

MELISSA KAY DILIBERTI, HEATHER L. SCHWARTZ, DAVID GRANT

# Stress Topped the Reasons Why Public School Teachers Quit, Even Before COVID-19

It is no surprise that teaching during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has added pressure to what was already a high-stress profession (American Federation of Teachers, 2017; Walker, 2018). Our new survey of nearly 1,000 former public school teachers reveals how important stress has been—even more so than pay—to teachers' decisions to leave the profession.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Almost half of the public school teachers who voluntarily stopped teaching in public schools after March 2020 and before their scheduled retirement left because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- At least for some teachers, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have exacerbated what were high stress levels pre-pandemic by forcing teachers to, among other things, work more hours and navigate an unfamiliar remote environment, often with frequent technical problems.
- Many early leavers could be lured back to public school teaching. Over half of the teachers who voluntarily left the profession early primarily because of the pandemic indicated that they would be somewhat or definitely willing to return to public school teaching once most staff and students are vaccinated. Slightly fewer of those would return if there was only regular testing of staff and students for COVID-19.
- Stress was the most common reason for leaving public school teaching early—almost twice as common as insufficient pay. This is corroborated by the fact that a majority of early leavers went on to take jobs with either less or around equal pay, and three in ten went on to work at a job with no health insurance or retirement benefits.
- Of the teacher leavers who are currently employed, about three in ten hold a noneducation-related job, another three in ten have a different type of teaching position, and the rest are in nonteaching education jobs. For those teacher leavers who are still in education, more flexibility was the most common attribute that attracted them to their new jobs.

In the years before the COVID-19 pandemic, about 8 percent of public school teachers were leaving the profession annually, either via retirement or attrition (Goldring et al., 2014). By early fall 2020, teacher attrition had increased in some, but not all, districts: Around one-third of school leaders in a national *Education Week* poll reported that teacher attrition rates were higher than normal, while two-thirds said that they were about the same (Will, 2020).

However, extremely high rates of teacher burn-out and low levels of morale during the 2020–2021 school year portend elevated teacher attrition by the end of it (Diliberti and Kaufman, 2020; Kaufman and Diliberti, 2020; Kurtz, 2020). As of October 2020, about one-quarter of respondents in a nationally representative sample of teachers said that they were likely to leave the teaching profession before the end of the 2020–2021 school year, a majority of whom said that they were not likely to leave the profession before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (Diliberti and Kaufman, 2020).

Teacher attrition matters because it reduces student achievement, impedes the ability of schools to build coherent curricula, and creates additional expenditures for districts who need to screen and hire their replacements (Sorenson and Ladd, 2019). Amid an ongoing teacher shortage in the United States, it is all the more important to reduce teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017; García and Weiss, 2019).

In this report, we attempt to understand what is and is not *normal* about teacher attrition during this highly abnormal pandemic era. We present our findings in four sections. First, we build a profile of teacher leavers both before and during the pandemic. We then examine how the pandemic has influenced teachers' exits. Given the centrality of stress to teachers' departures, we next contextualize the pandemic-related findings by examining pre-pandemic stressors in the teaching profession. We then examine what former public school teachers reported doing after leaving their public school positions. To conclude, we discuss the implications of these findings for public

school teaching and offer recommendations for educators, researchers, and policymakers.

To address these topics, we used the RAND American Teacher Panel (ATP) to identify and invite former public school teachers to take a survey in December 2020. We sent an invitation to more than 20,000 ATP members across all 50 states in the United States and Washington, D.C., and asked those who were no longer employed as public school teachers to complete the survey. We offered former teachers \$40 to complete a ten-minute survey and capped the number of possible respondents at 1,000. Over the course of one week, we received 958 complete survey responses (and several hundred partially completed surveys). Our sample includes both teachers who left the profession in the two years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic and teachers who left after the pandemic began.<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, we refer to these two groups as *pre-pandemic teacher leavers* versus *pandemic teacher leavers*. We also define public school teachers who left the profession prior to scheduled retirement as *early leavers*. For more information about the survey methodology, see Appendix A.

In this report, we discuss only a portion of the survey answers. The survey questions and responses are provided in Appendix B. Unless otherwise noted, we discuss only the differences among teacher subgroups (e.g., teachers who left before versus during the pandemic, teacher leavers under versus over age 40) that are statistically significant. Because the intent of this report was to provide exploratory, descriptive information rather than to test specific hypotheses, we did not make statistical adjustments for multiple comparisons.

The American Teacher Panel (ATP) consists of 25,000 teachers who have agreed to take periodic surveys. ATP is one of three educator panels at RAND. For more information about the panels, visit [www.rand.org/aep](http://www.rand.org/aep).

## Who Are the Former Public School Teachers Who Took Our Survey?

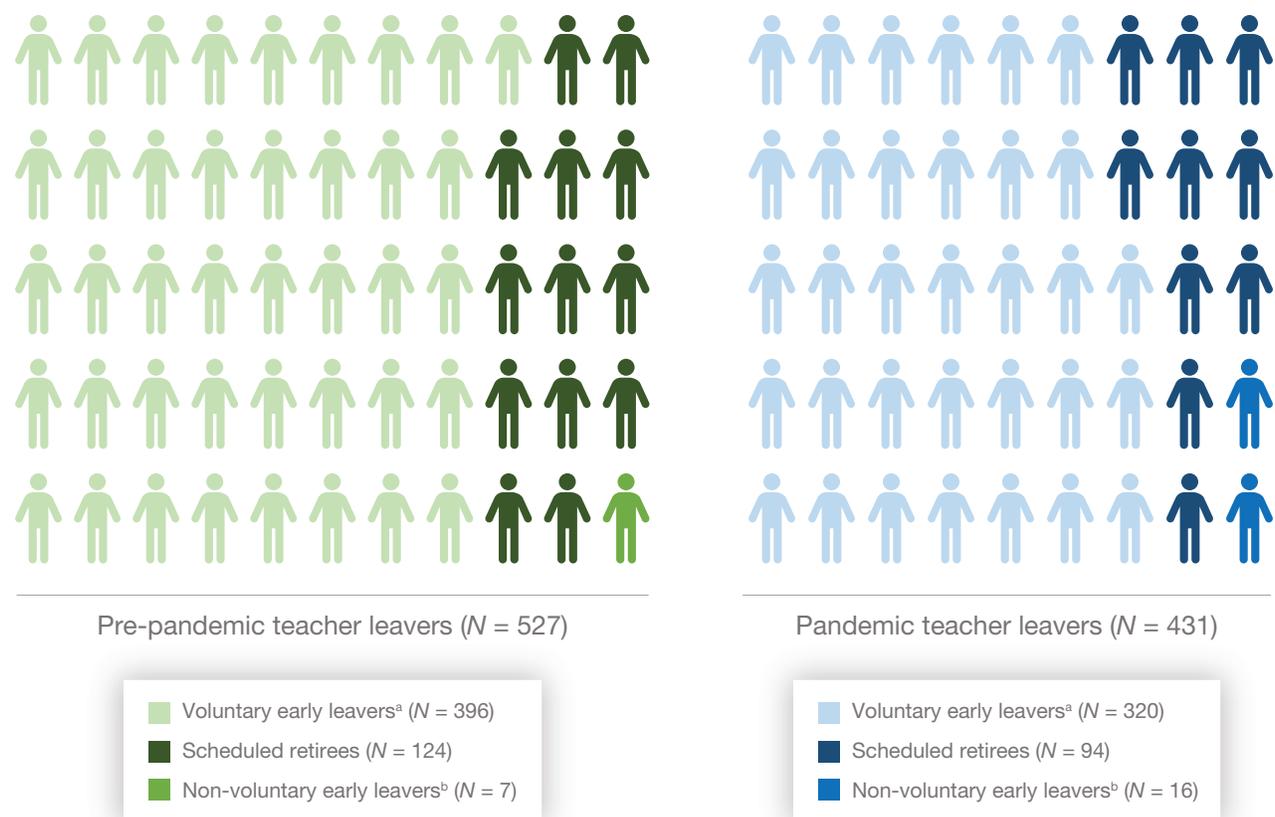
### Teachers Who Left the Profession During the Pandemic Shared Similar Characteristics with Those Who Left in the Years Leading Up to It

Of the former teachers in our sample, 527 (55 percent) left the profession primarily in the two school years leading up to the pandemic, and 431 (45 percent) left after the pandemic began in March 2020. In this section, we document that pre-pandemic and pandemic teacher leavers generally share similar

characteristics; however, we do not yet know whether the rate at which teachers leave the profession over the course of the entire pandemic will exceed the rate at which teachers exited the profession prior to the pandemic.

The two groups of pre-pandemic and pandemic teachers left the profession in similar ways, as shown in Figure 1. For example, among those who left public school teaching during the pandemic, the majority (74 percent) left early and voluntarily—either by resigning, taking early retirement, or taking an unpaid leave of absence. Another 22 percent of pandemic teacher leavers took scheduled retirement, while 4 percent left involuntarily because they were either furloughed or laid off. The percentage of pan-

FIGURE 1  
Teachers Left the Profession in Similar Ways Leading Up to and During the Pandemic



<sup>a</sup> Includes those who took early retirement, resigned, or took an unpaid leave of absence.

<sup>b</sup> Includes those who were laid off or furloughed.

NOTES: This figure uses response data from the following survey questions: “At what point did you stop teaching in a public school?” and “How did you leave your public school teaching position?” (N = 958) In response to the latter question, 150 respondents selected “Other” and provided a written response describing how they left the profession. We reviewed these responses and reclassified them into the response options provided on the survey. One respondent did not provide any information about how they left their public school teaching position. Therefore, counts for how pandemic teachers left their profession will not sum to the total number for pandemic teachers.

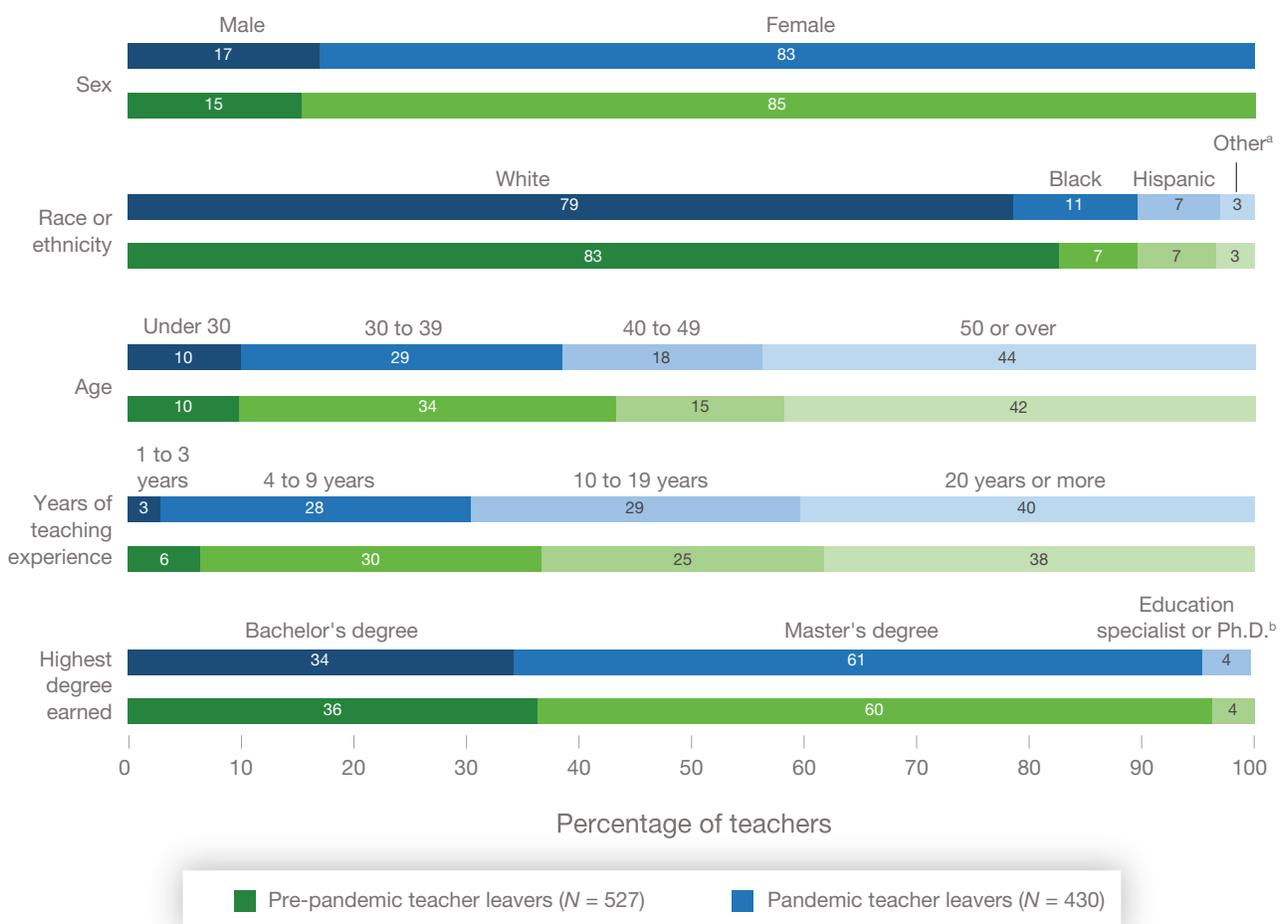
demographic teachers who left the profession an involuntary manner (4 percent) was slightly higher than the corresponding percentage of pre-pandemic teachers (1 percent).

When we compare those who left pre-pandemic with those who left after March 2020, we also observe a similar profile in terms of teachers' sex, race or ethnicity, age,<sup>2</sup> years of teaching experience, and educational attainment (see Figure 2). For example, 10 percent of the pre-pandemic teacher leavers were under age 30, as were 10 percent of pandemic teacher leavers.

There are some small but notable ways in which the pre-pandemic teacher leavers differ from their pandemic counterparts. These differences might

indicate how the pandemic is beginning to influence teacher attrition. Black teachers comprised a slightly greater proportion of pandemic teacher leavers (11 percent) compared with pre-pandemic teacher leavers (7 percent). Meanwhile, inexperienced teachers (those with three years of experience or less) were underrepresented, comprising 3 percent of pandemic teacher leavers but 6 percent of pre-pandemic teacher leavers.

FIGURE 2  
Pre-Pandemic Teacher Leavers Looked Like Pandemic Teacher Leavers



<sup>a</sup> Includes teacher leavers who are Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or two or more races.

<sup>b</sup> Includes additional degrees beyond the master's level, such as first professional degrees.

NOTE: Categories may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

## Majorities of Both Pre-Pandemic and Pandemic Teacher Leavers Exited the Profession from Schools Located in the South

Pre-pandemic and pandemic teacher leavers left similar types of schools located in similar areas of the country. About half of each teacher-leaver group left elementary schools, one-third left from city schools, four in ten left from large schools (those with 750 or more students), and about one in ten left from the highest-poverty schools where 75 percent or more of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. And a majority of both pre-pandemic and pandemic teacher leavers (60 and 55 percent, respectively) exited from schools located in the South. (We use U.S. Census Bureau [2010] definitions of regions.) These data corroborate findings from other studies that have found teacher turnover rates to be highest in the Southern states (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017). Meanwhile, 16 percent of our pandemic teacher leavers exited from schools located in the Northeast, 12 percent left schools in the Midwest, and 17 percent left schools in the West.

## The Influence of COVID-19 on Teachers' Decisions to Leave

We focus this section on teacher leavers who left because of COVID-19, comparing them with those who left before the pandemic began and those who left *during but not because of* the pandemic. To do so, we first draw on two survey questions that were posed to all former public school teachers who left the profession early (that is, who took early retirement, an unpaid leave of absence, or resigned). Specifically, we asked “Did you leave teaching mainly because of reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic?” and “What were the reasons you left teaching in a public school, regardless of whether COVID-19 influenced your departure?”<sup>3</sup> (Respondents who did not teach during the pandemic did not receive the first question.)

To glean more specifics, we posed two additional questions to pandemic teacher leavers who left mainly because of COVID-19: “What were the

### Our Sample Aligns with the National Population of Teachers Who Have Left Public Schools

We extrapolate that the almost 1,000 former public school teachers who took our survey resemble the larger set of public school teachers who leave the profession across the United States in a “normal” school year. However, our extrapolation hinges on the assumption that the characteristics of teacher leavers have held steady over the past ten years—which is how old the most recent national profile of teacher leaver estimates are. The 958 teachers who completed our survey generally resemble the characteristics of teacher leavers from that “normal” school year, as did the schools from which the teacher leavers departed (see Table A.1 in Appendix A for details).

COVID-19 related reasons you left teaching in a public school?” and “Among the reasons you selected, what would you say is the single biggest COVID-19 related reason you left public school teaching?” (See Appendix B for more information regarding the sub-populations that received each survey question.)

## Almost Half of the Public School Teachers Who Left the Profession Early and Voluntarily Since March 2020 Listed COVID-19 as the Main Reason for Their Departure

Among the 248 teachers in our sample who taught during the pandemic and left of their own volition before a scheduled retirement, almost half (44 percent) said that the COVID-19 pandemic was their main reason for leaving. The remaining 56 percent left for what they said were non-pandemic-related reasons. Of these, the most common reasons they selected were stress and a dislike for the way things were run at their school.

## Stress Was the Most Frequently Selected Reason for Leaving Among All Voluntary Early Leavers, and “Insufficient Pay to Merit the Risks or Stress” Was the Most Frequently Selected Top Reason for Leaving Early Among Those Who Left Because of COVID-19

Four in ten voluntary early leavers—including both those who left before and during the pandemic—selected “the stress and disappointments of teaching weren’t worth it” as a reason for leaving. This response was the most frequent choice among the ten reasons we listed. About one in five teacher leavers who left because of the pandemic said that insufficient pay to merit the risks or stress was their biggest COVID-19–related reason for leaving the profession. Even when teachers did not rank stress as their top reason, two-thirds of those who left because of the pandemic still indicated that it was one of their COVID-19–related reasons for leaving.

After insufficient pay to merit the risks or stress, personal factors weighed heavily in early teacher leavers’ decisions to leave the profession during the pandemic. The health risks associated with COVID-19, for either the respondent or a respondent’s loved ones, was the second-highest-ranked reason for leaving among those who said the pandemic drove them out of the profession, followed by childcare responsibilities. Early leavers who left because of the pandemic less-frequently selected instructional challenges or inadequate safety plans as their top COVID-19–related reason for leaving. Although fewer than one in ten said that challenges related to remote or hybrid instruction was their top reason for leaving, more than four in ten teachers who left the profession early because of the pandemic cited challenges with remote or hybrid instruction as playing a part in their decision.

## The Additional Stresses That COVID-19 Posed Might Have Raised the Minimum Pay at Which Teachers Are Willing to Work

Before the pandemic, U.S. teachers were already making less than teachers in some other developed countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020). The voluntary early leavers in our sample—i.e., those who resigned, took early retirement, or took unpaid leave—earned an average base salary of \$53,100 when they exited the profession with an average of 13 years of teaching experience. As a point of comparison, this is less than the national average base salary (\$57,860) among teachers with a similar number of years of experience in 2017–2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1990–2019).

When we compare the average base salaries of early teacher leavers who left before versus during the pandemic, we observe a potential COVID-19 premium: More-highly paid teachers are now willing to leave earlier than would otherwise be the case. Pandemic early teacher leavers earned around 7 percent more at the time they left the profession (\$55,000) than pre-pandemic early teacher leavers (\$51,600). We also know that pandemic early leavers were no more likely to move into higher-paid jobs than their pre-pandemic counterparts. We interpret this salary difference with caution; although this difference is statistically significant, we cannot with certainty attribute teachers’ pay requirements to COVID-19–induced stress.<sup>4</sup> But we find support for this theory: Pre-pandemic and pandemic scheduled retirees in our survey had similar wages when they left the profession, suggesting the comparability of our two survey subgroups. The scheduled retirees in our sample earned \$72,200, on average, in their last year of public school teaching, regardless of whether they left before or during the pandemic.

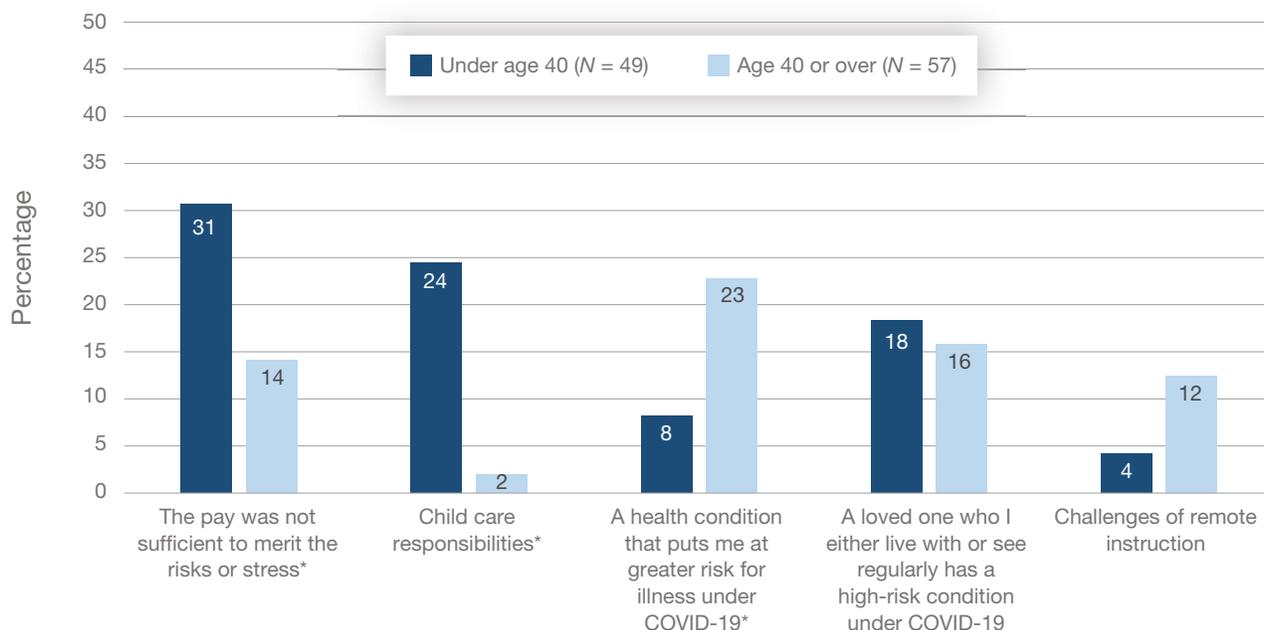
## Younger Teachers Were Especially Likely to Say That Insufficient Pay and Childcare Responsibilities Drove Them Out During COVID-19; Older Teachers Were More Likely to Say Health Conditions Made Them Leave

There were notable age-related differences in the COVID-19–related reasons why public school teachers left the profession early. Teachers under age 40 were especially likely to say that their pay was insufficient to merit the risks or stress, which comports with the fact that younger teachers (who are generally more inexperienced) tend to earn less than more experienced teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 1990–2019, Table 211.20). Only 14 percent of teachers age 40 or over said that insufficient pay was their main reason for leaving, compared with 31 percent of younger teachers (Figure 3).

Furthermore, childcare concerns weighed heavily for younger teachers, especially women. Of younger teachers who left mainly because of the pandemic, 24 percent ranked childcare as their main COVID-19–related reason for leaving the profession, compared with 2 percent of teachers 40 or over. None of the male teachers ranked it as their main COVID-19–related reason for leaving (results not shown). However, we caution readers against overinterpretation because there were only 17 male teachers in our sample who said that the pandemic was their main reason for leaving, only six of whom were under 40. Even if it was not their top reason for leaving, 60 percent of young female teachers and 33 percent of young male teachers ranked childcare as one of their COVID-19–related reasons for leaving the profession.

Conversely, a higher percentage of older teachers said that having a health condition that puts them at

FIGURE 3  
Teachers’ Five Main COVID-19–Related Reasons for Leaving Early Depended on Their Age



Among early teacher leavers, specific top COVID-19–related reason for leaving

NOTES: This figure uses response data from the following survey question that was administered to teachers who indicated that they left teaching in or after March 2020 and who said that the pandemic was their main reason for leaving the profession: “Among the reasons you selected, what would you say is the single biggest COVID-19–related reason you left public school teaching?” (N = 106)

\*Indicates a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the percentage of teachers under age 40 and the percentage of those age 40 or over.

a greater risk for COVID-19 was their top reason for leaving the profession early during the pandemic.

## Remote Instruction Was Challenging for Most, but Especially for Older Teachers

Eight out of ten pandemic teacher leavers in our survey taught at a school that was primarily fully remote—using either synchronous or asynchronous instruction—in the time that the respondent taught during the pandemic. Only one in 20 pandemic teachers were teaching fully in person. Regardless of age, about two-thirds of pandemic teachers said that they had not received adequate training to deliver remote instruction, and similar proportions of older and younger teachers had no experience delivering instruction remotely before the pandemic. Perhaps related to their inexperience and insufficient training, only six in ten pandemic teachers agreed with the statement that they were able to deliver remote instruction well.

Furthermore, almost half of the pandemic teacher leavers taught in a school that was using an instructional mode during COVID-19 that did not match the teachers' preferences. This finding aligns with evidence from prior teacher surveys that suggests that majorities of pandemic teachers are dissatisfied or have mixed feelings regarding their school or district's instructional decisions during the pandemic (Diliberti and Kaufman, 2020). Of the pandemic teachers who taught fully remote, two in ten would have preferred to be in a school using a hybrid model and a little less (16 percent) would have preferred to be fully in-person. Conversely, among the few teachers that were teaching in-person, six in ten would have preferred to be fully remote and two in ten would have preferred a hybrid model.

Among those teacher leavers who left the profession primarily because of the pandemic, a higher percentage of those over age 40 reported that they had challenges with remote learning. Over half (58 percent) of these older teachers rated remote learning as one of their reasons for leaving, with about one in ten saying it was their top reason. By comparison, 39 percent of younger teachers said the challenges of remote

learning was one of their COVID-19–related reasons for leaving, with only one in 20 ranking it their top reason. The source of these remote learning troubles, especially among older teachers, did not stem from inadequate access to technology because similar percentages of older and younger pandemic teachers in our survey reported having up-to-date computers and reliable internet access.

## Regardless of Teachers' Ages, Frequent Technology Problems Might Also Be a Reason Why Pandemic Teachers Left

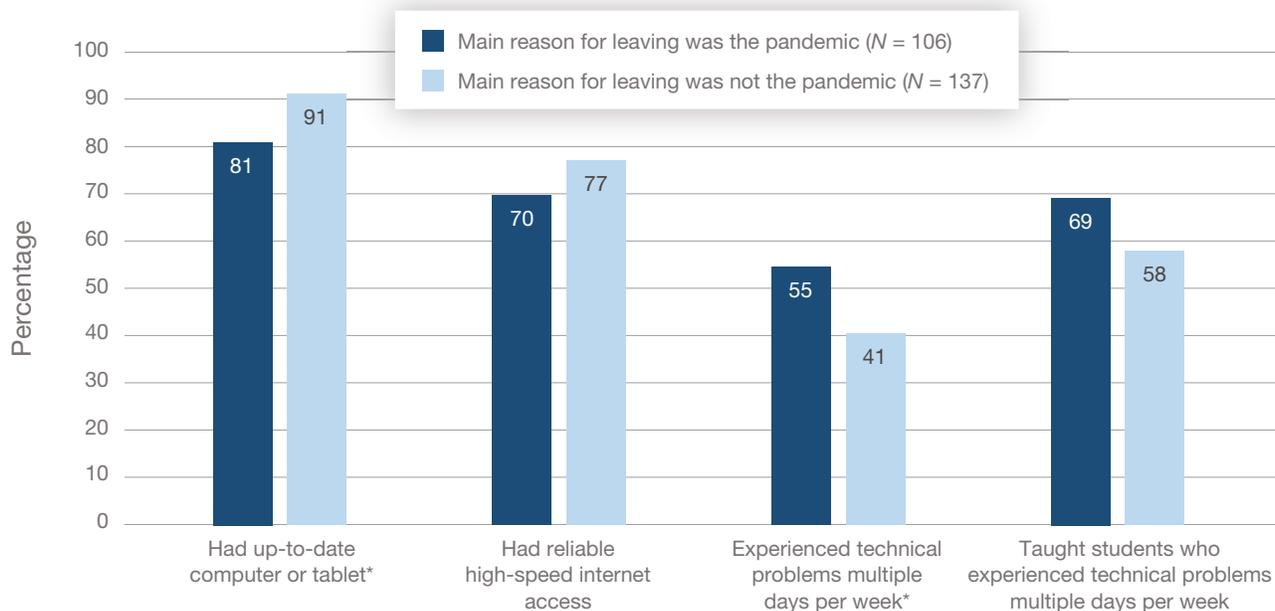
A concerning number of teacher leavers who taught during the pandemic did not have sufficient technology to meet their instructional needs, even a month into remote teaching. One in four pandemic teachers said that they did not have reliable high-speed internet access at home and a little more than one in ten said that they did not have an up-to-date computer. This aligns with other recent surveys of pandemic teachers, which have found that teachers' technology needs remain unmet even several months into remote instruction (Diliberti and Kaufman, 2020).

Technology-related problems might have contributed to teachers leaving the profession during the pandemic. Teachers who left mainly because of the pandemic were more likely to cite not having an up-to-date computer or tablet as a main reason for leaving than teachers who left for reasons other than the pandemic (Figure 4). Teachers who left mainly because of the pandemic were also more likely to report experiencing technology issues during multiple days each week.

Unsurprisingly, a higher percentage of pandemic teachers who departed from rural schools reported experiencing technical problems daily (18 percent) than their urban counterparts (10 percent). At least in this relatively small survey sample—140 rural and 277 urban pandemic teachers—the difference seems to derive from out-of-date devices rather than unreliable internet at home, although we note that there were no significant differences in up-to-date computing devices and home internet for the subset of rural and urban teachers who said that they left because of

FIGURE 4

There Were Greater Technology-Related Problems Among Teacher Leavers Who Said That the Pandemic Was Their Main Reason for Leaving the Profession



NOTE: This figure uses response data from the following survey questions that were administered to teachers who indicated that they left teaching in or after March 2020: “Did you have an up-to-date computer or tablet that worked sufficiently for you to deliver instruction remotely during COVID-19?”; “Did you have high-speed internet access at home that worked sufficiently for you to deliver instruction remotely during COVID-19?”; “After about a month into remote teaching, how frequently did you personally experience technical problems?”; and “After about a month into remote teaching, how frequently did your typical student experience technical problems?” (N = 243)

\* Indicates a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the percentage of teachers who said the pandemic was their main reason for leaving and those who did not.

the pandemic. Looking at only those rural and urban teachers who left because of the pandemic, there was nevertheless a striking divide in their feelings about remote instruction. Only 32 percent of rural teacher leavers who left because of the pandemic thought that they had delivered remote instruction well, compared with 60 percent of their urban counterparts.

### Notwithstanding the Challenges, About Half of Those Who Left Primarily Because of COVID-19 Would Be Willing to Come Back with Widespread Vaccine Adoption or Regular Rapid COVID-19 Testing

Once most students and staff are vaccinated, 34 percent of teachers who voluntarily left teaching early, primarily for reasons related to the COVID-19 pan-

dem, would be “definitely willing” to return to public school teaching. Another 27 percent would be “somewhat willing” to return in the event of widespread vaccine adoption. Regular testing of staff and students for COVID-19 could also attract former teachers back, although to a lesser degree than the vaccine. Regular testing would make 13 percent of voluntary early leavers “definitely willing” to return to public school teaching, and another 42 percent would be “somewhat willing” to return. Surprisingly—given differences in their reasons for leaving the profession—teachers under and over age 40 had similar rates of willingness to return based on widespread vaccinations and COVID-19 testing.

## Pre-Pandemic Stressors in Teaching

### Stress Seems to Be at the Heart of Teachers Leaving the Profession Early, Both Before and During the Pandemic

Three out of four former teachers ( $N = 949$ ) said that work was “often” or “always” stressful in the most recent year in which they taught in a public school. This was true among both teachers who left the profession before the pandemic began and among those who left after March 2020. Both before and during the pandemic, around one-third of teacher leavers said that work was “always” stressful. These results comport with prior education research that identifies stress as a key factor in teacher turnover (see McCarthy et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2017).

Not surprisingly, considering our focus on teachers who have left the field, stress levels among these former public school teachers were higher than among public school teachers at large. But stress levels among active public school teachers have traditionally been high, too. On a 2017 survey that had an almost identically worded survey item, 61 percent of teachers said that work was often or always stressful (American Federation of Teachers, 2017); most of these teachers said work was often, but not always, stressful. Similarly, in a 2017–2018 survey of a nationally representative sample of U.S. public school teachers, 22 percent somewhat agreed and another 6 percent strongly agreed that the “stress and disappointments involved in teaching at this school aren’t really worth it” (National Center for Education Statistics, undated-b).

Among our sample, stress was the most commonly reported reason for leaving the profession among both those who left before and those who left during the pandemic. Perhaps surprisingly, a higher percentage of pre-pandemic teacher leavers than pandemic teacher leavers (48 percent versus 36 percent, respectively) rated stress as a reason for leaving. In fact, a higher percentage of pre-pandemic teacher leavers indicated that that stress of teaching was not worth it (48 percent) than ranked insufficient pay (27 percent) as a reason for leaving.

### Former Public School Teachers Were Working More Than 40 Hours per Week Before March 2020, Which Increased During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The teacher leavers in our sample were working an average of 49 hours in a typical week before the pandemic began. These working hours are higher than the estimated 42 hours per week worked by a typical teacher (Startz, 2019). During the pandemic, teacher leavers in our sample reported working an average of 52 hours per week, and one-third of pandemic teachers said that they worked 56 hours or more per week during COVID-19. Our survey data corroborate findings from other recent teacher surveys that have found that teachers’ working hours have increased during the pandemic (Diliberti and Kaufman, 2020; Doan et al., 2020).

Furthermore, teachers also started sleeping less after the onset of the pandemic. Before the pandemic, 74 percent of teacher leavers slept less than eight hours per night. During the pandemic, this increased to 83 percent of teacher leavers.

### One-Third of Former Teachers Held Second Jobs While Teaching

One out of every three former public school teachers in our survey earned income from a second job at the same time they were last teaching in a public school. This held true both for teachers who left the profession before and those who left during the pandemic. This is on par with national estimates of teachers holding second jobs from 2017–2018: Nationally, four in ten public school teachers earned supplemental income from extracurriculars in the same school system, and two in ten held a second job outside their school system (National Center for Education Statistics, undated-a). Most commonly, in the national estimates from 2017–2018, teachers’ additional jobs were in a school district; they worked such jobs as coaching an athletic team, writing assessments or curricula, or serving as a department head. Half of the teacher leavers in our sample who earned income from a second job earned it by taking on additional responsibilities in a school district. The second-most-common additional job was tutoring.

Male teacher leavers were more likely than women to have been holding a second job around the time they left the teaching profession. Among those that did hold a second job, men were more likely to have additional paid responsibilities within their or another school district and women were more likely to tutor. Teachers under age 40 and those making less than the national average base salary (\$57,950 in 2017–2018, according to the National Center for Education Statistics [1990–2019]) were far more likely to hold a noneducation-related job, such as bartending, cashiering, or consulting.

Teacher leavers who left before the onset of the pandemic were almost twice as likely as their pandemic peers (32 percent versus 18 percent, respectively) to have had a second job that was noneducation-related.

## **The Jobs Teachers Took After Leaving Public Schools**

### **Of the Teacher Leavers Who Are Still Employed, About Three in Ten Have Left the Education Sector, Four in Ten Hold Nonteaching Education Jobs, and the Rest Hold Various Teaching Positions**

Just over half of our teacher leavers were employed at the time of the December 2020 survey. The others had retired (one in four teacher leavers), were unemployed and not seeking work (one in ten), were unemployed and seeking work (one in 20), or enrolled as a student (one in 40, or 3 percent). Of those who were employed, four in ten worked in nonteaching education jobs,<sup>5</sup> such as school administration, while three in ten worked in jobs outside the field of education.

The rest of the employed teacher leavers held various types of other teaching jobs. The most common of these was at a private school, where about 14 percent of those employed at the time of the survey—and 7 percent of all former public school teachers—had moved. Among those currently employed, 9 percent held nontraditional teaching jobs, such as leading a learning pod; another 7 percent worked as tutors, and the remaining 4 percent held other miscellaneous

teaching-related education jobs, such as substitute teaching, or were on leave (Figure 5).

Leavers' current employment status somewhat depended on sex and age. Younger and female teacher leavers were particularly likely to have left the labor force (i.e., be unemployed and not seeking a job); 3 percent of younger teachers specifically mentioned the assumption of childcare responsibilities as their current status. Men were more likely than women to have taken a job outside education (23 percent of men versus 14 percent of women).

There are some differences in current employment status according to whether teachers left during or before the pandemic. A slightly higher percentage of pandemic teacher leavers are now fully retired than their pre-pandemic counterparts (30 versus 23 percent, respectively). Because similar percentages of pre-pandemic and pandemic teacher leavers left the profession through a scheduled retirement, this suggests that pre-pandemic scheduled retirees remain more active in the labor force than those who took a scheduled retirement after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, ten percent of pandemic teacher leavers were unemployed and seeking a job when they took the survey in December 2020, compared with only 2 percent of pre-pandemic teacher leavers. (Together, these differences could be because those who left their job prior to the pandemic had more time to find a job than pandemic leavers at the time of our survey.) Conversely, higher percentages of those who left before the pandemic began went on to teach in a private school and worked outside the field of education.

### **Teachers Who Left for a “Better” Education Job Liked the New Job More Primarily Because It Offered More Flexibility in Their Schedule and Had a Better Work Climate**

Thus far, we have considered such factors as stress, pay, and hours: factors that have pushed public school teachers out of the profession. But there are also important pull factors about teacher leavers' new jobs that illuminate less-than-satisfactory conditions in

FIGURE 5  
What Are Former Public School Teachers Doing Now?



<sup>a</sup> Includes substitute teaching and teachers on paid or unpaid leave (commonly on Family and Medical Leave Act leave or maternity leave).

NOTES: This figure uses response data from the following survey question: “What is your current employment status? Indicate your MAIN job if you hold more than one.” (N = 955). In response to this question, 94 respondents selected “Other” and provided a written response describing their current employment situations. We reviewed these responses and reclassified them into the response options provided on the survey.

their former positions. Of the early teacher leavers, almost half said that a “better job” was a reason for leaving public school teaching. For those who indicated that they held a better education-related job, we went on to ask about which attributes of those jobs attracted them to the position.

The attributes that teacher leavers liked about their new job depended on what job they had at the time of our survey (Figure 6). For example, those who left for a private school job cited better work climates and more control over what they teach. Tutors and nontraditional teachers, such as those in learning pods or micro schools, particularly valued the flex-

ibility that their new jobs offered. Meanwhile, former teachers now employed in a nonteaching role also liked having more flexibility and better pay.

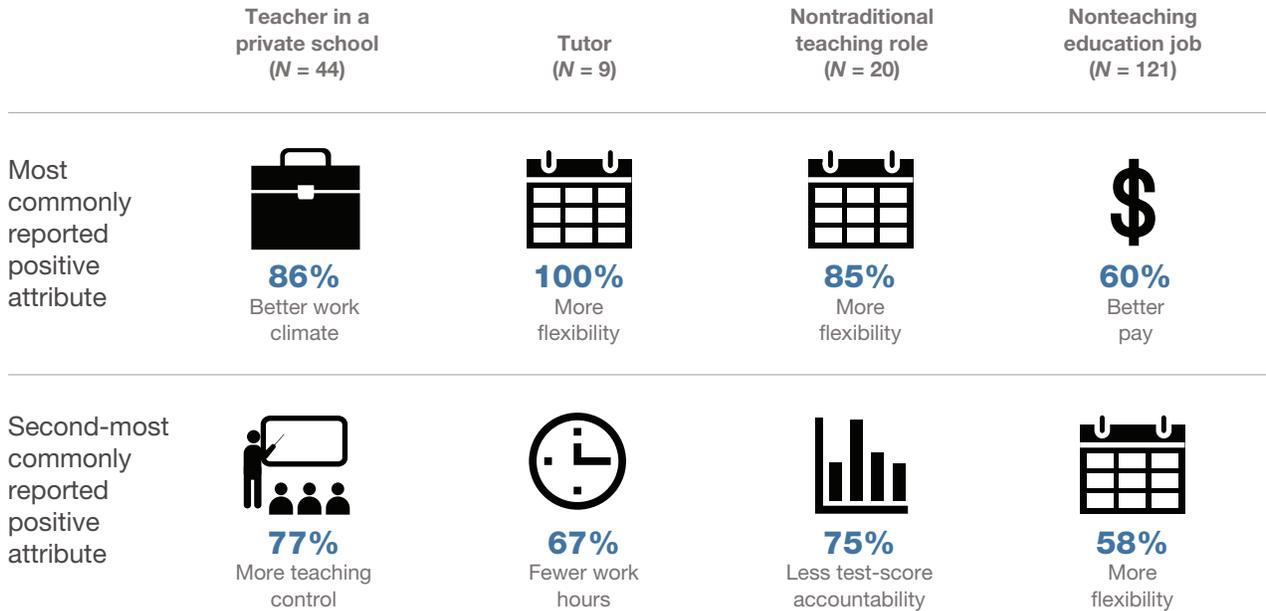
### Those Few Former Public School Teachers Who Have Gone on to Nontraditional Teaching Roles Plan to Remain in Their Roles in 2021–2022, in Spite of a Smaller Paycheck

A little less than one in ten employed former public school teachers who took our survey went onto a

FIGURE 6

## Top Two Attributes That Drew Former Public School Teachers to Their New, Better, Education-Related Job

Percentage of former public school teachers who say that they like certain aspects of their new job



NOTES: This figure uses response data from the following survey questions: “What is your current employment status? Indicate your MAIN job if you hold more than one.” and “What attributes of your current, main job attracted you to the position?” (N = 194) Respondents were only asked about the positive attributes of their new jobs if they indicated that they found a “better” education job.

nontraditional teaching role, such as leading a learning pod or teaching in a micro school (N = 43). These former public school teachers were largely representative of the population of U.S. public school teachers; they were mostly female, mostly White, about half were under 40, and most had a master’s degree or higher credential.

The most-commonly reported attribute that attracted these teacher leavers to their nontraditional teaching roles was more flexibility, followed closely by less student test score accountability and fewer work hours. However, almost two out of three of these nontraditional teachers earned less than they made as a public school teachers, and an approximately equal proportion said that their new jobs did not offer such benefits as retirement and health insurance.

Of the 43 teachers in our sample now employed in nontraditional teaching jobs, almost half left the profession after the pandemic began, a majority of whom said that the pandemic was their main reason

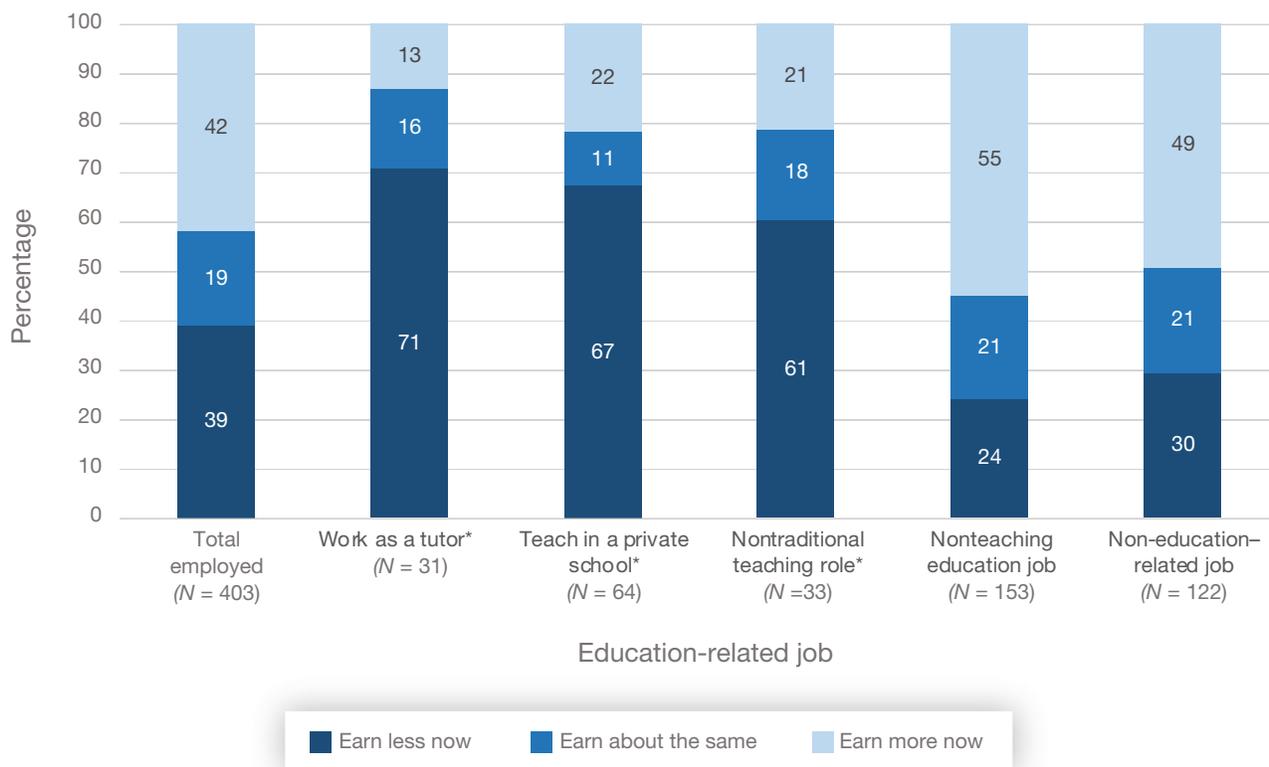
for leaving. About two-thirds of these nontraditional teachers said that they planned to remain in their new jobs for the 2021–2022 school year. However, of those that left primarily because of the pandemic (only 13, so a small sample), about half said that they would be somewhat or definitely willing to return to public school teaching if most students and staff had been vaccinated.

### Four in Ten Former Teachers Earn Less in Their New Jobs, Another Four in Ten Earn More, and the Rest Earn About the Same

Among the former teachers who are currently employed and did not leave teaching through scheduled retirement, four in ten earned less in their new main jobs than in their former public school teaching jobs. This holds true regardless of whether the teacher left before or during the pandemic. Majorities of tutors, private school teachers, and nontraditional

FIGURE 7

### How Earnings in New Jobs Compare with Those in Last Public School Teaching Jobs



NOTES: This figure uses response data from the following survey question: “How do your earnings in your current main job compare with your earnings as a public school teacher?” (N = 403) We removed from this analysis 38 former teachers who took scheduled retirement.  
 \* Indicates a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the percentage of teachers who say that they earn less in this role and the percentage who say they earn less in a non-education-related job.

teachers reported earning less than they did as public school teachers (shown in Figure 7). Specifically, in tutoring, 71 percent of former teachers went on to earn less, as did 67 percent of private school teachers, 61 percent of nontraditional teachers, and 24 percent of the nonteaching educators. Among those who moved into a noneducation job, 30 percent earn less than they did as public school teachers. In only the nonteaching education jobs (e.g., school administration) did more than half of former public school teachers earn more. Note that we did not ask whether their current employment was full or part time.

As former teachers moved into other jobs, many have sacrificed not only higher pay but other benefits, such as health insurance and retirement. About three in ten teacher leavers said that they are now employed in a job that does not offer these benefits, but there were notable differences depending on current pro-

feSSION. Ninety percent of tutors said that their jobs do not provide benefits, as did 64 percent of nontraditional teachers. In comparison, only 30 percent of private school teachers and 19 percent of nonteaching educators said that their jobs lacked health insurance and retirement benefits.

### Not Many Former Teachers Currently Working in New Jobs Plan to Return to Public School Teaching in 2021–2022

Seven out of ten early teacher leavers who were employed as of December 2020 planned to remain in their jobs for the 2021–2022 school year. Of the remaining 27 former teachers who did not plan to remain in their jobs, a little over half (56 percent) planned to return to public school teaching. Among the 15 teachers who said that they plan to return, four

were currently tutoring or held nontraditional teaching roles, five were working in nonteaching education positions, and six were working outside education.

## Implications

Although it is too early to say whether the overall number of teachers leavers will go up because of COVID-19, early signs indicate that it will, which will put additional strain on the already daunting prospects for the 2021–2022 school year. But as of December 2020, when we surveyed almost 1,000 former public school teachers, we do not see a change yet in the profile of those who left during the pandemic, compared with those who left in the two years leading up to it.

The teacher leavers in our survey left for both COVID-19–specific reasons and because of longer-standing structural problems with the profession that the pandemic has exacerbated. Some of the COVID-19–specific problems might fade as the urgency and danger of the pandemic lessens. These include care for sick loved ones, underlying health conditions that make some teachers more vulnerable to the virus, frequent technology troubles at home, difficulty balancing child care for children who are learning remotely at home, and the difficulty of leading remote instruction without sufficient training.

But that still leaves the persistent structural problems that likely will outlast the pandemic unless there are changes to the teaching profession. These challenges include long work hours, lack of flexibility in work schedules, poor work climate for some, and low pay relative to job demands.

Collectively, these problems generate stress for teachers. An extremely high proportion of the former public school teachers in this survey—three out of four—said that teaching was often or always stressful in the most recent year in which they taught in a public school. Stress was a more prevalent reason for leaving the profession early than pay. Many teacher leavers went on to take lower-paying jobs, presumably to reduce stress. Furthermore, three in ten teachers who left public school teaching early went on to jobs that did not offer health and retirement benefits

(although it possible that these individuals hold second jobs, about which we did not ask on the survey).

Looking across the different types of education jobs into which former public school teachers moved, the most common attraction was more flexibility in their schedule. But the specific factors that attracted teacher leavers to new employment opportunities depended on their new job. For example, a better work climate was the top attraction for those who went into private school teaching.

Our survey does not show an exodus of teachers to new, innovative forms of schooling that have evolved or expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic. A little less than one in ten employed former public school teachers have moved into nontraditional teaching roles, such as leading a learning pod or a micro school. For the few who have moved into such roles, increased flexibility, fewer work hours, and less accountability attached to student test scores are the main job attributes that attracted them to these positions.

The good news for public school district administrators is that, although the teachers leavers in our sample enumerated many reasons for leaving, over half of the early leavers who left the profession primarily because of reasons related to the pandemic appear amenable to returning to public school teaching. Widespread vaccination of staff and students would make 34 percent of teacher leavers who left because of COVID-19 “definitely willing” and another 27 percent “somewhat willing” to return to public school teaching. And, while the public waits for the take-up of vaccinations, regular testing of staff or students for COVID-19 infection would make 13 percent of teacher leavers who left because of COVID-19 “definitely willing” to return to public school teaching and another 42 percent “somewhat willing” to return.

## Recommendations

- 1. Involve teachers in developing districts’ responses to reducing teacher stress.**

COVID-19 could open a policy window through which to reconsider the job responsibilities of the typical public school teacher.

Although prior research offers a good starting place to understand stressors (see, for example, Boyd et al., 2005; Ingersoll, 2001; McCarthy et al., 2016; Pearson and Moomaw, 2005), districts should learn from their teachers what local factors influence stress on the job. Furthermore, involving teachers in developing responses could have the added benefit of reducing teacher stress itself (Pearson and Moomaw, 2005).

- 2. Districts and state departments of education should consider ways to increase flexibility in teachers' schedules during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the long term.** There are early indications that some districts are already considering how to do so. In an October 2020 nationally representative survey, about four in ten district leaders indicated that they were planning to adopt flexible staffing models that adjust students' assignments to teachers, three in ten were adjusting teacher compensation and work rules (the survey did not ask in what ways), and two in ten noted that they intend to keep fully remote learning as an option for at least some students in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic (Schwartz et al., 2020). Although only a minority of public school teachers might prefer remote schooling, it could still be attractive to a subset of teachers who wish for more flexibility in their schedules. Other countries' models and innovations—in addition to some that are already being implemented in the United States—offer such options as job sharing (Williamson et al., 2015); changes in teacher credentialing, such as micro-credentials that provide ways for teachers to further specialize and thereby narrow their job responsibilities; and otherwise differentiating teachers' roles, such as identifying teacher experts who model particular skills for other teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; DeMonte, 2017).
- 3. While waiting for COVID-19 vaccines to roll out, schools should partner with a third party to start regularly testing students and staff as a means to keep schools open.** The federal government should fund COVID-19

testing systems in schools (via qualified third parties) and mandate that insurers cover the costs of both symptomatic and asymptomatic COVID-19 testing. The President Joseph Biden administration has proposed to do so as of this report writing (January 2021). Schools that have been testing students (which have been primarily private, but also some public) in the 2020–2021 school year consistently said that the chief benefits are reducing anxiety, establishing whether rates of positivity in the school population are low, and helping contain spread of COVID-19 via asymptomatic cases (Faherty et al., forthcoming).

## Appendix A. Methods

The RAND American Educator Panels include probability-based recruited samples of K–12 public school teachers, principals, and school districts and charter management organizations. Our survey of teacher leavers was conducted with self-identified former members of the ATP. The ATP was created in 2014 and includes between 25,000 and 30,000 teachers who have agreed to participate in several surveys each school year. More information about the sampling and recruitment of teachers to the ATP is available in Robbins and Grant (2020).

As with all survey panels, the ATP experiences attrition as teachers retire, change careers, or otherwise decide to no longer participate in the panel. The vast majority of attrition is passive; that is, most teachers do not inform RAND that they are leaving the panel but simply stop participating. We update the teacher panel annually to remove those who are no longer participating by sending emails to those who have not responded to several consecutive email invitations and attempting to verify their desires to remain in the panel. We offset attrition by recruiting new teachers to join the panel. Because of the fluid nature of attrition, we can never be certain of the number of teachers actively eligible to participate in our surveys (i.e., which panelists are still in a public school teaching position) nor of the number who are actively engaged in the panel (i.e., which panelists

receive our emails and consider participating in our surveys).

Teachers who accept our invitation to join the panel complete an online enrollment form. Part of that process confirms and corrects teachers' contact information, including school-based email addresses. We also ask teachers to provide alternate personal email addresses that we can use to contact them, and we ask them to designate a preferred email address. A teacher also has the option of editing their school-based email address and changing it to a non-school-based email address. Thus, for every teacher panelist we have one or two email addresses, including one email address that might be school-based.

To conduct this survey of teacher leavers, we reviewed records for all teachers who were part of the ATP as of February 2020 (29,234) and retained teachers with a preferred and/or alternate email address with a common, public domain (e.g., gmail.com, yahoo.com, comcast.com). This effort identified 21,679 teachers (74.2 percent) with a non-school-based email address.

We sent an email invitation to the ATP members with a non-school-based email address announcing a special opportunity for those who were no longer public school teachers. Our invitation provided information about the purpose of the survey, the anticipated survey length (ten minutes), and the incentive amount (\$40), and encouraged former teachers to click a link taking them to the survey. (It also included a link for continuing ATP members to click that allowed them to avoid receiving future email reminders about the teacher leavers survey.) Current teachers, such as those in private or micro schools, were eligible to participate as long as they had left a traditional teaching position in a public school.

The incentive amount we offered former teachers was considerably higher than typical ATP surveys (which is \$1 per survey minute, or \$10 for a ten-minute survey) to encourage as many former teachers as possible to respond. We set the incentive at \$40 because we were concerned that teachers who had left their public school teaching positions—and were therefore no longer eligible to participate in the ATP—might not respond to an ATP invitation.

We emailed the invitation for the teacher leaver survey on Thursday, December 3, 2020, and data

collection was completed on Friday, December 11. One reminder was sent to those who had started but not completed the online survey during the week of December 7. We set a quota to allow 1,200 responses (completes and partials); we aimed to cap participation at no more than 1,000 completed surveys. During the week of data collection, we received 942 complete surveys and 258 partially completed surveys. After reviewing the partial responses, 20 respondents had completed enough of the survey to consider them complete, which produced a data file that had 962 cases for analysis. (Another 395 invite recipients attempted to enter the survey but were denied because the quota had been reached by the time they attempted to enter the survey.) After reviewing the information that our 962 respondents provided about their current employment status, we removed four respondents who indicated that they were currently employed in a teaching position in a charter school. These respondents should have been ineligible to complete the survey because we do not consider current charter school teachers to have left public school teaching. After removing these four respondents, our final sample size was 958.

We are not able to determine how well the teacher leavers who completed our survey represent the current U.S. population of teacher leavers. Although the ATP—as a probability-based sample of teachers—is nationally representative, this teacher leaver survey is a self-selected group of former teachers. We do not know what proportion of total former public school teachers completed the survey, nor do we know how many former teachers did not possess a personal email to receive an invitation to participate in the survey. We also do not have access to an up-to-date national data source that tracks the number of teachers leaving the profession. Together, these limitations prevent us from calibrating or weighting the sample for our analysis.

However, we were able to compare our sample of 958 teachers at a high level with the 2012–2013 Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) to the 2011–2012 Schools and Staffing Survey. Conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, this data collection included tracking teachers who left the profession between the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years. We found that our survey respondents

TABLE A.1

Descriptive Statistics for Our Survey Sample Compared with the U.S. Population of Teacher Leavers in a Typical, Pre-Pandemic School Year

Descriptive Category	Teacher Leavers in Typical, Pre-Pandemic School Year (2012–2013) <sup>a</sup> (N = 259,400)	Survey Respondents (N = 958)
Teacher characteristics		
Sex		
Male	20	16
Female	80	84
Race or ethnicity		
White	81	81
Black	9	9
Hispanic	8	7
Asian or Pacific Islander	‡	1
American Indian or Alaska Native	‡	<1
Two or more races	‡	2
Age		
Less than 30 years	15	10
30 to 39 years	20	31
40 to 49 years	13	16
50 years or older	52	43
Teaching experience		
1 to 3 years	11	5
4 to 9 years	24	29
10 to 19 years	27	27
20 years or more	38	39
How they left the profession <sup>b</sup>		
Resigned	52	63
Retired	38	35
Involuntarily	10	2
School characteristics <sup>c</sup>		
Level		
Elementary	47	48
Middle	15	23
High	30	28
Combined	9	2
Urbanicity		
City	29	32
Suburb	31	34
Town	10	11
Rural	31	24

TABLE A.1—CONTINUED

Descriptive Category	Teacher Leavers in Typical, Pre-Pandemic School Year (2012–2013) <sup>a</sup> ( <i>N</i> = 259,400)	Survey Respondents ( <i>N</i> = 958)
Student enrollment		
Less than 200	4	3
200 to 499	33	31
500 to 749	26	27
750 or more	37	39
Percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch <sup>d</sup>		
0 to 34 percent	31	41
35 to 49 percent	16	23
50 to 74 percent	25	24
75 percent or more	25	12

‡ National Center for Education Statistics' reporting standards not met.

<sup>a</sup> Data for teacher leavers in a typical, pre-pandemic school year are from the 2012–2013 TFS, conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. The 2012–2013 TFS was conducted with a subsample of teachers who participated in the nationally representative 2011–2012 Schools and Staffing Survey in part to measure teacher attrition rates between school years. TFS data presented in the table were pulled from Goldring et al., 2014.

<sup>b</sup> Among the pre-pandemic teacher leavers, we know that 38 percent have a current employment status of “retired.” We presume these teachers left the profession via an early or scheduled retirement. We also know that 10 percent of leavers left the profession involuntarily (e.g., were laid off). Therefore, we presume that the remainder of teacher leavers in 2012–2013 left the profession through a voluntary resignation.

<sup>c</sup> In our ATP records of teacher leavers, we have information on which school respondents were last known to have held a public school teaching position. We presume this is the school from which teacher leavers exited the profession. We linked to respondents' school information to the 2018–2019 Common Core of Data, issued by the National Center for Education Statistics, to obtain information on school characteristics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

<sup>d</sup> TFS data include a category for “school did not participate in free or reduced-price lunch program.” We cannot match this category with our survey data because we do not know how the category was calculated. Only 2 percent of teacher leavers in 2012–2013 departed from schools that did not participate in the free or reduced-price school lunch program.

NOTE: Some categories may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

generally have similar demographic characteristics as those in the 2012–2013 TFS (see Table A.1).<sup>6</sup> We also found that our teacher leavers departed the profession from public schools with similar characteristics. We do note, however, that a small proportion of our teacher leavers left the profession involuntarily, and more in our survey resigned than did between the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years, which might or might not be related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout this report, to assess whether differences between subgroups were statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level, we conducted pairwise tests, comparing two subgroups at a time (e.g., teachers who left the profession before the pandemic began versus those who left after March 2020). Because of the exploratory nature of this study, we did not apply multiple hypothesis test corrections.

## Appendix B. Survey Questions and Responses

### Reasons for Leaving Teaching in Public Schools and Experience After Leaving

TABLE B.1  
When Individuals Stopped Teaching in a Public School

Question 1. At what point did you stop teaching in a public school? (*N* = 958)

Timeframe	Percentage
Prior to the 2019–2020 school year	50
During the 2019–2020 school year (before March)	5
During the 2019–2020 school year (March or after)	5
At the end of the 2019–2020 school year	27
During the 2020–2021 school year	13

TABLE B.2  
How Individuals Left Their Public School Teaching Positions

Question 2. How did you leave your public school teaching position? (*N* = 958)

How Teacher Left	Percentage
I took early retirement	11
I took scheduled retirement	22
I resigned	41
I was furloughed	1
I was laid off	1
I took an unpaid leave of absence	8
Other (please specify)	16

TABLE B.3  
Teachers Who Left Because of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Those Who Left for Other Reasons

Question 3. Did you leave teaching mainly because of reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic? (*N* = 248)

Response	Percentage
No	56
Yes	44

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they took scheduled retirement, were laid off, were furloughed, or selected "other (please specify)" in response to Question 2. Respondents also did not see this question if they left teaching prior to March 2020.

TABLE B.4

## Willingness to Resume In-Person Public School Teaching

Question 4. How willing would you be to resume in-person public school teaching if the following were true? (*N* = 109)

Potential Scenario	Percentage			
	Definitely Unwilling	Somewhat Unwilling	Somewhat Willing	Definitely Willing
Regular COVID-19 rapid testing of students and staff occurred at the school	27	18	42	13
Most or all students and staff received the COVID-19 vaccine	22	17	27	34
Other	0	7	40	53

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they took scheduled retirement, were laid off, were furloughed, or selected “other (please specify)” in response to Question 2. Respondents also did not see this question if they left teaching prior to March 2020 or left teaching mainly because of reasons unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic.

TABLE B.5

## Feelings of Safety Delivering In-Person Teaching Under Certain Conditions

Question 5. How safe would you feel delivering in-person teaching if the following were true? (*N* = 139)

Potential Scenario	Percentage			
	Very Unsafe	Somewhat Unsafe	Somewhat Safe	Very Safe
Regular COVID-19 rapid testing of students and staff occurred at the school	9	22	49	20
Most or all students and staff received the COVID-19 vaccine	6	13	42	38

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they took scheduled retirement, were laid off, were furloughed, or selected “other (please specify)” in response to Question 2. Respondents also did not see this question if they left teaching prior to March 2020 or left teaching mainly because of reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

TABLE B.6

## COVID-19–Related Reasons for Leaving Public School Teaching

Question 6. What were the COVID-19–related reasons you left teaching in a public school? (*N* = 109)

Reasons	Percentage
The pay wasn’t sufficient to merit the risks or stress	64
[I have] a health condition that puts me at greater risk for illness under COVID-19	36
A loved one who I either live with or see regularly has a high-risk condition under COVID-19	42
Challenges of remote instruction	49
Challenges of hybrid instruction	43
Challenges of in-person instruction	35
Inadequate support from my school or district	39
Inadequate remote instruction materials	30
Inadequate safety plans for COVID-19 mitigation at my school or district	44
Childcare responsibilities	35
Other	11

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they took scheduled retirement, were laid off, were furloughed, or selected “other (please specify)” in response to Question 2. Respondents also did not see this question if they left teaching prior to March 2020 or left teaching mainly because of reasons unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents were instructed to select all responses that apply; percentages will not sum to 100.

TABLE B.7

## Biggest COVID-19–Related Reason for Leaving Public School Teaching

Question 7. Among the reasons you selected, what would you say is the single biggest COVID-19–related reason you left public school teaching? (*N* = 109)

Reason	Percentage
The pay wasn't sufficient to merit the risks or stress	21
A loved one who I either live with or see regularly has a high-risk condition under COVID-19	17
[I have] a health condition that puts me at greater risk for illness under COVID-19	16
Childcare responsibilities	13
Challenges of remote instruction	8
Inadequate support from my school or district	7
Inadequate safety plans for COVID-19 mitigation at my school or district	6
Challenges of hybrid instruction	4
Challenges of in-person instruction	4
Other reason:	4
Inadequate remote instruction materials	1

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they took scheduled retirement, were laid off, were furloughed, or selected "other (please specify)" in response to Question 2. Respondents also did not see this question if they left teaching prior to March 2020 or left teaching mainly because of reasons unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic.

TABLE B.8

## Reasons for Leaving Public School Teaching, Overall

Question 8. What were the reasons you left teaching in a public school, regardless of whether COVID-19 influenced your departure? (*N* = 723)

Reason	Percentage
COVID-19 was the only reason I left public school teaching	7
I found a better traditional teaching job in another school	6
I found a better non-traditional teaching job (e.g., leading a learning pod or teaching in a micro school)	5
I found a better job that is education-related (e.g., school administration, tutoring)	23
I found a better job that is not education-related	13
My pay was not sufficient	24
I did not get enough support from my district or school	29
The stress and disappointments of teaching weren't worth it	43
I didn't like the way things were run at my school	32
Other	32

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they took scheduled retirement, were furloughed, or were laid off. Respondents were instructed to select all responses that apply; percentages will not sum to 100.

TABLE B.9  
Current Employment Status

Question 9. What is your current employment status? Indicate your *main* job if you hold more than one. (N = 955)

Status	Percentage
Retired	26
Teach in a private school	7
Work as a tutor	4
Hold a nontraditional teaching role (e.g., leading a learning pod or teaching in a micro school)	4
Work in a position in the field of education, but not as a teacher	18
Work in a position outside the field of education	14
Enrolled as a full-time or part-time student	3
Unemployed and not seeking a job	10
Unemployed and seeking a job	5
Other	10

TABLE B.10  
Positive Attributes of Current Position

Question 10. What attributes of your current, main job attracted you to the position? (N = 194)

Attribute	Percentage
More flexibility in your schedule	59
Better work climate	55
Better pay	47
Less student test score-related school accountability	43
Greater impact on children and/or their families	41
More chances to innovate how or what to teach	40
More supportive peers and/or school leader(s)	35
Fewer work hours	29
More control over what I teach	28
More job responsibility	21
Better benefits	20
Other	11
More job stability	10

NOTE: Respondents only saw this question if they indicated that they are currently employed as a private school teacher, tutor, in a nontraditional teaching role, or in a nonteaching education-related position and said that a "better" teaching or education-related job was one of their reasons for leaving public school teaching. Respondents were instructed to select all responses that apply; percentages will not sum to 100.

TABLE B.11  
Intention to Remain in Current Position

Question 11. Do you intend to remain in this job as of next school year (2021–22)? (N = 441)

Response	Percentage
No	7
Yes	71
Maybe	22

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they indicated a nonworking employment status.

TABLE B.12  
Main Reasons for Not Planning to Remain in Current Position

Question 12. What are the main reasons you do not plan to remain in this job as of next school year (2021–2022)? (N = 30)

Reasons	Percentage
The position will end before or during the 2021–2022 school year	10
I plan to retire	10
I plan to return to public school teaching	50
I plan to stay in the same career, but find a better job	13
I plan to change careers	23
I plan to enroll in school as a full-time or part-time student	3
Other	7

NOTE: Only respondents who indicated a working employment status and who indicated that they do not intend to remain in their job as of the next school year saw this question. Respondents were instructed to select all responses that apply; percentages will not sum to 100.

TABLE B.13  
Earnings in Current Position Relative to Public School Teaching

Question 13. How do your earnings in your current main job compare with your earnings as a public school teacher? (N = 441)

Response	Percentage
I earn less now	44
I earn about the same	17
I earn more now	39

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they indicated a nonworking employment status.

TABLE B.14  
Current Job Benefits

Question 14. Does your new job include benefits such as health insurance and retirement benefits? (N = 441)

Response	Percentage
No	39
Yes	61

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they indicated a nonworking employment status.

TABLE B.15  
Health Insurance

Question 15. Do you have health insurance? (*N* = 171)

Response	Percentage
No	19
Yes	81

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they indicated a nonworking employment status or if they indicated that their new job includes benefits.

TABLE B.16  
Degree of Difficulty Covering Expenses

Question 16. In the past month, how difficult has it been for you to cover your expenses and pay all your bills? (*N* = 953)

Response	Percentage
Very difficult	7
Somewhat difficult	36
Not at all difficult	56
Don't know	1

## Demographics and Teaching Experience

TABLE B.17  
Racial Demographics

Question 17. What is your race? (*N* = 952)

Response	Percentage
White	84
Black or African-American	9
Asian	2
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0
American Indian or Alaska Native	1
I prefer not to answer	5

NOTE: Respondents were instructed to select all responses that apply; percentages will not sum to 100.

TABLE B.18  
Hispanic or Latino Demographics

Question 18. Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin? (*N* = 950)

Response	Percentage
No	93
Yes	7

TABLE B.19  
Age Demographics

Question 19. In what year were you born? (N = 948)

Decade	Percentage
1940–1949	1
1950–1959	22
1960–1969	18
1970–1979	16
1980–1989	30
1990–1999	14

NOTE: Respondents entered their birth year. The responses have been grouped for the table.

TABLE B.20  
Years of Teaching Experience

Question 20. Including the most recent partial or full year in which you taught in a public school, how long have you worked as a teacher? (N = 949)

Response	Percentage				
	0–5 Years	6–10 Years	11–15 Years	16–20 Years	21 Years or More
Total number of years teaching	15	24	14	11	36
Total number of years teaching in a public school	19	24	14	10	33
Total number of years teaching in a private school	94	3	1	1	1

NOTE: Respondents entered total years for each question. The responses have been grouped for the table.

TABLE B.21  
Grades Taught

Question 21. In the most recent year in which you taught in a public school, what grade(s) did you teach? (N = 949)

Grade(s) taught	Percentage
Kindergarten	16
Grade 1	16
Grade 2	18
Grade 3	17
Grade 4	17
Grade 5	16
Grade 6	18
Grade 7	18
Grade 8	19
Grade 9	21
Grade 10	23
Grade 11	25
Grade 12	24
Ungraded (including special education students aged 18–22)	2
Other	6

NOTE: Respondents were instructed to select all responses that apply; percentages will not sum to 100.

TABLE B.22

## Subjects Taught

Question 22. In the most recent year in which you taught in a public school, please indicate the subject(s) you taught. (*N* = 949)

Subject(s) taught	Percentage
Mathematics (including general mathematics, algebra, geometry, calculus, etc.)	46
English language arts (including English, language arts, reading, literature, writing, speech, etc.)	52
Natural science (including general science, biology, chemistry, physics, etc.)	37
Social science (including social studies, geography, history, government/civics, etc.)	38
Art and/or music	12
Health education	7
World languages	4
Computer science	6
Career or technical education	5
Special education	14
English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Language Development (ELD)	8
Physical education	3
Other	5

NOTE: Respondents were instructed to select all responses that apply; percentages will not sum to 100.

TABLE B.23

## Frequency of Work Stress

Question 23. In the most recent year in which you taught in a public school, how often was work stressful? (*N* = 949)

Frequency	Percentage
Never	0
Hardly ever	3
Sometimes	20
Often	42
Always	35

TABLE B.24

## Hours Worked per Week During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Question 24. During a typical full week in your last year in a public school, approximately how many hours did you work? (*N* = 424)

Number of hours	Percentage
0 to 31 hours	4
32 to 39 hours	2
40 to 47 hours	28
48 to 55 hours	33
56 to 63 hours	22
64 hours or more	11

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they left public school teaching prior to March 2020. Responses have been grouped into ranges for the table.

TABLE B.25

## Hours Worked per Week Before the COVID-19 Pandemic

Question 25. During a typical full week of teaching before COVID-19, approximately how many hours did you work? (*N* = 948)

Number of hours	Percentage
0 to 31 hours	6
32 to 39 hours	3
40 to 47 hours	30
48 to 55 hours	36
56 to 63 hours	17
64 hours or more	8

NOTE: Responses have been grouped into ranges for the table.

TABLE B.26

## Hours Slept on School Nights During COVID-19 Pandemic

Question 26. How many hours did you sleep on average during a 24-hour period on school nights while teaching during COVID-19? (*N* = 423)

Number of hours	Percentage
0 to 4 hours	7
5 hours	15
6 hours	33
7 hours	28
8 hours	14
9+ hours	2

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they left public school teaching prior to March 2020. Responses have been grouped into ranges for the table.

TABLE B.27

## Hours Slept on School Nights Before the COVID-19 Pandemic

Question 27. How many hours did you sleep on average during a 24-hour period on school nights while teaching before COVID-19? (*N* = 937)

Number of hours	Percentage
0 to 4 hours	2
5 hours	11
6 hours	27
7 hours	34
8 hours	24
9+ hours	3

NOTE: Responses have been grouped into ranges for the table.

TABLE B.28

## Title I Designation

Question 28. Did the most recent public school you worked at have a schoolwide Title I designation? (N = 949)

Response	Percentage
No	27
Yes	62
I don't know	11

TABLE B.29

## Percentage of English Language Learners in Class

Question 29. When you were last teaching in a public school, approximately what percentage of your students were English language learners? (N = 949)

Percentage	Percentage
0 to 10 percent	53
11 to 25 percent	19
26 to 50 percent	13
51 to 75 percent	5
76 to 100 percent	10

TABLE B.30

## Percentage of Students with Accommodations

Question 30. When you were last teaching in a public school, approximately what percentage of your students had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and/or 504 plan? (N = 949)

Percentage	Percentage
0 to 10 percent	29
11 to 25 percent	37
26 to 50 percent	24
51 to 75 percent	4
76 to 100 percent	7

TABLE B.31

## Union Membership

Question 31. When you were last teaching in a public school, were you a member of a teachers' union or an education association similar to a union? (N = 949)

Response	Percentage
No	39
Yes	61

TABLE B.32

## Participation in Retirement System

Question 32. In the most recent year in which you taught in a public school, did you participate in a teacher retirement system? (*N* = 949)

Response	Percentage
No	8
Yes	92

TABLE B.33

## Base Teaching Salary

Question 33. When you were last teaching in a public school, what was your base teaching salary for the entire school year? (*N* = 872)

Amount	Percentage
\$0 to \$29,999	2
\$30,000 to \$49,999	39
\$50,000 to \$69,999	38
\$70,000 to \$89,999	14
\$90,000 or more	8

NOTE: Responses have been grouped into ranges for the table.

TABLE B.34

## Additional Compensation While Working in Public School

Question 34. When you were last teaching in a public school, did you earn additional compensation from working in any additional jobs beyond your public school teaching position? (*N* = 946)

Response	Percentage
No	64
Yes	36

TABLE B.35

## Additional Job(s) Held at the Same Time as Public School Teaching Position

Question 35. Which of the following best describes the additional job(s)? (*N* = 343)

Description	Percentage
Tutoring	34
Nontraditional teaching position (e.g., leading a learning pod or working in a micro school)	3
Teaching in a summer school	16
Teaching a second job in another school during the school year	6
Paid by my district or another district for work other than teaching (e.g., athletic coach, coaching other teachers, writing assessments or curriculum, serving as department head)	48
Other education-related work that is not tutoring or teaching (e.g., essay review, curriculum development)	22
I received pay for a noneducation-related position (e.g., bartending, cashiering, consulting)	26
Other	13

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they indicated that they did not earn additional compensation from work beyond their public school teaching position. Respondents were instructed to select all responses that apply; percentages will not sum to 100.

TABLE B.36

## Income Earned from Employment Outside School District

Question 36. How much were you paid for all the work you performed outside of your school district in the last full year you were a public school teacher? (N = 341)

Amount	Percentage
Less than \$2,500	45
\$2,500–\$4,999	24
\$5,000–\$9,999	19
\$10,000–\$19,999	9
\$20,000–\$29,999	3
\$30,000 or more	1

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they indicated that they did not earn additional compensation from work beyond their public school teaching position.

## Teaching Experience During the COVID-19 Pandemic

TABLE B.37

## Instructional Model Provided During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Question 37. Which of the following most closely reflects how instruction was provided most of the time you were teaching in a public school during COVID-19? (N = 423)

Type of instruction	Percentage
Fully remote instruction, where a large majority or all of your students received at least one synchronous class each school day	36
Fully remote instruction, where a large majority or all of your students received less than one synchronous class each school day (i.e., instruction might be distributed via paper workbooks or asynchronous videos)	45
Hybrid model where a majority or all of your students receive some in-person instruction and some remote instruction	14
Fully in-person instruction each school day for the majority, if not all, of your students	4

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they left public school teaching before March 2020.

TABLE B.38

## Instructional Model Preferred During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Question 38. Which of the following most closely reflects how you would have liked instruction to be provided to your students during COVID-19? (N = 424)

Type of instruction	Percentage
Fully remote instruction, where a large majority or all of your students received at least one synchronous class each school day	46
Fully remote instruction, where a large majority or all of your students received less than one synchronous class each school day (i.e., instruction might be distributed via paper workbooks or asynchronous videos)	16
Hybrid model where a majority or all of your students receive some in-person instruction and some remote instruction	21
Fully in-person instruction each school day for the majority, if not all, of your students	17

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they left public school teaching before March 2020.

TABLE B.39

## Experience Delivering Remote Instruction Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Question 39. Prior to COVID-19, did you have any experience delivering instruction to students remotely (e.g., running a blended learning class, a fully online class, or assigning and receiving student work through an online learning management system)? (*N* = 424)

Response	Percentage
No	66
Yes	34

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they left public school teaching before March 2020.

TABLE B.40

## Presence of Sufficient Technology to Deliver Instruction Remotely

Question 40. Did you have an up-to-date computer or tablet that worked sufficiently for you to deliver instruction remotely during COVID-19? (*N* = 424)

Response	Percentage
No, I only had an out-of-date computer or tablet of my own.	6
No, I only had an out-of-date computer or tablet my school or district issued to me.	8
Yes, I had my own up-to-date computer or tablet.	30
Yes, I had an up-to-date computer or tablet my school or district issued to me.	56

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they left public school teaching before March 2020.

TABLE B.41

## High-Speed Internet Access

Question 41. Did you have high-speed internet access at home that worked sufficiently for you to deliver instruction remotely during COVID-19? (*N* = 423)

Response	Percentage
No, I did not have home internet access.	3
Yes	74
I had home internet access, but it was not fast or reliable enough to deliver instruction without technical problems.	23

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they left public school teaching before March 2020.

TABLE B.42

## Frequency of Technical Problems During Remote Teaching

Question 42. After about a month into remote teaching, how frequently did you personally experience technical problems? (*N* = 424)

Frequency	Percentage
I experienced technical problems daily	13
I experienced technical problems several days a week	29
I experienced technical problems about one day a week	23
I experienced technical problems less often than one day a week	29
N/A—I didn't use online instruction with my students	6

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they left public school teaching before March 2020.

TABLE B.43

### Frequency of Typical Student-Experienced Technical Problems During Remote Teaching

Question 43. After about a month into remote teaching, how frequently did your typical student experience technical problems? (*N* = 424)

Frequency	Percentage
My typical student experienced technical problems daily	25
My typical student experienced technical problems several days a week	32
My typical student experienced technical problems about one day a week	25
My typical student experienced technical problems less often than one day a week	12
N/A—I didn't use online instruction with my students	6

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they left public school teaching before March 2020.

TABLE B.44

### Guidance and Support for Students with Particular Needs

Question 44. Did you receive adequate guidance and support from any source in your public school system to address the learning needs of each of the following groups of students at any point during COVID-19? (*N* = 424)

Group of students	Percentage			N/A, I Did Not Teach These Students
	Yes	No	I Don't Know	
Students with mild or moderate disabilities	28	54	4	13
Students with severe disabilities	9	37	4	50
English language learners	23	49	5	23
Students affected by poverty	30	55	9	6
Students experiencing homelessness	15	50	13	21
Students whose work was below grade level	29	62	5	4
All other students	45	40	8	7

NOTE: N/A = not applicable. Respondents did not see this question if they left public school teaching before March 2020.

TABLE B.45

### Lesson Planning While Remote Teaching

Question 45. Which of the following best describes how you planned the majority of your lessons after your school stopped in-person instruction because of COVID-19? (*N* = 421)

Response	Percentage
I drew on existing lesson plans from the school or district curricula	32
I drew on existing lesson plans from sources not provided by my district or school (e.g., crowdsourcing websites like Teachers Pay Teachers)	25
I created new lesson plans from scratch	43

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they left public school teaching before March 2020.

TABLE B.46

## Ability to Deliver Remote Instruction

Question 46. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements. (*N* = 420)

Statement	Percentage			
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
My school or district provided me adequate training in how to deliver instruction remotely.	32	32	31	5
I was able to deliver remote instruction well.	12	28	46	14

NOTE: Respondents did not see this question if they left public school teaching before March 2020.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although we know that half of our sample left the teaching profession prior to the 2019–2020 school year, we do not know precisely when these teachers left. However, we review information on ATP panelists annually and clean out inactive public school teachers from the panel. Therefore, we presume that the majority of our teacher leavers who left before the pandemic began would have left public school teaching no earlier than the 2018–2019 school year, which was the last time we performed this cleaning process. Nevertheless, it is possible that our cleaning process does not precisely capture the specific school year in which teachers leave the profession (and therefore that some former teachers in our sample left the profession earlier than the 2018–2019 school year) because we are rarely informed when a teacher leaves the profession.

<sup>2</sup> A respondent's age was calculated using the birthdate that they provided on the survey. Therefore, a respondent's age is as of the date they took the survey, not the age they were when they left the teaching profession. Because we assume that everyone in our sample has left public school teaching within the last year or two, we feel comfortable assuming that the respondent's age as of December 2020 is a reasonable proxy for their age at the time that they left the teaching profession.

<sup>3</sup> Respondents' answers to the question "How did you leave your public school teaching position?" determined which follow-up questions they received about their reasons for leaving the profession. One hundred fifty respondents (or 16 percent of our sample) selected "Other" and provided a written response. We reviewed these responses and reclassified them into the response options provided on the survey. We classified 141 of these respondents (or 95 percent) as voluntary early leavers (i.e., those who left the profession by resigning, taking early retirement, or taking unpaid leave). Respondents who taught during the pandemic and were reclassified to be voluntary early leavers did not receive the follow-up question about whether the pandemic was their main reason for leaving the profession.

<sup>4</sup> The difference in teachers' salaries at the time that they left the profession could also be related to other factors, such as their years of teaching experience. Pandemic early teacher leavers left the profession with 1.6 more years of teaching experience on average than their pre-pandemic counterparts. Furthermore, as noted previously, we do not know precisely when pre-pandemic teacher leavers left the profession. Therefore, we are unable to adjust teachers' salaries for year-to-year inflation differences to appropriately account for the year in which teachers' left the profession.

<sup>5</sup> This includes some individuals who hold a teaching job at the early childhood or postsecondary level.

<sup>6</sup> The 2012–2013 TFS counts a teacher who left a public school teaching position and moved to a private school teaching position as a "mover" (i.e., someone who is still teaching but has moved to a different school), and therefore does not consider those teachers part of teacher attrition. In contrast, our survey counts teachers who have left a public school teaching position for a private school teaching position as a "leaver."

## About This Report

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## About the Authors

**Melissa Kay Diliberti** is an assistant policy researcher at RAND and a doctoral fellow at the Pardee RAND Graduate School. Her research interests include survey design and methodology and educational equity. She holds a master of public policy degree.

**Heather L. Schwartz** is the director of the pre-K to 12 educational systems program within the Education and Labor division of RAND. She researches education and housing policies intended to reduce the negative effects of poverty on children and families. She holds a Ph.D. in education policy.

**David Grant** is a senior social/behavioral scientist at RAND. Grant has extensive survey research experience, including telephone-based surveys, random digit-dial sampling, address-based sampling, noncoverage, and nonresponse bias. Grant holds a Ph.D. in sociology.



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