

TEACHING FOR TOMORROW

# Staying Power

What It Takes to Make  
Teaching Affordable  
and Sustainable



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# Introduction

Teachers have a profound impact on students' success in school. Indeed, 63% of middle and high school students say they are most excited about what they are learning when a teacher goes out of their way to make it engaging, and 83% of teachers who strongly agree they are excited about what they teach say their students are also excited about learning, compared with just 58% of teachers with lower levels of excitement.<sup>1</sup>

After a year of tracking teacher experiences through the Walton Family Foundation-Gallup *Teaching for Tomorrow* study, the research shows that high-quality teaching — and the student engagement it produces — often occurs despite significant classroom challenges. Two-thirds of teachers say they lack enough people resources, like teaching assistants or instructional coaches, to support students, and one-third believe their district-provided curriculum is low quality.<sup>2</sup> On average, teachers work up to 50 hours<sup>3</sup> a week as they navigate these barriers and strive to deliver high-quality instruction for their students.

**This research explores the current realities of how teachers experience the profession, how they envision their future in education, and what could support their goals for career growth and longevity in the profession. The findings reveal the day-to-day realities teachers face, with nuances that reflect a diverse teacher workforce.**

While household financial challenges are not unique to education, teachers who are struggling most financially report the greatest strain on their lives and work. These teachers — who comprise 21% of the workforce — are more likely to hold second jobs like rideshare driving or retail, more likely to say their second job has a negative impact on their teaching responsibilities and more likely than their peers to experience burnout. At the same time, the findings provide insights into the career goals teachers hold for themselves and point to opportunities for school leaders and policymakers to better support teachers in building sustainable, long-term careers in education.

1 Gallup-Walton Family Foundation. (2025). Teaching for Tomorrow: Educators on the Future of Their Profession. <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/659822/walton-family-foundation-gallup-teach-tomorrow-report.aspx>

2 Gallup-Walton Family Foundation. (2025). Teaching for Tomorrow: How Supporting Teachers Today Shapes Classrooms Tomorrow. <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/659819/k-12-teacher-research.aspx>

3 Ibid.

# Key Findings

1

## One in five teachers (21%)

find it **difficult to get by on their household income**, and 52% feel they are just getting by.

2

## One-third of teachers (33%)

**hold a second job that is unrelated to education.**

Teachers report most of these jobs (85%) are done at least partially during the school year.

3

## Financial stress may push teachers to find second jobs outside of education.

Teachers who find it difficult to get by on their present income are among the most likely to have a second job that's unrelated to teaching (46%) compared with others who are getting by or who are living comfortably (34% and 22%, respectively).

4

## Two-thirds of teachers (67%)

**plan to stay in K-12 education** the rest of their career, with the majority (55% overall) planning to remain in the classroom teaching students.

5

## Almost four in 10 teachers (37%)

indicate that **more pay and benefits is the most important aspect of career growth** for them. Most of the other 63% of teachers are spread evenly between learning new skills, moving to a role outside the classroom and taking on a teacher leadership role while continuing to teach.

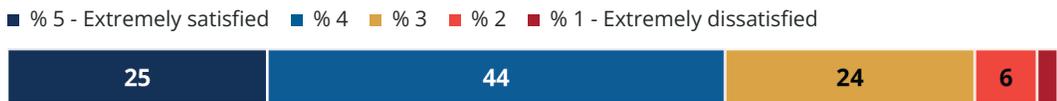
# Detailed Findings

## Despite high job satisfaction, a minority of teachers say they can live comfortably on their household income

In the fall of 2025, over two-thirds of teachers (69%) report being satisfied with their place of work, and few (8%) are dissatisfied. Prior research from the *Teaching for Tomorrow* study has shown that teachers’ satisfaction is linked to opportunities to maximize their strengths at work and satisfaction with workload, as well as satisfaction with pay.<sup>4</sup>

FIGURE 1

### How satisfied are you with your place of employment as a place to work?



Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding. Values less than 5% are not shown.

Despite high rates of job satisfaction through the 2024-25 school year into fall 2025,<sup>5</sup> about one in five teachers (21%) are facing financial challenges at home, saying they are finding it difficult to get by on their present income. The largest share, 52%, say they are “getting by” on their household income, while 28% are living comfortably. While estimates vary, the average teacher salary during the 2024-25 school year was approximately \$60,000<sup>6</sup> to \$72,000.<sup>7</sup>

FIGURE 2

### Which one of these phrases comes closest to your own feelings about your household income?



Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding.

4 Marken, S., & Hrynowski, Z. (2025, April 29). Two-Thirds of K-12 Teachers Satisfied With Their Workplace. Gallup.com. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/659567/two-thirds-teachers-satisfied-workplace.aspx>

5 Ibid.

6 The most recent estimate of average teacher pay from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is \$60,100 during the 2020-21 school year.

7 The National Education Association provides a more recent teacher pay estimate of \$72,030 for the 2024-25 school year.

## Who can afford to teach?

Most teachers (81%) have other sources of income contributing to their household, primarily from another working member of the household (63%). Just 19% of teachers say their household relies solely on their teaching salary. Others cite additional paid jobs (29%) or sources of income like investments or rental income (12%).

**Prior Gallup research finds that teachers are more likely than comparable professions<sup>8</sup> to have other income sources contributing to their household (by about seven percentage points).**

The one in five teachers who are the sole earner in their household are even more likely than others to find it difficult to get by on their teaching salary. Gender also matters: Women whose teaching salary is the sole income in the household face even greater financial pressure, as women on average earn lower teaching salaries than men.<sup>9</sup> Almost three in 10 women (29%) who are also the sole earner in their household say they find it difficult to get by on their present income, compared with 22% of men who are the sole earner and 20% of women in households with an additional source of income.

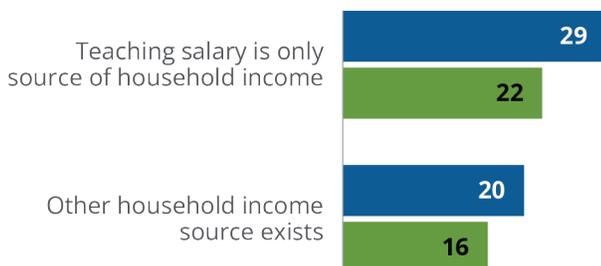
**Female teachers** who are the sole earner for their household are hit the hardest: 29% say they struggle to get by on their household income.

**FIGURE 3**

### Which one of these phrases comes closest to your own feelings about your household income?

% Finding it difficult to get by

■ Female ■ Male



<sup>8</sup> Comparable professions are workers in non-education industries who have at least a bachelor's degree.

<sup>9</sup> Hansen, M., Quintero, D., & Zerbino, N. (2023, March 9). Public schools heavily rely on women's labor. Why do they pay female teachers less? Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/gender-wage-gaps-policy-brief/>

### For teachers looking to leave, dissatisfaction with pay comes second after the workload and job demands

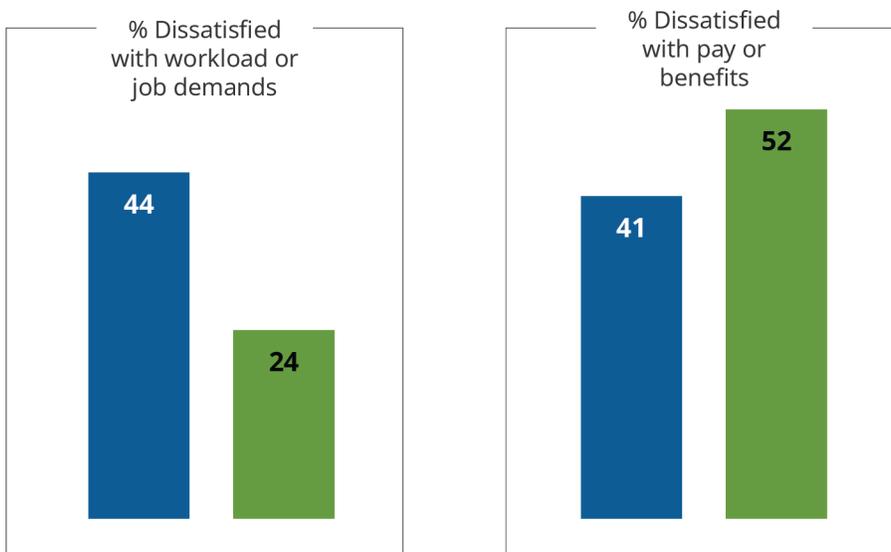
In 2025, Gallup found that teachers who were actively looking for or watching for another job differed from workers in other industries in their motivations to leave their profession: Teachers are more likely than those in other industries to cite workload and job demands as one of the top three things they are dissatisfied with (44% vs. 24%), with pay and benefits ranking second (41% among teachers). Prior research from the *Teaching for Tomorrow* study also demonstrates that workload and opportunities for teachers to do what they do best are linked to job satisfaction, in addition to pay.<sup>10</sup>

FIGURE 4

### What are the top three things you are dissatisfied with in your current job?

Among workers who are actively looking, or watching, for another job

■ Teachers ■ Full-time workers with a bachelor's in other industries



Source: Gallup 2025 workplace data

10 Marken, S., & Hrynowski, Z. (2025, April 29). Two-Thirds of K-12 Teachers Satisfied With Their Workplace. Gallup.com. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/659567/two-thirds-teachers-satisfied-workplace.aspx>

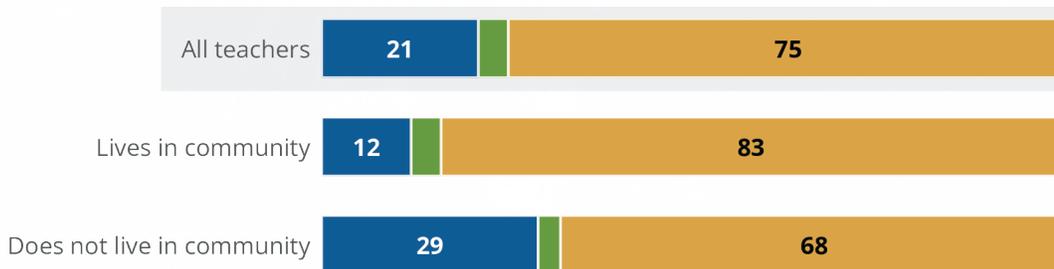
### One in five teachers wish they lived closer to their school, with affordability a top barrier

While most teachers are fine with the current distance they live from their school, 21% wish they lived closer. Teachers who do not live in the same community as their school or district are the most likely to wish they lived closer (29%), compared with those who do live within their school communities (12%).

FIGURE 5

### Ideally, would you like to live closer to or further away from the school you teach at?

■ % Closer to the school I teach at ■ % Further from the school I teach at  
■ % Neither (I'm fine with the current distance)



Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding. Values less than 5% are not shown.

Among teachers who wish they lived closer, “affordability/cost of living” is the most-cited barrier to living closer to their school (for 58% of teachers who wish they lived closer), followed distantly by personal/family ties (30%).



## One-Third of Teachers Hold a Second Job Unrelated to Teaching

One-third of teachers (33%) say that in the past year they've held an additional job or gig that is not related to their teaching job, such as rideshare or food delivery, working in food service or running a side business.

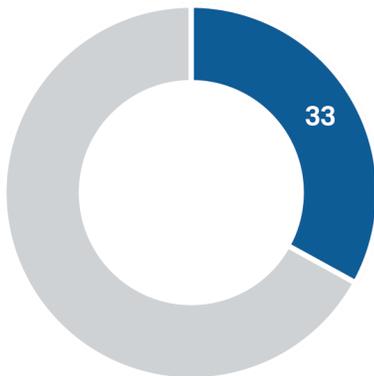
More teachers (62%) hold a second job that's related to teaching, and some hold both — overall, 71% of teachers hold one or both types of jobs.



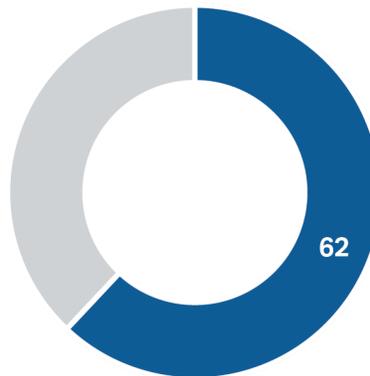
FIGURE 6

**In addition to your primary classroom teaching role, have you taken on additional responsibilities, jobs or gigs for pay that [are/are not] related to your teaching job in the past 12 months?**

% Teachers who have an additional job or gig NOT related to teaching



% Teachers who have an additional job or gig related to teaching

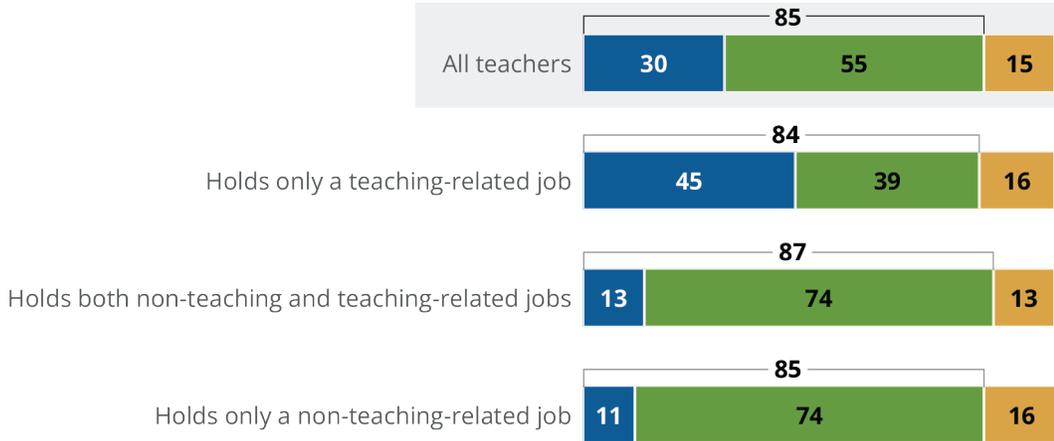


The vast majority of teachers (85%) report their side jobs are happening at least partially during the school year, with only 15% saying their side gigs happen only during school breaks. This is largely true regardless of whether the side job is teaching-related or not, as 85% of teachers with only a non-teaching-related job also say their side job happens at least partially during the school year.

**FIGURE 7**

**In a typical year, when do you work for additional pay outside of your primary teaching role?**

■ % During the school year ■ % Both ■ % Only during school breaks (e.g., summer break, winter break)



Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding.

**Are side gigs sidelining students?**

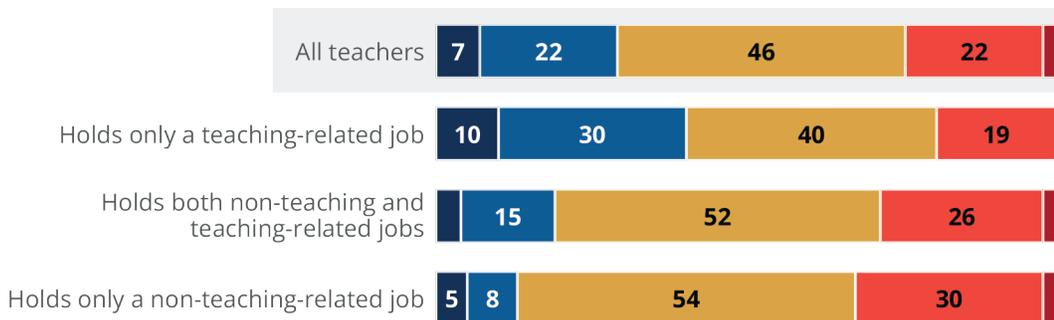
Almost half of teachers with additional jobs (46%) say the job has no impact on their teaching responsibilities, while the rest are split between seeing a positive (29%) or negative (24%) impact. However, teachers whose secondary job is related to teaching are less likely to say the work negatively impacts their teaching responsibilities (20%) than those with a non-teaching-related job (34%) and those who hold both a teaching and non-teaching side gig (29%).

**FIGURE 8**

**In your opinion, what impact does your additional work have on your teaching responsibilities?**

Among teachers with additional job(s)

■ % Very positive ■ % Somewhat positive ■ % No impact ■ % Somewhat negative ■ % Very negative

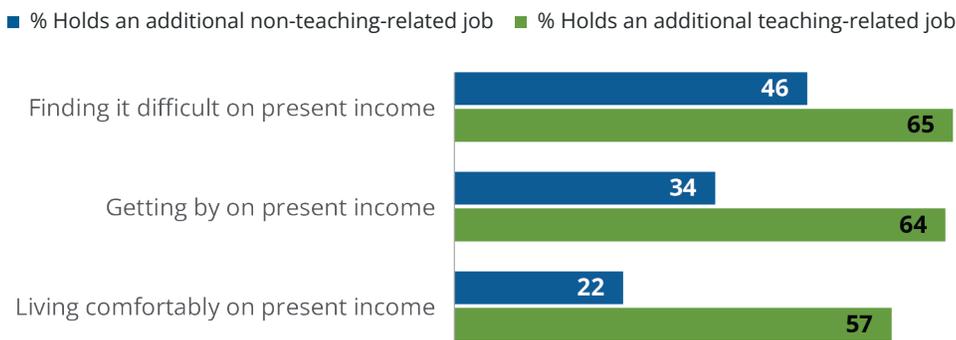


Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding. Values less than 5% are not shown.

Teachers who find it difficult to get by financially may feel compelled to take second jobs outside of education due to financial stress: Those who find it difficult to get by financially are twice as likely as those who are living comfortably to have a side gig unrelated to teaching (46% vs. 22%). Teaching-related second jobs, like coaching or tutoring, are not as strongly linked to income, suggesting that side gigs like rideshare, food service and non-education work might be more effective at providing financial relief.

**FIGURE 9**

**In addition to your primary classroom teaching role, have you taken on additional responsibilities, jobs or gigs for pay that [are/are not] related to your teaching job in the past 12 months?**

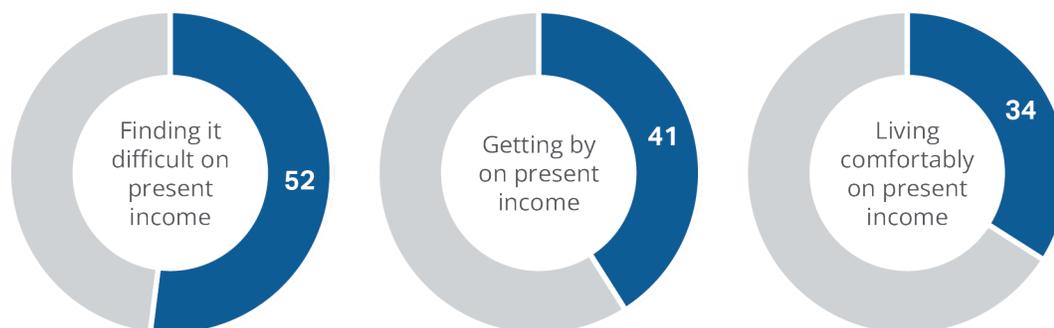


Teachers under financial stress are also facing higher burnout in the profession. About half (52%) of those who find it difficult to get by financially say they feel burned out at work very often or always, compared with 41% of those getting by and 34% of those living comfortably on their present income.

**FIGURE 10**

**I feel burned out at work.**

% Always or very often



Simply holding a second job, in and of itself, is not meaningfully related to burnout: Educators with a second job not related to teaching are four percentage points more likely than those without to feel burned out very often or always (44% vs. 40%). Teachers with second jobs related to teaching are two percentage points more likely than those without to feel burned out (42% vs. 40%).

## More than eight in 10 teachers feel it is important to stay in an instructional role

Most teachers say it is very (50%) or somewhat (34%) important to them to stay in an instructional role.

FIGURE 11

How important, if at all, is it for you to stay in an instructional role (i.e., teaching students) in the next five years of your career?

■ % Not at all important ■ % Not very important ■ % Somewhat important ■ % Very important



Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding.

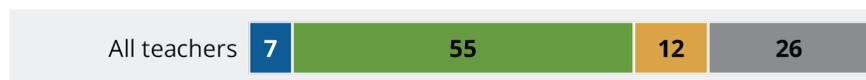
Yet, when asked whether they plan to stay in the K-12 profession for the rest of their career, only 55% feel confident they will stay a classroom teacher. This is higher among teachers who feel it is very important to keep working with students, 80% of whom plan to stay as a classroom teacher for the rest of their career.

Overall, 26% of teachers are unsure whether they plan to stay in the K-12 profession, and 12% would like to stay but in a role other than teaching.

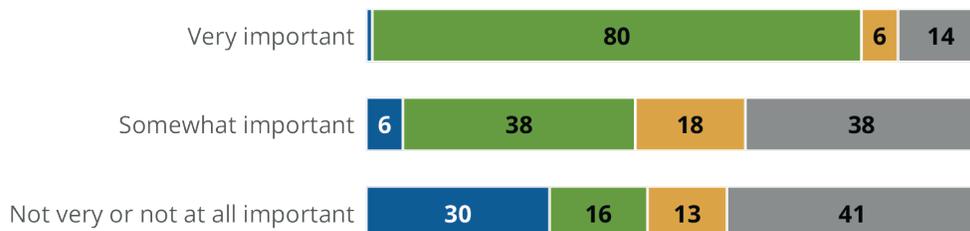
FIGURE 12

Do you plan to stay in the K-12 profession for the rest of your career?

■ % No ■ % Yes, as a classroom teacher ■ % Yes, in a role other than teaching ■ % I don't know



Among teachers who feel it is \_\_\_ to stay in an instructional role:



Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding. Values less than 5% are not shown.

## Teachers' Career Goals Depend on the Individual

To understand how they envision career growth and what is most important to each individual, teachers were asked what they view as the most important aspect of career growth, as well as the experiences that would be most meaningful to that career growth, regardless of pay. Almost four in 10 teachers (37%) indicate that more pay and benefits is the most important aspect of career growth for them. This is even more likely among teachers who are struggling financially: Gaining more pay and benefits is a top priority for 43% of teachers who say they find it difficult to get by on their present household income, compared with 29% of teachers living comfortably. Teachers living comfortably on their present income are more likely to choose learning new skills or earning advanced credentials compared with those who are financially struggling (28% vs. 15%).

% Choosing "gaining more pay and benefits" as most important to career growth:

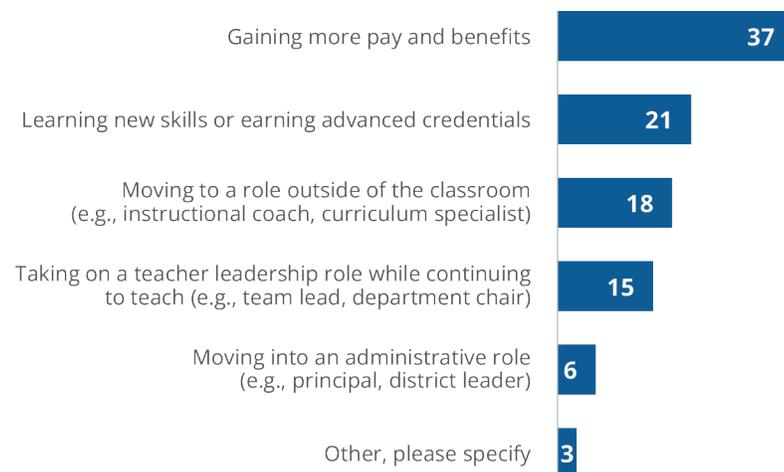
- **43%** of teachers finding it **difficult on present income**
- **38%** of teachers **getting by on present income**
- **29%** of teachers **living comfortably on present income**

Outside of pay and benefits, the other 63% of teachers choose diverse goals for career growth. Overall, 21% of teachers say learning new skills or earning credentials is most important to them and 18% say the same about moving to a role outside the classroom, followed closely by the 15% who want to take a leadership role that still involves teaching, such as department chair.

FIGURE 13

**When you think about "career growth" as an educator, which of the following is most important to you, personally?**

% Selected

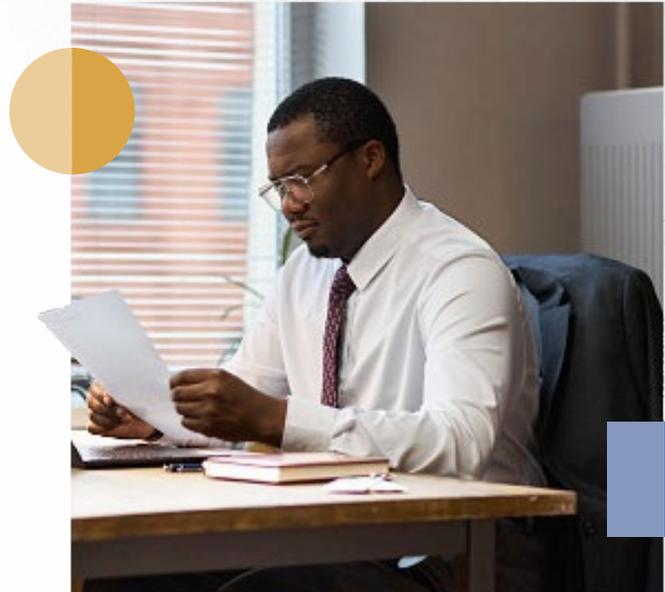


Note: This item allowed teachers to select only one option.

Teachers were then asked to choose the most meaningful steps they could take to advance their career goals (regardless of additional pay that might come with it).

**Forty-four percent of teachers say a non-classroom administrative position would be most meaningful.**

This is followed by mentoring other teachers (38%) and earning advanced credentials (30%). Teachers were able to select up to three options.



**FIGURE 14**

**Which of these opportunities would be most meaningful for progressing in your career, regardless of the additional pay that may come with it? (Select up to three)**

% Selected



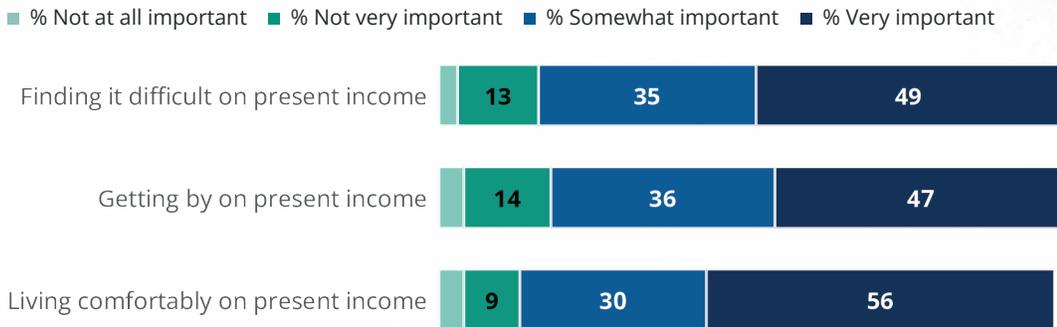
## Pathways to Advancement That Can Pay the Bills

Teachers of all financial circumstances share a similar level of dedication to staying in an instructional role for the next five years, with only minimal differences by household income. Eighty-four percent of teachers who find it difficult to get by financially say it's very or somewhat important to continue teaching students, compared with 83% of those who are getting by and 86% of those who are living comfortably.



FIGURE 15

**How important, if at all, is it for you to stay in an instructional role (i.e., teaching students) in the next five years of your career?**

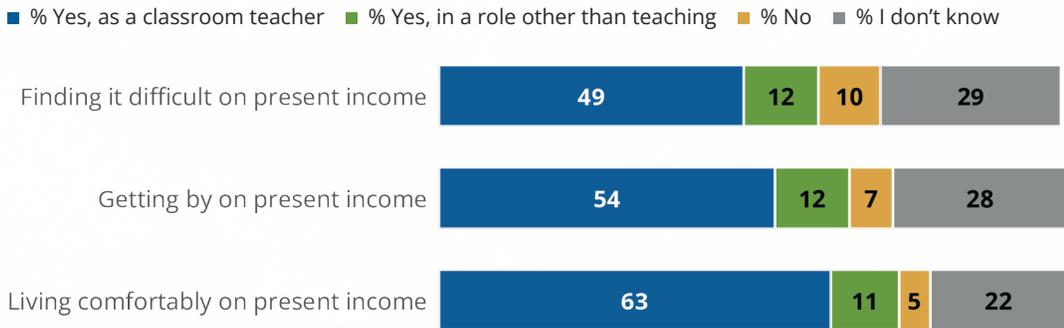


Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding. Values less than 5% are not shown.

Yet, when asked about whether they plan to stay in the classroom for the rest of their career, the teachers who are struggling the most financially are the least likely to say they can stay in the classroom for the rest of their career.

**FIGURE 16**

**Do you plan to stay in the K-12 profession for the rest of your career?**



Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding.

**In order to remain in the classroom long-term, teachers who are struggling financially may need a pathway to income growth that allows them to stay in the classroom — and with a manageable workload.**

Both burnout and income are strongly related to a teachers’ plans, with those who are more burned out and those who are worse off financially being less likely to say they will stay as a classroom teacher for the rest of their career. However, the impact of income still exists after controlling for burnout. For example, among teachers who experience minimal burnout, 70% of those who are financially comfortable plan to remain as a classroom teacher for the rest of their career, compared with 60% of those finding it difficult on their present income. Among those who are burned out very often or always, 49% of teachers who are financially comfortable plan to remain as a classroom teacher for the rest of their career, compared with 38% of those finding it difficult on their present income.

# Conclusion

Findings underscore a central reality of today's teaching profession: While affordability remains a real and pressing concern for many teachers, the factors shaping teachers' experiences — and their decisions about whether to stay — are nuanced. Financial strain matters, particularly for teachers who are struggling to make ends meet, but workload demands and the structure of the job itself also play a powerful role in driving burnout and dissatisfaction. Teachers who are struggling or just getting by financially are more likely to take a second job unrelated to education and more likely to feel burned out compared with their peers who are financially comfortable.

At the same time, most teachers aspire to stay in education. Two-thirds (67%) plan to stay in K-12 education for the rest of their career, with the majority (55% overall) planning to remain in the classroom teaching students. This finding points to the importance of intentional conversations about what it means to build a viable, long-term career in teaching. Solutions about pay are necessary, especially for the one-third of teachers who take side jobs unrelated to teaching, but perhaps not sufficient on their own. Teachers also need opportunities to pursue professional milestones that match their own career goals and access to a range of meaningful pathways and growth options — especially within the classroom. Many want manageable workloads and opportunities for leadership. For teachers looking for a pathway to pay growth, ideal solutions include school or district positions, responsibilities that can both pay the bills and keep them connected to the classroom.

**Ultimately, supporting teachers may require moving beyond a “silver bullet” toward a more holistic understanding of their lives and careers. By engaging teachers in conversations about affordability, workload and growth — and by responding with structures that reflect those realities — education leaders and policymakers can help create conditions in which teaching is not only meaningful, but sustainable.**

# Methodology

Results are based on a web survey conducted Oct. 16-Nov. 5, 2025, with a sample of 2,012 U.S. teachers working in public K-12 schools. Teachers were recruited from the RAND American Teacher Panel, a nationally representative, probability-based panel of U.S. public school teachers. More information about the RAND American Teacher Panel is available [here](#).

The final sample was weighted to match the school- and teacher-level demographics of K-12 public school teachers in the U.S., including school level, student poverty, student race and Hispanic ethnicity, school size, school urbanicity, teacher gender, teacher race and Hispanic ethnicity, and teachers' years of experience. Targets for these characteristics were retrieved from the National Center for Education Statistics. Teacher-level characteristics were based on the 2020-2021 National Teacher and Principal Survey, while school-level characteristics were based on the 2023-2024 Common Core of Data.

For the total sample of 2,012 U.S. teachers, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 2.5$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher. All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.



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