

Dear Administrators: Teachers Want You to Get These 8 Tasks Off Their Plates



By Madeline Will — March 29, 2024

6 min read



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Teachers say they work an average of 57 hours a week, but less than half of that time is spent teaching.

The rest of teachers' time is spent on a hodgepodge of planning, meetings, administrative work, professional development, communication with parents, and non-curricular activities, like supervising sports or clubs. There are plenty of other tasks, too—including some that teachers say are not squarely within their job descriptions.

That's according to EdWeek's The State of Teaching survey, a nationally representative poll of nearly 1,500 teachers conducted in October. The survey also found that teachers wished that they could spend more time planning and less time in meetings.

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To better understand the scope of teachers' daily work, the survey asked respondents what, if any, roles or tasks they were expected to take on at work this school that they did not believe should be a part of the role of a teacher. About 1,200 teachers answered the question.

"Where do I begin?" one teacher wrote. "We are expected to do and be far more than is realistic, [which is] the exact reason why so many teachers are exiting the field. The pressure is too much."

Many teachers said they felt stretched thin and were often doing the work of multiple people.

 A Flourish chart

Even so, some survey respondents said they thought all their job duties were appropriate.

"Being a teacher means an umbrella of jobs and services," one teacher wrote. "I cannot think of anything I do that should not be a role of the teacher."

Time, though, is an ever-present challenge: "All roles are important," another teacher wrote. "Time is the problem."

Given the amount of work to do and the finite amount of time to do it, teachers have urged administrators to take some things off their plates. Here are eight tasks that teachers say shouldn't be part of their job descriptions. These quotes, all pulled from open-ended responses to the survey, have been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Finding—and acting as—substitutes

Schools have struggled to keep a steady roster of substitute teachers, which has added more work for full-time teachers.

- "Finding our own substitutes when ill."
- "Finding my own coverage for [Individualized Education Program] meetings."
- "If off a day of work where bus duty is assigned, one is supposed to find one's replacement when that is inherently managerial in nature."
- "Covering for other classrooms that do not have a teacher due to lack of substitutes."
- "Covering multiple classes at once in the auditorium."
- "Subbing on my prep [period]; taking half of another class for the day."

Collecting and analyzing student data

Data has long been a source of tension between administrators and students. Student data can inform instruction and help target students' strengths and weaknesses, but teachers say the focus on data has also added a lot more work to their plates.

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- “We have been asked repeatedly to collect data and analyze it. Most teachers do not need repeated data to know which students need help. ... I am not a data guru, I just want to teach.”
- “Administration should not be asking for us to create reports of data they have access to.”
- “Hand-writing data logs for students when the same information can be accessed and collected digitally.”
- “We are continually asked to collect data and administer district assessments, yet we are not provided with the help needed for kids that fail the assessments. We KNOW which kids need support without doing multiple ‘district-required’ assessments and would prefer if we are required to give the assessments, [that] the district provided the in-class support needed based on the results.”
- “I should not have to prepare data and enter data that can easily be accessed from the computer. It’s repetitive and excessive.”

Helping new teachers

New teachers need a lot of support, but several teachers wrote that too much of it fell on their shoulders.

- “Mentoring/training new teachers but not getting any extra pay.”
- “Helping new teachers with classroom management; helping new teachers how to break down standards into teachable lessons for students.”
- “Coordinate ‘Bagels with Buddies,’ a mentoring program for new staff (unpaid).”
- “Fixing the problems of a new teacher, assisting with planning, management, etc.”
- “Mentoring teachers to the extent that we have to observe them and evaluate them and [give] them feedback.”

Keeping parents in the loop on everything

While most teachers want a good relationship with parents, several said they were expected to send more updates than they felt were warranted.

- “I have to assess the children and call all of the parents when their kids are sick or injured. I have no medical training. We have no nurse.”
- “Communicating to parents subjects that should be communicated by administration.”
- “Calling parents and explaining bad behavior and choices to parents when there aren’t enough hours in the day to get it all in. Administration needs to assume responsibility for this instead of putting it on teachers.”
- “Contacting parents about student attendance. We have an automated system, so why is it all on me?”
- “Contacting parents (for positive remarks and failing grades). I understand the value, but have no time for it.”

Participating in school community events

Extracurricular events can make for a thriving school community, but several teachers said they didn’t think they should be expected to staff such activities—especially when they’re not receiving any additional pay to do so.

- “Always volun-told to do graduations, proms, etc., when teachers are not paid.”
- “Any unpaid events, such as chaperoning extracurricular events such as school dances.”
- “Fundraising by working a shift at McDonald’s for a day.”
- “Fill in as a ticket-taker at school sports event.”
- “Boosting ‘school spirit.’”

Taking on janitorial duties

Nearly half of public schools reported needing more custodians at the start of this school year, federal data show. That might have led to more teachers being expected to fill in the gaps and clean themselves.

- “Vacuuming my instructional carpet area and emptying the trash.”
- “Recycling, empty trash, clean classroom, restock paper towels.”
- “Making sure our recycling gets taken out to the recycle bin.”
- “Breakfast in the classroom—cleaning all the mess/food from breakfast.”
- “Cleaning my room—sweeping, mopping, wiping down desks, dusting. Everything.”

Taking on non-instructional duties

Many teachers said they were asked to monitor bathrooms, hallways, recess, lunch periods, and drop-off and dismissal times—and they felt like it was too much.

- “We have some duties (bus duty, lunch duty, hall duty, walking kids to and from class, etc.). Some is natural and expected, but each year it becomes more and

more duties piled on and less planning time given.”

- “We are called to be everything to everyone the minute we walk in the school. No matter what the task is.”
- “We are expected to be a ‘team player’ and step in to assist because [in our contract] it is stated ‘other duties as assigned.’”

Preparing for the threat of gun violence

School shootings may be statistically rare, but the threat is an ever-present fear for most teachers. Several teachers said they wished they didn’t have to think about and prepare for the possibility of gun violence.

- “Protecting kids from school shooters.”
- “Administering and practicing lockdown drills and drills for active shooters.”
- “Security for school shooters.”

