



2026

# The State of California's Public Schools

A SURVEY OF TK-12 EDUCATORS



CALIFORNIA  
TEACHERS  
ASSOCIATION



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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 fourth<sup>1</sup> 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.



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 <b>serious issues</b>	Percentage point increase from 2025 saying the issue is <b>very serious</b>
<b>88%</b> Insufficient funding for schools	<b>+8</b> points
<b>88%</b> Low pay for educators	<b>+4</b> points
<b>78%</b> Overcrowded classrooms	<b>+2</b> points

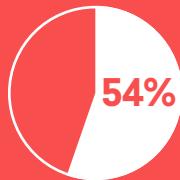
Concerns about layoffs and school closures rose 6 percentage points in the last year alone.

# 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

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

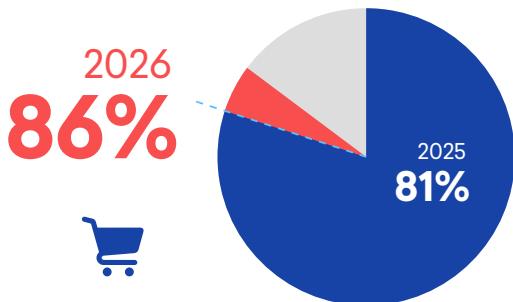
# Compounding Affordability Crises Take a Toll

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 rise<sup>3</sup>. 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.

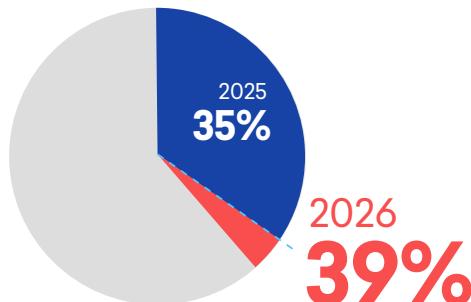
# Financial Sacrifices and Troubling Trends

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

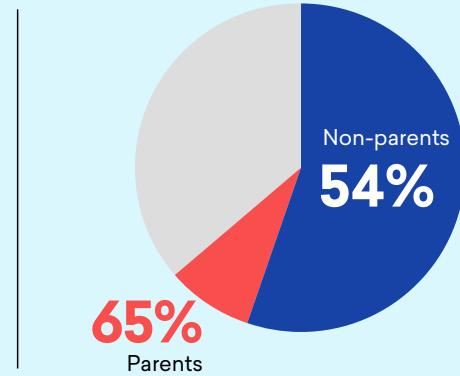
**40% of educators have children in the household.** For every question asked in the survey regarding sacrifices made to make ends meet, educators with children were 5 to 9 percentage points more likely to report having done so this year.

**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.



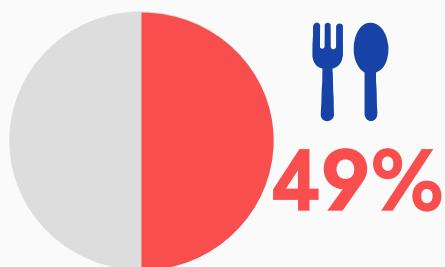
## SECTION 3

# Confronting Political Attacks on Schools & Communities

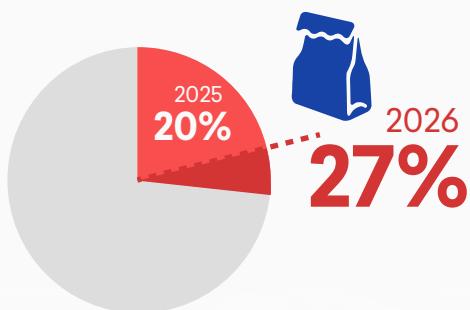
In its first year, the Trump administration has advanced initiatives to destabilize and dismantle the infrastructure and funding that makes public education possible across the nation, and in California. This includes cuts to funding and infrastructure for special education, budget reductions at the 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 SNAP benefits. **Nearly 2 million children in California receive supplemental food assistance from CalFresh<sup>4</sup>.**



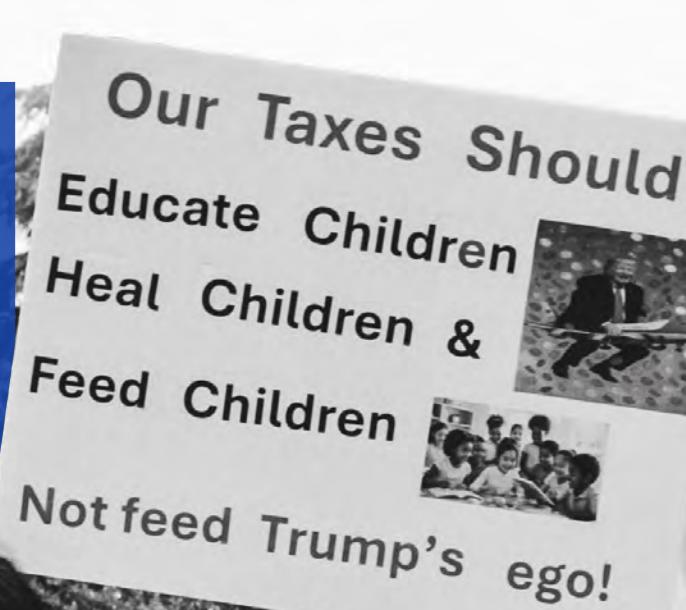
of all surveyed members work in schools where more than three-quarters of **students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.**



**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 students<sup>5</sup> have an undocumented parent, and nearly half<sup>6</sup> (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%<sup>7</sup> in three Central Valley counties following raids earlier this year.**

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



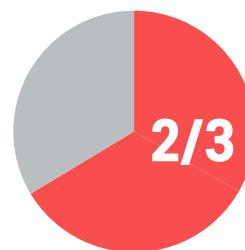
Over half say it's a serious problem



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**.

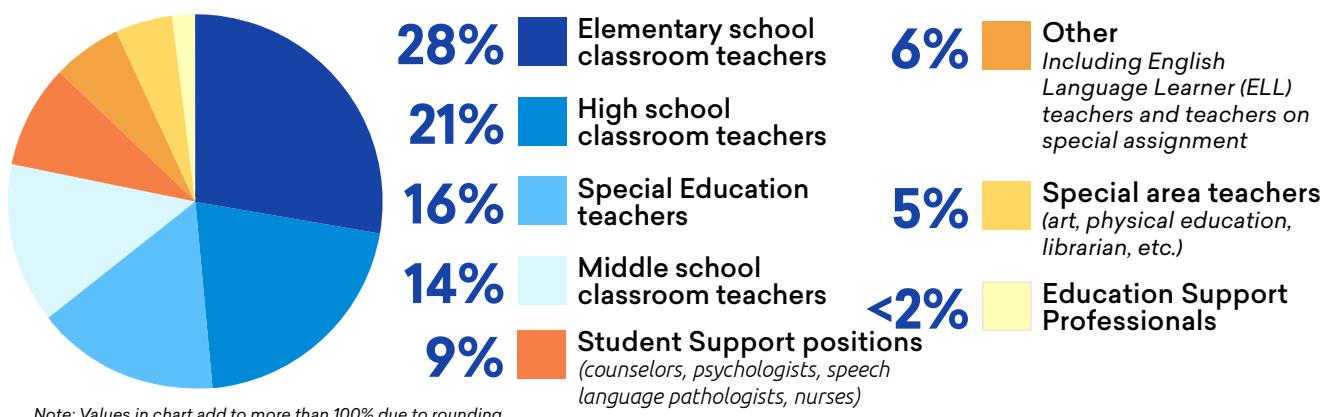
**Nearly 70%** of educators say they are **willing to strike to improve staffing levels for special education** (69%), for **student support staff** like counselors and nurses (69%), and to **enable smaller class sizes** (68%). And **62% would strike to stop layoffs and school closures**.

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

Suburban 55%

Urban 30%

Rural 12%

# Notes

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup>Public Policy Institute of California. Immigrants in California. Fact Sheet: January 2025.

<sup>7</sup>Annenberg Institute at Brown University. Recent Immigration Raids Increased Student Absences. June 2025.