



Office of Research and Promising Practices

2026 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey

Preliminary Statewide Findings and Implications for School,
District, and State Leaders

May 2026

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Executive Summary

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey is one of the state's primary tools for understanding how educators experience the schools in which they teach and support students. The 2026 results provide statewide insight into the conditions that shape instruction, collaboration, climate, leadership, time, student conduct, safety, resources, community engagement, non-discrimination, and teacher retention. This report focuses on the clearest statewide patterns and the conditions most relevant to teachers' daily work and longer-term commitment. Findings should be interpreted as preliminary and descriptive. The survey closed on March 31, 2026, and response data were received on April 15, 2026, leaving limited time for analysis and review before the May 2026 State Board of Education presentation.

The 2026 Teacher Working Conditions Survey achieved strong statewide participation. A total of 102,640 educators responded, producing an overall response rate of 90.5 percent, an increase of 5 percentage points from the 2024 administration. Participation was especially strong in traditional public schools, where the response rate exceeded 93 percent. Public charter school participation was lower, at approximately 64 percent, and varied more widely across schools. A total of 104 of North Carolina's 115 districts exceeded a 90 percent response rate, with 20 districts achieving a 100 percent response rate.

Overall, the results suggest that teachers remain strongly committed to their students and schools and report broadly positive working conditions. At the same time, teachers' commitment appears closely tied to whether they experience their work as manageable, supported, and sustainable. The clearest challenges are concentrated in a smaller set of domains, with time, managing student conduct, and professional support standing out as the areas where targeted improvement may be most needed.

Teacher Commitment and Professional Plans

Teachers expressed strong pride, belonging, and loyalty to their schools. Retention-related items showed high levels of positive agreement, especially on whether the school is a good place to work and learn, whether teachers are proud to work at their school, whether they feel like an important part of the school, and whether they feel loyal to the school. Professional plans also point to relatively strong workforce stability, with 91.1 percent reporting plans to continue teaching next year and 84.3 percent planning to remain at their current school. Collectively, the survey results indicated three key findings:

- **Teacher commitment is strong.** Most teachers report pride, belonging, and loyalty to their schools, and the large majority plan to continue teaching next year.
- **Teachers who plan to stay report more positive conditions.** Teachers who plan to stay at their current school reported the strongest positive responses across domains, suggesting that retention is connected to teachers' day-to-day work environments.
- **Teachers planning to move schools or leave education report a different experience.** Although this group is smaller, their substantially lower ratings across multiple domains suggest that decisions to change schools or leave education are tied to concerns across several working conditions.

Leadership, Time, and Professional Supports

The largest differences between teachers planning to stay and those planning to leave appeared in retention, school leadership, time, and managing student conduct. Teachers reported positive views of school leadership overall, especially for instructional direction and support, but results were lower for trust, teacher voice, and leaders' awareness of classroom realities. Time also emerged as one of the clearest constraints on daily work, with teachers reporting an average of 9.3 hours per week on school-related work outside the regular school day. Managing student conduct was one of the lowest-rated domains and one of the clearest day-to-day challenges, especially in middle and high schools. Taken together, these results indicate several key findings:

- **School leadership is closely associated with retention and daily working conditions.** Trust, communication, teacher voice and autonomy, classroom awareness, and visible support were central to how teachers experience school leadership.
- **Time is both a workload issue and an instructional improvement issue.** Teachers expressed a need for protected time to plan, collaborate, observe peers, communicate with families, and manage core professional responsibilities.
- **The most requested supports center on time, peer learning, and special populations.** Teachers most often requested time to observe other teachers, attend professional conferences, and collaborate with teachers outside the school. Professional development priorities point to a need for support for students with disabilities, gifted students, multilingual learners, and other student groups.
- **Student conduct affects both instruction and sustainability.** Teachers' concerns are not limited to student behavior itself. They also reflect whether schoolwide expectations, consequences, and adult follow-through are consistent enough to protect instruction.

Student Readiness, Community Support, and Wellbeing

Safety and wellbeing was one of the stronger domains overall, particularly for emergency preparedness and school safety procedures. However, teachers were less likely to agree that students arrive at school with their basic needs met, including supplies, clean clothes, food, and sleep. Similarly, community support and involvement was strong overall, but teachers were less positive about whether parents, guardians, and community members support teachers in ways that contribute to student success. Collectively, these results point to several key findings:

- **Teachers generally view schools as safe and prepared.** Emergency preparedness and school safety procedures were among the strongest safety and wellbeing items.
- **Student readiness remains a concern.** Teachers were least positive about whether students arrive with basic needs met, and open-ended comments similarly described students coming to school tired, hungry, or lacking needed supplies and support.
- **Teachers report strong family and community engagement, but direct support is less consistent.** Teachers report strong communication with families and broad encouragement of parent and guardian involvement, but they are less likely to agree that families and community members actively support teachers in ways that contribute to student success.
- **Some pressures on teachers extend beyond classroom instruction.** Student behavior, mental health, family engagement, and school and district support for special populations all shape teachers' daily work.

Compensation, Resources, and System-Level Constraints

Open-ended responses reinforce findings from the broader survey results while adding context about the working conditions that teachers experience. Many comments described schools as supportive, collaborative, and student-centered places to work. At the same time, teachers also raised concerns about compensation and funding, facilities and resources, and district or state system-level constraints that affect daily work but are often beyond the direct control of school leaders. Collectively, comments surfaced three themes distinct from closed-ended survey results:

- **Many teachers distinguish school-level strengths from broader system constraints.** Some comments described positive school cultures and supportive local leadership while also pointing to district or state policies, funding limits, staffing shortages, and compliance demands as sources of strain.
- **Compensation and funding emerged as recurring concerns.** Teachers connected pay, resource limitations, staffing, class size, and retention concerns to broader questions about whether teaching feels sustainable over time.
- **Facilities and resources remain important contextual factors.** Although facilities and resources were not among the lowest statewide domains, open-ended comments show that building conditions, classroom resources, and access to adequate support staff continue to affect teachers' daily work in some schools.

Implications for School, District, and State Leaders

The 2026 results point to a focused set of improvement priorities for strengthening teacher working conditions. Rather than broad, unfocused reform, the findings suggest targeting attention on the conditions most clearly connected to teachers' daily work and longer-term commitment.

School, district, and state leaders should consider four priorities for improving working conditions:

1. **Protect teachers' time** for planning, collaboration, observation, and other essential professional responsibilities. Teachers need time for instruction and other core responsibilities protected from competing demands such as meetings, classroom coverage, paperwork, and other duties that interfere with teaching and planning.
2. **Strengthen leadership practice** by emphasizing communication, trust, teacher voice and autonomy, classroom visibility, and consistent follow-through when concerns are raised.
3. **Support student behavior systems** with clearer expectations, more consistent consequences, stronger adult alignment, and targeted support in middle and high schools.
4. **Coordinate support for high-need students** so teachers are not left to address academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and basic needs without adequate staffing, services, or resources.

The central message of the 2026 survey is clear: teachers are committed to their students and schools, but that commitment appears closely connected to whether working conditions are sustainable. Protecting time, strengthening leadership, supporting student conduct, and addressing student needs are among the most direct ways to improve teachers' daily experience and help sustain their commitment over time. Because statewide averages can mask important variation across schools and districts, leaders should use their own results to identify the conditions most affecting educators in their context.

Introduction

The Teacher Working Conditions Survey is one of North Carolina's primary tools for understanding how educators experience the environments in which they teach and support students. It provides statewide insight into the school and system conditions that shape instruction, collaboration, climate, leadership, time, student behavior, and teachers' sense of connection to their schools.

The 2026 administration allows school, district, and state leaders to examine not only whether teachers view their schools positively overall, but also which specific conditions may strengthen or strain the daily experience of teaching. Because working conditions influence both day-to-day practice and longer-term workforce stability, the results have clear implications for school improvement, district support, and state policy.

This report is intended for education stakeholders. Rather than reviewing every survey item in equal depth, it focuses on the clearest statewide patterns and the conditions most relevant to teacher experience, teacher commitment, and future action. Its purpose is both descriptive and practical: to identify the strongest opportunities for improvement at the school, district, and state levels.

About the Survey

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey is a biennial, anonymous statewide survey of classroom teachers and other licensed school-based educators. The current instrument includes 100 questions across 11 domains that address school climate, leadership, instructional and professional support, time, safety, resources, community engagement, non-discrimination, and teacher retention. It also includes items on professional plans, needed instructional supports, professional development priorities, and open-ended comments.

The current survey reflects a substantial revision process completed before the 2024 administration. The instrument was reduced from 199 questions to 100, optional demographic questions were added, and several sections were refined to better align with educators' day-to-day work. The revision process included feedback from teachers, principals, charter leaders, chief academic officers, and superintendents; an external item review survey; consultation with survey and content experts; review by internal NCDPI staff and advisory groups; and psychometric analyses to strengthen reliability and domain coverage. As a result, the 2026 survey builds on a more focused instrument designed to support statewide interpretation and local improvement planning.

Limitations of the Preliminary Results

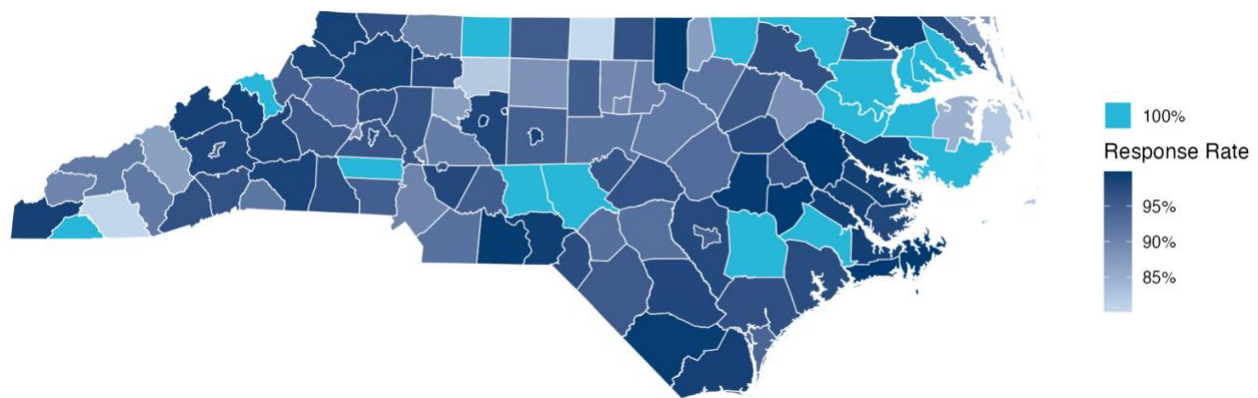
Several limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting this report. First, these findings are preliminary and are intended to accompany the May 2026 presentation to the State Board of Education, not to serve as a final report. The survey closed on March 31, 2026, and response data were received on April 15, 2026, limiting the time for data cleaning, analysis, and review. Second, statewide averages can conceal meaningful local variation across districts, schools, and educator groups. Third, open-ended comments and automated text analysis are useful for illustration and identifying broad themes, but they are not a substitute for rigorous qualitative analysis. Finally, the report is descriptive. It identifies important patterns and relationships in the results, but it does not support causal claims about why those patterns exist.

Survey Participation

The 2026 administration of North Carolina's Teacher Working Conditions Survey achieved very strong statewide participation. A total of 102,640 educators responded, producing an overall response rate of 90.5 percent, an increase of 5 percentage points from the 2024 administration.

Participation was especially strong in traditional public schools, where the response rate exceeded 93 percent overall. This strength was reflected in district-level results, with 104 of North Carolina's 115 districts exceeding a 90 percent response rate and 20 districts reaching 100 percent participation. By contrast, public charter school participation was lower, at about 64 percent, and varied more widely across schools. Overall, this pattern supports confidence in the statewide findings while suggesting greater unevenness in charter representation.

Figure 1: District response rates, 2026 Teacher Working Conditions Survey



Who Responded to the Survey

The respondent pool was made up primarily of classroom teachers, who accounted for 87.2 percent of respondents, while 12.8 percent were student services personnel. Respondents were also relatively experienced: 60.2 percent reported 11 or more years in education, including 30.8 percent with 11 to 20 years of experience and 29.4 percent with more than 20 years. By school level, the largest share of respondents worked in elementary schools (43.3 percent), followed by high schools (29.8 percent) and middle schools (19.4 percent).

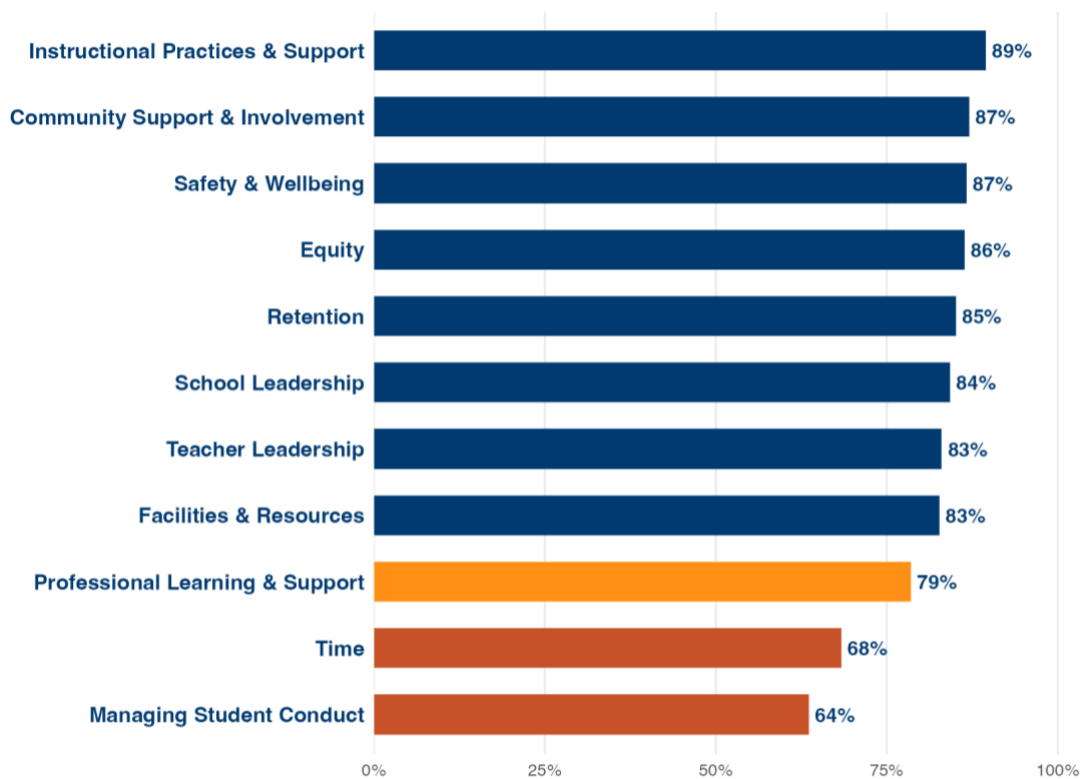
Among respondents who answered the optional race and ethnicity item, 66.3 percent identified as White and 16.6 percent identified as Black, with smaller shares identifying as Hispanic (3.8 percent), Asian (2.5 percent), American Indian (1.0 percent), Pacific Islander (0.1 percent), or Two or More Races (3.5 percent). Because some respondents did not answer every background item, these distributions should be interpreted as descriptive of survey respondents rather than the full statewide educator workforce.

Statewide Patterns Across Survey Domains

The chart below summarizes teacher responses across the survey's 11 domains. For each domain, results reflect the share of positive responses by teachers, typically whether they agreed or strongly agreed, across all items in that domain. Because domains vary in both length and content, these percentages should be interpreted as broad indicators of relative strengths and challenges rather than exact point-for-point comparisons. Appendix A briefly describes each domain and the process used for calculating percentages throughout this report.

Across domains, teachers report broadly positive working conditions. Every domain is above 60 percent positive agreement, with eight of the 11 domains above 80 percent. The strongest agreement appears in the domains of instructional practices and support, community support and involvement, safety and wellbeing, non-discrimination, and retention. At the same time, weaker results in professional learning and support, time, and managing student conduct point to a smaller set of conditions where improvement is most needed.

Figure 2: Percentage of positive responses (agree/strongly agree) across all survey items by domain



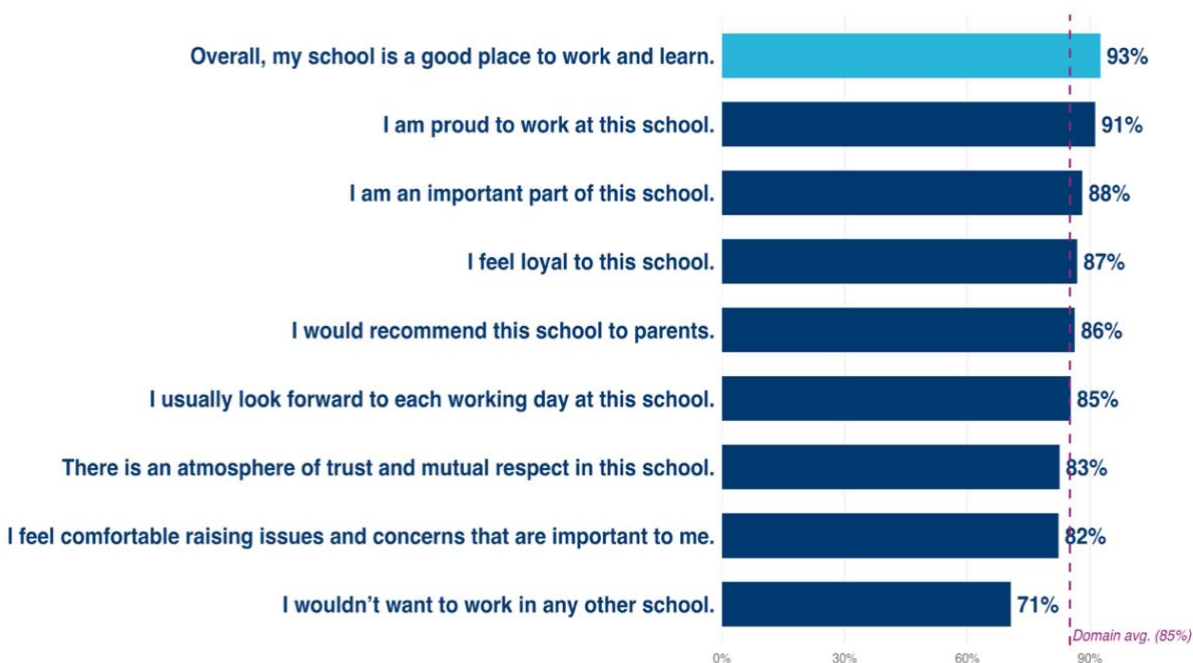
The remainder of this report builds on this statewide snapshot by examining the conditions that appear most consequential for teachers' day-to-day experience and longer-term commitment. The sections that follow look more closely at teachers' connection to their schools, professional plans for next year, leadership, time, professional learning, safety, student conduct and wellbeing to better understand both the strengths reflected in these results and the areas where targeted improvement may have the greatest effect.

Teacher Connection to Their Schools

This section examines teacher connection to their schools as one important indicator of retention. The nine retention-related survey items capture how teachers experience their schools as places where they belong, are valued, and want to remain. These items reflect several related dimensions of connection, including pride, belonging, trust, voice, and loyalty. Taken together, they provide a useful picture of how strongly teachers feel tied to their schools and whether those schools feel like places where they can continue their work over time.

Teachers expressed strong pride, belonging, and loyalty to their schools. As shown in Figure 3, the strongest results are on items that reflect general regard for the school, pride, belonging, and loyalty. Positive response rates are especially high for “Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn” and “I am proud to work at this school.” Other items related to being an important part of the school, feeling loyal to the school, and recommending the school to parents also remain high. Together, these results suggest that most teachers feel positively connected to their schools and identify strongly with them.

Figure 3: Percentage of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed on retention domain items



Open-ended comments point in a similar direction. Many teachers described their schools as welcoming and supportive places, with strong relationships among staff and a shared focus on students. Some said their schools “feel like family” or emphasized doing “what is best for our students.” Together, these comments suggest that positive connection to schools reflects belonging, shared purpose, and supportive relationships with colleagues and school leaders. The following quote illustrates this broader pattern:

“I am very happy here and proud to work at this school. Despite the challenges... staff at this school work hard to ensure the needs of all students are met to the best of our ability.”

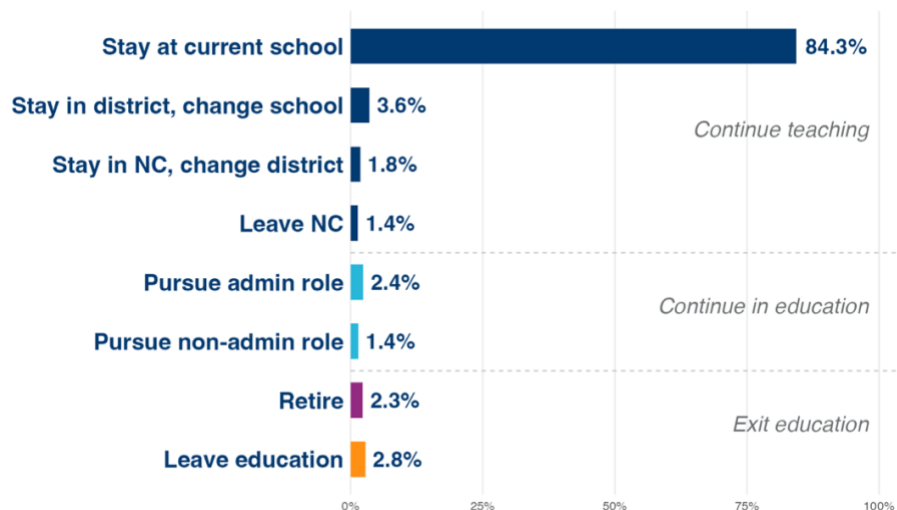
– Elementary Teacher, Public Schools of Robeson County

Professional Plans for Next Year

Teachers’ professional plans for the next school year provide a more direct view of retention. While the retention items show how teachers experience their current schools, the professional plan item assesses whether those experiences translate into an intention to stay, move, or leave. The item serves as both a measure of workforce stability and a bridge between teachers’ connection to their schools and the working conditions that may be shaping their next steps.

A large majority of teachers plan to continue teaching next year, most at their current school. As shown in Figure 4, 91.1 percent of teachers report plans to remain in teaching, including 84.3 percent who plan to stay at their current school and 6.8 percent who plan to teach elsewhere. A far smaller share of teachers report plans to pursue another role in education, retire, or leave education entirely.

Figure 4: Percentage of teachers who plan to continue teaching, change roles, or exit education



Although high levels of teacher connection to schools and a large share planning to remain at their current school are encouraging, the chart also shows that a meaningful share of teachers (6.8 percent) expect to continue teaching elsewhere. Teachers’ professional plans suggest that they are sorting themselves differently based on how they experience their working conditions. The next section examines that pattern directly by comparing working conditions across teachers with different plans for next year and identifying which conditions most clearly distinguish those who plan to stay from those who plan to move schools or leave the profession.

How Working Conditions Relate to Teachers' Plans

Teachers' professional plans differ meaningfully by how they view their working conditions. As shown in Table 1, teachers who plan to stay at their current school report the most positive results across all domains. By contrast, teachers who plan to change schools, whether within the district, elsewhere in North Carolina, or in another state, as well as those who plan to leave education entirely, report substantially less positive results across multiple domains. This pattern suggests that teachers' professional plans are shaped in part by how they experience their day-to-day work.

Table 1: Percentage of positive responses pooled across all survey items in each domain

Survey Domain	Stay at current school	Retire	Pursue another role	Leave education	Teach at another school	Overall
Instructional Practices and Support	91.0%	88.6%	85.3%	78.6%	78.1%	89.5%
Community Support and Involvement	88.4%	87.9%	83.2%	75.4%	76.7%	87.0%
Safety and Wellbeing	87.9%	86.3%	83.2%	76.7%	76.7%	86.6%
Equity	88.1%	87.1%	81.4%	72.9%	72.3%	86.4%
Retention	88.6%	86.9%	77.7%	60.3%	55.0%	85.1%
School Leadership	86.8%	85.8%	79.0%	65.6%	62.2%	84.2%
Teacher Leadership	84.6%	84.0%	78.4%	71.0%	70.8%	83.0%
Facilities and Resources	83.9%	83.7%	80.1%	72.3%	74.0%	82.7%
Professional Learning and Support	80.5%	79.8%	73.6%	62.2%	63.8%	78.6%
Time	70.8%	70.3%	64.6%	46.7%	48.9%	68.4%
Managing Student Conduct	65.4%	61.9%	58.0%	49.3%	50.5%	63.6%

Note: Orange shading identifies response categories that are approximately 10 percentage points lower than the overall percentage within the same survey domain. More pronounced differences are highlighted in dark orange.

Teachers planning to leave their school or the profession responded substantially less positively across domains. The largest differences appear in retention, school leadership, time, and managing student conduct. Together, these patterns indicate that teachers' future plans are tied not simply to general regard for a school, but to a broader set of working conditions that influence whether they can see themselves continuing there.

Among these differences, school leadership stands out as especially important. Leadership is one of the domains with the largest gaps by professional plans, and those differences align with a broader pattern in the survey: teachers who report more positive views of leadership are also more likely to see their current school as a place where they want to remain. The next section examines that relationship more closely by looking at how leadership is associated with teachers' day-to-day working conditions and, in turn, their decisions to stay or leave.

School Leadership and Teacher Retention

Teacher perceptions of school leadership draw on three related sources of evidence: the 12 survey items in the School Leadership domain, teachers' reported professional plans for the following year, and open-ended comments about their work environments. Together, these sources capture whether teachers experience school leadership as administratively effective, professionally supportive, and relationally trustworthy, and whether those experiences appear to be linked to teachers' longer-term intentions to stay or leave.

Teachers report positive views of school leadership overall, but trust and classroom awareness stand out as less positive. As shown in Table 2, the strongest results are on items related to instructional direction and support, including encouraging teachers to use new knowledge and skills obtained through professional development (91.8 percent) and setting clear expectations for instruction (89.0 percent). The lowest items are whether leadership creates a culture of trust in the building (77.6 percent) and whether leadership knows what is going on in teachers' classrooms (78.9 percent). Overall, results suggest that leadership is viewed more positively as a source of direction and structure than as a source of trust, visibility, and day-to-day connection.

Table 2. Positive agreement on school leadership items by teachers' professional plans

Survey Items	Stay at current school	Retire	Pursue another role	Leave education	Teach at another school	Overall
Encourages teachers to use new knowledge and skills obtained through professional development.	93.3%	91.3%	87.9%	81.2%	79.8%	91.8%
Sets clear expectations for instruction.	91.1%	91.1%	84.2%	74.3%	71.1%	89.0%
Effectively manages daily operations at the school.	89.2%	87.8%	82.6%	69.8%	65.7%	86.8%
Communicates a clear vision.	88.5%	87.8%	80.3%	69.9%	65.7%	86.1%
Makes decisions based on the best interests of their students.	87.2%	85.5%	79.6%	64.3%	61.4%	84.4%
Helps teachers set clear and actionable goals for improving student learning.	86.9%	85.9%	79.0%	65.3%	64.1%	84.4%
Ensures that teachers receive coaching and support to implement new practices.	85.8%	84.8%	78.4%	65.8%	64.2%	83.5%
Helps teachers improve instruction.	85.7%	84.5%	78.6%	63.9%	61.5%	83.1%
Makes decisions that are reasonable and justified.	86.1%	84.4%	77.9%	62.1%	57.0%	83.1%
Looks out for the wellbeing of the faculty members.	85.2%	85.2%	76.0%	58.5%	52.9%	81.9%
Knows what's going on in my classroom.	81.6%	80.6%	73.2%	58.0%	56.2%	78.9%
Creates a culture of trust in the building.	81.0%	80.7%	70.0%	54.0%	47.1%	77.6%
Pooled Domain Percentage	86.8%	85.8%	79.0%	65.6%	62.2%	84.2%

Note: Orange shading identifies response categories with percentages at least 10 percentage points lower than the overall percentage within the same survey domain. More pronounced differences are shaded in darker orange.

Leadership appears closely tied to retention and attrition. As illustrated in Table 2, teachers who plan to continue teaching at their current school report the most positive views of leadership overall. Ratings are somewhat lower among teachers planning to pursue another role in education, but they decline more sharply among teachers planning to leave their current school or leave education entirely. These differences appear across every leadership item, suggesting that leadership is closely associated with teachers' day-to-day experience and whether they see themselves staying in their current school or in the profession.

Teacher Views of School Leadership

Open-ended comments from teachers reinforce this pattern. Leadership was one of the most common topics among teachers' open-ended responses (see Appendix B), underscoring how strongly school leaders shape whether working conditions feel supportive or strained.

Teachers with favorable views of school leaders describe them as supportive, open, and trusting. In more favorable comments, teachers described leaders who listen, communicate clearly, solve problems collaboratively, and treat teachers as professionals. Other comments praised administrators for being "approachable, open-minded, supportive, and transparent" and for being willing to "jump in and help with anything that is needed." The quote below illustrates this broader pattern of teachers valuing leadership that is accessible, responsive, and trusting.

*"I always feel like leadership has my back...
Having immediate open-door access means
issues are solved collaboratively and quickly.
I appreciate the professional trust."*

- Middle School Teacher, Alamance-Burlington Schools

Teachers critical of school leaders describe them as dismissive, restrictive, and unsafe. In more critical comments, teachers more often described poor communication, limited input, and hesitation about speaking candidly. Other comments stated that the principal "does not listen to feedback" and that "sharing concerns is not safe and causes retaliation and targeting of staff." The quote below reflects this broader pattern of teachers describing leadership environments in which feedback feels unwelcome and trust is low.

*"At this school there is no voice for teachers.
Everything is micromanaged, and if it isn't what leadership
wants to hear, it is shut down."*

- Elementary School Teacher

Teachers' open-ended comments reinforce a clear pattern in the broader results: trust, teacher voice, and visible support are central to how teachers experience school leadership.

Time for Planning and Professional Learning

Time emerged as one of the clearest constraints on teachers' day-to-day work. This section draws on four related sources of evidence: the five survey items in the Time domain, teachers' reported hours spent on school-related work outside the regular school day, teachers' reported instructional support needs, and open-ended comments. Together, these sources show whether teachers have enough time, whether that time is protected from competing demands, and how additional time could support instruction, planning, collaboration, and other core professional responsibilities.

Time is one of the clearest constraints on teachers' work. As shown in Table 3, teachers are more positive about being able to focus on instruction with minimal interruptions and being protected from duties that interfere with that role than about having sufficient instructional time, minimized routine paperwork, or sufficient non-instructional time. Elementary teachers, in particular, report the weakest results on the sufficiency of non-instructional time. Consistent with this pattern, teachers reported spending an average of 9.3 hours per week on school-related work outside the regular school day, including 9.6 hours for classroom teachers and 6.6 hours for student services personnel. Together, these findings suggest that time pressures reflect both limited protected time during the school day and the amount of essential work conducted beyond it.

Table 3. Percentage of positive agreement on Time domain items by school level

Survey Items	Elementary	Middle	High	Overall
Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions.	73.5%	69.8%	76.6%	73.9%
Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students.	74.4%	69.7%	69.8%	72.2%
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	61.9%	68.2%	76.9%	68.3%
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do.	62.7%	69.5%	72.1%	67.4%
The non-instructional time provided for teachers is sufficient.	51.9%	62.8%	69.9%	60.2%
Domain Overall	64.9%	68.0%	73.1%	68.4%

Note: Orange shading identifies response categories with percentages at least 8 percentage points lower than the overall percentage within the same survey domain.

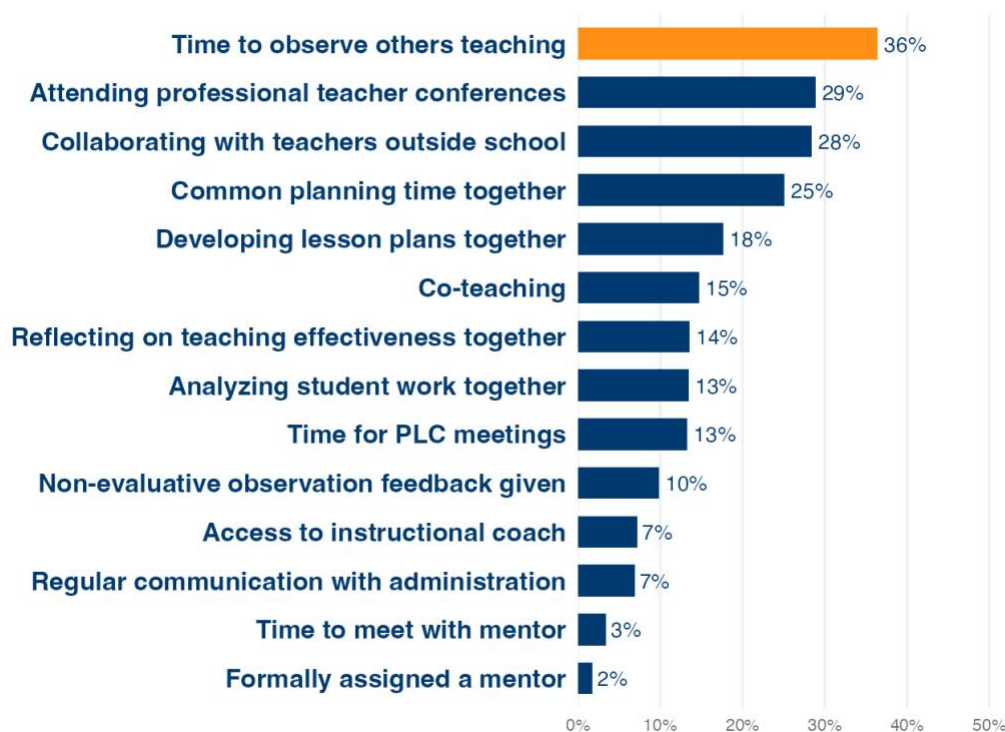
Teachers connect time pressures to stress, burnout, and a sense that the work is becoming less sustainable. On open-ended comments, teachers often described time issues not simply as a shortage of hours, but as a lack of protected time for core professional duties. They pointed to planning periods interrupted by meetings, coverage when short staffed, paperwork, and other non-instructional demands. Many noted that lesson preparation, grading, parent communication, and other essential tasks spill into evenings and weekends. Taken together with other survey results, this pattern helps explain why time emerges as one of the clearest constraints on teachers' day-to-day work and why many of the most requested supports center on protected time for collaboration, observation, and planning.

Needed Instructional Supports

Teachers' most requested instructional supports center on protected time and peer learning.

As shown in Figure 5, the top requested support was time to observe other teachers teaching (36 percent), followed by opportunities to attend professional teacher conferences, collaborate with teachers outside the school, and share common planning time with other teachers. Other commonly selected supports, such as developing lesson plans together, reflecting on teaching with other teachers or coaches, and time for professional learning community (PLC) meetings, also depend on protected time built into the workday.

Figure 5. Needed supports ranked by percentage of teachers who selected each item



Teachers identified support for special populations as the leading professional development priority.

Among professional development priorities, 43.2 percent of teachers selected support for special populations (e.g., students with disabilities, gifted students), followed by 34.4 percent who selected their content area and 32.7 percent who selected multilingual learners. This suggests that teachers are asking not only for more time to learn with and from peers, but also for more targeted support in serving students with specialized academic, behavioral, language-learning, and other instructional needs.

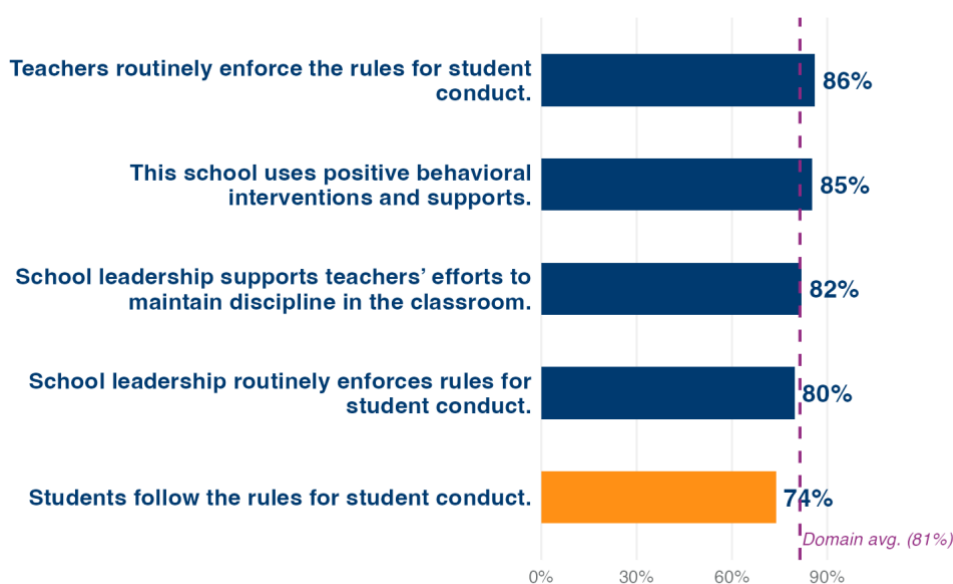
These results also help explain patterns elsewhere in the survey. In the retention section, teachers planning to leave education or change schools reported substantially weaker views of time than those planning to stay at their current school, suggesting that time pressures also shape whether teachers see their work as sustainable. Time is one of the clearest and most consequential conditions in the survey: it affects how teachers experience daily work and whether they see that work as manageable in the future.

School Discipline and Student Conduct

Managing Student Conduct emerged as one of the most challenging working conditions in the survey and one of the clearest day-to-day issues for teachers. This domain combines two related parts of teachers' experience: whether teachers believe schoolwide expectations and behavior supports are functioning, and whether specific behavior problems affect daily instruction. Taken together, these items provide a fuller picture of whether teachers experience student conduct as manageable and supported or as a recurring source of disruption and strain.

While teachers broadly agree that schoolwide expectations and behavior supports are in place, student conduct remains a daily challenge. Teachers report mixed views of student conduct, with the least agreement centered on whether students follow the rules and whether leadership consistently enforces student conduct rules. As shown in Figure 6, respondents are more likely to agree that teachers routinely enforce the rules for student conduct and that the school uses positive behavioral interventions and supports. They are somewhat less likely to agree that school leadership supports teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom and routinely enforces student conduct rules. The lowest item by a wider margin is whether teachers agree that students follow the rules for student conduct (73.8 percent).

Figure 6. Percentage of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed on student conduct items



Student conduct concerns are most pronounced in middle and high schools, though patterns differ by school level. The grade-level table on the following page shows that student conduct concerns are not distributed evenly across settings. Middle schools stand out for the breadth of their challenges, especially student disrespect towards teachers and disorder in unstructured areas such as hallways, cafeterias, and bathrooms. High schools show a somewhat different pattern, with the sharpest concerns centered on tardiness or skipping class and cheating, along with elevated concerns about drug or tobacco product use. Elementary schools generally report fewer concerns than middle and high schools, though student disrespect and disorder in unstructured areas remain common there as well.

Table 4. Percentage of teachers who reported student behaviors as an issue at their school

Survey Item	Elementary	Middle	High	Overall
Student possession of weapons	4.8%	9.0%	11.1%	7.6%
Gang activity	3.2%	9.3%	15.0%	8.2%
Threats of violence toward teachers	13.4%	16.8%	12.5%	13.9%
Robbery or theft	13.6%	21.9%	17.7%	16.5%
Vandalism	16.7%	39.0%	26.5%	24.6%
Cyberbullying	12.4%	45.8%	35.2%	27.0%
Drug/tobacco products use	3.9%	43.5%	64.1%	31.2%
Physical conflicts among students	31.8%	47.4%	38.4%	36.9%
Cheating	13.9%	55.3%	66.9%	39.6%
Bullying	34.2%	57.2%	37.6%	40.5%
Disorder in classrooms	48.3%	56.6%	38.0%	46.7%
Tardiness/skipping class	37.3%	61.1%	77.4%	55.0%
Disorder in unstructured areas (e.g., hallways, cafeteria, bathrooms)	53.0%	66.7%	52.2%	55.6%
Student disrespect of teachers	56.3%	69.5%	53.6%	58.1%

Note: For conduct items, responses are reverse coded so that higher percentages indicate a larger share of teachers reporting the behavior as a problem. Dark orange shading marks the most prominent concerns within each grade span, and light orange shading marks a second tier of notable concerns.

Open-ended comments reinforced this pattern. Across responses related to student behavior, teachers described conduct as “disruptive behavior” that “prevents learning.” Many also pointed to “no consistency with consequences,” office referrals that were “often ignored,” and students being “returned to class shortly after” removal. Together, these comments suggest that teachers’ concerns are not limited to student behavior itself but also extend to whether consequences and follow-through are consistent enough to protect instruction and support teachers.

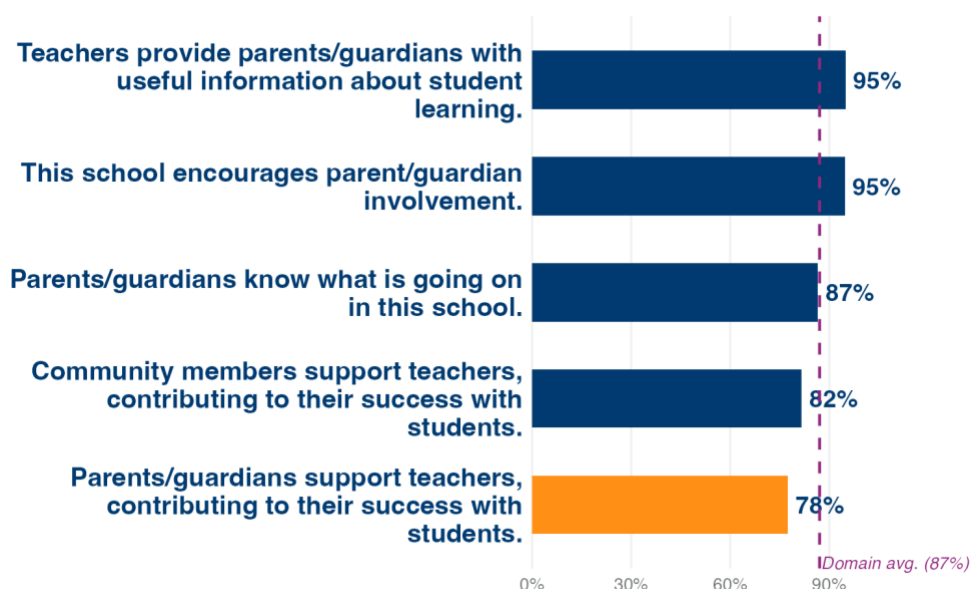
Taken together, the student conduct results point to a challenge that is both instructional and organizational. Teachers generally see adults as trying to enforce conduct expectations but are less confident that students consistently follow those expectations or that leadership applies schoolwide discipline with the same consistency. Teachers are not simply reporting that some student behaviors are difficult. They also indicate that the routines, supports, and leadership practices needed to address those behaviors do not always feel strong or consistent enough. That makes student conduct important not only as a school climate issue, but also as a condition that shapes whether teachers can sustain instruction, protect learning time, and see their work as manageable over time.

Community Support and Involvement

Community Support and Involvement is one of the stronger domains in the survey and reflects an important part of teachers' day-to-day experience: whether schools are connected to families and communities in ways that support student learning. At the statewide level, results suggest that teachers generally view their schools as places where family communication and involvement are strong.

Teachers report especially strong results on school-family communication and parent involvement. As shown in Figure 7, the strongest items in this domain are whether teachers provide parents and guardians with useful information about student learning (94.9 percent) and whether schools encourage parent and guardian involvement (94.7 percent). Teachers are also broadly positive about whether parents and guardians know what is going on in the school (86.5 percent). Together, these results suggest that schools are generally communicating with families effectively and creating opportunities for involvement.

Figure 7. Percentage of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed on community support items



Teachers report that community support is less consistent. At the same time, the weaker items in this domain suggest that communication and involvement do not always translate into direct support for teachers. The least positive item is whether parents and guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students, followed by whether community members support teachers, contributing to their success with students. This pattern suggests that teachers generally feel schools are doing a strong job of reaching families but are less certain that families and community members consistently reinforce teachers' work in ways that help students succeed.

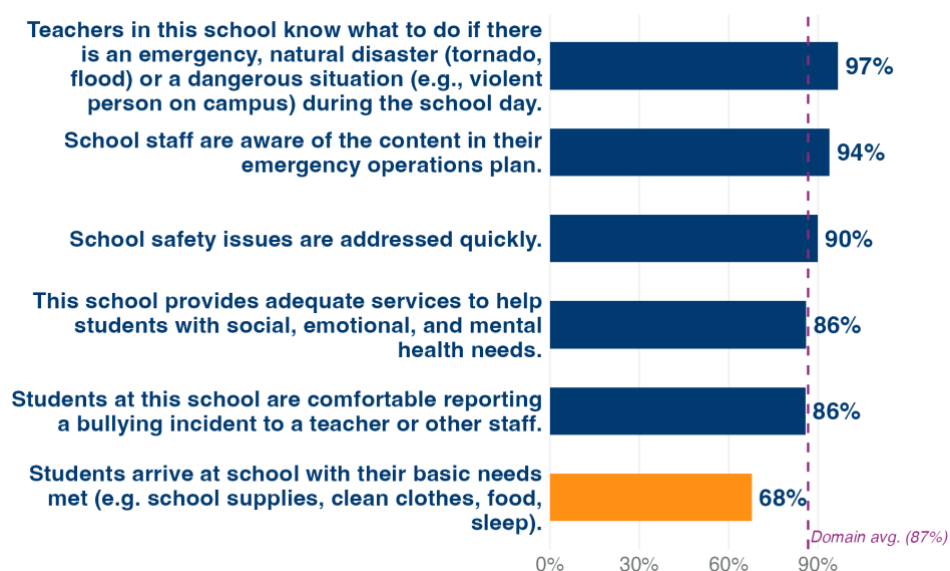
Collectively, the Community Support and Involvement results point to a clear strength with an important limitation. Teachers generally report strong communication and parent engagement, but they are less positive about whether that engagement translates into active support for teachers. This suggests that the next opportunity for improvement may lie less in basic communication and more in strengthening shared responsibility for supporting teaching and learning.

Safety and Wellbeing

Safety and Wellbeing is also one of the stronger domains in the survey and captures a broad set of conditions related to school safety, emergency preparedness, student wellbeing, and readiness to learn. These items reflect whether teachers see their schools as physically safe and prepared, whether students can access support when needed, and whether students arrive at school ready to participate fully in learning. Overall, results suggest that teachers are broadly positive about school safety and emergency readiness.

Teachers report especially strong results on emergency preparedness and school safety procedures. As shown in Figure 8, the strongest item in this domain is whether teachers know what to do in an emergency or dangerous situation (96.7 percent), followed by whether staff are aware of the school's emergency operations plan (93.9 percent) and whether school safety issues are addressed quickly (89.8 percent). These results suggest that teachers generally view their schools as prepared, organized, and responsive when it comes to school safety.

Figure 8. Percentage of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed on safety and wellbeing items



Teachers are less likely to agree that students arrive at school ready to learn with their basic needs met. The weaker items in this domain point to a different kind of challenge. The least positive item by a wide margin is whether students arrive at school with their basic needs met, including school supplies, clean clothes, food, and sleep (67.7 percent). The following quote illustrates how unmet basic needs can shape teachers' day-to-day experience of student readiness:

“Our school is a rural, title 1 school. Many students do not have adequate food, clothing, resources. Many come to school tired.”

- Elementary Teacher

Compensation, Resources, and System-Level Constraints

The open-ended responses reinforce many of the main findings from the closed-ended survey items, particularly around leadership, time, student conduct, and support for high-need students. They also surface several additional themes that are less central in the main body of the report but important for understanding how teachers interpret their working conditions. In particular, teachers frequently commented on compensation and funding, district and state system-level constraints, and facilities and resources. These comments suggest that teachers often distinguish between conditions within their immediate school environment and broader structural conditions that shape their work but may be outside the direct control of school leaders. See Appendix B for illustrative quotes.

Compensation and funding were recurring concerns. Teachers often connected pay, benefits, budgets, and broader funding levels to morale, recruitment, retention, and the long-term sustainability of teaching. Some comments described teachers working additional jobs, struggling to keep pace with rising costs, or questioning whether compensation reflects the demands and responsibilities of the profession. Others connected funding concerns to classroom-level conditions, including staffing, class size, instructional resources, and the ability of schools to provide adequate support for students. These comments suggest that compensation is not viewed only as an individual financial issue, but also as a broader working condition that affects whether educators feel valued and whether schools can attract and retain experienced teachers.

Teachers also identified district and state system-level constraints as sources of strain. A notable pattern in the open-ended responses is that teachers often separated their views of their school from their views of the broader system. Some teachers described supportive principals, strong colleagues, and positive school cultures while also expressing frustration with district or state decisions, mandates, policies, staffing limitations, or resource constraints. In these comments, teachers often located the source of their concerns beyond the school building, noting that some challenges affecting working conditions originate in district offices, state policy, funding structures, or compliance requirements. This distinction is important because improving working conditions will require action at multiple levels, not only within individual schools.

Facilities and physical resources remained important contextual factors. Although Facilities and Resources was not among the lowest-rated statewide domains in the closed-ended results, open-ended comments show that physical conditions continue to affect teachers' daily work in some schools. Teachers described concerns related to classroom space, maintenance, air quality, temperature, cleanliness, safety, and aging buildings. In some cases, teachers connected facility concerns to broader issues of prioritization and resource allocation, including delayed repairs, inadequate custodial support, or insufficient classroom materials. These comments suggest that statewide averages may mask school-level variation in physical working conditions and that facilities remain an important part of how some teachers experience the quality and sustainability of their work environment.

Taken together, these additional themes broaden the interpretation of the survey findings. The closed-ended results provide a statewide picture of the working conditions most directly connected to teachers' day-to-day experience and professional plans. The open-ended responses add context by showing that teachers also interpret their working conditions through broader questions of compensation, funding, district support, state policy, and resource allocation. These comments do not change the main findings of the report, but they help explain why some teachers view their work as difficult to sustain even when they describe their school-level culture, colleagues, or administrators positively.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2026 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey points to a clear overall message: teachers remain strongly committed to their students and schools, but that commitment depends on whether daily working conditions are sustainable. Some of the clearest challenges are related to time, trust in leadership, and student conduct, while the clearest opportunities for improvement are protected time for instructional planning, professional learning with and from peers, stronger leadership practice, and targeted support for student behavior and high-need learners.

Teacher commitment to schools is strong but should not be taken for granted. Teacher connection to schools remains high, and most teachers report plans to continue teaching next year, usually in their current school. At the same time, teachers who plan to leave their school or leave the profession report substantially fewer positive responses for school leadership, time, student conduct, and teacher connection to their schools. This suggests that retention is shaped not only by commitment to schools, but by whether teaching feels manageable and worth sustaining over time.

Leadership matters because it shapes both retention and the daily experience of teaching. Teachers report positive views of leadership overall, but weaker results on trust, teacher voice, and leaders' awareness of classroom realities show where improvement is most needed. Because leadership is also one of the domains most closely tied to whether teachers plan to remain in their current school, these results point to the importance of stronger communication, visible support, meaningful teacher voice, and consistent follow-through.

Protecting teachers' time and expanding opportunities for peer learning are among the clearest improvement priorities. Time emerges throughout the report as one of the most consistent constraints on teachers' daily work, especially the sufficiency of non-instructional time. Teachers' most requested supports also center on opportunities to learn with and from other educators through observation, collaboration, conferences, and common planning. Together, these findings suggest that schools and districts should not only provide time, but protect it for planning, collaboration, and job-embedded professional learning.

Student behavior, readiness, and special populations require more targeted support. Student conduct is among the clearest day-to-day challenges in the survey, especially in middle and high schools. Teachers also report concerns about whether students arrive with basic needs met and whether families consistently support their work. Professional development priorities show strong demand for help serving special populations and multilingual learners. Together, these findings point to the need for stronger behavior systems and more coordinated support for students whose needs make learning harder to sustain.

Overall, the most effective response to these findings is likely to be focused, practical, and locally informed. Because statewide averages can mask important variation across schools and districts, leaders should use their own results alongside direct teacher feedback to identify the specific conditions most affecting educators in their context. Across settings, however, the statewide results point to a common set of priorities: protect teachers' time, expand collaborative learning, strengthen leadership practice, and provide more consistent support for student behavior and student needs. These are the conditions most likely to improve teachers' day-to-day experience and help sustain their commitment over time.

Appendix A: Data Sources and Methods

Survey Instrument

The analysis is based on responses to the 2026 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) Survey, administered statewide to licensed educators across all 115 public school districts and public charter schools. The survey includes agreement-scale items organized into 11 domains, two sets of check-all-that-apply items (Needed Supports and Professional Development Priorities), and selected demographic and background items.

Survey Domains

The Teacher Working Conditions Survey organizes items into the following 11 domains:

1. **Retention:** Teachers' connection to their school, including trust, belonging, pride, willingness to recommend the school, and plans to remain.
2. **School Leadership:** How teachers view school leaders' communication, decision-making, instructional support, trust-building, operations, and attention to staff wellbeing.
3. **Teacher Leadership:** Teachers' shared responsibility for school vision, student learning, data use, and participation in school-level decisions.
4. **Managing Student Conduct:** Schoolwide expectations, discipline support, rule enforcement, positive behavior supports, and the extent of student conduct concerns.
5. **Safety and Wellbeing:** Perceptions of school safety, emergency preparedness, bullying reporting, student basic needs, and social-emotional supports.
6. **Facilities and Resources:** The adequacy of the physical environment and instructional infrastructure, including cleanliness, comfort, maintenance, security, lighting, noise, and internet access.
7. **Community Support and Involvement:** Parent, guardian, and community engagement in supporting students, teachers, and the school.
8. **Professional Learning and Support:** The quality, relevance, timing, collaboration, and instructional usefulness of professional development, along with teachers' highest-priority areas for future professional learning.
9. **Instructional Practices and Support:** Feedback, observation, and evaluation practices that support instructional improvement, along with the specific instructional supports teachers say would most improve their practice.
10. **Time:** Teachers' ability to focus on instruction, access sufficient non-instructional and instructional time, and avoid unnecessary paperwork or duties.
11. **Non-discrimination:** Fairness, cultural respect, inclusive materials and environments, support for special populations, and equitable staffing practices.

Analysis of Closed-Ended Response Data

Calculations

District Participation Rates

A total of 102,640 respondents completed the survey across 2,646 schools and 115 school districts. District-level participation rates were computed as the number of completed survey responses divided by the number of invited educators, aggregated to the district level. Charter schools, lab

schools, and other non-LEA entities were excluded from district-level participation rate calculations. Of 115 districts, 104 (85%) achieved a 90% or higher participation rate.

Percentage Positive Calculation

For the primary analysis metric, % positive agreement, the following rules were applied:

- **Denominator:** All respondents who provided a non-missing response to a given item, including those who selected "Don't Know." Respondents who did not answer a question (missing/NA) were excluded from the denominator.
- **Numerator:** Respondents who selected "Agree" or "Strongly Agree."
- **Reverse-coded items:** Fourteen items in the Managing Student Conduct domain asked respondents to rate the extent to which specific student conduct issues are a problem at their school. For these items, "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" were treated as the positive response (indicating the conduct issue is *not* a problem), consistent with the domain's scoring convention.

The effect of including "Don't Know" in the denominator is that items with higher rates of "Don't Know" responses will show somewhat lower percent positive values than if "Don't Know" were excluded. This is the approach used for historical reporting of the TWC survey and consequently the primary approach used throughout the report.

Domain-Level Averages

Domain-level percentage positive values were computed by pooling all individual responses across all items within a domain into a single mean. This approach weights items by their response count (items with fewer missing responses receive slightly more weight) but differences are negligible given the large sample size.

Check-All-That-Apply Items

Two sets of items, Needed Supports (14 items) and Professional Development Priorities (12 items), used a check-all-that-apply format in which respondents could select up to three options. For these items, the metric reported is the % of respondents who selected each option, computed as the mean of a binary indicator (1 = selected, 0 = not selected) across all respondents. Unlike the agreement-scale items, there is no "positive/negative" direction for these items.

Managing Student Conduct: Multi-Select Items

In addition to the five agreement-scale items in the Managing Student Conduct domain, 14 items asked respondents whether specific conduct issues are a problem at their school using an agree/disagree scale. These items are reported separately as % reporting the conduct issue IS a problem (i.e., % Agree or Strongly Agree), with a reversed color scale so that higher values indicate greater concern.

Hours Outside School Day

Respondents were asked: *In an AVERAGE WEEK of teaching, how many hours do you spend on school-related activities outside of the regular school work day?* Responses greater than 80 hours per week were excluded as implausible. Mean, standard deviation, and median hours are reported overall and by subgroup in Table 5.

Table 5. Hours spent on school-related activities outside the school day

Group	n	Mean	SD	Median
Position				
Classroom Teacher	81,777	9.6	9.0	8.0
Student Services Personnel	11,058	6.6	6.8	5.0
School Level				
High School	27,424	9.6	9.2	7.0
Elementary	40,761	9.2	8.5	7.0
Middle School	17,870	9.0	8.7	6.5
K-8	4,519	8.8	8.8	6.0
6-12	1,576	8.6	9.0	6.0
Other	28	4.4	4.5	3.0
Teaching Experience				
20+ Years	27,459	9.6	8.5	8.0
One Year	4,579	9.5	9.2	7.0
2-3 Years	8,296	9.5	9.4	7.0
7-10 Years	12,565	9.0	9.0	6.0
4-6 Years	11,181	9.0	9.0	6.0
11-20 Years	28,755	9.0	8.6	6.0
Overall	92,835	9.3	8.8	7.0

Subgroup Breakdowns

Percent positive was computed independently for each subgroup. The denominator for each subgroup column reflects only respondents within that subgroup who provided a non-missing response, it is *not* the total statewide sample. For the professional plans breakdown, the eight original survey response options were consolidated into five groups:

- **Stay at current school:** Stay at current school
- **Leave current school, continue teaching:** Stay in district (change school), Stay in NC (change district), Leave NC
- **Pursue other role in education:** Pursue administrative role, Pursue non-administrative role
- **Retire:** Retire
- **Leave education:** Leave the education profession entirely

Missing Data

Two demographic variables used in subgroup breakdowns contained missing values:

- **Race/Ethnicity:** 6,248 respondents (6.1%) did not provide a race/ethnicity response. These respondents are excluded from the Race/Ethnicity subgroup breakdowns but are retained in all other analyses, including the overall statewide percentages.
- **School Level:** 747 respondents (0.7%) could not be matched to one of the six school level categories (Elementary, K-8, Middle School, 6-12, High School, Other). These respondents are excluded from school level breakdowns but retained in all other analyses.

For both variables, percentages reported in the respondent characteristics table (n and %) use the **total sample of 102,640** as the denominator, so the sum of percentages within each characteristic will be less than 100% where missing values are present. Footnotes in the table indicate the number of non-respondents for each affected characteristic.

Analysis of Open-Ended Response Data

The 2026 TWC Survey included one open-ended item asking educators, “Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the Teacher Working Conditions at this school?” This section documents the analytic approach used to summarize broad patterns in those responses. The analysis identifies recurring topics and describes the highest-probability terms associated with each topic. As in the rest of this report, these results are descriptive and exploratory. They are intended to complement, not replace, close qualitative reading or formal hand coding of comments.

The analysis was conducted in R using a reproducible workflow for tokenization and topic modeling. Core packages included *tidyverse* and *tidytext* for data manipulation and token processing, and *topicmodels* for LDA estimation. Output tables and figures were then used to support manual topic interpretation and descriptive reporting.

Data Preparation

Responses fewer than 10 words in length were excluded from analysis, as very short responses (e.g., “N/A”, “None”) do not carry sufficient content for topic modeling. The remaining 36,745 responses were tokenized using the *tidytext* package. Standard English stop words (from the *tidytext* stop_words lexicon) were removed along with five survey-context tokens (*school*, *teacher*, *teachers*, *student*, and *students*) that appear in the vast majority of responses and carry no discriminating signal. Tokens fewer than three characters in length and purely numeric tokens were also removed. The resulting document-term matrix was further trimmed by removing terms appearing in fewer than 0.1% of documents (sparse = 0.999), and documents that became empty after trimming were excluded.

Topic Modeling

Broad themes in the comments were identified using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), an unsupervised machine-learning method that groups related words and comments into topics. Under LDA, each response is represented as a mixture of latent topics, and each topic is represented as a probability distribution over terms. The final model was estimated with 12 topics. Model selection was based on a combination of held-out fit and interpretability. In particular, models with fewer topics combined substantively distinct themes, while larger solutions yielded narrower splits with less practical value for interpretation. In the final review of candidate solutions, the 12-topic model provided the best balance between statistical fit and conceptual coherence.

Topic Interpretation and Limitations

The 12-topic solution produced substantively interpretable themes that aligned with major areas of teacher concern and affirmation. The topic labels shown in Table 6 were assigned after model estimation through manual review of the highest-probability terms and a random sample of responses associated with each topic. Each response was then assigned to its single most probable topic for descriptive reporting. Because topic labels are interpretive rather than machine-generated, adjacent topics should be read as related clusters of meaning rather than perfectly discrete categories.

Table 6. Topic labels and representative top terms

Topic	% of responses	Representative top terms
Pride and Affection for School	12.2%	feel, principal, love, administration, amazing, supported, wonderful, job, team, enjoy, assistant, elementary
Time and Workload	9.6%	time, planning, meetings, hours, day, plan, required, days, week, lunch, duties, complete
School Community and Climate	9.6%	environment, learning, supportive, community, positive, culture, staff, strong, opportunities, growth, learn, create
Administrative Culture and Respect	8.7%	staff, admin, administration, people, team, care, respect, hard, treated, faculty, person, helpful
Discipline Policy and Accountability	8.1%	behavior, parents, discipline, behaviors, consequences, kids, issue, expectations, held, accountable, follow, rule
Compensation and Funding	8.1%	pay, education, schools, continue, budget, job, leave, funding, educators, teaching, public, paid
District and System-Level Concerns	7.8%	district, county, level, conditions, office, questions, change, survey, administrators, decisions, based, due
Facilities and Physical Environment	7.6%	building, classrooms, classroom, issues, issue, quality, air, safety, mold, campus, system, concern
Leadership and Communication Concerns	7.5%	leadership, lack, communication, staff, concerns, morale, expectations, administrative, feedback, trust, consistent, negative
Instructional Support and Resources	7.5%	support, resources, meet, special, provide, health, children, population, provided, additional, adequate, effectively
Curriculum and Instruction	7.4%	class, teach, grade, instructional, classes, instruction, data, curriculum, professional, focus, development, sizes
General Teaching Frustrations	5.9%	teaching, lot, day, classroom, difficult, hard, daily, times, makes, amount, expected, due

Note. Terms are shown as representative high-probability words used in topic interpretation. They are intended to aid substantive reading of the model rather than to serve as standalone evidence for any topic label.

Several topics reflected clearly positive comments, especially Pride and Affection for School and Administrative Culture and Respect. Others captured recurring sources of strain, including

Compensation and Funding, Time and Workload, Discipline Policy and Accountability, Leadership and Communication Concerns, and Facilities and Physical Environment. Additional topics captured more diffuse or cross-cutting concerns, including General Teaching Frustrations and School Community and Climate. Overall, the topics suggest that teachers used the open-ended item both to express attachment to their schools and to identify specific organizational, instructional, and working-condition constraints.

Several limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting these results. First, topic models identify statistical clusters of words rather than directly observed constructs, so topic labels necessarily involve researcher judgment. Second, because each response was assigned to a single most probable topic for reporting, the summaries necessarily simplify comments that may contain multiple themes. Finally, automated text analysis is useful for summarizing large volumes of text efficiently, but it should not be treated as a substitute for more time-intensive qualitative analysis when the goal is fine-grained interpretation, local diagnosis, or causal explanation.

Appendix B: Topic Summaries and Illustrative Quotes

Open-ended responses suggest that teachers often experience their schools as caring and collaborative places to work, while also reporting persistent strain related to leadership communication, student discipline, planning time, workload, resources, compensation, and support for high-needs students. Many comments also distinguish between supportive school-level cultures and broader district or state constraints that make working conditions more difficult.

The sections below extend that summary by describing each of the 12 topics identified in the analysis and presenting five illustrative quotes per topic that show how teachers expressed these themes in their own words. These quotes have been lightly edited to remove school, district, and other potentially identifying information while preserving the substance, tone, and meaning of the original comments.

Pride and Affection for School

Comments in this topic reflect strong attachment to the school, its staff, and its leadership. Teachers often describe their schools as places they value deeply and are proud to represent, even when they also acknowledge ongoing challenges.

“This is the best school I have worked at in my career by far. Admin is extremely supportive of teachers, the grade level and PLC teachers I work immediately with are wonderful, and I have been able to foster a classroom that thrives on routine, high expectations, hard work and respect from students. I love working at [school name].”

“This is an amazing place to work. Having worked in many school districts and for over five different principals, I can easily state that this environment and leadership is of the highest quality. I am blessed to be here, and I am so proud to talk about my work environment with peers.”

“This is an amazing school, which is led with respect and love for all students and staff alike. It is a happy place to work. I think this school is a great representation of how schools should be run.”

“I love my school environment and I wish all teachers could experience this type of working and learning environment. I work in an environment that is judgment free and a learning environment for students, staff, the community and parents.”

“I really enjoy teaching here at my school. It is a great place to be. If all continues to go well, I plan on staying here in my position until I retire.”

Time and Workload

Comments in this topic focus on the difficulty of managing the work of teaching within the regular school day. Teachers frequently describe limited planning time, too many meetings, added duties, and work that extends into evenings and weekends.

“I think teachers need more planning time during the school workday to prepare for the work they do with students.”

“The working conditions for EC teachers at this school are not sustainable. The demands of compliance-driven paperwork, including IEPs, documentation, and progress monitoring, far exceed the time provided within the regular school day. As a result, teachers are consistently required to work extended hours early in the morning, after school, and on weekends just to meet required deadlines.”

“At the beginning of the school year, there are too many non-essential meetings and obligations that take away the time needed to plan and prepare for the students. We need that planning time in our classrooms and with our teams to plan and prepare. Less protected workdays. Each year there are more added to the calendar. We need that time to get our work done.”

“Let teachers teach, we don't need more meetings, we need more time to do our job. Not having equal pay or even a budget is unacceptable. Hijacking teachers every moment without students to give them more tasks to complete while also stealing their time is unacceptable and causing extreme burnout.”

“As a teacher with 17 years of experience, I continue to spend a significant amount of time outside of the school day planning, grading, and preparing instruction. Despite my experience, the demands of teaching a tested subject create ongoing pressure and stress that extend well beyond contract hours. This workload is exhausting and impacts long-term sustainability in the profession.”

School Community and Climate

This topic reflects teachers' views of the overall school environment, including morale, collegiality, safety, and the quality of relationships among staff and students. Comments often emphasize culture and belonging, though some also describe climates that have deteriorated over time.

"This is an amazing school with amazing students and dedicated teachers who have a heart for children. There is a clear structure and opportunities to express concerns. There are also opportunities for teachers to grow through coaching, committees, or leadership roles."

"The leadership is extremely caring about students and staff. The students are very appreciative and show their gratitude through polite comments."

"This school is top notch. I have worked at many different schools and this is the most cohesive and supportive environment I have ever had the privilege to be a part of."

"I think 3 things that are essential to teachers enjoying their work and staying at the school they are currently at are being in a safe and positive environment, having their time protected so they can actually lesson plan, grade, teach, and build relationships effectively, and being paid a competitive and reasonable salary."

"Overall toxic environment that puts a lot of mental stress on teachers. You see very few smiling faces and most seem to be in survival mode."

Administrative Culture and Respect

Comments in this topic focus on how teachers experience the culture created by school administrators. Teachers often describe whether they feel supported, respected, trusted, and treated as professionals.

"What makes this school stand out is the culture of advocacy. Teaching is challenging, but I always feel like leadership has my back. Whether it's through consistent classroom resources or a highly supportive administrative team, I never feel like I'm teaching on an island. Having that immediate, open-door access to leadership means that when issues arise, they are solved collaboratively and quickly, rather than being left for the teacher to handle alone. I appreciate the professional trust."

"My administration is the best I have ever had in all of my years of teaching. They are very supportive and respectful of their staff."

“The principal is well versed in policies and procedures. She cares about her staff both at school and beyond the confines of the school day. She ensures that all students and staff feel welcome and are appreciated.”

“Administrators at the school do their best to maintain an atmosphere of respect and are always willing to listen and try to resolve any problems.”

“This is a very supportive place to work. The other staff and administration of this school are willing to give their time and are ready to help with any needs or concerns that are met while teaching. Additionally, the staff and administration work hard to meet the needs of the students at this school.”

Discipline Policy and Accountability

This topic centers on schoolwide discipline systems and whether behavior expectations are enforced consistently. Teachers often describe frustration with weak consequences, limited follow-through, and uneven accountability.

“Lack of an attendance policy and 50s are the most detrimental thing affecting student learning in our school. I understand that this is not specific to our school, but I have to speak my peace. What’s more shocking than our policies, or lack thereof, are the amount of parents who do not feel it is necessary to personally hold their children accountable.”

“There is a need for more consistent consequences for misbehavior at the elementary level. The district should implement and closely follow student behavior plans for those who repeatedly disrupt instructional time.”

“Students are allowed to roam the hallways and be disruptive instead of being in class or ISS. When teachers report roaming or disruptive students, students are rarely given consequences or made to go back to class, often allowed to hang out in the front office.”

“No expectations at all for students. Students are running around and running the school. Teachers are not supported when they are having discipline issues.”

“There is a lack of consistent expectations for student behavior, leading to a culture where school rules are routinely ignored. When consequences are issued, they are often disproportionate to the infractions. High-level issues like fighting and vaping are the only areas receiving administrative attention, leaving daily disruptions unaddressed and undermining classroom management.”

Compensation and Funding

This topic includes comments about teachers' salaries, benefits, school funding, and the broader financial conditions that affect teaching. Teachers frequently connect compensation and funding to morale, recruitment and retention, and whether the profession feels sustainable.

"Increasing teacher pay should be a priority. Many educators are forced to work two or even three jobs simply to make ends meet. This places additional stress on teachers and can impact their ability to focus fully on their students and work."

"I cannot continue to support my family with the state sponsored increases to healthcare and power if I do not receive a significant raise in the near future. I will be seeking employment out of state at my earliest convenience."

"I wish, hope and pray teachers and anyone who works in public schools are valued and paid more. This job is more demanding than the public knows. The retention of great teachers in public schools is declining and public education is on a decline. Please fix it by supporting public schools and valuing those in it."

"The pay disparity between our superintendent and the teachers is disappointing. I am not sure if I am disappointed in how [the state] treats public education and educators or if it is the district. I imagine it is a combination of both. The pay scale here is a joke."

"The state needs to finalize a budget. Masters pay should come back. We need better health insurance and higher pay."

District and System-Level Concerns

This topic captures concerns that teachers locate beyond the school itself, including district, county, and state decisions. Comments often distinguish between supportive school-level environments and broader system constraints that make teachers' work harder.

"My issues are with the district policies and resources, not our particular school. I would love a district survey to discuss concerns about the lack of time and resources."

"Still only asks questions about individual schools and no questions at system level, which is frustrating. The issues in my school originate at the system level, not the building level. Why no ability to comment on those variables?"

"Most of the problems reflected in this survey are more directed toward the state and district level support than the school site."

“I love my school and principal. I am tired, though, of feeling the presence of the district. I simply have no faith in the ability of anyone outside this building to improve anything inside this building. People who work at the district level have left the classroom for a reason and are usually out of touch with its harshest realities.”

“There are systemic issues that are out of the control of our building-level administrators that affect our working conditions. One issue is that the student-to-teacher ratio is too high. Teaching working conditions would be more sustainable with smaller class sizes. All of these factors lead to strain and burnout among staff.”

Facilities and Physical Environment

Comments in this topic focus on the physical conditions of the school building and campus. Teachers describe concerns related to classroom space, maintenance, air quality, cleanliness, safety, and the adequacy of the physical environment for teaching and learning.

“The building requires a complete renovation. By simply approaching the school, it's apparent that we rank third among the three high schools in terms of visual appeal. Both the exterior and interior look worn and outdated.”

“This school has gone through a lot of changes recently, mainly because the school system and the superintendent do not make this school or our students a priority. We still have ceilings falling apart, broken stall doors in the bathrooms, doors with locks that don't work, a parking lot that is full of potholes, and sewage backup in the locker rooms.”

“Old building and many of the classrooms have very uncomfortable air quality and temperature environments due to lack of ventilation and the poor HVAC system.”

“There are some maintenance issues that really need to be taken care of. This is a district issue. There are repair requests that were made back in August that are still unresolved.”

“The issues stem from the very top. There are too many admin and central office positions but not enough frontline positions. We need more custodians to keep the buildings clean, supplies do not arrive when requested so the buildings run out.”

Leadership and Communication Concerns

This topic reflects more critical views of leadership, especially around trust, transparency, consistency, and communication. Teachers often describe unclear expectations, weak follow-through, low morale, or feeling unheard.

“Sometimes, I feel like it is hard to get ahold of the administration for questions and that would be the main thing that I would emphasize because it affects communication. There have been times I have had to call the office for assistance with behavioral issues and no help was provided.”

“I believe that the leadership at our school has taken a dip this year. Administrators come in with a scowl on their face and their arms crossed. They appear to judge more than want to help. Feedback is never positive, always critical. I feel that we are never enough.”

“The school administration severely mismanages our school. We can’t retain high quality teachers because administration creates a toxic environment. Administrative communication is often unclear and last minute. Teachers are not involved in decision making at this school in any way.”

“The administration at our school is very much so dictatorship-like. If you do not agree with something the principal says, she does not listen or take feedback. She stresses test scores too much, making it stressful for students and staff. The morale at the school is very low.”

“The past 3 school years at our school were amazing. This school year, there is a lack of trust, communication between the principal and staff, and student involvement. All things that were innovative in the last 3 years have been removed.”

Instructional Support and Resources

Comments in this topic focus on the supports available to help teachers meet student needs, including staffing, materials, specialized services, and instructional assistance. Teachers often describe gaps in support for special populations and high-need students.

“Our gifted population is not given the same opportunities at our school that our special needs students require.”

“There are not nearly enough resources. I have coworkers that have been told that folders are not available as a school purchased supply, and they would need to buy them for themselves. Additionally, we don’t have the manpower. There is

not enough EC support in classrooms, because EC Teachers are stretched too thin, so general education teachers tend to miss out on EC support.”

“Salary increase for special education teacher: It’s not easy to handle students with disabilities, especially when you have 13 students with multiple disabilities, including those with behavioral issues, visual impairments, and nonverbal and verbal students, with only one teacher assistant.”

“More support is needed for students with medical issues, a full-time nurse on site, and students with disabilities and behavioral issues in general education.”

“Managing a large number of students with diverse needs, varying reading levels, and limited support resources can make it challenging to consistently provide differentiated instruction at a high level. While structures are in place, more consistent support, resources, and time for small-group instruction would strengthen student outcomes.”

Curriculum and Instruction

This topic centers on instructional practice, curriculum demands, data use, and professional learning. Comments often describe tension between meaningful teaching and pressures tied to pacing, testing, curriculum implementation, and documentation.

“Our day is packed from start to finish with instructional time. While the curriculum is important, it leaves virtually no time to intentionally teach or practice executive functioning skills.”

“We were provided a curriculum that has made learning for these students almost impossible. I feel that admin don’t really know how bad it is and just act like it’s amazing to save face with central office. We need people to be more curriculum focused to even be data focused.”

“We are moving away from child-based education and are focusing on stats and data and what ‘looks good.’ I have noticed a difference among my peers, my students, and the families. The change is not for the better.”

“Our admin is great, but the demands on teachers from the state are unreasonable. We are teaching too many standards too early, and students aren’t developmentally ready for them.”

“Teacher expertise is no longer valued. The frantic pace at which school is unfolding is not sustainable for either students or teachers. We will lose teachers because they are not given space or freedom to do what works for them.”

General Teaching Frustrations

This topic captures broader dissatisfaction that is not limited to a single issue. Comments often reflect cumulative stress, competing demands, and a general sense that the work has become harder to sustain, even when teachers remain committed to students and their schools.

“We need to focus more on teaching the kids instead of paperwork and worrying about what the politics want us to do or the community.”

“Teachers deserve a lunch break. Stop making teachers eat lunch in the cafeteria.”

“We need more resources, time, and people. Teachers are doing 5 jobs in one. This potentially pertains to more than just this school but is still a concern of mine, especially concerning burnout and longevity of staying in a teaching career.”

“Difficulties this year stem from an increase in demands on teachers with no adjustment for support. New grading requirements, required PD, clubs initiative, morning meeting requirements, new discipline policy, more IA requirements. No additional resources, no additional staffing, no schedule shifts to support. Teachers are taking on an enormous workload alone and barely staying afloat.”

“This is a very challenging school to teach at. Many concerns come from the community rather than the school itself. Students disrespecting teachers verbally and physically. Large classes with high-need students make teaching difficult. I feel overwhelmed by the workload.”
