

TEACHERS ARE FEELING UNDER SIEGE AND UNDERPAID. WHAT'S MAKING SOME LEAVE THE PROFESSION AND OTHERS STAY?

Need-to-know data for decision-makers on the teacher shortage and how Americans, parents and educators are weathering the storm.

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GAME CHANGERS



KEY FINDINGS:

1. Most K-12 parents are aware of the teacher shortage.
2. Teachers feel working conditions have gotten worse.
3. Teachers, K-12 parents, and the general public agree: teachers don't make enough.
4. Some parents feel that they, not teachers, should be the final decision makers regarding what their child is learning in the classroom.
5. Teachers see their profession as meaningful, but fewer educators see teaching as prestigious.

Between the [pandemic](#), debates over curriculum, [culture wars](#) entering classrooms, low [teacher pay](#), [the student mental health crisis](#) and the introduction of [artificial intelligence](#) in the classroom, educators have faced a significant amount of turmoil over the past few years.

Notably, all these problems have pushed many out of the teaching profession. Many schools have [vacant teaching positions](#) and interest in teaching has [hit its lowest level in 50 years](#) among high school seniors and college freshmen. Teachers leaving the classroom and young professionals losing interest in entering the field may lead to serious short-term and long-term consequences for education in America.

[Recent NPR/Ipsos polling](#) explores teachers' experiences and the highs and lows of teaching during such turbulent times. Policymakers must first understand what challenges teachers face before they can address the pressing teacher shortage issue in the K-12 education system.

Most K-12 parents are aware of the teacher shortage

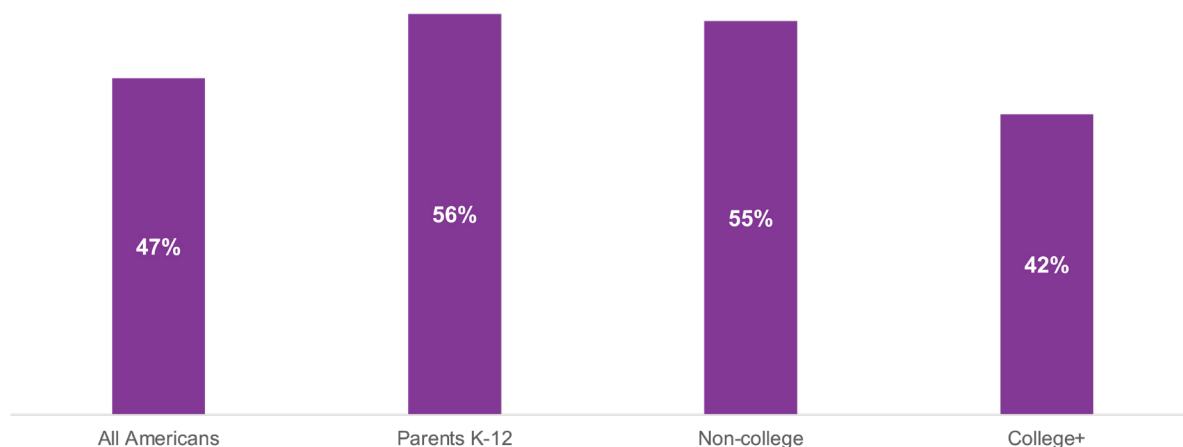
Policymakers should know that the teaching shortage is far from a niche topic. Most Americans are aware of the issue. Beyond just shallow awareness, most people, especially parents of K-12 students, say there are teacher shortages in the public schools in their communities.

Inequalities in how Americans are experiencing teacher shortages make the issue particularly concerning: non-college-educated Americans are more likely to report that teacher shortages are happening in public schools in their community compared to college-educated Americans.

While the teacher shortage is a concerning industry-wide topic, decision-makers should note that these conversations and issues are happening across the country, not just in trade-specific circles.

Most parents, and those without a college degree, report that there are teacher shortages in their community

Percent who report that **teacher shortages** recently occurred in K-12 public schools in their community



Source: NPR/Ipsos fielded May 5-11, 2023, among 1,316 U.S. adults 18+ and 452 K-12 parents on Ipsos' KnowledgePanel



Teachers feel working conditions have gotten worse and that the public trusts them less

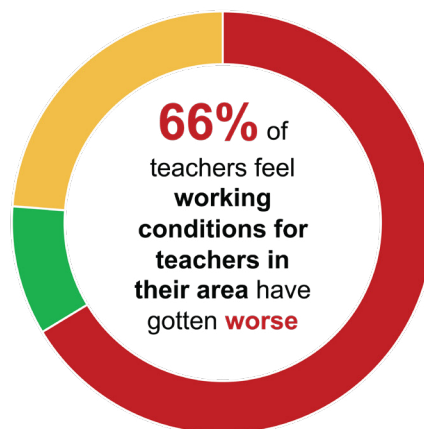
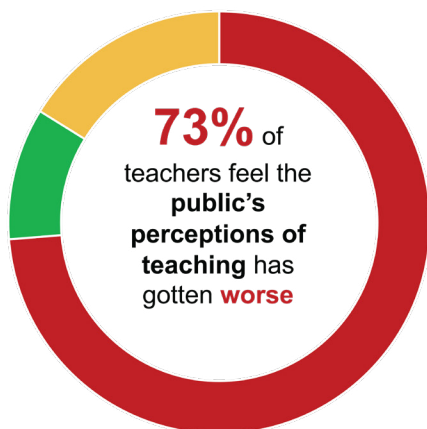
At a time when schools report difficulty filling vacancies, two-thirds of teachers feel that the working conditions for teachers in their area have deteriorated in the last decade. But it is not only working conditions: Many Americans, including teachers themselves, report a decline in the public's perception of teaching. Three in four teachers feel the public's perception of teachers has declined in the past ten years. [Many among the general public, as well as K-12 parents](#), are noticing these changes too.

After a tumultuous few years, many teachers report a combination of deteriorating working conditions and public perception, potentially playing into the teacher shortage. Despite these growing obstacles in the teaching experience, teachers remain mostly positive towards national teachers' unions, the organizations tasked with advocating for better salaries and working conditions. A majority of teachers (59%) support the national teachers' unions, unchanged from April 2018.

Policymakers need to address these problems. At its root, teachers feel their working conditions and their standing with the American public are in decline, a demoralizing position for both current and future educators. Tackling these issues may help alleviate the teacher shortage.

Teachers report worsening work conditions and declining perceptions in the public's mind

Share of teachers who report that they know or feel that in the last ten years each of the following has gotten better, worse, or stayed the same



Source: NPR/Ipsos fielded May 8-12, 2023, among 510 K-12 teachers on Ipsos' KnowledgePanel



Teachers, K-12 parents, and the general public agree: teachers don't make enough

Pay and scant classroom resources are other struggles that teachers are reporting. The overwhelming majority of teachers say that teachers are asked to do too much work for the pay they receive. Compared to 2018, growing numbers of teachers report that they devote time outside school hours to help a student or purchase school supplies with their own money. In addition, some teachers report taking even more extreme measures to make ends meet, including taking a second job (33%) or increasing their debt (24%).

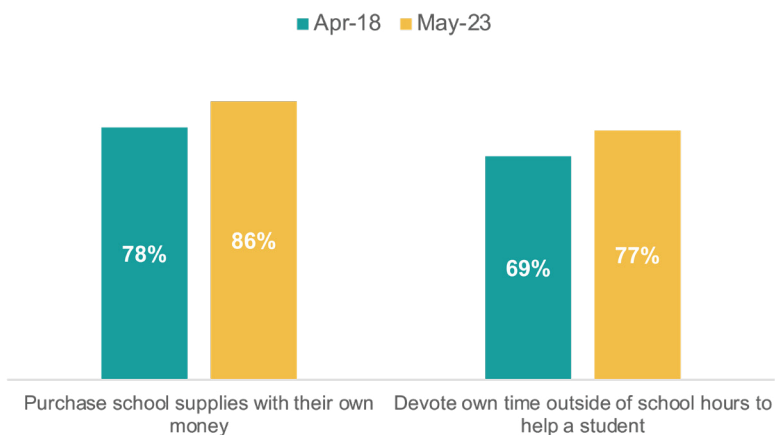
These effects are especially pronounced among younger teachers, potentially making it more difficult to attract and maintain young talent. While most teachers, regardless of age, report devoting their time outside of school hours to help students, teachers under age 50 are more likely to be doing this than teachers over 50 (82% vs. 66%, respectively). Younger teachers are also more likely to say they are working a second job to make ends meet (39% under 50 vs. 26% over 50). Likewise, teachers under 50 (27%) are more likely to report running up a debt to make ends meet compared to those over 50 (17%).

Nearly all teachers feel they are not being fairly compensated for the work they do, and younger teachers are especially feeling pressure on their time, resources, and finances. Will these teachers stay, given this experience? It's hard to say, but the downstream effects of not retaining young talent can compound over time and should not be overlooked by decision-makers. Policymakers and administrators focused on addressing the teacher shortage should look at the financial and resource-strained experiences of teachers broadly, and young teachers specifically.

Nearly all teachers say they are asked to do too much work for the pay they receive



Percent of teachers who report doing the following over time



Source: NPR/Ipsos fielded May 8-12, 2023, among 510 K-12 teachers on Ipsos' KnowledgePanel



Some parents are feeling that they, not teachers, should be the final deciders over what their child is learning in the classroom

A decisive majority of Americans and parents of K-12 students trust teachers to make decisions about classroom curriculum. But, when asked who should be primarily responsible for what is taught in public schools in the U.S., the answers are mixed. A substantial minority of parents feel that parents rather than teachers should have the final say about what is taught in public schools. Teachers overwhelmingly think that they should be the primary voice in curriculum decisions in public schools.

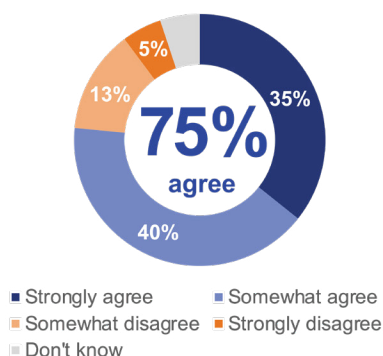
While parents do trust teachers, some parents want the final say. That puts teachers in a particularly delicate and stressful position, balancing parents' expectations with their own professional training. Decision-makers should know that this is yet another worry on teachers' plates. Finding ways to back teachers up and support them as they navigate the tense position between parents, students, and curriculum may help teachers feel seen and defended, reducing turnover issues.

Vast majority of Americans say they trust teachers, yet they're mixed on who should be the *primary* voice on what's taught

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

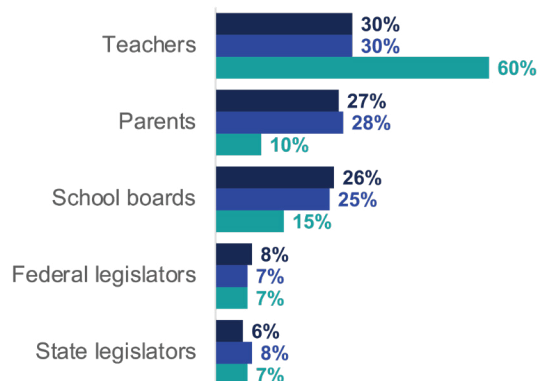
% selecting among all Americans

"Teachers are professionals who should be trusted to make decisions about classroom curriculum"



Which of the following groups do you believe should be primarily responsible for decisions about what is taught in public schools in the United States?

% selecting among ■ All Americans ■ K-12 Parents ■ K-12 Teachers



Source: NPR/Ipsos Education Poll, fielded May 5-11, 2023; NPR/Ipsos Teachers Poll, fielded May 8-12, 2023

Base: All Americans (N=1,316); K-12 parents (N=452); K-12 teachers (N=510)



Teachers see their profession as meaningful, but fewer educators see teaching as prestigious

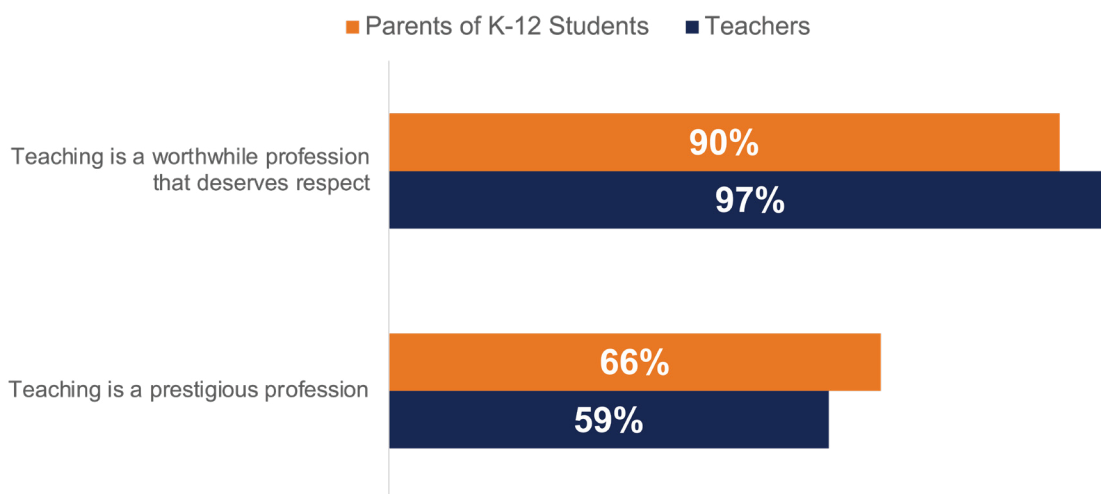
Teachers face many challenges, making it difficult to be in the profession. With worsening working conditions and declining public perception—what is keeping teachers teaching? Despite these issues, many teachers say they find teaching meaningful and are happy they became a teacher.

Most teachers say they are happy they became a teacher (80%), want to do good (95%), and like educating (96%). While practically all teachers (97%) and K-12 parents (90%) say teaching is a worthwhile profession that deserves respect, fewer teachers (59%) and K-12 parents (66%) say teaching is prestigious. That's true, even as most teachers (65%) say you cannot be an effective teacher without a bachelor's degree.

Despite the significant hurdles of teaching, nearly all find the profession meaningful, and many are happy but don't always feel their profession is esteemed or respected. All the struggles aside, the meaning teachers find in the profession represents the biggest draw to the industry, which should be leaned on as an existing strong point when addressing the teacher shortage.

Most agree teaching is a worthwhile profession that deserves respect, fewer feel teaching is prestigious

Percent of teachers who agree with the following



Source: NPR/Ipsos fielded May 5-11, 2023, among 1,316 U.S. adults 18+ and 452 K-12 parents on Ipsos' KnowledgePanel



What's Next

The state of education is at a critical point. Teachers continue to face numerous obstacles after years of crisis, and many are leaving the profession as teacher recruitment wanes. What can policymakers looking to understand and address the issue do? Hear from teachers themselves.

Below are five things to remember about Americans and teachers' experience with education in America today:

1. Most Americans are aware of the teacher shortage and see the issue in their communities.
2. Teachers are feeling demoralized, with many noticing deteriorating working conditions and declining support from the American public. Policymakers addressing the teacher shortage should pay attention to and address the embattled position of teachers.
3. Decision makers should note that teachers feel underpaid and under resourced, with these issues especially acute among young teachers, potentially holding long-term consequences for teacher retention.
4. Some parents and teachers have diverging ideas of who should be primarily responsible for curriculum decisions. Policymakers should support teachers in navigating this difficult position.
5. Educators derive value, meaning, and happiness from teaching, even as they see teaching as less prestigious. Lean into what draws people to teaching.



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