

# Teachers Work 50-Plus Hours a Week—And Other Findings From a New Survey on Teacher Pay



By Madeline Will — September 12, 2023

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Yet another survey reveals that teachers work longer hours and for less money than other working adults.

Last school year, teachers worked 53 hours per week—seven hours more than the average working schedule of other adults. While contract hours and extra paid duties made up the

bulk of teachers' schedules, one out of every four work hours for teachers went uncompensated, covering things like grading or day-to-day planning.

These long hours are taking a toll: Teachers' dissatisfaction with the hours worked, their base salary, and working conditions hurt their well-being and caused some to consider quitting, the study found.

Those results come from a new nationally representative survey of K-12 public school teachers by the RAND Corp., as well as a companion survey of other workers. (Both surveys were deployed in January.) The researchers defined total hours worked per week as hours spent on all school-related activities during the 2022-23 school year during the school day, before and after school, and on weekends. The other workers were asked to account for their hours since September 2022, so their responses covered roughly the same time frame as teachers.

"Most teachers feel overworked, ... [and] unsurprisingly perhaps, most teachers feel underpaid," said Elizabeth Steiner, a policy researcher at RAND and a co-author of the report.

Nearly 9 in 10 teachers said they work more than the standard 40 hours each week, compared with less than half of all working adults.

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About half of teachers say they work for extra pay, which could include coaching, writing curriculum, or serving as a department head. But most of the extra work teachers do is unpaid—for instance, responding to student or parent emails at all hours, grading on the weekends, or planning lessons late into the night.

On average, teachers work 15 uncontracted hours per week, 12 of which are unpaid.

And Black and Hispanic teachers reported working more hours than their white peers at similar types of schools. That could be because past research has suggested that teachers of color might be spending more time engaged in culturally responsive practices, such as developing relationships with families, or because they're often seen as the school disciplinarian and have extra responsibilities associated with that stereotype, the RAND researchers noted.

Teachers of color also might be under greater financial pressure and be working more hours to increase their total pay, the report said.

## **Teachers are less satisfied with their working conditions than other Americans**

Only 1 in 4 teachers said they were “mostly” or “very” satisfied with the hours they worked in a week, compared with half of all working adults. And only 1 in 3 teachers said they were satisfied with their base salary, compared with 2 in 3 working adults.

“Teachers feel very differently about their compensation than most working adults do,” Steiner said.

Teachers reported an average annual base salary—meaning their paycheck before any supplemental pay or benefits—of about \$67,000 for the 2022-23 school year. That’s consistent with the National Education Association’s analysis.

The RAND researchers asked teachers who weren’t satisfied with their base salaries what they would have to be paid to consider their salaries to be adequate, assuming their role and responsibilities were unchanged. On average, those teachers said \$80,000—about a 27 percent pay increase from what they’re currently making.

Steiner noted that the size of the desired increase was the same across cost-of-living areas, education levels, and experience levels.

It’s also comparable with the estimated teacher pay penalty: Past research has found that when comparing weekly wages, teachers earn an average of about 24 percent less than other college-educated workers.

## **Poor working conditions could cause teachers to quit**

In recent years, many school districts have reported difficulties staffing classrooms, as the teacher pipeline has shrunk and more teachers exit the profession. The survey results suggest that low pay and long working hours are key reasons why teachers want to quit.

The top reason teachers said they were considering leaving their jobs at the end of this school year is that they felt like the stress and disappointments of teaching were not worth it. That could include dissatisfaction with pay, hours worked, or other working conditions.

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“Yes, pay is very important: Teachers desire to be paid more,” Steiner said. “Increasing pay for teacher seems like it would influence their perception of other working conditions. But increasing pay alone doesn’t seem like it would be the only thing that is necessary to do.”

She said she hopes policymakers will increase base salaries as well as make other efforts to improve teachers’ working conditions. For example, district leaders could create more opportunities for supplemental pay or dedicate more planning time during the school day. Hiring support staff can also reduce teachers’ workloads.

The RAND report also found that teachers who reported being dissatisfied with their hours worked were more likely to report frequent job-related stress, feelings of burnout, difficulty coping with the stress, and symptoms of depression. (The analysis could not account for factors outside of work that might affect these indicators of well-being, or other work-related factors, such as class size or support from paraprofessionals that could ease teachers’ job burden.)

While many of the teachers who say they are considering leaving the classroom won’t actually do so, Steiner said it’s still an indication of job satisfaction overall.

“Even if a teacher doesn’t actually leave their job, if they’re dissatisfied, they might be less engaged in their work, they might be absent more often—maybe they’re less engaged in the school community,” she said. “The risk of having a dissatisfied and disengaged workforce that is present, but not fully present, is a risk for students and for teachers and for school communities.”