

More Teachers Name Classroom Management as a Job Stress Than Low Pay

Teachers are burning out, but they're sticking it out, new data show



By [Sarah D. Sparks](#) — June 10, 2026 ⌚ 3 min read



Teachers follow each other in a circle during a workshop helping teachers cope with stress and burnout in the classroom, on Aug. 2, 2022, in Concord, N.H. New data show that teachers continue to face high levels of stress, but many plan to stay in the profession long term.

— Charles Krupa/AP

Misbehaving students. Pay gaps. Work and family responsibilities that never seem to balance.

None of these top stress points that can drive teachers out of the classroom have changed in the last few years. But more teachers plan to stick it out for as long as they can even in stagnant working conditions, according to new data from the RAND Corp.'s 2026 State of the American Teacher and the American Life Panel surveys.

Eighteen percent of K-12 public teachers say they plan to leave at the end of this school year, roughly flat from last year and 5 percentage points less than those who planned to leave in 2022-23. Nearly 1 in 4 teachers, and 30% of teachers in their first five years, said in 2026 that they planned to stay in the classroom as long as they could.

The survey paints a mixed bag for teacher well-being. The share of teachers with stress and depression has declined since last year, even as burnout has increased, particularly for male teachers. For the past five years, teachers

consistently have been more likely than similar working adults to report frequent job-related stress and difficulty coping with it, as well as symptoms of depression and burnout, the report concludes.

More teachers stressed than other working adults

Across every indicator of well-being, teachers report worse outcomes than other working adults in the United States, RAND Corp. finds. While overall stress levels have improved for teachers in the past year, burnout is on the rise.

[Hover over data points to reveal data.](#)

DATA SOURCE: ["Teacher Wellbeing, Pay, and Intentions to Leave, 2026," RAND Corp.](#)



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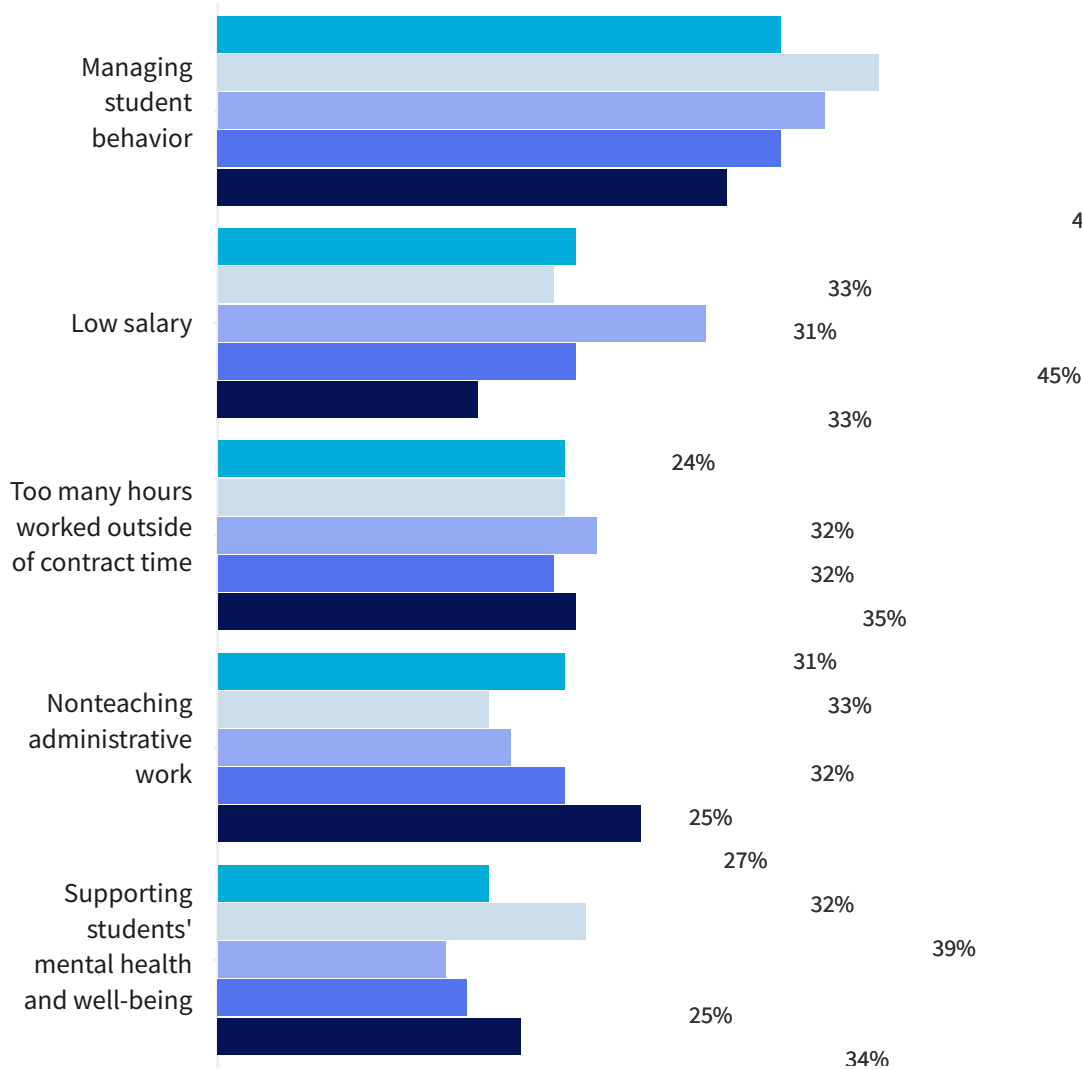
The research think tank surveyed a nationally representative sample of 829 K-12 public school teachers this spring about their well-being, workload and stressors; income and family responsibilities; and whether they planned to stay in their jobs. The researchers then compared teachers' answers to those of nearly 500 similar working adults—those ages 18-65, holding at least a bachelor's degree and working at least 35 hours a week in a non-teaching job.

A majority of teachers surveyed listed student misbehavior among the top three common causes of stress, higher than any other option. Student behavior was 20 percentage points more likely to be in teachers' top three sources of stress than low pay, the next most common stressor.

Misbehavior tops educators' stressors

For novice and veteran teachers alike, student misbehavior is the most common cause of stress, according to new RAND Corp. data. More teachers consider behavior management among their top three stressors than any other aspect of the workplace.

All teachers
 0-5 Years
 6-10 Years
 11-20 Years
 21+ Years



DATA SOURCE: "Teacher Well-Being, Pay, and Intentions to Leave in 2026," RAND Corp.



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Elizabeth Steiner, a RAND senior policy researcher and the lead author of the report, said student behavior has been a consistently high source of teacher stress for the last five years, and the research group plans to release more detailed data on [teachers' classroom-management challenges](#) later this summer.

Teachers report similar workloads and family responsibilities this year compared to last year, spending on average 50 hours working in school and 13 additional hours on other work for those with second jobs outside of school. The number of educators who report difficulty coping with work stress declined slightly—suggesting, Steiner said, they may be finding a new normal after pandemic and technological disruptions.

Just under 1 in 5 teachers plan to leave their jobs at the end of the 2025-26 school year, roughly on par with last school year. However, teachers of color remain more likely to say they plan to leave either at the end of the year or “as soon as possible,” compared to white teachers, and more female teachers planned to leave than their male colleagues.

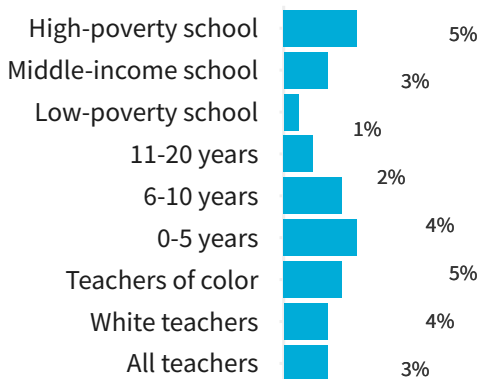
While RAND does not track how many teachers from prior years followed through on their desire to quit, prior research shows teachers who actively plan to quit are more likely to leave the classroom than those who have not stated a plan.

How long do teachers plan to stay?

Teachers' plans to continue in their current jobs vary significantly by their background, experience, and the needs of their schools, according to a new study by RAND Corp. Relatively few want to leave as soon as possible, but more are looking for better opportunities.

SELECT

As soon as I can
 Until a more desirable job comes along
 As long as I am able



DATA SOURCE: "Teacher Well-Being, Pay, and Intentions to Leave in 2026," RAND, Corp.



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Family work and finances an issue

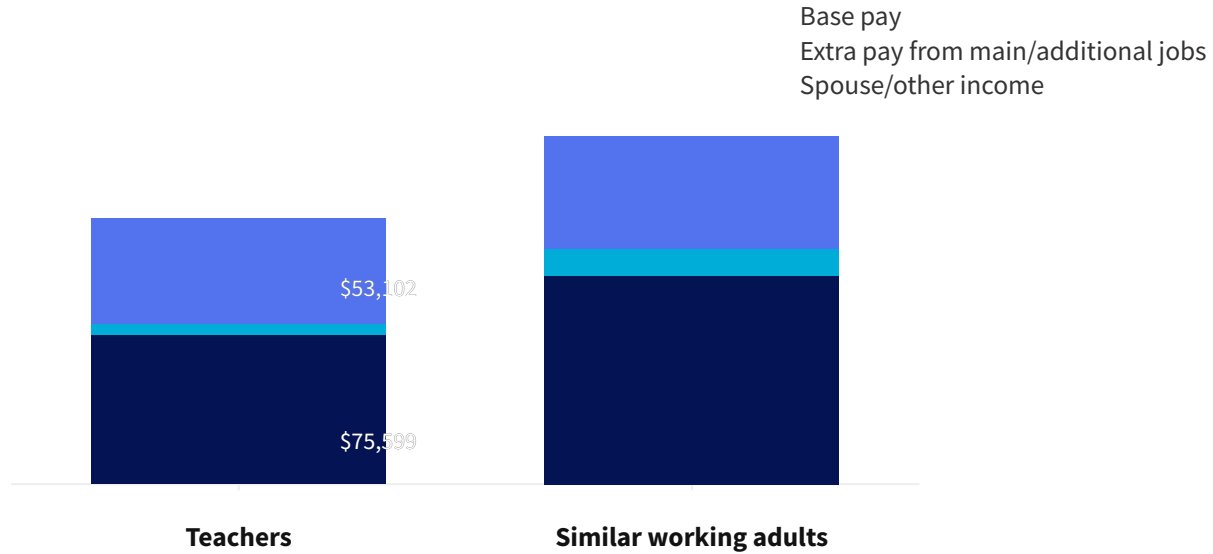
The increasingly uncertain economy may also play a role in educators choosing to stay in the classroom.

Teachers' career choices are driven in part, Steiner said, by “their feelings about whether they are likely to find another job that uses their skills, and how certain they feel about paying the bills.”

For the first time, RAND analyzed teacher’s contributions to their overall household finances. Teachers’ base pay and extra income account for 60% of their families’ income.

Educators provide most family income

Educators' pay, both in their main jobs and through outside work, account for 60% of their household income, according to new RAND Corp. data.



DATA SOURCE: "Teacher Well-Being, Pay, and Intentions to Leave in 2026," RAND Corp.



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After accounting for inflation, 61% of teachers and 57% of similar workers earned less in 2026 than 2025. Virtually all teachers also still pay for at least some of their classroom supplies, RAND found, averaging \$665 in 2026.

“Almost every teacher reports receiving some kind of raise” in 2025-26, Steiner said, “but when you transfer these into real wages and adjust for inflation, lot of teachers actually received a wage decrease.”

Teachers were more likely than similar workers to pick up additional work outside their main teaching roles, but they earned less doing so: just over \$5,400 for teachers’ extra work, less than half as much as other workers make in second jobs.

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