



2026

The State of California's Public Schools

A SURVEY OF TK-12 EDUCATORS

CTA CALIFORNIA
TEACHERS
ASSOCIATION



California educators have been navigating underfunded schools, personal economic uncertainty, and attacks on free speech in the classroom for decades. Today, these issues are exacerbated by the Trump administration's attempts to dismantle and defund public education. In classroom communities across the state, food insecurity is on the rise and students fear the presence of ICE and Border Patrol in their schools and neighborhoods. **The critical role of schools as stable, safe and consistent places for young people to learn is on the line**, leaving educators and communities in the fourth¹ largest economy in the world confronting an existential struggle for public education. For the second year in a row, the California Teachers Association (CTA) surveyed over 2,000 of our members to understand what it takes for educators to weather economic uncertainty in their classrooms and careers, and keep students safe, engaged and thriving as attacks on public education intensify.

SECTION 1

Sounding the Alarm: The Cumulative Effects of Underfunding Our Schools

80% of educators say that schools in California don't have enough resources to meet the needs of students – a three point increase from 2025. Two-thirds of California's public school educators are not satisfied with conditions facing educators in their districts, up from an already-high 62% last year. Despite this, California educators remain resilient and committed to their students, with 77% saying they still love their job.



Educators are actively organizing to increase and defend school funding across the state, ensuring school districts prioritize spending on student learning conditions, and working toward a permanent extension of Prop. 55 and the up to \$15 billion dollars it generates for our schools² annually.

The following issues were underscored in this year's survey, compared with last year's, illustrating just a few of the ways that educators and public schools are functioning under increased attacks on resources and public education.

Percentage of educators reporting the following as **serious issues**

88% **Insufficient funding for schools**

88% **Low pay for educators**

78% **Overcrowded classrooms**

Percentage point increase from 2025 saying the issue is **very serious**

+8
points

+4
points

+2
points

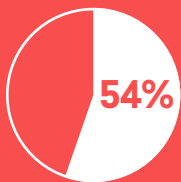
Concerns about layoffs and school closures **rose 6 percentage points** in the last year alone.

Critical Staffing Issues Persist

73% report a **serious educator shortage** at their school

84% report **insufficient resources**, staff, and/or training to **support special education students**

68% say there are **serious issues with student access to mental health support** at school



Over half of educators know coworkers who **left careers in education because of financial strain**

28% of educators say they **have taken on a second job** or “gig” work to make ends meet this year

Even though the vast majority are satisfied with their job...

40%
are considering leaving education in the next few years

and

45%
cite the influence of **financial strain** on their decision



SECTION 2

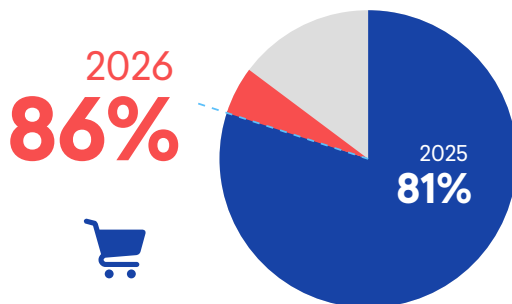
Compounding Affordability Crises Take a Toll

Educators responded to this survey as the economic effects of Trump's tariff policies played out in realtime, with the cost of consumer goods on the rise³. California is already one of the most expensive states in the country for working families who continue to face rising housing costs, unaffordable childcare and healthcare, and an insufficient safety net.

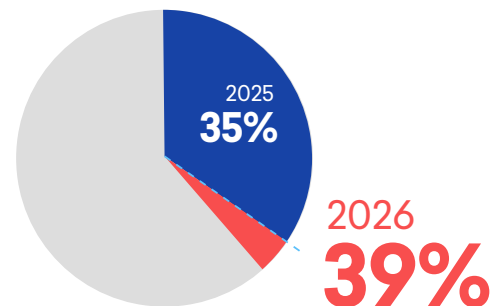
Financial Sacrifices and Troubling Trends

California's educators have long contended with the exorbitant cost of living across the state. Responding to worsening economic uncertainty means making increasingly consequential sacrifices to basic needs and future security. This is how educators responded to the following statements:

“The costs of everyday goods and services increased more than my salary over the past year.”



“I reduced retirement contributions due to financial strain.”



One-third of educators are living paycheck to paycheck, a 2% increase from last year.



3-in-4 educators feel that their out-of-pocket healthcare costs are too high, a five percentage point increase from last year.

A lack of affordable healthcare is a critical issue for educators. Rising healthcare premiums, increases to co-pays and relentless attacks on Medicare and the Affordable Care Act by the Trump administration are intensifying this crisis.

61% of educators report concerns about affording healthcare costs

1-in-3 delayed or skipped medical care to save money

California's High Cost of Living Hits Home

Over half (54%) of educators are worried about paying the rent or mortgage each month – and **83%** of educators are concerned about affording basic cost of living expenses, like gas, groceries and electric bills.

Faced with financial strain, **over half** of educators also took the following measures:



incurred personal debt, like credit cards or personal loans



delayed home or car repairs



skipped vacations or family events



6-in-10 are concerned about covering these bills on a monthly basis

82%

say **housing affordability is a problem** for educators at their school



Close to **a third (31%)** would like to buy a home, but can't afford to



Over three-quarters say they **have students who lack stable housing**

Educators with Children

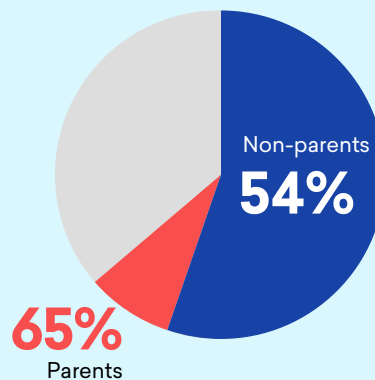
40% of educators have children in the household. For every question asked in the survey regarding sacrifices made to make ends meet, educators with children were 5 to 9 percentage points more likely to report having done so this year.

Parents are 10 percentage points **less likely to have savings or an emergency fund** that can cover **three months of living expenses.**



1-in-4
educators with
children say
affording childcare
is a major concern

90%
of parents are
concerned about
saving for their
child or children's
higher education



Percentage of educators who report that **building savings and covering unexpected costs is a major concern**

Parents were much more likely to have **cut back their household's budget in the last year.**



While parents are **less** likely to report considering leaving education, those that do are **15 percentage points more likely** than non-parents to cite financial strain as having a great deal of influence on their decision.

Insufficient paid pregnancy and family leave has long presented educators with impossible choices when it comes to caring for their families. **Nearly 60% of educators without children feel there is insufficient paid leave for educators**, but among **parents, this is even higher—72% consider the lack of leave to be a serious issue.**



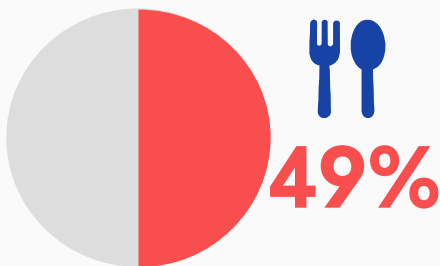
SECTION 3

Confronting Political Attacks on Schools & Communities

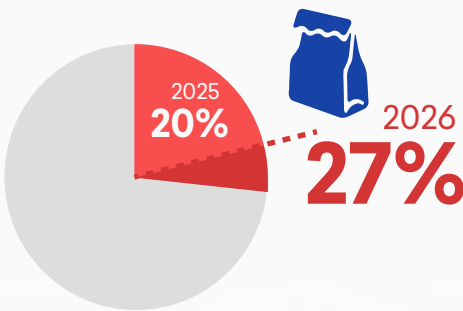
In its first year, the Trump administration has advanced initiatives to destabilize and dismantle the infrastructure and funding that makes public education possible across the nation, and in California. This includes cuts to funding and infrastructure for special education, budget reductions at the Department of Education and censorship in the classroom. The administration's policies are exacerbating issues that previously persisted, like attacks on immigrant and LGBTQIA+ school communities and food insecurity among students.

Hunger in the classroom

For many students, school is the only place where they have consistent access to meals. Educators report rising rates of food insecurity among students, reflecting the rising cost of groceries and the Trump administration's attack on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. **Nearly 2 million children in California receive supplemental food assistance from CalFresh⁴.**



of all surveyed members work in schools where more than three-quarters of **students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals**



In just one year, the percentage of educators reporting that **student access to school meals is a serious problem increased seven percentage points, to 27%**

71% have students who **lack reliable access to meals**

45% have purchased food for students who are hungry or food insecure this school year





Classroom Communities Under Attack

Federal immigration policies are accelerating fear and uncertainty in California's schools, where **1 million students⁵ have an undocumented parent, and nearly half⁶ (45%) of all children have at least one immigrant parent.** We asked educators about the atmosphere in their schools when it comes to this issue and the ongoing threat of climate change-related risks.

ICE and Border Patrol Raids

Recent escalations and targeted raids are intensifying fear and anxiety among families, which has a ripple effect on the safety and mental health of students. **Notably, absences rose 22%⁷ in three Central Valley counties following raids earlier this year.**

Educators on the **impact of immigration raids** in their school community:



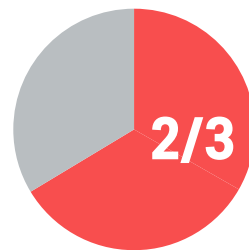
Over half say it's a **serious problem**



of those, **1/3** say it's a **very serious** concern

Free Speech in the Classroom

Educators have an essential role to play in developing the critical thinking skills of young people. **But the Trump administration has advanced a dangerous censorship agenda,** threatening educators and students with book bans, and restrictions on teaching about race, justice, and equity, including LGBTQ+ issues. These policies have been accompanied by the threat of serious funding cuts, should states refuse to comply. California educators continue to lead the charge against this repressive agenda.



of educators say policies that **threaten what educators can teach in their classrooms is a serious issue for them**

Determined and Ready for Action: Educators Prepared to Fight for California's Schools

We are facing a historic onslaught of anti-education policies, budget cuts, and dangerous rhetoric, and California's educators are already responding with heightened collective action. **83% of educators** say they are **willing to strike to improve educator pay, which is essential for stable, thriving schools**. As the Trump administration threatens to make healthcare even more unaffordable, **72% of educators** say they are **willing to strike to lower healthcare costs**.

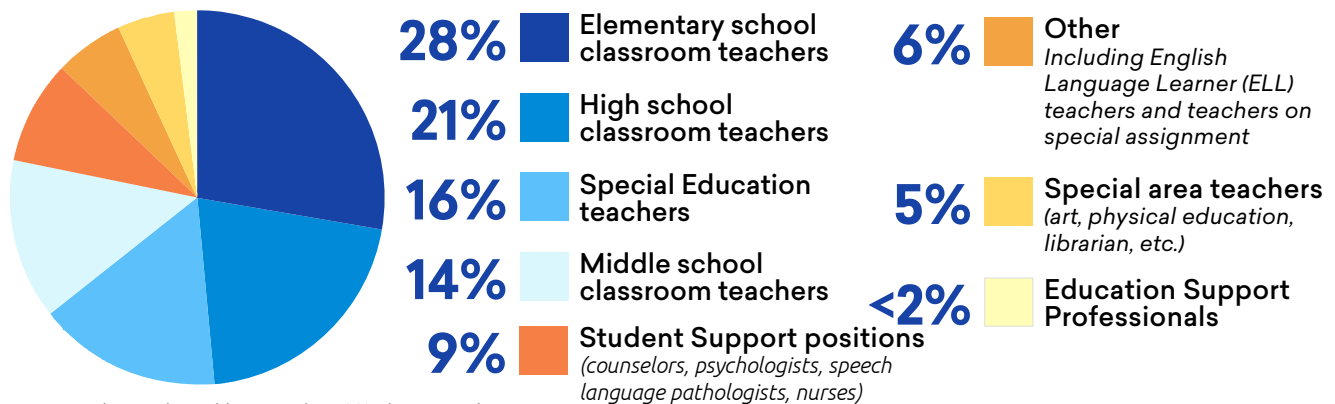
Nearly 70% of educators say they are **willing to strike to improve staffing levels for special education** (69%), for **student support staff** like counselors and nurses (69%), and to **enable smaller class sizes** (68%). And **62% would strike to stop layoffs and school closures**.

It's up to state lawmakers, now more than ever, to translate California's wealth into financial security for our educators and stable learning conditions for the 5.8 million public school students who rely on them each day.



Methodology

2,015 active certificated and classified CTA members in TK-12 schools filled out the survey via email between December 2nd and 9th, 2025. Of the members surveyed:



School Setting



Notes

¹Office of Governor Gavin Newsom. California is now the 4th largest economy in the world. April 23, 2025.

²EdSource. California's largest teachers union spurs drive to make income tax surcharge permanent <https://edsources.org/2025/california-tax-education-funding/745606>. November 21, 2025.

³CNBC. From bananas to toys, these 5 charts show how much costs have risen since Trump's tariffs went into effect. September 15, 2025.

⁴Public Policy Institute of California. California's Nutrition Safety Net. Fact Sheet: May 2025.

⁵Children's Partnership. A Child is a Child – 2024 SNAPSHOT: California Children's Health.

⁶Public Policy Institute of California. Immigrants in California. Fact Sheet: January 2025.

⁷Annenberg Institute at Brown University. Recent Immigration Raids Increased Student Absences. June 2025.

