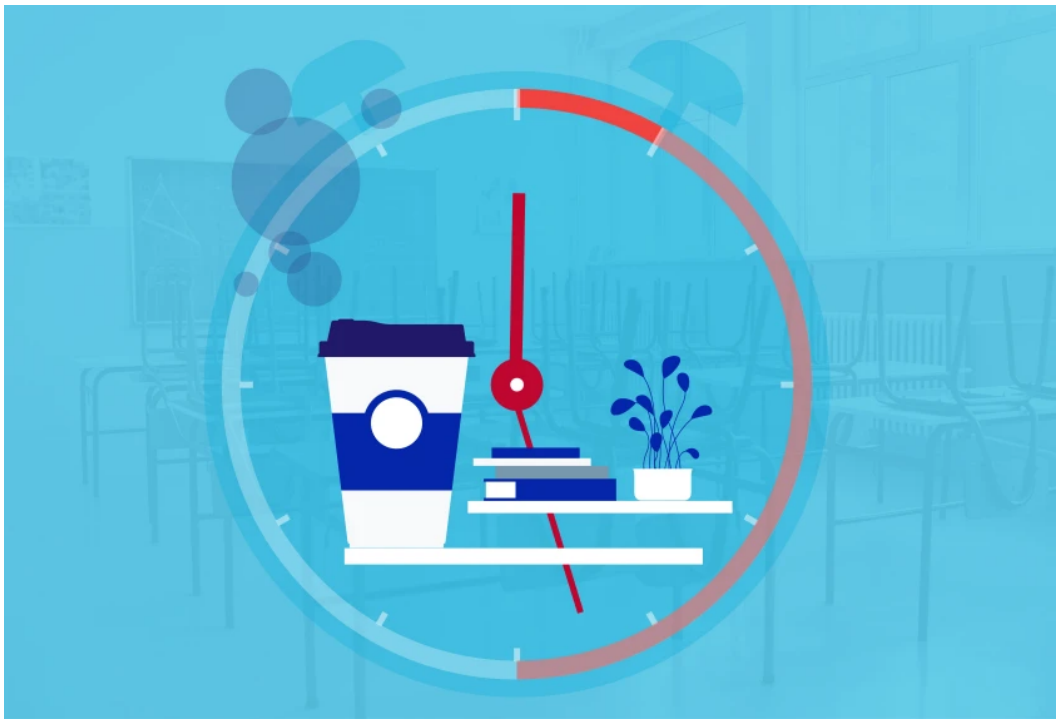
Long Hours, Second Jobs: New Federal Data Give a Snapshot of the Teaching Profession

By Madeline Will — December 13, 2022 6 min read



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Teachers work long hours, far more than what's required of them. Even still, 17 percent are also working second jobs outside the school system.

That's according to newly updated federal data from the 2020-21 academic year. The data shine a light on teachers' demographics, salaries, and their perceptions of how much influence and control they have over school policies. The release also captures the depth of staffing vacancies during the first full school year of the pandemic.

"The nation's teachers and principals have had a front-row view into what is happening in classrooms day to day, and their perspectives and experiences are going to be essential to driving a recovery that's empathetic, equitable, and exceeds the pre-pandemic status quo," said Peggy Carr, the commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, in a media briefing last week. "The National Teacher and Principal Survey, also known as NTPS, gives us a closer look at the work of our educators during this very difficult period."

The U.S. Department of Education collects data on schools, principals, and teachers every two years through its National Teacher and Principal Survey. The survey went out to 68,300 public school teachers and 8,000 private school teachers, as well as principals. Data were collected from October 2020 through August 2021.

Here are five takeaways about the teaching profession from the new release.

1. The teaching profession remains overwhelmingly white—and grew even whiter.

During the 2020-21 school year, 79.9 percent of public school teachers were white, 9.4 percent were Hispanic, 6.1 percent were Black, 2.4 percent were Asian, and 1.6 percent were of two or more races. Just 0.4 percent of teachers were American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.2 percent were Pacific Islander.

This is largely unchanged from the results of the 2017-18 survey—with a notable exception. The percentage of Black teachers ticked down slightly, from 6.7 percent. Instead, the teaching profession grew even whiter, up from 79.3 percent in 2017-18.

These new data are a setback to policymakers' and district leaders' efforts to diversify the teaching profession.

"It's definitely disappointing," said Sharif El-Mekki, the founder and chief executive officer of the Center for Black Educator Development, a group dedicated to recruiting, training, and retaining Black educators. "I'm hoping this really galvanizes the government as well as districts to go from this being an important issue to being a priority. I think that's really crucial to addressing this, because if we're not careful, that downward slide can just continue."

Travis Bristol, an associate professor of teacher education and education policy at the University of California, Berkeley, said most policymakers tend to focus more on recruiting new Black teachers into the profession, rather than keeping the ones who are already in classrooms.

"The recruitment piece is easy—that's why people focus on it," he said, citing scholarship programs as an example. "The retention work is challenging because Black teachers are … leaving because of the working conditions in their schools. And attending to those working conditions—that's hard work."

2. Teachers are working an average of 52 hours a week.

"We all know that our educators work very hard, and it is not news to anyone that they often work beyond their required hours," Carr said. "In the 2020-21 school year, they worked well beyond what was required, putting in additional hours to keep kids learning and schools operating."

Full-time public school teachers are required to work 38.4 hours a week, on average, per their employment contracts with districts. But in reality, teachers spent an average of 52 hours working during a typical school week.

Less than half of that time—25.2 hours—was spent on actual teaching.

Compared to the 2015-16 school year, full-time teachers spent fewer hours delivering instruction to students—27.4 hours compared to 25.2. They also spent slightly fewer hours working in total: In 2015-16, teachers spent 53.3 hours working on school activities.

That decline is not surprising given that many schools were offering remote or hybrid instruction during the 2020-21 school year, said Susan Moore Johnson, a professor of education at Harvard Graduate School of Education who studies teacher working conditions. “People honestly for most of the time couldn’t have instructed their students for as many hours,” she said.

While the federal survey didn’t break down what exactly teachers are spending their time on, the findings are similar to the results of an EdWeek Research Center nationally representative survey that was commissioned by the Winston School of Education and Social Policy at Merrimack College earlier this year.

That survey found that teachers spend several hours a week grading and providing feedback, planning and preparing for lessons, doing general administrative work, interacting with students outside of teaching, and other tasks.

3. Many teachers supplement their base salary with extracurriculars or second jobs.

Public school teachers made an average base salary of $61,600 in the 2020-21 school year. That’s up from $57,900 in the 2017-18 school year.

In comparison, private school teachers made $46,400 as a base salary, the new NTPS survey revealed.

Teacher salaries do vary significantly from state to state. Teachers in New York, for example, made on average $90,222 in the 2020-21 school year—and teachers in Mississippi made an average of $46,862. (There are further variations from city to city.)

Nationally, teachers were able to supplement their salaries. About 40 percent of public school teachers were compensated for extracurricular or additional activities in the same school system. About 5 percent received additional compensation based on their students’ performance. Eight percent received a boost to their salary through another source within their school system, such as a state supplement.

And 16.8 percent of public school teachers held a job outside the school system during the school year.

4. Most teachers feel like they have control over school policies—but some more than others.

The federal survey presented teachers with a list of classroom and school policies to see if they had any sway over them. The vast majority of teachers felt like they had at least some say in most policies and practices, although private school teachers reported having more than their public school counterparts.

However, the data released today did not break out how many teachers said they had “minor” or “moderate” control or influence versus “a great deal of” control or influence. Lumping those three categories together makes the findings less useful, Johnson said, as there is a difference in the experiences of a teacher who says she has “minor control” over selecting textbooks and one who says she has “a great deal of control.”

Maura Spiegelman, the study director for NTPS, said in an email that those breakouts would be published next year.

Johnson also noted that these results would likely vary significantly by district and school.

"It's quite clear that the principal is incredibly important in determining what influence teachers have in determining schoolwide policy and practice," she said, adding some districts also have designated roles for teacher leadership. "It usually depends on the principal, but it can certainly be enhanced by formal roles and practices that specify that teachers ought to be agents rather than objects of reform."

5. Teacher vacancies spanned all subjects.

The pandemic exacerbated staffing shortages in schools. The NTPS data found that in the 2020-21 school year, public schools found it very difficult or were unable to fill their vacancies in these subject areas:

- foreign languages (42.5 percent)
- special education (40.2 percent)
- physical sciences (37.3 percent)
- English as a second language (31.8 percent)
- mathematics (31.7 percent)
- computer science (31.3 percent)
- career or technical education (31.2 percent)
- biology or life sciences (30.8 percent)
- music or art (23.3 percent)
- English/language arts (18 percent)
- general elementary (13.1 percent)
- physical education (11.6 percent)
- social studies (10.8 percent)