



SURVEYS

Survey: Nearly Half of Teachers Have Recently Considered a Job Change as COVID-19 Drags On

By Emily Tate

Aug 31, 2020



Robert Elias / Shutterstock

Even before the pandemic, teachers were feeling **burnt out** and **demoralized**. For many, it seems the sudden changes in recent months—prolonged school closures, emergency distance learning and the politicization of school reopenings—have only pushed them closer to a breaking point.

In a recent survey of 1,200 educators conducted by Teachers Pay Teachers, an online marketplace where teachers buy and sell original education resources, 47 percent said they had considered making a major job-related change in the last month. For 17 percent, that could mean a complete career change—away from teaching. Another 12 percent have considered a leave of absence. Nine percent have thought of retiring, and

8 percent are looking into teaching a “pod,” or small group of students paid for privately by parents.

This is not good news for the education field, which was already experiencing a nationwide teacher shortage prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

In the same survey, conducted in mid-August, about a third of respondents said their morale was “low” or “very low.” That number is up 9 percentage points from June, when 23 percent of teachers reported having low morale in a similar survey.

Educators were facing many of the same stressors in June as in August, acknowledges Michelle Cummings, vice president of content at Teachers Pay Teachers: The delivery mode of instruction had changed rapidly, their health and safety are at risk, many are experiencing grief, loss, unemployment and uncertainty. But the difference, she says, is that teachers may not have been mentally preparing to do remote learning or navigate socially distanced classrooms into another school year. Now, many are realizing this is going to be the reality for quite some time.

“This back-to-school moment, with the calendar turning to September, is another moment of awareness for us collectively that this back-to-school season is not your typical [one]. It’s much more fraught than that,” Cummings says.

She notes that teachers tend to report high morale when they have “voice, choice and agency.” And right now, all three are lacking for many of them.

Of the 1,200 educators surveyed, 42 percent said their school would be reopening fully remote this fall. Another 32 percent were preparing to do blended or hybrid instruction, while 25 percent would be teaching in person.

Only 38 percent of educators said they were confident they could provide effective instruction to students in the fall. That rate is lower for teachers who are returning in hybrid or online settings (26 percent and 31 percent, respectively), and it’s at 57 percent for educators teaching students in person.

For some of those starting face-to-face, the return to the classroom may be welcome, but it will likely include many changes: desks spread farther apart, students and teachers wearing masks all day, smaller class sizes, limited options for in-class collaboration and group activities. Other teachers will be returning to school against their better judgment, **fearing for their safety or health**, or the safety or health of those in their households who may be in a high-risk group.

Cummings described an elementary school teacher in New Jersey who is pregnant and will have to report to the school building to teach her students in-person every other week.

“She’s concerned about her personal health and that of the child she’s carrying,” she says. Educators are “figuring out how to balance the new realities of teaching face-to-face in a pandemic and also balancing their own personal circumstances.”

Cummings adds: “We also have teachers who are parents themselves, and while they may be going to in-person classes to teach, perhaps their own children aren’t.”

In preparing for the coming school year, many educators noted they have been focused on distancing learning lessons (58 percent), social-emotional learning lessons (38 percent) and developing a classroom culture in a virtual environment (38 percent).

Cummings describes a third-grade teacher in Florida who was able to build community with her students despite the challenges presented by an online learning environment. In that class, every Friday on Zoom had a different theme; the class would have pajama parties, scavenger hunts and show-and-tell where everybody brings a stuffed animal from home.

The goal, Cummings says, was “to create this moment of joy and safety for kids. That’s going to be even more vital this year.”

Emily Tate (@ByEmilyTate) is a reporter at EdSurge covering early childhood and K-12 education. Reach her at [emily\[at\]edsurge\[dot\]com](mailto:emily[at]edsurge[dot]com).

Professional Development

Surveys

Teaching & Learning