

Voices from the Classroom: Developing a Strategy for Teacher Retention & Recruitment

Key Findings from a survey of TK-12 teachers in California and in-depth interviews with aspiring and former teachers in California. Conducted by Hart Research Associates on behalf of the California Teachers Association and UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is an imperative in California to address the massive teacher shortage and to improve both teacher retention and recruitment. To inform potential policy changes that will help accomplish these goals, Hart Research completed a quantitative survey of current teachers and qualitative, in-depth interviews with former teachers and aspiring teachers who have taught or plan to teach in California.

Key Takeaways

- Teachers' primary motivations for entering the profession and staying in it are to help students and to make a positive difference in our world.
- While many current California teachers find their work rewarding and fulfilling, they most commonly and acutely feel exhausted and stressed. Majorities of current teachers also express low levels of satisfaction with key aspects of their job.
- Teacher retention will be a challenge in the near term. Four in ten current teachers have explored leaving the classroom either to continue within education or to switch occupations entirely. One in five current teachers say they will likely leave the profession in the next three years. Current teachers aged 55 and older are the most inclined to leave teaching within three years but more than one-third of younger teachers have a similar outlook.
- Burnout from stress is the top reason current teachers say they are considering leaving, with political attacks on teachers the next highest-ranking factor. Workload, low pay, student apathy and behavioral issues, and the lack of support from district administrators contribute to the stress felt by teachers. Former teachers underscore that teachers' compensation is too low to afford the high cost of living in California—a state with one of the highest levels of income inequality in the country.
- Many current teachers of color, especially Black teachers, say they have experienced discrimination and do not feel comfortable expressing themselves. LGBTQ+ teachers have also experienced discrimination at high rates. Aspiring and former teachers of color share that feeling comfortable and a part of their school community was directly tied to whether their students and their families, peers, and leadership had similar racial/ethnic backgrounds to their own.

- There are a variety of changes that current and former teachers believe would address burnout and improve teacher retention. Current and former teachers' top priority for state and local officials is better pay. Second-tier priorities are all things that could reduce the stress that current teachers are feeling in their jobs, including smaller class sizes, stronger discipline policies for students who behave disruptively, better staffing and a more manageable workload, and more support services for students.
- Classroom and relationship management are major concerns among aspiring, current, and former teachers. Former teachers feel there should be more professional opportunities for teachers (especially those who are newer to the field) to learn relationship-based skillsets to manage interactions with students, other teachers, administrators, and parents.
- Finally, aspiring teachers provide several insights on teacher preparation programs. First, real-time teaching experiences are of central importance to prepare future teachers. Second, the workload is a major stressor, including the required state teacher assessments. Third, the financial costs influenced their decision to enter, and their ability to finish, the teacher preparation program.
 - Compensating student teachers was suggested by a significant number of the aspiring teachers and is viewed as a very important policy change that will help alleviate financial stress at an important time in the teacher preparation process.
 - Aspiring teachers of color report that they had become less motivated to teach as a result of their preparation program at higher rates than their white teacher counterparts, due to heightened financial stress, low or no pay for student teaching, and the required teacher candidate assessments, which some express are racially biased.