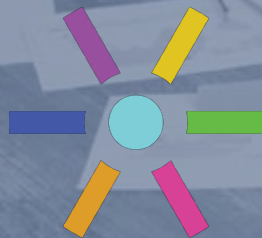


Educator Working Conditions

Investigating Why Educators Leave the Profession



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September 16th, 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the 2020-21 school year, school districts across Illinois retained approximately 87% of their teacher workforce, on average.¹ Although this figure has remained stable for the past 5 years, recent reports have revealed that educator shortages disproportionately exist in certain *content areas*, such as special education and bilingual/English as a Second Language; *educator demographics*, such as race; and *geographic regions*, including large urban counties (e.g., Cook County) and rural areas.^{2, 3, 4} In addition, since the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly began in 2020, educators have found themselves in high-stress roles due to fluctuating school conditions—the prolonged toll of which has been predicted to worsen educator shortages further.^{5, 6}

To understand the factors that contribute to educator attrition and mobility, the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS) emailed the Educator Working Conditions Survey in Spring 2022 to over 26,000 current and former educators across the state of Illinois. The goal of the survey was to assess the personal and school-related reasons why educators decide to leave their positions. Valid responses were received from 3,478 current and former educators, a 13% response rate.

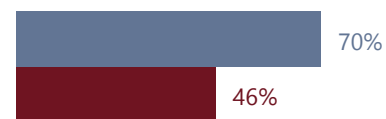
Across all educators who responded to the survey, less than two-thirds (61%) of responders were satisfied in their most recent position. Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority (89%) of educators agreed that they had positive relationships with their teaching peers. Many educators (85%) also agreed that their work as an educator had a positive impact on the world. Conversely, only 40% of responders agreed that their salary as an educator was appropriate, and only 52% of responders agreed that their workload as an educator was reasonable.

Based on responses to survey questions, 2,984 educators were categorized as *stayers* (i.e., still a teacher or administrator) and 494 as *leavers* (i.e., no longer a teacher or administrator). The most notable significant differences between leavers and stayers were within the Teacher-School Connection factor. For this factor (see Figure 1), most stayers (70%) agreed with the survey items about positive teacher-school connection, compared to less than half of leavers (46%). This factor included acceptance in the school or district, support from school leadership, autonomy for planning, involvement in decision making, and relationships with leadership. Conversely, there was little to no difference between leavers and stayers within the Educator Efficacy factor. This factor included concerns about quality of teaching, impact of educators, personal growth, and appreciation from parents and students. For example, the majority of both stayers (74%) and leavers (73%) agreed on items such as “Students appreciated my efforts as an educator.”

“After teaching in many public schools and at a state school, I realize there is never enough support from administration. We need more college level courses on how to support teachers.”

Special Education Teacher at Statewide Public School, March 2022

Figure 1: Percent of Stayers vs. Leavers Who Agreed on Teacher-School Connection Factor.



Executive Summary

A deeper analysis highlighted commonalities across stayers and leavers based on their *intentions* to remain in—or return to—the education profession. Responders were categorized into two groups: (1) **Would Return** educators, which included stayers who were planning to remain educators and leavers who would like to return to education and (2) **Would Not Return** educators, which included stayers who were considering leaving the profession or moving schools/districts and leavers who would not like to return to education. Less than one-third (29%) of educators who Would Not Return were satisfied in their most recent educator position, compared to a majority (69%) of educators who Would Return (see Figure 2). Significant differences between educators who Would Return and Would Not Return were observed for all prompts on the survey. Most notable, only 30% of educators who Would Not Return agreed that they felt support from school leadership, compared to 67% educators who Would Return (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: Percent of Would Return vs. Would Not Return Educators Who Were Satisfied in Their Recent Position.

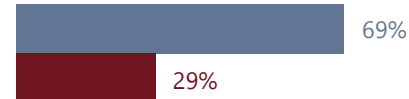
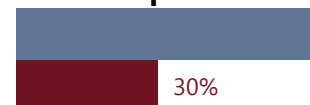


Figure 3: Percent of Would Return vs. Would Not Return Educators Who Felt Support From School Leadership.



Factors that affect teacher retention vary for educators representing historically marginalized groups.^a To illustrate, within the subgroup of educators who Would Not Return to the profession, responders from historically marginalized groups reported lower levels of agreement with the prompt, "School policies aligned with my personal beliefs," compared to responders from non-historically marginalized groups. In addition, within this same subgroup of educators who Would Not Return, responders from historically marginalized groups reported higher levels of agreement with the prompt, "I had appropriate resources for teaching," compared to responders from non-historically marginalized groups.

Early career educators had different reasons for leaving the profession than late career educators. Fewer early career educators who left the profession agreed with the prompt, "I felt accepted in my school/district," than late career educators who left the profession. Whereas, the prompt, "There was good access to child or senior care in the surrounding area," was a smaller concern for early career educators to leave the profession than for late career educators.

This report provides an overview of the entire Educator Working Conditions Survey. More in-depth reports on specific topics will be released throughout fall 2022. The full report can be found [here](#).

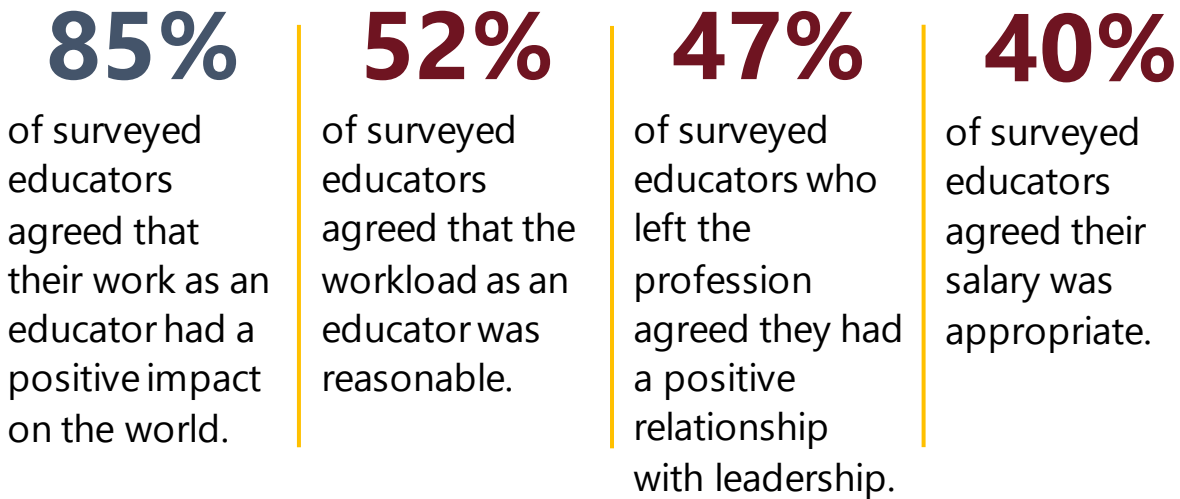
"Community expectation of schools has grown. Local boards place great pressure on administrators. Administrators' demands to facilitate growth are ever reaching. Teachers are expected to work harder and in tougher conditions than in past decades. Overall, administrators in my district do not and cannot pay teachers fairly for the demands they place on them. Teachers face fatigue and whether they can leave the profession or not, their hearts have gone out of the job." - Elementary Administrator in Cook County, March 2022

^a Non-historically marginalized groups included White. Historically marginalized groups included all other indicated racial or ethnic groups.

EDUCATOR WORKING CONDITIONS

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KEY FINDINGS



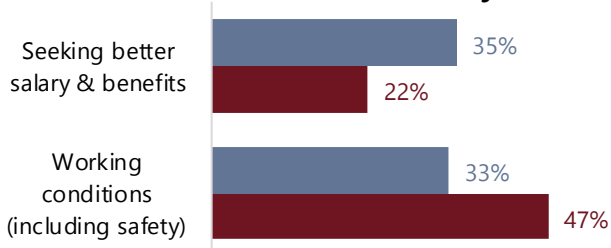
3,478 Current and former educators from 93 counties and 500 out of 863 districts responded to the survey.

"As a society, we must stop putting everything on the backs of educators. Educators and schools cannot continue to be expected to provide every service society deems appropriate or necessary. What is expected is too much and many are rapidly leaving the field for less stress, more money, and much more respect."

Elementary Teacher in Southeast IL, March 2022



Percent of Movers and Leavers by Reason for Leaving their Educator Position



More educators **moved districts** to find better salary & benefits than **left the profession**.

More educators **left the profession** over working conditions than **moved districts**.

