



TSTA NEWS

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TSTA survey indicates a record 70 percent of teachers on the verge of quitting as educator morale sinks; political attacks, pandemic, years of state neglect to blame

A record 70 percent of teacher-members surveyed by the Texas State Teachers Association said they were seriously considering leaving the profession as they ended a difficult school year last spring. The number was the highest ever recorded in the teacher moonlighting and morale survey, which has been tracking Texas teachers' concerns for more than 40 years, and it was a significant jump from the 53 percent who expressed similar feelings the last time the survey was conducted in 2018.

"Lingering stress from the pandemic is a factor, but it isn't the only one. Inadequate pay, political attacks on educators and the failure of state leaders to protect the health and safety of students and school employees also have combined to drive down the morale of teachers to the lowest level in recent memory and endanger our public school system," TSTA President Ovidia Molina said.

"Many of these teachers will be missing from our classrooms this fall, and for others, it is only a matter of time."

The survey indicates the vast majority of teachers believe they have lost the support of elected state leaders as well as parents, whose support is critical to a successful public education system.

Eighty-five percent said they didn't believe state leaders and legislators had a positive opinion of teachers, a sentiment that has been growing during the pandemic. Eighty percent expressed a similar belief in the 2018 survey.

Sixty-five percent said the general public didn't have a positive opinion of teachers either, a significant increase over the 49 percent who thought that way four years ago — before COVID and before Gov. Greg Abbott and many lawmakers started attacking teachers over critical race theory and alleging "pornography" in school libraries. Seventy percent of teachers answering TSTA's survey said parental support for their work also decreased during the pandemic.

"For political reasons, Gov. Abbott has been trying to drive a wedge between parents and teachers, and this has definitely hurt teachers and hurt their students as well. It threatens the future of public education in Texas," Molina said.

Some 94 percent of survey respondents said the stress in their professional lives increased during the pandemic, and 84 percent said their workload and planning requirements increased. Meanwhile, 51 percent said support from their school administrators fell during the health emergency.

Eighty-two percent said they experienced more financial pressures during the pandemic.

Four of every 10 teachers (41 percent) said they took extra jobs during the school year to meet their families' financial needs, even though 79 percent of the moonlighters believed their additional jobs hurt the quality of their teaching. Eighty-seven percent said they would quit moonlighting but, on average, would need a pay raise of about \$12,000 to be able to afford to do so. Fifty-five percent had summer jobs.

The average salary of the respondents was \$59,000, more than \$7,000 below the national average, while their take-home earnings continued to be eroded by rising health insurance premiums and classroom expenses for which they were not reimbursed.

Their average increase in annual salaries since 2018 was \$5,779, including pay raises ordered by the Legislature in 2019. But much of that was lost to an average \$2,136 increase in annual health insurance premiums. The state has not increased its share of educator insurance premiums in 20 years, despite the ever-rising cost of health care.

Teachers answering the survey also reported spending an average of \$846 out of their own pockets during the past school year for classroom supplies. That was an increase of \$108 over 2018.

"Abbott banned school districts from issuing mask mandates during a dangerous pandemic and, even after the tragedy in Uvalde, he refuses to address sensible gun reform. Teachers have been working for years with inadequate funding and a lack of respect from state leaders. It is time for these leaders to wake up to the crisis they are causing our public schools and put education over politics," Molina said.

The online survey of 688 teacher-members of TSTA was conducted in the late spring and early summer by Dr. Robert Maninger and Dr. Casey Creggan of the School of Teaching and Learning in the College of Education at Sam Houston State University. It is part of an academic longitudinal study begun in 1980. Surveys normally are taken every two years. No survey was conducted in 2020 because of COVID.

Teachers surveyed were from all grade levels and represented urban, suburban and rural school districts. Their average classroom experience was 16.4 years.