from 11.6% in the 2021-22 school year and 9.3% in 2020-21. It is at its highest level in available data since 2011.<sup>2</sup>

Having seriously considered leaving one's position as a public school teacher is prevalent across demographic groups. It is reported by seven in 10 or more teachers regardless of gender, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, salary level, and tenure.

There are differences by urbanicity and region. Seventy-nine percent of teachers in urban areas have seriously considered leaving their position in the past year, compared with 66% in rural areas.<sup>3</sup> Suburban teachers are in the middle, at 74%. By region, having seriously considered leaving peaks at 81% of teachers in Central Texas; it is lowest among teachers in East Texas, at 67%, with other regions in between.

After running a statistical analysis called regression, workplace stress is one of the strongest independent predictors of having seriously considered leaving the profession. Illustratively, among teachers who reported six or more major work stressors, 92% said they have seriously considered leaving, compared with 48% who reported no more than one major stressor.

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<sup>2</sup> Educator Reports and Data were obtained from the Texas Education Agency. For more information, visit <https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/educator-data/educator-reports-and-data>

<sup>3</sup> The sample size of teachers in rural areas is small, n=93, against a preferred standard of n=100 for subgroup analysis.

Of the stressors included in this survey, excessive workloads, a lack of communication and understanding from administrators, stress surrounding supporting students' mental health and emotional well-being, and poor pay and benefits are most closely associated with seriously considering leaving. For example, 85% of teachers who experienced excessive workloads as a major stressor have seriously considered leaving, compared with 56% of those who said this is no more than a minor source of stress. Similarly, 89% of teachers who identified a lack of communication and understanding from administrators as a major source of stress have considered leaving, compared with 63% of those who experienced it as no more than a minor source of stress.

Self-assessed mental and emotional health ratings are also strongly associated with having seriously considered leaving the job, even after controlling for workplace stressors. Teachers who described their mental health and emotional well-being in relation to their work as only fair or poor are 35 points more apt than those who rated it as excellent or very good to have seriously considered leaving, 93% versus 58%.

A positive work culture and environment is another independent predictor of having seriously considered leaving the profession. Nearly all teachers who feel they lack a positive work culture and environment – 94% – have considered leaving. That compares with 64% of those who reported a positive workplace experience.

Among other factors, feeling unfairly paid is associated with having considered leaving, but only before controlling for workplace stressors, school culture and environment, and self-assessed mental health. Seventy-eight percent of teachers who reported feeling unfairly paid have seriously considered leaving their position, compared with 65% of those who said their pay is fair.

**“We do not have childcare; however, I would love it if they would offer that. That would definitely encourage me to stay and encourage others to join.”**

— High school teacher

# Retention strategies

Four retention strategies were tested in this year’s poll. Among them, a four-day school week with longer school days ranked highest, though none of the strategies are considered highly important by at least 50% of teachers. Nearly half (48%) of Texas teachers said a four-day workweek would be extremely or very important in encouraging them to continue working as a public school teacher. An additional 24% said it would be somewhat important.

Among other strategies, 36% said their school participating in the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) program would be highly important in encouraging them to continue teaching; an additional 25% called this somewhat important, leaving 38% rating it as less important.<sup>4</sup>

Child care paid by the district is considered extremely or very important to 33% of teachers overall. That soars to 74% of teachers who are parents or guardians of a child of age five or younger in their household.

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<sup>4</sup> The Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) was described as a program which uses information such as student test data, parent surveys, and classroom observations by administrators to recognize effective teachers and award them higher pay. For more information about TIA, visit <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-educators/educator-initiatives-and-performance/educator-initiatives/teacher-incentive-allotment>



The last strategy – an extended school year, with up to 30 additional days of instruction and additional salary for teachers – is considered extremely or very important by just 16% of teachers. Eighteen percent said this would be somewhat important, leaving 66% less interested.

Views on these retention strategies are largely consistent across demographic groups, with a few exceptions. Sixty-three percent of Black teachers said a four-day school week would be extremely or very important in encouraging them to continue teaching, versus 53% of Hispanic teachers and 45% of White teachers.<sup>5</sup>

Forty-four percent of Black and 42% of Hispanic teachers are more apt than 30% of White teachers to have said the TIA would be highly important in encouraging them to stay in their jobs. Newer teachers are also more likely than others to call the TIA highly important. Forty-five percent of teachers at schools where three-quarters or more of the students are from economically disadvantaged households said their school participating in the TIA would be highly important in encouraging them to stay, compared with 25% of those where fewer than half of the student population are from economically disadvantaged households.<sup>6</sup>

**Retention strategies tested in the [2022 Texas Teacher Poll](#) had much broader appeal.** In that poll, 91% of teachers said a significant salary increase would be extremely or very important in encouraging them to continue teaching. Eighty-eight percent said the same for maximizing retirement benefits, as did 85% for a schedule with more time for planning or additional district-wide days off for teacher and student well-being. In terms of intangible aspects of the job, 97% said a positive work culture and environment would be extremely or very important in encouraging them to continue working.

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<sup>5</sup> The difference between Black and Hispanic teachers is marginal.

<sup>6</sup> Students' socioeconomic status was obtained from the Texas Education Agency's *Economically Disadvantaged Status Reports*. Details about these classifications can be found at <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/adhocrpt/adstc.html>

Recess is a time for students to play and teachers to find companionship with colleagues.

## Pay and benefits

In the 2020 and 2021 Texas Teacher Polls, seven in 10 Texas teachers said they feel unfairly paid. That jumped to 81% in 2022 and remains there in 2023.

This sentiment is shared among teachers across income groups. Eighty-three percent of those earning less than \$65,000 annually feel unfairly paid, as do 77% of those earning \$65,000 or more. Roughly equal shares across these income groups called poor pay and benefits a major stressor and selected it as one of their single biggest sources of stress.

Feeling unfairly paid also is prevalent across other demographic groups, reported by about three-quarters or more regardless of gender, age, tenure, educational attainment, region, urbanicity, or the grade levels taught. Teachers reported a median annual salary of \$60,000 for 2022-2023, up from \$57,000 in 2021-2022, and \$55,220 in 2020-2021.

Pay varies across groups. Seventy-nine percent of teachers with more than 20 years of experience earn at least \$60,000 annually, dropping across tenure groups to 37% of those with five or fewer years of experience. High school teachers, men, those with postgraduate degrees, and those in urban areas also reported higher salaries than their counterparts.

There are variations by region. About eight in 10 teachers in the Houston area and 73% in Dallas/Fort Worth earn at least \$60,000, more than in the South/Southwest (45%), West Texas (42%), East and West Texas (37%), and the Central region of the state (36%). Ninety percent in Central Texas feel their pay is unfair, compared with around 73 to 83% in the other regions.

Teachers try to find times when students are away from the classroom for professional development, mentorship, lesson planning, and department meetings.

# Work culture and environment

While nearly all teachers last year cited the attraction of a positive work culture and environment, far fewer in this poll, 56%, feel this is largely present (a great deal or a good amount) in their current position, essentially unchanged from 2022.

To create a positive work culture and environment, anywhere from 91 to 94% of teachers said it is extremely or very important for administrators to give them autonomy in the classroom; support them in handling student discipline; take their opinions into account when setting school policy; advocate for them in interactions with parents and the community; provide adequate campus security, supplies and equipment, and support staff; and manage their level of non-instructional tasks and responsibilities. Eighty percent said it is highly important for administrators to foster collaboration between school employees.



Teachers said support in handling student discipline is the most important step administrators can take to create a positive work culture and environment for teachers, with 94% to have said it is extremely or very important. When asked about the single most important of these steps that their campus administrators can take, teachers ranked support in handling student discipline highest, at 32%. Twenty percent cited managing the amount of non-instructional tasks and responsibilities they receive, and 14% selected giving them autonomy in the classroom. The rest received single-digit mentions.

**32%**

of Texas teachers consider **support with student discipline the single most important step** campus administrators can take to create a positive work culture and environment

**“When teachers feel like their voice and identity and experiences are reflected in the decisions made by leadership, they can feel more a part of the school community.”**

— Elementary school teacher

Teachers support their students by promoting authenticity.



Among groups, middle school teachers are more apt than others to cite support handling in student discipline as the single most important step administrators can take, 38% versus 30% of pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers and a similar 28% of high school teachers. Special education teachers are least inclined to call this a top item; instead, they are more apt than others to prioritize adequate support staff, 14% versus 5%.

As noted, 93% of teachers said it is extremely or very important for administrators to advocate for teachers in interactions with parents and the community. Seventy-three percent reported having adequate training and support from their campus in how to handle collaboration with parents and families. About a quarter said they lack adequate support in this area, peaking at 34% of those with five or fewer years of experience.

# Fostering a sense of belonging

Encouragingly, eight in 10 Texas public school teachers feel they have adequate support from their campus to foster a sense of belonging among all students in their classroom. This included feeling supported to cultivate good relationships among students, creating a space where all students feel empowered to participate, and making a space where students can be their genuine selves. Nineteen percent of teachers said they do not have adequate support from their campus to provide these elements of belonging for their students.

Notably, among those who reported experiencing a positive work culture and environment, 90% or more feel adequately supported to provide elements of belonging to their students. That dropped to 50 to 57% among those with little to no positive work culture and environment.

## Teachers Report Adequate Support for Belonging-Related Factors In Their Classroom

% Texas teachers who have adequate support to provide belonging factors



**“I feel as if my school needs to start promoting equity and inclusion with faculty and staff to be more effective when doing so with students. I would love to see dedicated time during professional development and teacher training to address diversity, equity, and inclusion.”**

— Elementary school teacher

In a significant but less dramatic gap, teachers in schools where most students are White are 9 to 13 points more apt than those in more racially and ethnically diverse schools to have said they have support to create a sense of belonging for all their students. Similar gaps emerged by economic status: Teachers at schools where fewer than half the students are from low-income households are 8 to 11 points more apt than those in schools with more such students to have said they have adequate support to create a sense of belonging.

While most by far feel empowered to foster a sense of belonging, fewer feel they have adequate backing from their campus to meet the needs of specific student groups, including just 43% of teachers who reported having adequate support to handle the needs of students with behavioral challenges – the only student group specified in the survey in which fewer than half of teachers reported feeling adequately supported.

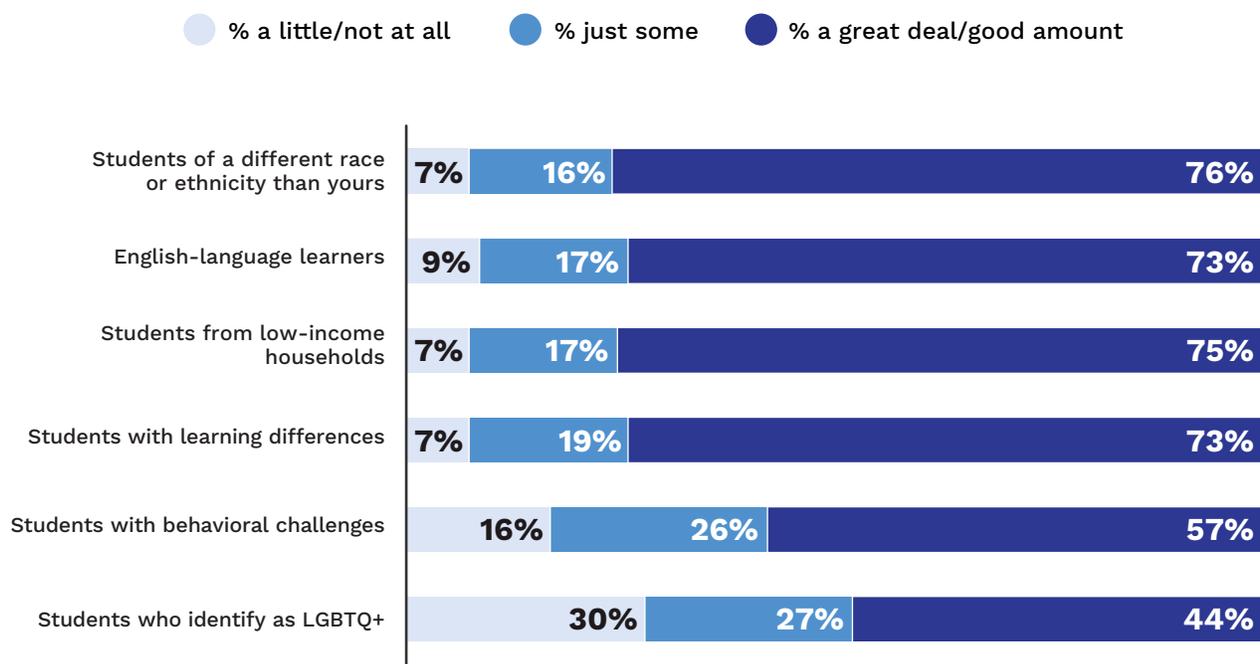
Fifty-five percent said they do not have adequate support to meet the needs of students with behavioral challenges, and 41% feel they do not have adequate support to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ students.

Fewer, but still 31%, said they do not have the support needed to effectively serve students with learning differences; 26% said the same for English-language learners. Roughly two in 10 feel they do not have enough support to meet the needs of students from low-income households (22%) or students of a different race or ethnicity from themselves (17%).

These views generally are consistent across demographic groups with some exceptions. Women are 18 points more likely than men to feel they do not have adequate support to meet the needs of students with behavioral challenges, 57% versus 39%. Elementary and middle school teachers are more apt than high school teachers to feel they lack support in this area, 59% versus 45%; and it is 58% among teachers at schools where at least half of the students are from low-income households, versus 50% of teachers at schools with fewer such students.

## Teachers' Ability to Advocate for all Student Populations

% Texas teachers reporting level of ability to advocate for students



Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

The poll also asked teachers about their ability to advocate for student groups at their campus. Just 44% reported a great deal or a good amount of ability to advocate for LGBTQ+ students. That rises to 57% for students with behavioral challenges and about three-quarters for each of the other student groups.

Campus support is strongly tied to teachers' ability to advocate. **Teachers who feel have adequate support to meet the needs of each of these groups of students at their campus are 28 to 39 points more apt than those without adequate support to feel they have the ability to advocate a great deal or a good amount for each group of students.**

“Students have influenced my sense of belonging as a teacher because of our similar backgrounds. This year I had the opportunity to teach emerging bilingual students. As a bilingual individual myself, I could relate to the students’ struggles and frustration with the language. Students felt safe learning the language in my class and asking questions when confused. By the end of the year, I began seeing how students adopted me as ‘their teacher,’ as I would often see them come visit me and spark conversation about everyday occurrences. They felt safe and loved in the classroom.”

— High school teacher

# Career plans

**W**hile understanding teachers' current experiences and challenges is essential to improving the profession, teachers' perspectives on the teaching pipeline and training are also valuable. Why do individuals become teachers? What is their preparation experience? For the first time in the Texas Teacher Poll history, teachers shared more about their career plans, including what led them to teach and what they experienced if they left the profession and returned. When they first entered the teaching profession, 53% of surveyed Texas public school teachers planned to be a PK-12 teacher for the entirety of their career. Thirty-four percent planned to transition to different work; 12% did not have specific career plans.

Career certainty is higher among older and longer-tenure teachers. Two-thirds of teachers with more than 20 years of experience planned to spend their career in the classroom; 40% of teachers in their first five years planned to do the same. Similarly, among teachers 50 years or older, 63% planned a career in teaching, compared with 49% of teachers under 50 years old. It is likely that many teachers who entered the profession with plans to transition to another career accomplished this goal as their career progressed.

White teachers are more apt than Black teachers to plan a full career as PK-12 classroom teachers, 60% versus 38%, with Hispanic teachers in between at 47%.

When students are not in the classroom, teachers spend considerable time completing administrative tasks such as writing emails, lesson planning, and grading.

Twenty-one percent of Texas teachers said they left their job as a public school teacher at some point, then returned. Among them, 7% left because of burnout or their psychological/emotional health, 6% left to care for children or another family member, and 4% left to pursue another career.

Teachers who left their teaching position were asked, in their own words, the main reason they decided to return to public school teaching. Many said they missed the work and interactions with students. Others cited their schedules and the need for a steady income.

**“I missed having a purpose outside of my house. I missed working with other teachers. Mostly, I missed working with the students.”**

— High school teacher

**“It best fits the needs of my family by allowing income, healthcare and time off with my children when they were out of school.”**

— Elementary school teacher

**“After a year of not teaching, I missed it because it is a part of who I am. Now 20 years in the classroom and trying to sustain. My love of teaching children keeps me going.”**

— Middle school teacher

**“The schedule. Having summers available to do volunteer work, and having breaks during the school year such as Fall Break, Winter Break, and Spring Break.”**

— High school teacher



# Teacher preparation

The following section provides findings on the types of teacher certification programs the surveyed teachers completed, the components that were a part of teachers' preparation, and reflections on their first year of teaching regarding how prepared they felt to support students.

## Certification type

Of the Texas public school teachers surveyed, 94% have completed a teacher certification program. Among them, more than half completed a traditional certificate program, such as an undergraduate teacher preparation program (44%) or a master's with teaching certification (11%). Forty-five percent completed an alternative certification program: 22% provided by an education service center, 10% provided by a university, and 13% by some other provider.

There is variation in certification type. Most strikingly, among those certified, 56% of teachers with 10 or fewer years of experience took an alternative route, compared with 22% of those with more than 20 years of experience.

Charter school teachers are more likely than those at traditional public schools to receive an alternative certification, 58% versus 43%. It is more common at schools where at least half of the student population is from low-income households, where 48% of teachers have received an alternative certification, compared with 38% of those where fewer students are from low-income households.

Alternative certification also is more common among men than women, 53% versus 43%, and among Hispanic teachers (58%) and Black teachers (56%) than White teachers (38%).

## Components of preparation

Some elements of teaching preparation are nearly universal. Almost all Texas teachers reported that observing other teachers in the classroom (95%), certification coursework (95%), training in developing lessons and assessments (93%), and support from their field supervisor (93%) were elements of their teacher preparation.

Eighty-eight percent said they had an assigned mentor, either during their preparation program or in their early years of teaching, and 80% reported having done student teaching. Fewer, 70 to 75%, said they participated in school- or district-provided training for early career teachers, school- or district-provided early career support groups, or an internship as part of their teacher preparation.

Among those who participated, direct experiences are cited as the most important. About eight in 10 said observing other teachers in the classroom (82%), student teaching (81%), or an internship (78%) is extremely or very important to their teacher preparation. Seventy-four percent said so for having an assigned mentor; 72% cited their training in developing lessons and assessments.

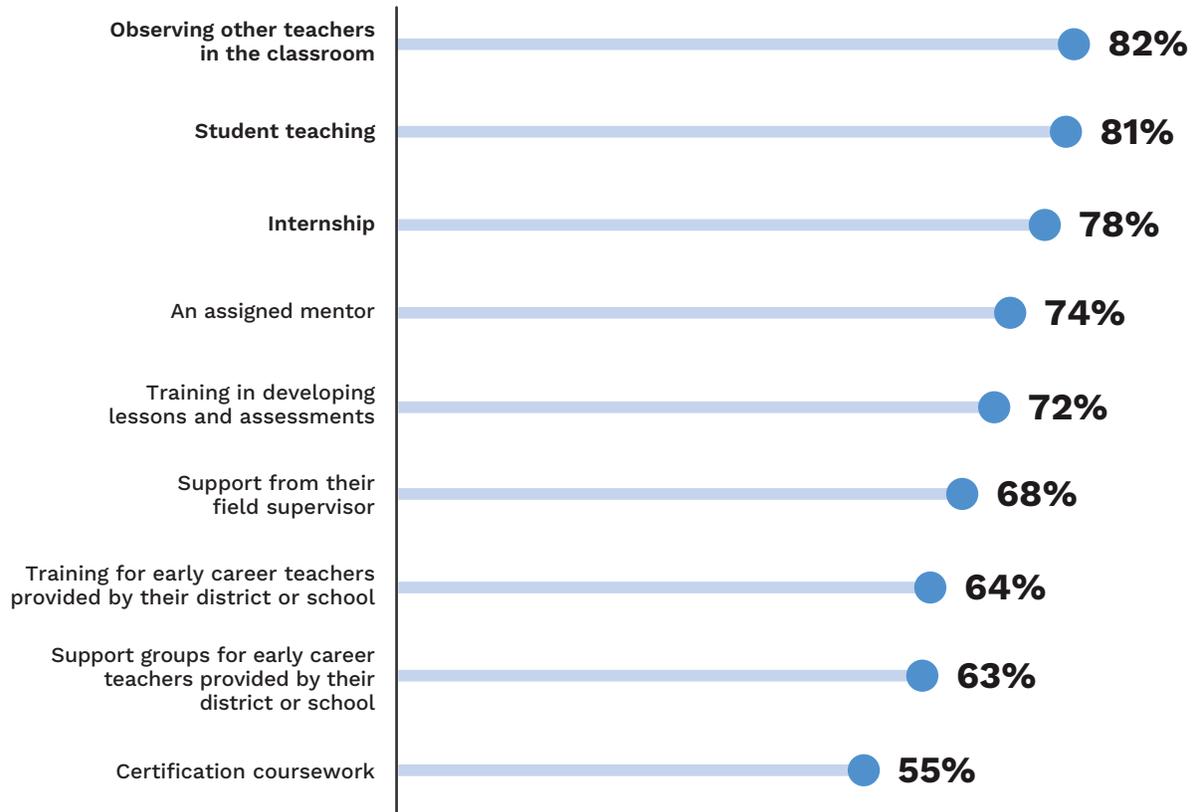
Sixty-eight percent said support from their field supervisor was highly important, followed by district- or school-provided early career training (64%) or support groups (63%). At the bottom of the list, 55% said certification coursework is highly important to their preparation.

Teachers find time to connect with students throughout the day.



## Importance of Field Experience

% Texas teachers who consider each teacher preparation component extremely/very important



Teachers for whom all nine elements were part of their preparation are 26 points more likely to feel they were at least somewhat prepared in their first year to support English-language learners, and 18 points more likely to have said they felt prepared to support students with learning differences, compared with teachers with fewer than six preparatory components. The gap between teachers who experienced all nine preparation components and those who experienced fewer than six elements narrows to 14 points to support the needs of students with behavioral challenges and those of a different race or ethnicity than their own, and 11 points in preparation to support students from low-income households. There is no significant difference in the number of preparation elements and feeling prepared to support LGBTQ+ students.

Teachers frequently lean on each other for guidance and mentorship during the school day.

## The first year

Looking back on their first year of teaching, Texas teachers reported being unevenly prepared to support the needs of various student populations. Large majorities said they were at least somewhat prepared to support the needs of students of a different race or ethnicity than their own (75%) and students from low-income households (68%). Smaller majorities were at least somewhat prepared to support students with learning differences (62%) and English-language learners (58%).

Fewer than half said they were prepared to support the needs of students with behavioral challenges (40%) and students who are LGBTQ+ (35%). As discussed, teachers also reported having less ability to advocate for students in these two groups and were less apt to feel they had adequate support from their campus on how to meet student needs in these groups, compared with other student populations.

Feelings of preparedness vary by type of teacher program. Teachers with traditional certificates are slightly more apt than those with alternative certificates to have said they were slightly more prepared to support the needs of students with learning differences in their first year, 64 versus 57%. Teachers who completed a master's with certification are more apt than those with other certification types to feel they were prepared to meet the needs of students of a different race or ethnicity than their own (86% versus 73%), and LGBTQ+ students (46% versus 34%).



Feeling prepared to serve LGBTQ+ students as a first-year teacher also varies substantially by age. Forty-five percent of teachers younger than 40 years old said they were at least somewhat prepared to support these students, compared with three in 10 teachers of age 40 years to 59 years old and 25% of those age 60 years and older.

Race and ethnicity also inform how prepared teachers felt to serve diverse groups of students as first-year teachers. Eighty-five percent of Black teachers said they were at least somewhat prepared to support students of a different race or ethnicity than their own, compared with 74% of Hispanic teachers and a similar 73% of White teachers. Black teachers are also more apt to have said they felt prepared to meet the needs of students from low-income households, 81%, compared with 64% of White teachers and slightly more than Hispanic teachers, 72%. Hispanic teachers are most apt to have said they felt prepared to support the needs of English-language learners, 68% versus 54% of White teachers and 55% of Black teachers.

## State law

Finally, a majority of teachers, 59%, said they have not received adequate training and support from their campus on how to respond to the 2021 state law<sup>7</sup> establishing guidelines for teaching on current and historical events, cultural differences, and political issues. Sixty-two percent of Texas teachers said complying with the state law is at least a minor source of stress this past school year. Even among those who reported adequate training and support from their campus on how to respond to the law, a majority, 52%, called it at least a minor source of stress; that rose to 69% of those without adequate training. Pluralities of 43 to 49% said it has had no impact on how they engage in classroom discussions, design their curriculum, talk with students individually, or foster students' sense of belonging. Thirty-one to 36% said the law has been harmful to these; fewer, 16 to 24%, said it has been helpful.

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<sup>7</sup> The 2021 state law is in reference to Texas House Bill 3979 and Senate Bill 3. For more information, visit [www.capitol.texas.gov](http://www.capitol.texas.gov)

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# Methodology

In this report, two forms of data collection were utilized to capture the perspectives of Texas public school teachers: polling/surveying and moderated online discussion forums. There were 1,029 teachers included in the survey. Additionally, 24 teachers who were not surveyed participated in the moderated online discussion forums. The following section provides a description of the survey methodology.

## Survey

Sampling and data collection for this report were conducted by SSRS of Glen Mills, Pa., at the direction of Langer Research Associates.

Using the Texas Education Agency's 2021-22 list of 376,397 public school teachers, 32,801 names and email addresses were randomly selected, stratified by metro status, region, race and ethnicity, years of teaching experience, and charter status. Oversamples were drawn to obtain results from at least 100 teachers in each of these groups: East, West, and Central regions; Black teachers; those with no more than two years experience and/or younger than 30; and charter school teachers.

Most email addresses in the TEA list are personal (typically with a .com suffix). To increase contact opportunity, a third-party vendor, MDR, appended school-based email addresses as available, adding them to 14,922 records.

Sampled teachers were sent personalized email invitations signed by Dr. Shari Albright, president of the Charles Butt Foundation, with a unique passcode-embedded link to complete the survey online. The sample was released in two waves, with the second wave designed to ensure adequate sample sizes from subgroups. Multiple email invitations were sent to all sampled teachers. Fieldwork was conducted March 22 through May 1, 2023, and June 13 through June 15, 2023.

Of those invited, 27,882 did not click the invitation link, 1,258 did so but did not complete the survey, 98 were determined

not to be current Texas public school teachers and 1,043 completed the survey. In quality control, the fastest 1% of respondents in total completion time were flagged for possible inattention, as were those who skipped more than 25% of the questions they received; these 14 cases were deleted. The final sample included 1,029 Texas public school teachers. The average time to complete the questionnaire was 17 minutes.

Data were weighted to address unequal probabilities of selection based on the number of available email addresses and to match known parameters from the TEA list, including:

- Gender (male, female)
- Age (18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60+)
- Race/ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, other)
- Highest degree earned (bachelor's or less, master's or higher)
- Tenure (2 years or fewer, 3-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-20 years, more than 20 years)
- School grade level (elementary, middle, high, combined, unknown)
- School enrollment (<100, 100-249, 250-499, 500-999, 1000-2499, 2500+, unknown)
- School's metro status (urban, suburban, rural, unknown)
- School's region (East, Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston area, Central, West, South/Southwest, unknown)

Weights were trimmed at the 2nd and 98th percentiles. The survey has a design effect due to a weighting of 1.41, for a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.6 percentage points for the full sample; error margins are larger for subgroups. Results are highly representative in terms of known demographic values.

## Moderated online discussion forums

For moderated online forum discussion methodology see [CharlesButtFdn.org/2023TXTeacherPoll](https://charlesbuttfdn.org/2023TXTeacherPoll).



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