

Not Yet Clear if Texas Teachers are Leaving the Profession at Higher Rates. Very Clear that Teachers Frustrated by Lack of Students Being on Grade Level

Written Testimony Submitted to the Senate Committee on Education
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Key Takeaways:

- The data is still not yet clear on the teacher shortage, but our polling indicates that between 4%-25% of Texas teachers are thinking about leaving the profession.
- Teachers are overwhelmingly very frustrated with students not being prepared for grade level work.

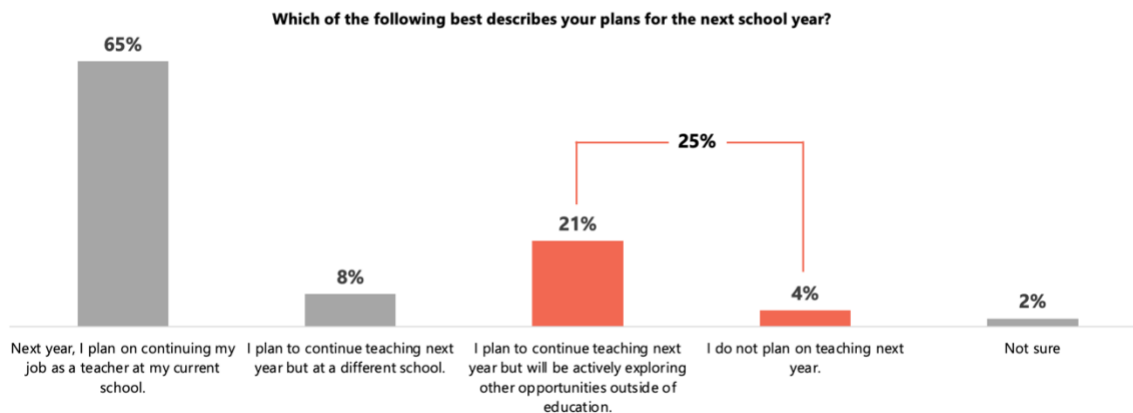
The state is still grappling to understand all the effects of the pandemic on our everyday lives. While the pandemic created new challenges, it also laid bare existing, systemic issues, like Texas’ difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers. For example, special education and bilingual/ESL education have been facing shortage for 32 years.¹ This teacher shortage was top of mind when the Legislature passed House Bill 3, leading to the bill’s focus on teacher incentive pay and overall teacher pay raises.

What are Texas Teachers Saying Their Plans Are? Texas 2036 is committed to hearing directly from Texans on the issues that they are facing. As part of this work, we launched a statewide teacher poll and teacher focus groups. When we asked teachers in March 2022 what they planned to do next school year, 4% said they did not plan on teaching next school year and 21% said they plan to continue teaching, but they are actively exploring opportunities outside education. This leaves the state with a significant liability: 25% of teachers are considering or planning to leave the profession. Much remains to be seen when the data comes in on teacher contract renewals, but our poll suggests that even if teacher attrition was down during the pandemic, there is good reason to be cautious that turnover concerns are not yet reflected in available data. Other surveys have found even higher numbers, reflecting the prevailing uncertainty around this important metric.²

What does the data say current teachers are planning on doing?



1-in-4 Texas teachers intend to leave the profession next year or are actively exploring other options.



¹ <https://www.raiseyourhandtexas.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Texas-Teacher-Workforce-Report.pdf>

² <https://www.texasaft.org/releases/the-crisis-in-our-schools-66-of-texas-educators-are-considering-leaving-the-profession/>

If teachers do plan to leave at

the end of this school year,

what could the reasons be? Teachers face many challenges and frustrations in their classrooms, so we wanted to figure out what the most frustrating or most challenging parts of being a teacher are. We started with focus groups, asking teachers to tell us what they found most difficult. Repeatedly we heard that teachers are frustrated their students are not on grade level. One 3rd - 5th grade elementary school teacher said:

“Basically, I have kindergarteners, because they haven’t been at school for a year and a half, and this is the first year they come back from school after the pandemic. But instead of changing the curriculum, the standards are still the same. So, I have a kindergartener and [they] expect them to read at a third-grade level. How can I give them grace if we still expect them to be third graders, even though they read at kindergarten level?”

When provided a list of common teaching frustrations (sourced from our focus group work), teachers in our poll listed the following as the most frustrating:

- Unrealistic expectations from the school district leadership on closing learning gaps.
- Parents not having an accurate understanding of how their child is doing academically.
- Insufficient support from district leadership.
- Students being behind grade level.

As Texas continues its discussion of how to retain educators in the profession, it is important to keep these frustrations in mind. With the state’s declining ranking on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the removal of the passage requirements in the 5th and 8th grade STAAR exams last session, and the learning loss from the pandemic, Texas has set up a system where the academic frustrations teachers experience will likely increase. Data suggests that the best way we can limit their frustrations is a focused effort on getting students back on grade level as quickly as possible, providing educators with the support and resources necessary to accomplish this important and challenging task.

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