

TEACHERS AT WORK

WORK ENVIRONMENT A DAY IN A TEACHER'S LIFE

A Teacher's Workday

The typical teacher in the United States works 54 hour a week. Just under half of that time (25 hours) is spent directly teaching students. From a 2022 national survey, most teachers say they'd like to spend more time on activities directly related to teaching (planning, instruction) and less time on more ancillary tasks (administrative work, non-teaching student interactions such as hall duty, mentoring, and counseling.) (*Merrimack, 2022*)

A Teacher's Classroom

A teacher can face many challenges in her/his classroom due to the circumstances of student's lives. Students come to school from a wide-range of situations that can impact their behavior, performance and achievement. "A student's social environments, their neighborhoods, their parents' educational attainment and employment status, and their access to health services and nutritious food can all have an effect." (*Southern Education Foundation, 2022*)

We continue to rely on schools to make up for a broad array of missing or inadequate financial, material, and relational supports ...without providing schools with the resources necessary to address all those needs.

Southern Education Foundation, 2022

Students in these types of circumstances are most prevalent in schools with a high rate of students in poverty. In Greenville County Schools, a significant number of schools have poverty rates at or above 70%: 45% of elementary schools, 37% of middle schools and 29% of high schools. (District-wide the poverty rate is 60%, and among all public schools in the state, the rate is 62%.) (*South Carolina Dept. of Education, 2022*)

The result is often a high level of classroom challenges. Of South Carolina teachers in a 2013 survey:

- **99%** have at least one student who needs assistance or intervention for social, emotional or behavioral challenges.
- **76%** have student reading levels that span four or more grades.
- **66%** have students who are working two or more grades below grade level.
- **61%** have special education students in their classroom.
- **55%** have students who are gifted or who are working significantly above grade level.
- **44%** have English Language Learners in their classroom.

(Scholastic Inc., 2013)

The Southern Education Foundation states, “We continue to rely on schools to make up for a broad array of missing or inadequate financial, material, and relational supports...without providing schools with the funding and resources necessary to address all those needs.” (Southern Education Foundation, 2022)

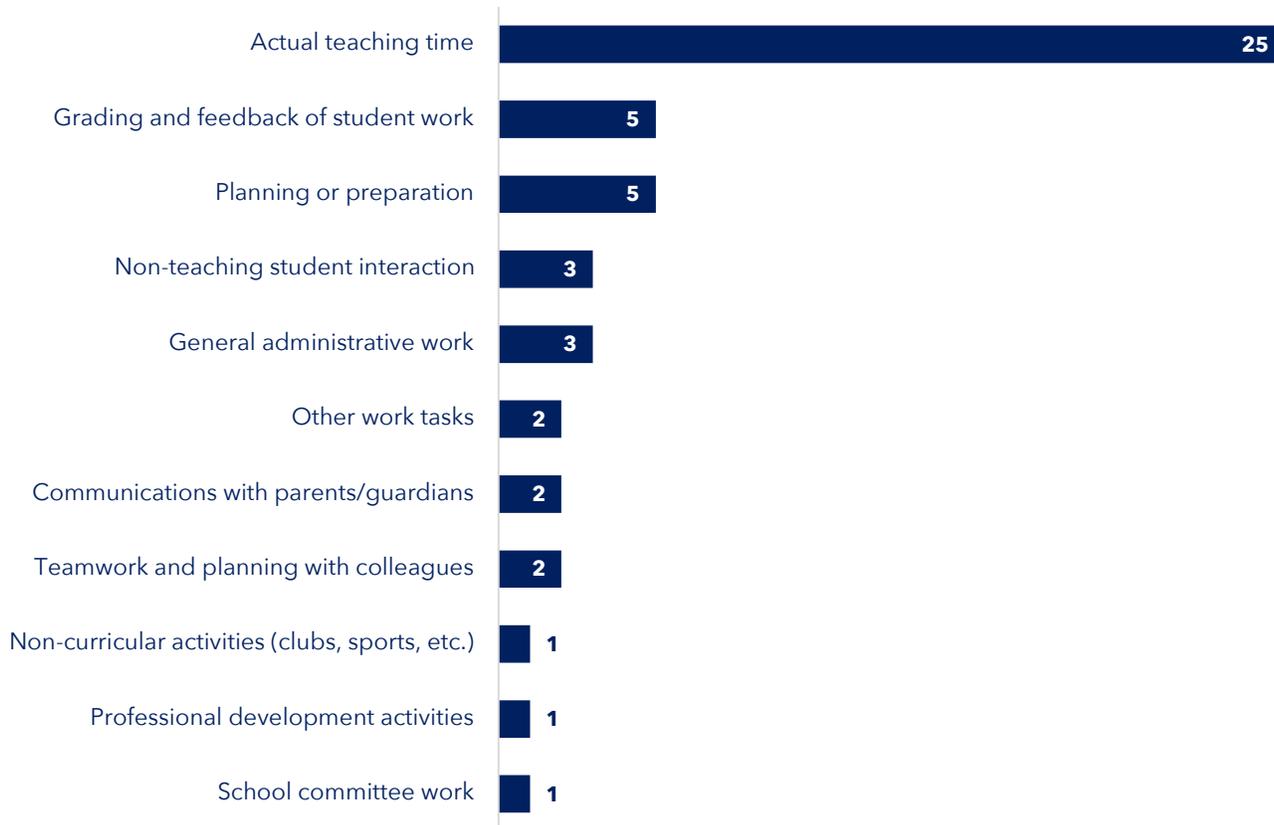
Teacher Stress

Today, teaching is one of the most stressful occupations in the U.S. (Greenberg, 2016) And teachers experiencing exhaustion and burnout related to their work are likely to have a number of negative physical and psychological symptoms and consequences. (Lever, 2017)

A recent study of teacher mental health in New Orleans found that “more than a third of educators met the threshold for a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, with one in five exhibiting significant symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. Teachers also reported rates of emotional distress that were similar to or higher than those of health care workers.” (Hawkins, 2022)

Teachers and other school staff who work closely with traumatized children are at risk of secondary traumatic stress. “The impact of compassion fatigue may be particularly acute for teachers working in poor, under-resourced urban and rural

Median hours per week teachers spend on in- and out-of-school work



Merrimack, 2022

communities, where students may have been exposed to community and family violence and traumatic experiences.” (Lever, 2017)

The New Orleans study found that teachers’ mental health is closely linked to how effective they feel in the classroom. Self-efficacy was found to buffer against a lot of trauma impacts and burnout. The report further states, “If teachers are feeling efficacious, if they feel like ‘I’m doing my job and doing it well,’ those are good signs in terms of their willingness to stay in the profession.” (Hawkins, 2022)

Impact of the Pandemic

Many of these challenges greatly increased recently due to the effects of the pandemic. This includes a high level of additional instructional work due to extended time out of the classroom for both students and teachers; a higher number of learning levels in a classroom; increased social, emotional and mental health needs of students and teachers; and staff shortages of substitutes and other school staff.

Extended Time Out of the Classroom for Both Students and Teachers. Since schools have re-opened, the isolation and quarantine of students and teachers due to Covid has resulted in long stretches of time out of the classroom. Helping students catch up from these extended periods of lost learning has been an additional challenge for teachers as was making up instruction due to their own bouts of Covid.

Higher Number of Learning Levels in a Classroom. Another impact of the pandemic on teaching has been the exacerbation of the racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps with the historically underserved falling further behind academically while more privileged kids moved farther ahead.

This can mean an increase in the number of learning levels represented in a single classroom

requiring teachers to further differentiate instruction. Before pandemic-related school closures, a single classroom could have students working at up to seven grade levels. Researchers predicted that when schools re-opened the array of abilities in a classroom could have widened by two or more grades. (APA, 2020; Fay, 2020; Hawkins, 2020; Kuhfeld, 2020)

Increased Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs of Students and Teachers. The American Psychological Association states that after two full years of the Covid pandemic and various traumas endured during that time, mental illness and the demand for psychological services are at all-time high among children as well as adults. (Abramson, 2022)

In a 2022 nationally representative survey, 80% of educators said that their students’ social skills and emotional maturity levels are somewhat or much less advanced now than they were in 2019. (Sparks, 2022)

Experts say teachers need to be prepared for these issues to persist for several years and to be equipped to understand and identify mental health issues in their students. (Will, 2021)

Staff Shortages. School districts have faced severe shortages of substitutes and in many other key positions adding more work to educators’ already full plates. Nationwide, teachers have been asked to give up their prep times or professional learning days to cover classes or are adding extra students to their classrooms. (Will, 2021)

Resulting Burnout. Operating schools under these conditions has led to burnout among teachers and other staff members. Ninety percent of teachers in a January 2022 National Education Association poll described burnout as a serious problem, largely because of the pandemic and related staffing shortages.

As a result, teachers commonly found that “they have a harder time sleeping, they’re less able to enjoy their free time with family or friends, and their physical health suffers.” As one teacher in the poll stated, “The pay check does not match the amount of workload we are given and the overtime we work to try and complete it all.” (Will, 2021; Heubeck, 2022)

Addressing Teacher Wellness

Efforts to address teacher wellness are improving. There are a number of “core wellness components and standards that have been established specifically for educator wellness initiatives.” (See Lever, 2017, for a discussion) And research has found several programs and policies that have “shown promise in reducing teacher stress and promoting their social-emotional competencies, well-being, health and performance.” (See Greenberg, 2016, for a discussion)

This paper does not cover these research findings nor the teacher wellness programming and services provided by our school district or our organization. Learn more about [Greenville County Schools Full Service Employee Assistance Program](#) and the “[Elevating Teachers](#)” Initiatives of [Public Education Partners](#).

What Teachers Want

A 2022 national teacher survey found that 56% of teachers say they are satisfied (very or somewhat) with their jobs. However, the percentage “very satisfied” with their jobs has declined from 62% in 2008 to 12% in this most recent survey. (Merrimack, 2022)

From this survey and recent research on teacher work conditions, four areas are among those most important to teacher well-being and satisfaction: positive school social conditions; autonomy; community respect and appreciation; and commensurate pay.

Positive School Social Conditions. Research has found that social conditions in a school—the

It is the social conditions in the school—it’s culture, the principal’s leadership, and relationships among colleagues—that best predict teachers’ job satisfaction and career plans. (Johnson, 2012)

school’s culture, the principal’s leadership, and relationships among colleagues—best predict a teacher’s job satisfaction and career plans. Importantly, this finding is independent of the background and demographics of students enrolled.

This research defines the elements as follows:

- **School culture:** school environments are characterized by mutual trust, respect, openness, and commitment to student achievement;
- **Principal’s leadership:** school leaders are supportive of teachers and create school environments conducive to learning;
- **Collegial relationships:** teachers have productive working relationships with their colleagues. (Johnson, 2012)

Autonomy. In the 2022 survey, autonomy was said to be a key indicator of job satisfaction. Teachers experience less burnout and stress, higher levels of morale and lower turnover rates when they have more control over their work environments—more autonomy over their classroom and collective influence over school policy.

While teachers, nationally, express strong rates of autonomy in many classroom-related areas, they “often feel micromanaged and left out of the decision-making rooms.” (Lever, 2017; Merrimack, 2022; Will, 2022a) Schools where teachers feel heard and have influence in decision making are places more likely to retain their teachers. (Bartlett, 2021)

Nationally,

- **85%** of teachers say they have control over their teaching/pedagogy;
- **75%** ...over students' classroom behavior;
- **57%** ...over the curriculum they teach;
- **36%** ...over their schedule; and
- **33%** ...over their school's policies

(Merrimack, 2022)

According to Linda Darling-Hammond, President and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute, a more flexible schedule is a particularly key area for improving teacher morale. "Teachers in the U.S. have some of the world's most-rigorous schedules with classes packed back to back and little time allotted for planning and breaks...More flexible schedules could mean more time for one-on-one meetings, planning periods and home visits...More flexibility also means more time for teachers to be able to listen to their students and have a better sense of their needs. It will ultimately improve morale for those in the profession."

(Stanford, 2022)

Community Respect and Appreciation. A consistent finding in the research is that teacher job satisfaction is linked to their sense of being respected. However, there is a growing perception among teachers that the general public does not understand or appreciate their work. A 2022 national survey, found that just 46% of teachers felt that the general public respected them and saw them as professionals versus 77% in a 2011 survey.

Percent of Teachers Feeling Respected by the Public

In 2011, 77%

In 2022, 46%

(Merrimack, 2022)

As one teacher surveyed expressed, "I feel that the media, parents, and even some students feel that they can speak to our situation without even

having a true sense of what massive amounts of work we do."

Commensurate Pay. Salaries are another reason many teachers are dissatisfied. Twenty-six percent of teachers in the survey said they are paid fairly for the work they do, down from 35 percent ten years earlier.

Nationally, major strides have been made in recent years to increase teacher pay. However, when compared to that of non-teacher, college graduates, teacher compensation continues to lose ground. In 2021 teacher wages were 23% lower than comparison college graduates. The teacher wage penalty in 1996 was 6%. (Allegretto, 2022)

South Carolina has also recently prioritized teacher salary increases. Even after accounting for inflation, some gains have been made. An analysis of the state's minimum teacher salary schedule found that over the ten-year period through 2022-23, gains were made in inflation-adjusted salaries for first-year and other early-year teachers with a bachelor's degree. A 7% increase occurred in inflation-adjusted, first-year-teacher salaries over the ten-year period.

However, at higher levels of experience and education, South Carolina minimum salaries have fallen after accounting for inflation. For example, the state minimum salary for a teacher with a master's degree and twenty years of experience fell \$5,000 in inflation-adjusted dollars over this time period. (Analysis of South Carolina Dept. of Education data)

When including benefits, the advantage in this area for teachers has not been enough to offset the growing wage penalty stated above. Nationally, the teacher *total compensation* penalty was 14% in 2021 (a 23% wage penalty offset by a 9% benefits advantage). In South Carolina, the weekly teacher wage penalty was 8% in 2021–fourth lowest in the country. (Allegretto, 2022)

A further inequity is the classroom supplies that teachers pay for out of their own pocket. While recent, data is lacking, for South Carolina in 2018, it was estimated by one source that, on average,

teachers spent \$433 of their own money on classroom supplies beyond what they were reimbursed by the state through their school district. (*Garcia, 2019*)

For over a decade, South Carolina public school teachers received the same \$275 annually from the state for classroom supplies. This amount was finally increased to \$300 for the 2022-23 school year. (*Proviso 1A.9, South Carolina Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year 2022-2023*)

To make up for insufficient pay, a majority of teachers in the country earn income beyond their teaching salary with many taking on coaching or other additional school responsibilities and some (18% of all teachers) working a second job outside of the school system. (*Heubeck, 2022; Will, 2020a*) Teachers at the lowest end of the salary scale are the most likely to supplement their teacher pay with outside earnings. They are also more likely to quit their jobs.

18 percent of all teachers work a second job outside of the school system. (*National Teacher and Principal Survey, 2017-18*)

In a March 2021 national survey of teachers, 57% of respondents said a salary hike would make a major difference in reducing their likelihood of leaving the K-12 teaching profession within the next two years. (*Heubeck, 2022*)

For more information on teacher salaries, see the "Teacher Salaries" fact sheet in [InformEdsc.org](https://www.informedsc.org).

Work Conditions Particular to Teachers of Color

Teachers of color face additional challenges that affect morale and their likelihood of staying in the profession.

Isolation. A teacher participating in a national survey stated: "On a day-to-day basis, it can be a little isolating to be a teacher of color...whether it's the curriculum I teach, or my own background, oftentimes it's not in connection with the other

teachers...making friends can be a little more difficult." (*Will, 2020b*)

In the 2020-21 school year in Greenville County Schools, there were a number of schools with an isolated teacher of color. At the elementary level, 18% of schools had only one Black teacher (24% had none) and 35% had only one Hispanic teacher (47% had none). Among middle schools, 32% of schools had only one Black teacher (11% had none) and 32% had only one Hispanic teacher (37% had none). (*Analysis of South Carolina Dept. of Education data*)

Unpaid Roles Outside Their Job Description.

Nationally, it's been found that teachers of color can experience an "invisible tax" in which they're asked to "take on unpaid roles that are outside the job they were hired to do, such as translating for parents who speak other languages, acting as school disciplinarians, or serving as mentors for students from their backgrounds."

Racial Bias From Colleagues. Teachers of color can and do face racial bias and racism—"both in terms of choices of policy, but also in terms of the ways it's expressed by colleagues, especially white colleagues." (*Will, 2020b*) According to a 2022 RAND survey, one-third of teachers of color experienced harassment at school because of their race or ethnicity on the job in the last year. (*Steiner, 2022*) "Fifty-six percent of teachers who experienced such discrimination pointed to fellow staff as the culprits." (*Will, 2022c*)

Social Justice Imperative. Many feel a sense of responsibility to themselves, their students, and their communities to lead conversations about race and racism while balancing the right amount of pushing for social change and fighting for what's right and not trying to burn out.

Stress of Being Hyper-visible or Invisible.

"Teachers of color may find themselves in situations at their schools where they feel hyper-visible or invisible. Either one can result in increased anxiety and stress affecting their engagement and drive." (*Will, 2020b*)

Initial Work Conditions that are Often Additionally Challenging. For many teachers of color their first job is in schools serving more economically disadvantaged and historically marginalized students. Such conditions can result in a higher risk of burnout and attrition from the profession. *(Gershenson, 2021)*

Impact of Attacks on Books and Classroom Topics

Calls for banning books and instruction related to race, racism and LGBTQ issues adds further stress and anxiety to teachers and is destructive to their standing as professionals and their own sense of professionalism. These actions occur at schools, at local school board meetings and by state legislators and governors and are often stated in a disparaging and degrading manner. The gross distortion and misapplication of Critical Race Theory to instruction in K-12 public education is just one example. All of this has been especially draining for teachers of color and LGBTQ teachers. *(Will, 2022b)*

Why Teachers Leave

“Stress is the most common reason for leaving public school teaching early—almost twice as common as insufficient pay.” This is supported by the fact that “a majority of those leaving early take jobs with either less or around equal pay, and three in ten go on to work at a job with no health insurance or retirement benefits.” *(Diliberti, 2021)*

Here are some comments from teachers participating in a 2022 national survey:

- “We cannot continue in this way...we are tired”
- “There is no work-life balance when you are a teacher.” *(Merrimack, 2022)*
- “We’re not complaining, we are hurting... Teachers truly, truly love their jobs. It’s sad to see how many of us are so disillusioned with it all.”

- I think the pandemic has dampened that joy [of teaching], and people are trying to find it again.” *(Will, 2022a)*

“Exiting teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs with most citing a variety of school and working conditions, including salaries, classroom resources, student misbehavior, accountability, opportunities for development, input into decision making, and school leadership.” *(Ingersoll, 2021)* These have only been exacerbated by the pandemic with growing workloads and more students having greater academic and social-emotional needs than ever before. *(Will, 2022a)*

Teachers are alarmed and have indicated that the burnout crisis in teaching is “a culmination of long-term factors” and “could take a toll on the profession’s ability to sustain itself in the future.” *(Brosbe, 2022; Merrimack, 2022)*

Despite the stress and desire to leave, far fewer actually leave than indicate they want to. From 2011 to 2022, the percentage of teachers saying they were very or fairly likely to leave the profession to pursue a different occupation rose from 29 to 44 percent. However, prior to the

As a society, we show we value education not by calling teachers heroes while treating their work as expendable. We do it by paying attention to the conditions that make teaching and learning possible and by ensuring that – despite everything else happening in the world – schools are sites of stability, not chaos.

(Cucchiara, 2022)

pandemic, about 8 percent of teachers left the profession annually. *(Merrimack, 2022)*

“Many teachers who say they’re considering leaving won’t actually do so because they can’t afford to lose their pay and benefits.” Older teachers may decide they’re close enough to a pension to hang on. *(Will, 2021)* “Health-care needs, family responsibilities, and the need for a

transition plan are all reasons teachers identify for postponing a career exit." (Bartlett, 2021)

Impact on Students from Teacher Stress and Attrition

Stress and burnout in teaching have a negative impact on the quality of instruction, classroom management, creation of a safe and stimulating classroom climate for students, and relationships with students resulting in lower achievement for students. (Greenberg, 2016; Johnson, 2012; Sparks, 2017; Will, 2021) "Teacher burnout appears to affect the stress and motivation levels of the students they teach." (Lever, 2017)

Accordingly, a supportive teaching environment contributes to improved student achievement. Research has found that "favorable conditions of work predict higher rates of student academic

"...it's worth emphasizing that a system that burns out teachers harms young people as well..."

(Brosbe, 2022)

growth even when comparing schools serving demographically similar groups of students." (Johnson, 2012)

Teacher attrition has its own negative impact on student achievement. In a New York City study, higher teacher turnover led to lower fourth and fifth grade student achievement in both math and language arts. While this impact is found across all student populations, turnover in the New York City study was particularly harmful to lower-performing students.

Because turnover occurs at a higher rate at higher poverty schools, inequity in education is increased. "It leads to long-term destabilization of low-income neighborhood schools which lose continuity in relationships between teachers, students, parents and community." (Greenberg, 2016)

Stress and attrition also result in higher costs for school districts who need to screen and hire their replacements. (Bartlett, 2021; Diliberti, 2021; Greenberg, 2016) "The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future estimates that public school teacher turnover costs more than \$7.3 billion per year. The cost per teacher is estimated from over \$4,000 in rural areas to over \$17,000 in urban districts." (Greenberg, 2016)

Why People Choose to Become a Teacher

There are several, major reasons for going into teaching. The reasons most cited from a survey of teachers were "to make a difference in children's lives (86%), to share their love of learning and teaching with others (75%), to help students reach their full potential (69%) and to be a part of those 'aha' moments when things 'click' for a student (65%)." (Scholastic Inc., 2013)

Here are the voices of three aspiring teachers:

I've always said I don't want to go to a job where it's just the same thing every single day. With teaching, every day is a new day, and no day is gonna be the same day. You have new experiences, and you have new challenges to overcome. That's something I'm really, really excited for.

I didn't really have a lot of teachers of color really until high school. When I was introduced to that, I was like, OK, I can see myself doing this. I did a lot of work in my high school teaching classes learning about the lack of Black educators in the classroom, specifically Black male educators. I found out that students of color are able to work better with seeing representation in the classroom. I just want to be a source of inspiration and motivation for students of color.

I've always wanted to be a teacher. I just really love working with kids, and I feel like their minds at [elementary] age are so malleable...I just feel like my calling is to work with the younger kids and shape their minds while they're starting to learn and be in school...I

don't think that you'll really make the kind of difference that you are able to make in the world if you're doing something that you don't love doing. (Will, 2022b)

are going to treat people the way they're treated. And we had the opportunity to show them how to do that. (Schwartz, 2022)

Why Teachers Stay

A Greenville County Schools Teacher -

My reason for teaching is knowing I make a difference in a student's life every day. Educators are the very people who can pull a student from the mire of negativity or the cycle of feeling like a failure. I have the opportunity to be an encourager, counselor, school mom, friend, role model, and educator all at the same time. I have heard many of my students say that my classroom is like a safe haven. That safety makes me feel like students enjoy being in my classroom and if they are comfortable, they will want to learn. (Causey, 2022)

A High School Teacher in New Mexico -

It's always the kids who keep me hopeful. Your job as an educator is to make sure that it's a comfortable learning environment for them, that they feel like they can be themselves, that they feel like it's a safe place for them to come in and grow as an individual—on all levels of their lives, emotionally as well as academically. That's always what keeps me going and pushes me forward, is just knowing that you have that opportunity, that blessing to have an impact.

A Teacher On Getting Through the Pandemic -

You know, some students lost loved ones, had family members who were in the hospital for long periods of time. What they were facing, they brought that into the classroom. And teachers had an opportunity to extend grace and make accommodations...to be interested in someone's background and their story and what was happening to them, and let that inform our decisions. I know that in my school, that's what the adults did. Kids

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