RAND AMERICAN EDUCATOR PANELS

Data Note

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Teacher Well-Being, Pay, and Intentions to Leave in 2026

Selected Findings from the 2026 State of the American Teacher Survey

For more information on this publication, visit **www.rand.org/t/RRA4404-2**.

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Summary of Key Findings

- In 2026, teachers were more likely than similar working adults to report experiencing poor well-being on every indicator—a consistent pattern since 2021.
- Since 2021, female teachers have been consistently more likely to report experiencing frequent job-related stress than male teachers and male or female similar working adults.
- The share of teachers who intended to leave their jobs was 18 percent in 2026. About one in four teachers plan to stay in teaching as long as they are able.
- Thirty percent of teachers reported holding a job outside their school systems. These teachers reported spending 13 hours per week, on average, working at this job.
- Teachers reported an average base salary of $75,599 in 2026, while similar working adults reported an average base salary of slightly more than $105,000.
- Only four in ten teachers reported pay raises in 2026 after adjusting for inflation.
- On average, teachers' total pay accounted for 60 percent of household income; similar working adults' total pay accounted for 68 percent of household income.
- Teachers reported spending a little more than $600 out of pocket on school supplies.

Overview of the State of the American Teacher Survey

- In this report, we present weighted results from the 2026 State of the American Teacher (SoT) survey, with new information about the well-being, intentions to leave, pay, and working conditions of K–12 teachers nationally that is relevant to state legislators, school district leaders, and school principals.
- The 2026 SoT survey received responses from 829 K–12 public school teachers across the country from late January to late February 2026. We weighted responses to represent U.S. public K–12 teachers nationally.
- For select items, we compared teachers' responses with those of a nationally representative sample of 498 similar working adults from RAND's American Life Panel (ALP) during February 2026. We define *similar working adults* as between the ages of 18 and 65, holding at least a bachelor's degree, working at least 35 hours per week (Allegretto, 2025), and not currently employed as a K–12 teacher in a public, private, or charter school.
- Where possible, we compared the 2026 survey responses of teachers and similar working adults with those from prior administrations of the SoT survey.
- We examined responses for subgroups of teachers for whom we might expect to see variation in well-being, intentions to leave, pay, or working conditions. We compared teachers across personal characteristics (e.g., gender, race, years of teaching experience), school characteristics (e.g., grade level), and whether they teach in a state where collective bargaining is required, allowed, or prohibited. In some cases, where research or theory suggests teacher or school characteristics could explain differences, we explored the robustness of subgroup differences to the inclusion of statistical controls for select teacher or school characteristics.
- The sections on data, methods, limitations, and findings contain recycled text from prior SoT reports and our technical documentation (Doan et al., 2025; Doan et al., 2026; Steiner et al., 2025). Additional methodological and technical details appear at the end of this report.

Limitations

- Like all survey research, SoT survey data are self-reported and may be subject to reporting biases, such as recall bias or social desirability bias. This may be especially true for some topics, such as well-being, intentions to leave their job, or pay.
- In our 2025 and 2026 ALP surveys of similar working adults, we screened out respondents who said that they were currently employed as K–12 teachers. However, we did not do so in 2022, 2023, and 2024; roughly 15 percent of ALP survey respondents in those years had occupations categorized as "Education, Training, or Library Occupation." Although this category includes postsecondary educators, library staff, museum employees, pre-kindergarten educators, and other

occupational categories that are not K–12 educators, some portion of the ALP samples in 2022, 2023 and 2024 likely included K–12 educators, minimizing observed differences between the American Teacher Panel (ATP) and ALP samples.

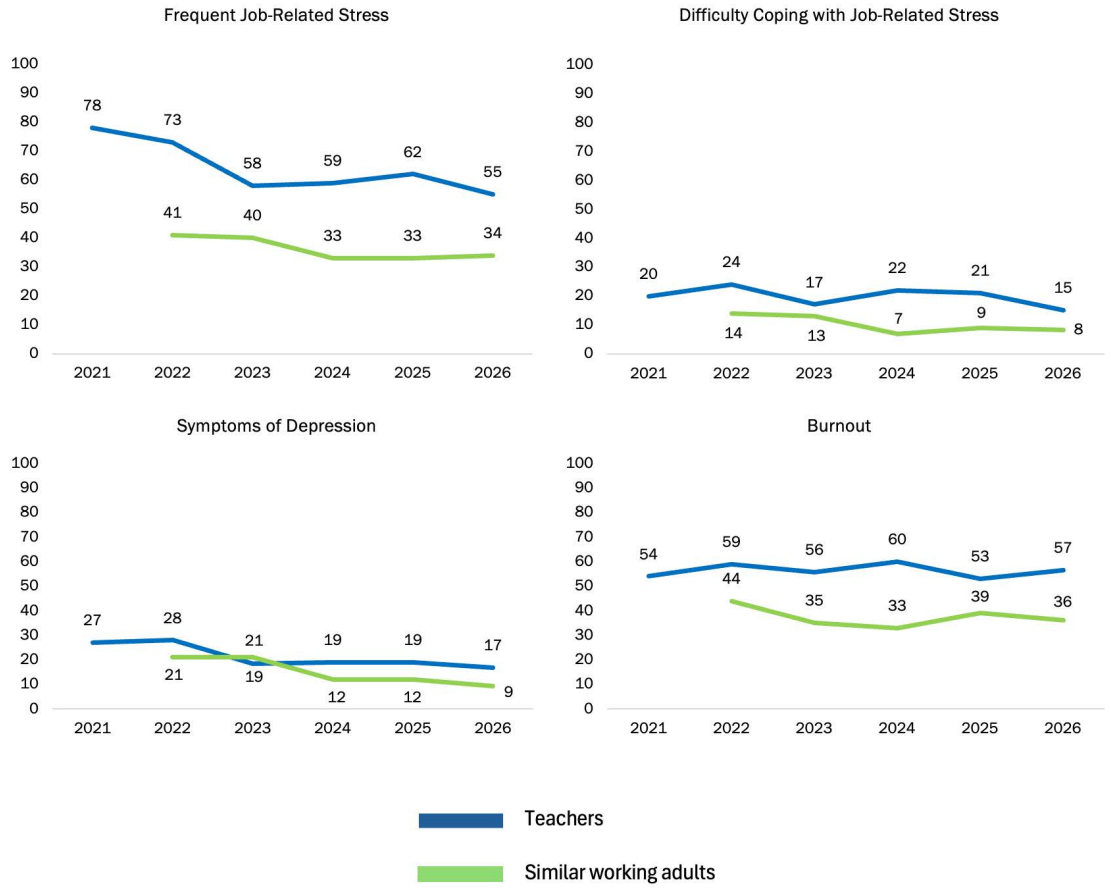
- Teachers and similar working adults, as defined here, likely differ in numerous ways that may affect job satisfaction, intentions to leave their job, salaries, or perceptions of working conditions, which we did not measure in this survey.
- We report tests of statistical significance to identify differences that may be relevant to education policymakers, researchers, and practitioners. These differences are affected by multiple factors, many of which are unmeasured in our surveys. Therefore, readers should not interpret our results as evidence of causal relationships.
- Although we present data from prior years of the SoT survey and the ALP companion survey as comparison points for the 2026 results, these data represent cross-sectional comparisons and are not linked longitudinally. The SoT and ALP surveys are not weighted for formal comparison across years or samples. Therefore, we were unable to perform tests of statistical significance to compare responses across years or between teachers and similar working adults.

How to Read the Figures in This Report

- In the figures in this report, we use asterisks (*) and bold text to indicate where teacher subgroup responses are statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from the reference group (indicated with *ref.*) before controlling for any teacher- or school-level characteristics. In figures that present multiple years of data, we show significant differences within survey year.
- In this report, we include three types of figures: line charts, bar charts, and heat maps.
  - **Line charts** display survey responses across different years of the SoT survey.
  - **Bar charts** display survey responses across teacher subgroups. Black lines indicate 95-percent confidence intervals.
  - **Heat maps** use color to highlight higher and lower percentages. Lighter-colored cells represent smaller percentages or means; progressively darker shades represent larger percentages or means. We order rows from most to least common survey response among teachers overall when applicable.
- For select figures, we describe in text additional relevant subgroup estimates that are not depicted in the figure.
- Figures 1 through 6 display job-related stress, intentions to leave, and weekly hours spent on work, household duties, and sleep. Figures 7 through 10 show base pay, pay increases, and out-of-pocket spending on school supplies.

Teachers Were Consistently More Likely Than Similar Working Adults to Experience Poor Well-Being

Figure 1. Well-Being of Teachers and Similar Working Adults



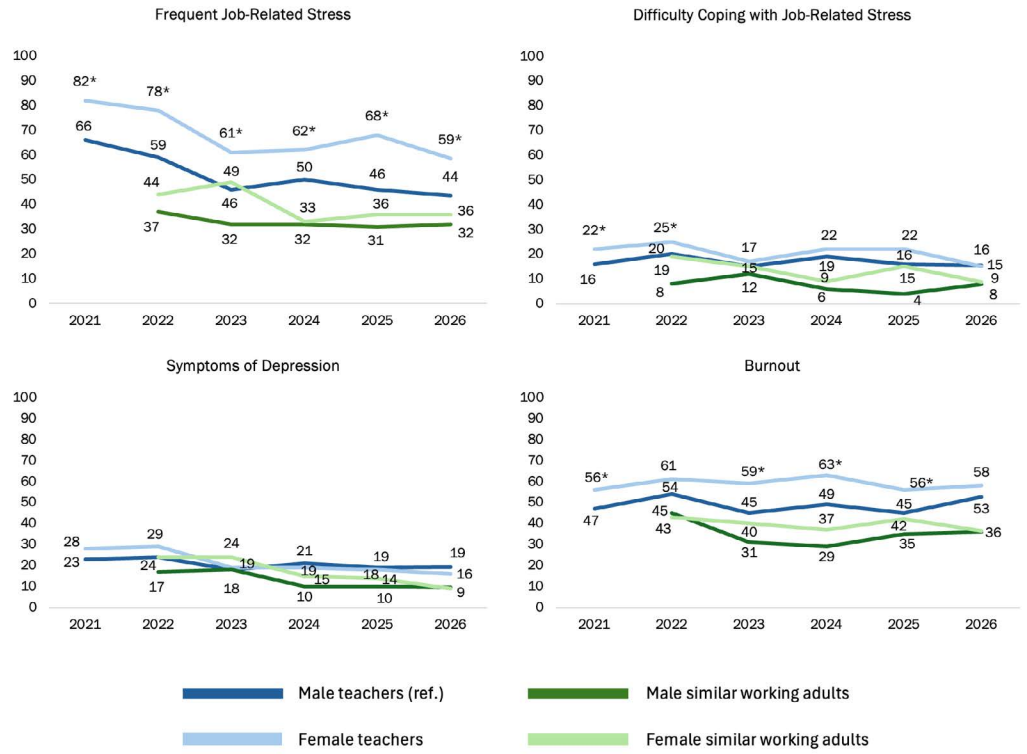
NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentages of teachers (blue) and similar working adults (green) coded as having or experiencing each of the indicators of well-being based on their survey responses. We describe how we measured each well-being indicator in the "How We Conducted This Analysis" section at the end of this report. The sample sizes for the 2026 data are as follows: teachers *n* = 826–829; and similar working adults *n* = 498. The 2021–2025 sample sizes ranged from 1,066 to 2,349 for teachers and from 216 to 507 for similar working adults.

Figure 1 shows K–12 public school teachers' self-reported well-being compared with that of similar working adults in the United States since January 2021, which was the first year we measured these indicators. In 2026, teachers were more likely than similar working adults to experience poor well-being on every indicator, consistent with previous years.

In spring 2026, the shares of teachers who reported experiencing burnout and symptoms of depression were similar to the shares who reported the same in spring 2023, spring 2024, and spring 2025; differences were 4 percentage points or fewer. The share of teachers who reported experiencing frequent job-related stress dropped from 62 percent in 2025 to 55 percent in 2026, and the share of teachers who reported difficulty coping with job-related stress dropped from 21 percent in 2025 to 15 percent in 2026. The relative stability of teachers' reports since 2023 suggests that teacher well-being may have stabilized since the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The larger fluctuation in teachers' reports of job-related stress over time compared with the other measures suggests that this measure may be more sensitive to personal, school, or environmental factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, than the other measures of well-being we ask about. Other research suggests that the overall well-being of the profession is at its lowest point in 50 years (Kraft and Lyon, 2024).

Female Teachers Were Consistently More Likely to Report Frequent Job-Related Stress Than Male Teachers

Figure 2. Well-Being of Teachers and Similar Working Adults, by Gender



NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentages of male teachers (dark blue), female teachers (light blue), male similar working adults (dark green), and female similar working adults (light green) coded as having or experiencing each of the indicators of well-being based on their survey responses. We describe how we measured each well-being indicator in the "How We Conducted This Analysis" section at the end of this report. The sample sizes for the 2026 data are as follows: male teachers n = 207–208; female teachers n = 602–605; male similar working adults n = 260; and female similar working adults n = 238. The sample sizes for 2021–2025 ranged from 237 to 507 for male teachers, from 763 to 1,839 for female teachers, from 101 to 247 for male similar working adults, and from 113 to 259 for female similar working adults. An asterisk (*) indicates that percentages for female teachers significantly differed at the $p < 0.05$ level from the reference group (male teachers) labeled (ref.) within the respective survey year. We do not display statistical significance for similar working adults.

Figure 2 shows male and female teachers' self-reported well-being compared with that of male and female similar working adults since January 2021. Female teachers have been consistently more likely to report experiencing frequent job-related stress than male teachers and male or female similar working adults. In 2026, 59 percent of female teachers experienced frequent job-related stress compared with 44 percent of male teachers, a statistically significant difference of 15 percentage points.

Between 2021 and 2026, female teachers were consistently more likely to report feelings of burnout than male teachers and male or female similar working adults. However, the gap between male and female teachers shrunk by half in 2026 and became statistically insignificant, and more male teachers reported feelings of burnout in 2026 than in prior years going back to 2022.

There are many possible reasons why more female teachers report experiencing job-related stress and burnout than male teachers. These reasons include differences in how female teachers experience working conditions, differences in the distribution of teachers by gender across grade level (e.g., 90 percent of elementary grade teachers are female), lower pay, or differences in home or family demands that affect their experiences at work (Quintero, Hansen, and Zerbino, 2023; Redding and Nguyen, 2024; Steiner, Woo, and Doan, 2023; Steiner, Woo, and Doan, 2025).

Among similar working adults, more females than males consistently reported experiencing frequent job-related stress, difficulty coping with job-related stress, and burnout, but the differences were generally smaller than they were for teachers. For example, in 2026, the difference between male and female similar working adults who reported frequent job-related stress was only 4 percentage points, one-third of the gap between male and female teachers.

Teacher Intentions to Leave Their Jobs Held Steady from the 2024–2025 to 2025–2026 School Years

Figure 3. Teachers' Intentions to Leave Their Current Teaching Jobs over Time, by Race and Gender

Year	All teachers	Teacher Race		Teacher Gender	
		White (ref.)	Non-White	Male (ref.)	Female
2022–2023 school year	23	22	26	17	25*
2023–2024 school year	22	20	30*	20	23
2024–2025 school year	16	14	23*	15	15
2025–2026 school year	18	17	21	14	19

NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentages of teachers indicating that they were "somewhat likely" or "very likely" to leave their current teaching jobs by the end of the 2025–2026 school year by race and gender. We asked teachers the following question: "What is the likelihood that you will leave your job at your school by the end of the current school year (2022–2023/2023–2024/2024–2025/2025–2026)?" The sample sizes are as follows: all teachers n = 788–1,479; White teachers n = 395–641; non-White teachers n = 147–1,044; male teachers n = 200–332; and female teachers n = 572–1,095. An asterisk (*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differed at the $p < 0.05$ level from the reference group labeled (ref.) within the respective survey year.

Figure 3 shows that the share of teachers intending to leave their jobs by the end of the 2025–2026 school year remained stable compared with the 2024–2025 school year. The longer-term decline in teachers' intentions to leave since the 2022–2023 school year is consistent with recent research using state administrative data, which found declining estimates of teacher turnover in North Carolina and Arkansas in the years following a peak during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bastian and Fuller, 2024; Camp, Zamarro, and McGee, 2024; Camp, Zamarro, and McGee, 2025). This pattern also aligns with recent district leader–reported estimates provided in a fall 2025 nationally representative survey of public school districts (DiNicola, Keskin, and Master, 2026).

More female teachers and non-White teachers expressed intentions to leave than their peers, although these differences were not consistently statistically significant across years. Notably, the differences in intentions to leave between White and non-White teachers in the 2025–2026 school year (4 percentage points) are smaller than the differences found in the prior two school years. The rates of intentions to leave were lower in 2025–2026 than in 2022–2023 for all subgroups reported in Figure 3.

Intentions to leave are an imperfect predictor of behavior, but teachers who state an intention to leave are more likely to resign than those who do not state such an intention (Grant and Brantlinger, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2025). A delay in leaving could explain the difference (Nguyen et al., 2025). Or intent to leave may signal job dissatisfaction rather than a plan to resign (Steiner et al., 2022). Thus, policymakers should use caution when interpreting these results solely as predictors of teacher attrition.

About One in Four Teachers Plan to Stay in Teaching as Long as They Are Able

Figure 4. How Long Teachers Plan to Remain in Teaching, by Race, Experience, and School Poverty

Which statement best describes how long you plan to remain in teaching?	All teachers	Teacher Race		Teacher Experience				School Poverty		
		White (ref.)	Non-White	0–5 years	6–10 years	11–20 years	21 or more years (ref.)	Low	Middle (Ref.)	High
	n = 788	n = 641	n = 147	n = 41	n = 160	n = 309	n = 263	n = 251	n = 431	n = 100
Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from this job	44	47	31*	23*	32*	47*	59	50	43	37
As long as I am able	23	21	31*	31	28*	19	19	19	22	32
Until a more desirable job opportunity comes along	14	13	20	27*	18*	19*	3	10*	17	13
Undecided at this time	8	8	8	9	8	8	8	11	7	6
Until a specific life event occurs (e.g., parenthood, marriage, retirement of spouse or partner)	5	5	3	5	8	3	4	5	5	5
Definitely plan to leave as soon as I can	3	3	4	5	4	2	3	1	3	5
Until I am eligible for Social Security benefits	2	3	2	0*	2	2	4	5	2	2
Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from a previous job	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0

NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentages of teachers indicating which statement best describes how long they plan to remain in teaching. We asked teachers the following question: "Which statement best describes how long you plan to remain in teaching?" Teachers could select only one response option. See the "How We Conducted This Analysis" section for definitions of low, middle, and high school poverty. An asterisk (*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differed at the $p < 0.05$ level from the reference group labeled (ref.).

Figure 4 displays teachers' retention plans by race, experience, and school poverty. Twenty-three percent of teachers—about one in four—plan to remain in teaching as long as they are able. Forty-Four percent of teachers plan to remain until they are eligible for retirement. Fourteen percent of teachers plan to stay until a more desirable job comes along, and only 3 percent of teachers plan to leave as soon as they can.

Teachers' reported intentions to stay varied by experience, race, and school poverty. Twenty-seven percent of teachers with 0–5 years of experience reported that they planned to stay in teaching until a more desirable job comes along, which is significantly more than the 3 percent of teachers with 21 or more years of experience that said the same. This pattern held for teachers with 6–10 and 11–20 years of experience compared with those with 21 or more years of experience. These differences remained statistically significant after controlling for base pay. More early-career teachers reported planning to stay as long as they were able than did teachers later in their careers, although the difference was only significant for teachers with 6–10 years of experience.

Among non-White teachers, 31 percent said that they planned to stay in teaching as long as they were able and 20 percent planned to stay until a more desirable job comes along compared with 21 percent and 13 percent of White teachers, respectively, who said the same. Only the first difference was statistically significant.

Fifty percent of teachers in low-poverty schools planned to stay in teaching until they were eligible for retirement compared with 37 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools. More teachers from high-poverty schools planned to stay in teaching as long as they were able. Although substantively large, these differences are not statistically significant, possibly because of small sample sizes.

Managing Student Behavior Was a Top Source of Job-Related Stress for Half of Teachers

Figure 5. Teachers' Top-Ranked Sources of Job-Related Stress, by Race and Years of Experience

Source of Stress	All teachers	Teacher Race		Teacher Experience			
		White (ref.)	Non-White	0–5 years	6–10 years	11–20 years	21 or more years (ref.)
	n = 829	n = 673	n = 156	n = 44	n = 170	n = 327	n = 271
Managing student behavior	52	53	49	61	56	52	47
My salary is too low	33	32	39	31	45*	33*	24
I spend too many hours working outside of my contract hours	32	32	36	32	35	31	33
Administrative work outside of teaching (e.g., paperwork, teacher evaluation)	32	32	32	25	27*	32	39
Supporting my students' mental health and well-being	25	26	19	34	21	23	28
Feeling like the goals and expectations of the school are unattainable	24	24	23	35	23	21	22
Preparing students for state standardized tests	22	22	23	22	22	24	19
Lacking support from school administrators	21	22	19	22	19	21	23
The intrusion of political issues and opinions in teaching	16	16	17	14	15	19	14
Limited voice in decision-making at my school	12	13	11	8	10*	11*	18
Taking on extra work because of staff shortages	10	10	12	0*	9	13	10
My job security	3	3	5	4	3	4	2
Working in an environment in which I feel physically unsafe	3	2	3	2	1	3	4

NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentages of teachers in response to the following question: "What are the top three sources of stress in your job right now?" The responses are shown for all teachers and for teachers disaggregated by race and experience. Teachers ranked up to three sources of stress; the figure shows the weighted percentage of teachers selecting each source of stress among their top three. An asterisk (*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the $p < 0.05$ level from the reference group labeled (ref.).

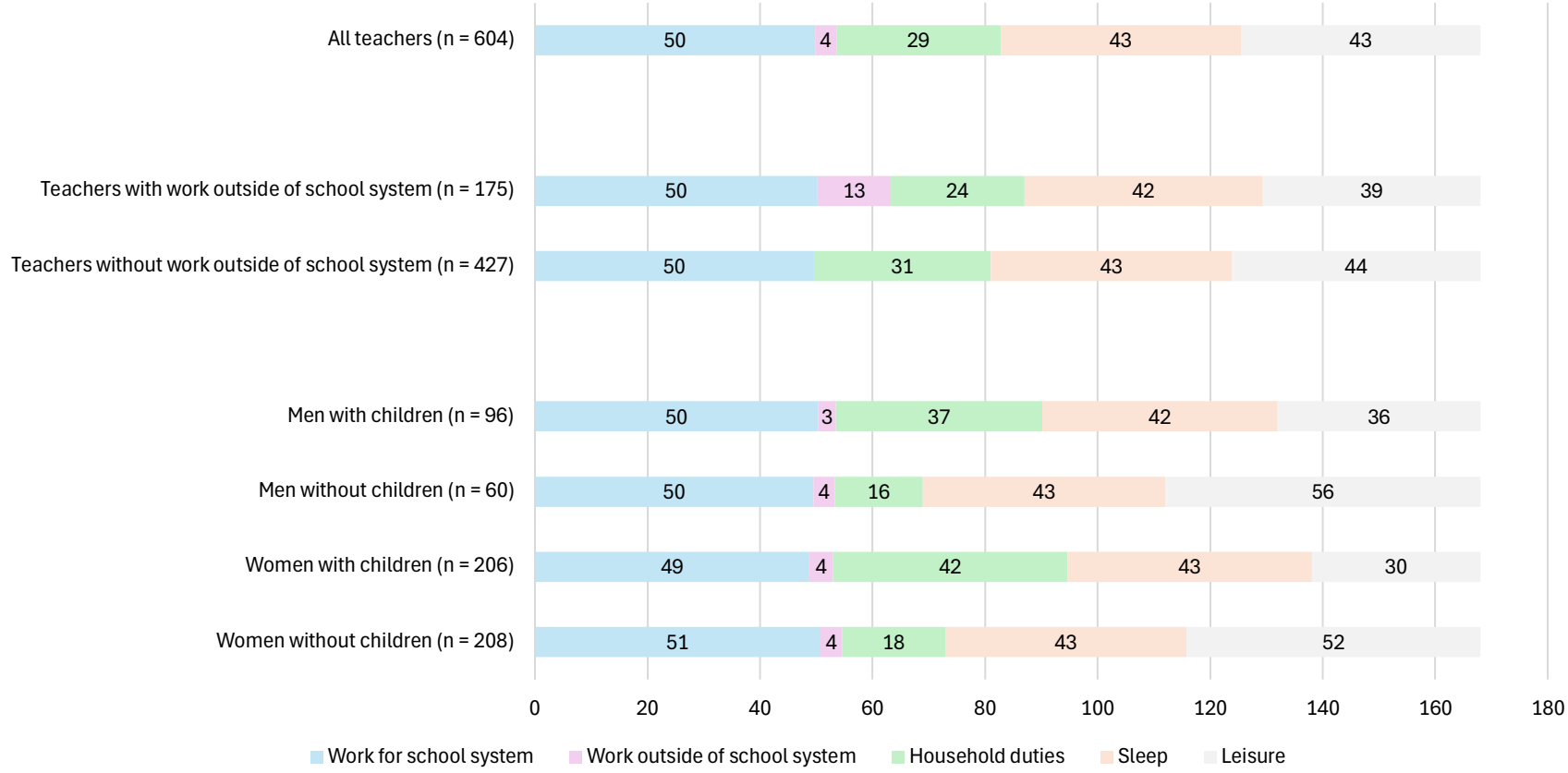
Figure 5 shows the factors that teachers ranked as being among their top three sources of job-related stress in 2026. Managing student behavior was a top source of stress for about half of teachers. Low salary ranked second at 33 percent. Thirty-two percent of teachers ranked spending too many hours working outside contract hours and performing administrative work outside teaching as among their top three sources of stress. Only three percent of teachers ranked physical safety concerns or job security among their top three stressors.

Because we asked about the same stressors in 2026 and 2025, we can make broad comparisons across years. However, few differences were larger than 5 percentage points. More teachers (32 percent) ranked spending too many hours working as a top-three stressor in 2026 than did so in 2025 (27 percent). Fewer teachers (16 percent) ranked the intrusion of political issues in teaching as a top-three source of stress than did so in 2025 (22 percent).

There were no statistically significant differences in top-ranked sources of job-related stress by teacher race and few significant differences by teacher experience. In 2026, 61 percent of teachers with 0–5 years of experience ranked managing student behavior as a top source of stress compared with about 50 percent of teachers with more experience. Despite the large magnitude, these differences were not statistically significant, possibly because of the small sample of teachers with 0–5 years of experience. More teachers with 6–10 and 11–20 years of experience ranked low salary as a top stressor than did teachers with 21 or more years of experience.

Teachers' Time Spent on Household Duties Was Shaped by Second Jobs and Children

Figure 6. Teachers' Weekly Hours Spent on Work, Household Duties, Sleep, and Leisure



NOTE: This figure displays teachers' average number of weekly hours spent on work for their school systems, work at jobs outside their school systems, household duties, sleep, and leisure time during the 2025–2026 school year for all teachers and disaggregated by whether teachers held a job outside their school systems, teacher gender, and whether teachers reported having children under 18 in their households. This figure omits responses from teachers who reported fewer total weekly hours for school-related work than total contracted hours for school-related work; see the "How We Conducted This Analysis" section for additional details.

Figure 6 shows estimates of teachers' reported or calculated weekly hours spent on work for their school systems, work at jobs outside their school systems, household duties, sleep, and leisure. Teachers did not directly report time spent on leisure in the 2026 SoT. We calculated time spent on leisure as the difference between 168—the total number of hours in a week—and the sum of the reported weekly hours spent on the other time use categories.

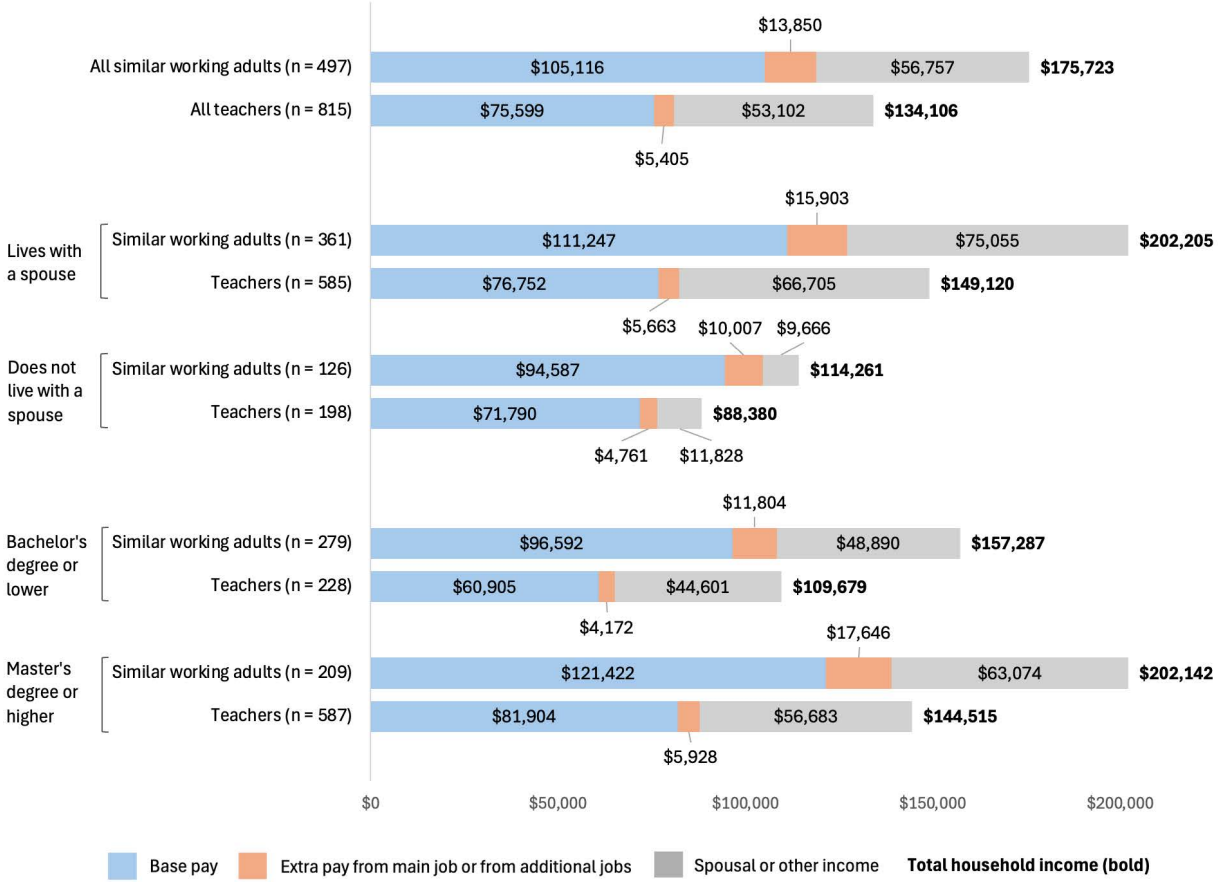
During the 2025–2026 school year, the average K–12 teacher reported spending roughly 54 hours per week on teaching and school-related activities (50 hours) and jobs outside the school system (4 hours). Teachers in high-poverty schools reported spending more time on teaching and school-related activities (54 hours) than their peers (50 hours). The average hours worked within and outside the school systems were broadly similar across other teacher and school demographic characteristics. Among teachers who reported working jobs outside their school systems, the average amount of time spent working non-school jobs averaged about 13 hours per week. About 30 percent of teachers in the 2026 SoT survey reported working at jobs outside their school systems during the school year, higher than the estimated 17 percent of public school teachers who reported the same in the 2021 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) (Wilhelm and Lewis, 2021).

Across the categories of teachers we compared, teachers consistently reported spending 42 to 43 hours per week sleeping (roughly six hours per night). We observed the most variation in reported hours spent on household duties and our constructed measure of leisure time. Teachers who held outside jobs during the school year reported spending seven fewer hours on household labor than those who did not hold outside jobs, suggesting some degree of trade-off between time spent on out-of-school and household labor.

Relative to teachers of their same gender, teachers with children reported spending 20 more hours per week on household duties, on average, than those without children. Among those with children in the household, female teachers reported spending about four more hours per week on household labor than male teachers. Female teachers with children reported the fewest hours of leisure time (30 hours) across the teacher categories we present in Figure 6. Male teachers without children had the most leisure time: an estimated 56 hours per week.

Teachers Have Lower Base Pay and Household Income Than Similar Working Adults

Figure 7. Teacher Pay and Household Income Compared with Similar Working Adults



NOTE: This figure shows the average reported base pay, extra pay, spousal or other income, and total household income (in U.S. dollars) reported by teachers and similar working adults in 2026. See the "How We Conducted This Analysis" section for definitions of household income, base pay, additional pay from school system, additional pay from outside job(s), and pay increase. For teachers, *extra pay from main job or from additional jobs* is the sum of *additional pay from school system* and *additional pay from outside job(s)* as defined in the "How We Conducted This Analysis" section. We calculated spousal or other income by subtracting base pay and extra pay from reported total household income.

Figure 7 shows teachers' base pay, extra pay for work outside their teaching jobs, and total household income compared with similar working adults. We calculated "spousal or other income" as the difference between respondents' reported total household income and the sum of their reported base pay and extra pay.[1]

Teachers reported an average base salary of approximately $75,599 in 2026. This is a roughly 3-percent increase from the average base salary reported in the 2025 SoT survey and a roughly 7-percent increase from 2024, consistent with data reported by the National Education Association (Doan, Steiner, and Pandey, 2024; National Education Association, 2026; Steiner et al., 2025).[2] Teacher salaries, on average, continue to trail behind the earnings of similar working adults, who reported an average base salary of slightly more than $105,000 in 2026, a gap similarly sized to the "teacher pay penalty" reported by Allegretto (2025). Across all categories, teachers reported earning less in base pay than similar working adults. The approximately $29,500 difference between 2026 teacher and similar working adult average base pay is comparable with the $30,000 difference that teachers and similar working adults reported in 2025 and is larger than the $18,000 difference reported in 2024 (Doan, Steiner, and Pandey, 2024; Steiner et al., 2025).

More teachers reported compensation for extra work outside their main teaching jobs than similar working adults, yet teachers earned less for this work. Sixty-four percent of teachers reported earnings for extra work outside their main teaching jobs and earned, on average, $5,405 for this work. Fifty-three percent of similar working adults reported earning additional compensation above their base salary and earned, on average, $13,850 for this work. Similar working adults reported earning two to three times more for their extra work than did teachers across all the subgroups we examined. Although we did not ask about all the sources of additional income for teachers or similar working adults, they likely differ. Similar working adults, for example, may receive bonuses or commissions to a greater degree than teachers.

Compared with similar working adults, teachers' base pay is a smaller share of their household income. On average, base pay accounts for 56 percent of teachers' reported household income. *Total pay* (i.e., base pay plus extra pay) accounts for 60 percent of teachers' total household income. For similar working adults, on average, base pay accounts for 60 percent of household income and total pay accounts for 68 percent of household income. In 2024, the last time we asked this question, teachers reported household

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[1] As we describe in the note for Figure 6, we defined *extra pay* slightly differently for teachers and for similar working adults, according to the nature of their jobs. For teachers, *extra pay* included additional compensation earned for work within their school systems, such as for extracurricular or additional activities, summer jobs, merit pay, bonuses or pay supplements from their state or school systems, and earnings from any jobs outside their school systems. For similar working adults, *extra pay* was defined as money earned for additional activities, merit pay, bonuses, overtime, pay supplements at their main jobs, or pay from other jobs. Therefore, these extra earnings could come from several sources, and these sources could differ for teachers and similar working adults.

[2] We report nominal increases without adjusting for inflation.

income of about $120,000, on average, while similar working adults reported $150,000 (Steiner, Woo, and Doan, 2024). Teachers reported $14,000 more in household income in 2026 than in 2024, while similar working adults reported $25,000 more in household income.

In 2026, Female Teachers Earned About $7,400 Less in Base Pay, on Average, Than Male Teachers

Figure 8. Teacher Household Income and Pay, by Gender, Highest Degree, and State Collective Bargaining Status

Income Type	All teachers	Teacher Gender		Teacher Highest Degree		State Bargaining Status		
		Male (ref.)	Female	Bachelor's or lower (ref.)	Master's or higher	Required (ref.)	Allowed	Prohibited
	n = 815	n = 204	n = 596	n = 228	n = 587	n = 550	n = 136	n = 128
Household income	$ 134,106	$ 135,651	$ 134,398	$ 109,679	$ 144,515*	$ 147,234	$ 115,325*	$ 100,803*
Base pay	$ 75,599	$ 81,201	$ 73,757*	$ 60,905	$ 81,904*	$ 81,992	$ 63,443*	$ 62,274*
Additional pay from school system	$ 3,171	$ 4,367	$ 2,796*	$ 2,327	$ 3,529*	$ 3,389	$ 2,588	$ 2,883
Additional pay from outside job(s)	$ 2,234	$ 3,725	$ 1,734*	$ 1,845	$ 2,398	$ 2,273	$ 2,304	$ 2,030
Pay increase	$ 1,847	$ 2,233	$ 1,710	$ 1,390	$ 2,045*	$ 2,190	$ 993*	$ 1,316*
Pay increase as a percentage of base pay	2.44%	2.75%	2.32%	2.28%	2.50%	2.67%	1.57%	2.11%

NOTE: This figure shows the average household income, base pay, additional pay from school system, additional pay from outside the school system, and pay increase from the prior academic year (in U.S. dollars) among teachers by teacher gender, highest degree, and state bargaining status. See the "How We Conducted This Analysis" section for definitions of household income, base pay, additional pay from school system, additional pay from outside job(s), and pay increase. An asterisk (*) indicates that estimates differed at the $p < 0.05$ level from the reference group labeled (ref.).

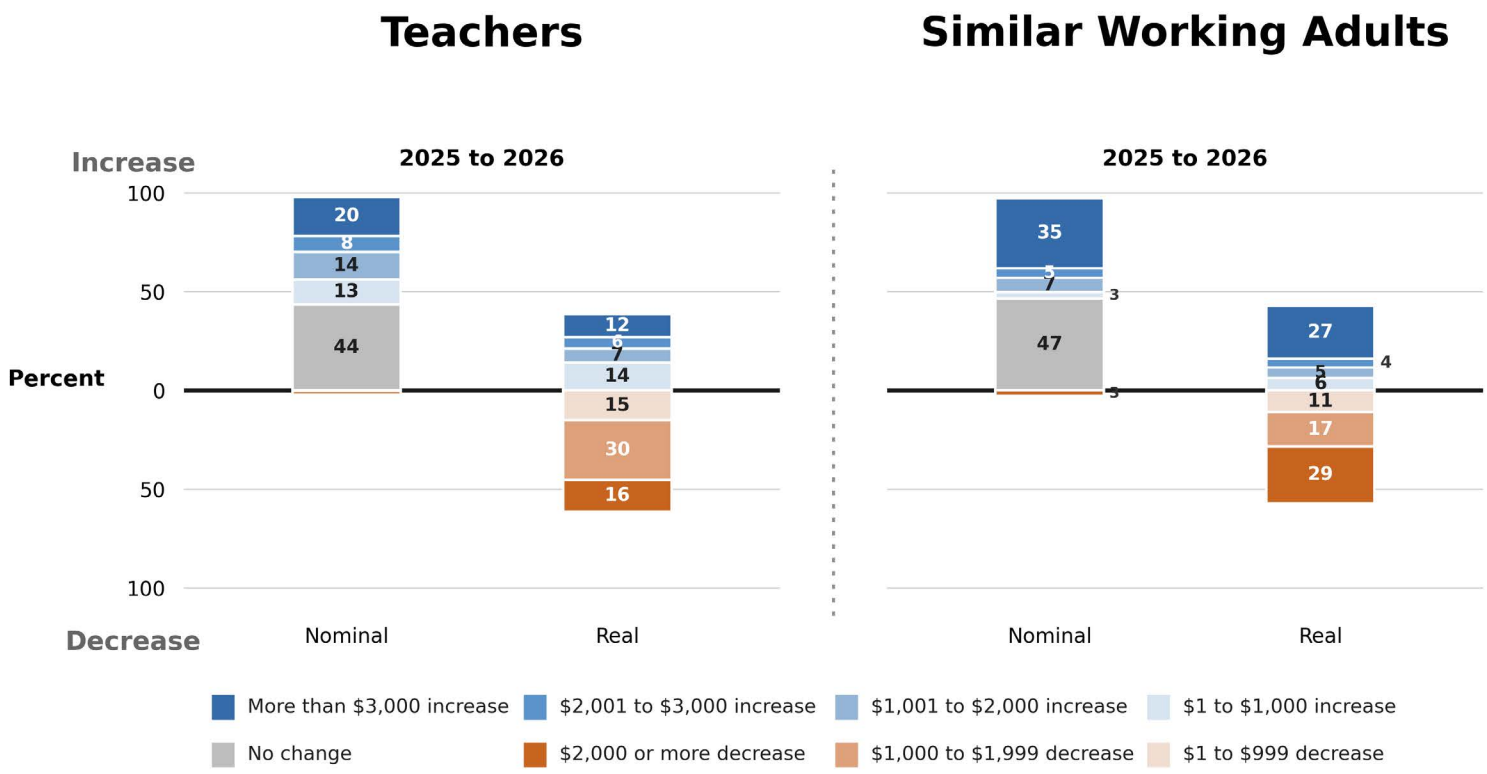
Figure 8 shows teachers' household income, base pay, additional pay received from their school systems (e.g., for extracurricular or additional activities, summer jobs, merit pay, bonuses, or pay supplements) and additional pay received from jobs outside their school systems during the school year or over the summer by teacher gender, highest degree, and state collective bargaining status. Teachers in states where collective bargaining is required reported average base pay that was roughly 30 percent higher than teachers in states where bargaining is allowed or bargaining is prohibited. This difference is roughly consistent with data reported by the National Education Association (2026). As we would expect, teachers with a master's degree or higher reported significantly higher average base pay than teachers with a bachelor's degree or below.

Female teachers reported annual base pay that was $7,444 less than male teachers, on average, in 2026. This difference is statistically significant and is similar to the average gap between female and male teacher base salaries reported on the SoT survey in 2025, which was also statistically significant (Steiner et al., 2025). Female teachers reported receiving less additional pay from their school systems and from jobs outside their school systems than male teachers, on average. This difference remained significant after we controlled for an array of teacher characteristics.

Prior research using teacher-reported pay has documented that female teachers tend to earn less than male teachers, on average. However, the size of these gaps can differ over time by school context, how pay is measured, and other factors (e.g., teaching experience, subject or grade taught, state of residence, or contract provisions) (Fox, Gmeiner, and Price, 2019; Grissom and Keiser, 2011; Quintero, Hansen, and Zerbino, 2023). One possible explanation is that secondary school teachers and teachers of high demand subjects, such as science and math, earn higher salaries and tend to be disproportionately male. However, the pay differences we observed between male and female teachers held after we controlled for subject taught and grade level, suggesting that this explanation does not account for the gap in our survey. Another possible explanation could be that female teachers take more unpaid time off than male teachers, a possibility suggested by research in other unionized professions (Bolotnyy and Emanuel, 2022). A more complete exploration of these differences is an area for future research.

Only Four in Ten Teachers Experienced Inflation-Adjusted Pay Raises in the 2025–2026 School Year

Figure 9. Reported Base Salary Changes for Teachers (2026) and Similar Working Adults (2026)



NOTE: This figure shows the distribution of nominal and inflation-adjusted (*real*) increases in (a) base teaching salary for teachers from 2025 to 2026 and (b) average pay increases for similar working adults from 2025 to 2026. These estimates are from the 2026 SoT survey and 2026 SoT companion survey, respectively. Teachers reported their base teaching salary during the current (2025–2026) and prior (2024–2025) academic year. On the 2026 SoT companion survey, respondents were asked to report their base salary over a 12-month period (1) from September 2025 to September 2026 ("current year pay") and (2) from September 2024 to September 2025 ("prior year pay"). We calculated nominal pay differences by subtracting prior year pay from current year pay. For real dollars, we adjusted prior year pay to current year dollars using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics from January 2026 and calculated an inflation-adjusted real pay increase. Individual percentages may not sum to numbers reported in the text because of rounding.

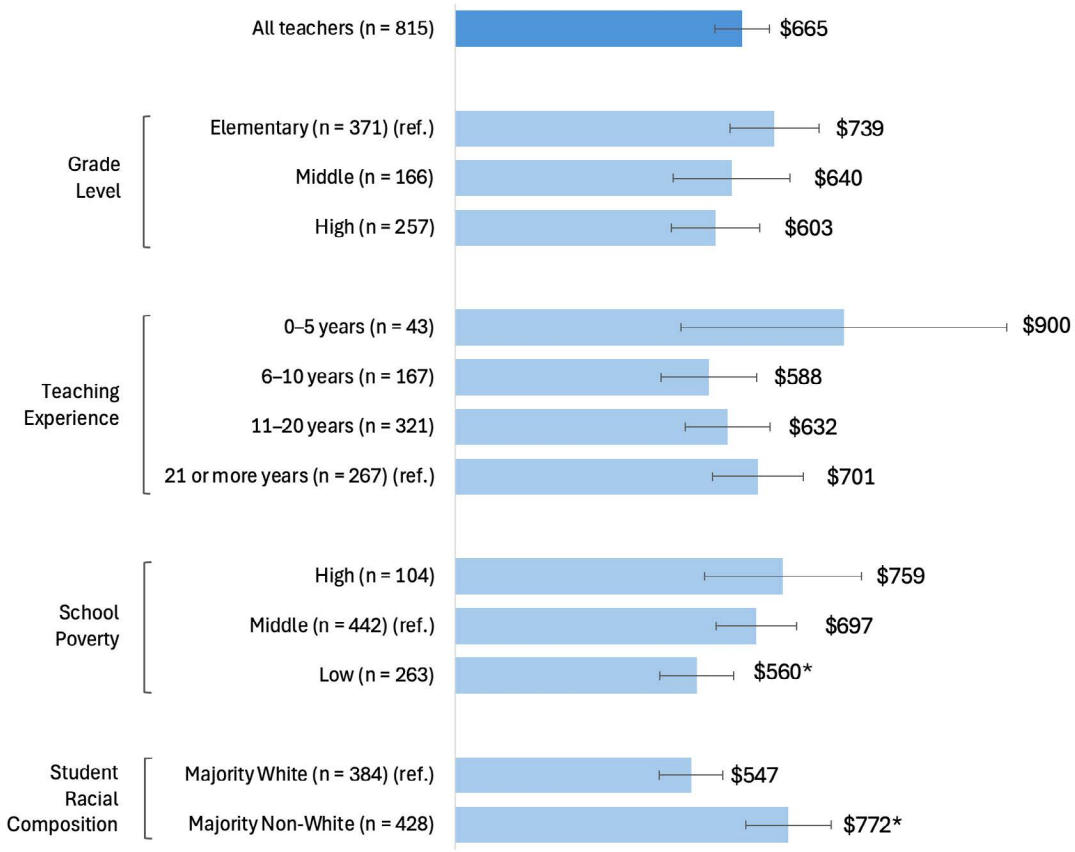
In Figure 9, we compare teachers' nominal and inflation-adjusted (*real*) reported pay raises from the 2025–2026 school years; see the "How We Conducted This Analysis" section for additional details. Roughly half of K–12 teachers (55 percent) reported that their base salaries during the 2025–2026 school year were higher than their base salaries in 2024–2025. Between these school years, the general price level in the U.S. economy increased by 1.02 percent. After adjusting teachers' reported pay by this same factor, only 39 percent of K–12 teachers reported a pay increase in real dollars. Comparing by gender, 37 percent of female K–12 teachers reported real pay increases compared with 42 percent of male K–12 teachers.

Compared with nominal and real pay changes reported in the 2024 SoT survey and 2025 SoT survey, the percentage of K–12 teachers overall reporting real pay increases in the 2025–2026 school year is roughly similar to percentages from the 2024–2025 school year (39 percent) and 2023–2024 school year (42 percent). This is despite the percentage of teachers reporting nominal pay raises in in 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 being more than 10 percentage points higher, reflecting higher rates of inflation in prior years.

Slightly larger shares of similar working adults (42 percent) reported increases in real pay between 2025 and 2026, despite the share of similar working adults reporting nominal pay increases being slightly lower (51 percent) than K–12 teachers. This is because of the magnitude of similar working adults' pay raises; while 35 percent of similar working adults reported increases in nominal pay of more than $3,000 between 2025 and 2026, only 20 percent of teachers reported increases of that size.

Teachers Spent More Than $600 Out of Pocket on School Supplies

Figure 10. Teacher Out-of-Pocket Spending on School Supplies



NOTE: This figure shows the weighted averages to the following question: “In the LAST SCHOOL YEAR (2024–2025), how much of your own money did you spend on classroom supplies, without reimbursement?” Responses are shown for all teachers and teachers disaggregated by school level, teacher experience, and school racial composition. Teachers were instructed to round to the nearest dollar and to write “0” if they did not spend any of their own money in the last school year for this purpose. We set three responses (<1 percent) that were greater than or within $1,000 of the respondent’s base pay to missing. See the “How We Conducted This Analysis” section for definitions of low, middle, and high school poverty. An asterisk (*) indicates that estimates for that subgroup significantly differ at the $p < 0.05$ level from the reference group labeled (ref.).

Roughly 94 percent of K–12 teachers reported spending their own money for classroom supplies ("out-of-pocket spending") last school year (2024–2025); the average teacher spent $665. These estimates of prevalence and the amount of out-of-pocket spending are in line with estimates from the NTPS, which found that during the 2019–2020 school year, 95 percent of K–12 teachers spent their own money on classroom supplies; the average teacher spent $445 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Other survey-based estimates of average teacher out-of-pocket spending range from $300 to $900 in a single school year (Walker, 2025). We did not find statistically significant differences in reported out-of-pocket spending by school level or teacher experience. But teachers working in low-poverty schools spent less than those working in middle-poverty schools, and teachers working in schools with majority students of color spent more than those working in schools with majority White students, both statistically significant differences. These patterns echo those found in out-of-pocket spending reported through the 2021 NTPS (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

How We Conducted This Analysis

We drew data for this report from two surveys: the 2026 SoT survey fielded to RAND's ATP and the 2026 SoT companion survey of similar working adults in the United States fielded to RAND's ALP. We have administered the SoT survey yearly to K–12 teachers in January and February via the ATP since 2021. We designed the SoT survey to generate nationally representative data on teachers' perspectives on their well-being and working conditions. In January and February 2026, 829 and 498 respondents completed the SoT survey and ALP companion survey, respectively.

We assign each SoT survey respondent a weight to ensure that estimates reflect the national population of teachers. Characteristics that factor into weighting include descriptors at the individual level (e.g., gender, professional experience) and school level (e.g., school size, level, locale, socioeconomic status). Unlike prior SoT surveys, the 2026 SoT survey did not purposefully oversample Black teachers and Hispanic teachers. Thus, where we compare teachers by race and ethnicity in this report, we compare White teachers to teachers who did not identify as White.

We administered the ALP companion survey to a nationally representative sample of similar working adults in 2026. Similarly, we assigned each ALP respondent a weight to ensure that estimates reflect the national population of working adults. In 2026 and 2025, we defined similar working adults as being between the ages of 18 and 65 who have at least a bachelor's degree and reported working at least 35 hours per week (Allegretto, 2025). We used a survey question to screen out individuals who were currently working as K–12 teachers in a public, private, or charter school. When we report data from similar working adults from 2022, 2023, and 2024, we

focus on a subset of ALP respondents who met the age, highest degree, and weekly hours worked criteria. We did not have the data to determine whether ALP respondents in these years were currently employed as a K–12 teacher. In 2022, a total of 216 (out of 487) ALP respondents met these criteria; in 2023, a total of 228 (out of 526) and in 2024, a total 219 (out of 501) ALP respondents met these criteria. We provide more information about SoT survey and ALP survey sampling and weighting and item sources in our technical report (Doan et al., 2026).

In this report, we highlight several survey items fielded in the 2026 SoT survey and, when relevant, analogous measures fielded in the 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 SoT surveys. The 2026 SoT survey examined teachers' reports of well-being, compensation and hours worked, out-of-pocket spending on school supplies, and teacher intentions to leave their current teaching job. We constructed the four measures of teacher well-being used in this report and previously fielded in the 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 SoT surveys as follows:

- *Frequent job-related stress* refers to the percentage of respondents who indicated "often" or "always" to the following question: "Since the beginning of the 2024–2025 school year, how often has your work been stressful?"
- *Difficulty coping with job-related stress* refers to the percentage of respondents who, on a 1–5 scale ranging from 1 = not well at all to 5 = very well, indicated responses of "1" or "2" to the following question: "How well are you coping with the stress of your job right now?"
- *Symptoms of depression* refers to the percentage of respondents with Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2) scores of 3 or above. PHQ-2 scores are determined by asking respondents to use a scale of 0 = not at all, 1 = several days, 2 = more than half the days, and 3 = nearly every day to report their frequency of the following events: (1) "little interest or pleasure in doing things" and (2) "feeling down, depressed, or hopeless." We calculate a PHQ-2 score for each respondent by summing their values across both items, resulting in a minimum score of 0 (i.e., a respondent selecting "not at all" for both items) to a maximum score of 6 (i.e., a respondent selecting "nearly every day" for both items).
- *Burnout* refers to the percentage of teachers who "somewhat agree" or "strongly agree" to at least two of the following four statements: (1) "The stress and disappointments involved in [my job] aren't really worth it," (2) "I don't seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began [my job]," (3) "I look forward to [my job] in the future," and (4) "I am glad I selected [my job] as a career." Items 3 and 4 were reverse-coded to match the directionality of items 1 and 2.

In Figures 7, 8, and 9, we present averages of teachers' and similar working adults' responses to a series of questions about pay and income. For each income or pay type, we asked respondents to think of the income or pay they expect to receive during the 2025–2026 school year over a 12-month period (i.e., from fall 2025 to fall 2026). We instructed respondents to enter zero for the amounts that do not apply to them and to round amounts to the nearest $1,000. We defined each type of 2026 income and pay as follows:

- *Total household income.* “Household income includes your pre-tax cash income from all your jobs and the pre-tax cash income of your partner or spouse, if they live in your household.” We asked both teachers and similar working adults about total household income.
- *Base pay.* “Your base salary is your salary before adding any additional compensation for extracurricular or additional activities, merit pay, bonuses, or pay supplements from your state or school system.” We asked both teachers and similar working adults about base pay.
- *Additional pay from school system.* “Additional compensation you earn for extracurricular or additional activities, summer job, merit pay, bonuses or pay supplements from your state or school system.” We asked teachers only about additional pay from their school systems.
- *Additional pay from outside job(s).* “Pay from ANY job OUTSIDE your school system, including jobs during the school year and during the summer.” We asked teachers only about additional pay from outside job(s).
- *Extra pay from main or additional jobs.* “Money you earn for additional activities, merit pay, bonuses, overtime, or pay supplements at your main job, or pay from other jobs.” We asked similar working adults only about extra pay from their main or additional jobs.

We applied standard criteria to correct obvious errors in reported dollar amounts. First, we set teachers’ reported base pay to missing for values below $20,000 or above $250,000. We selected these bounds based on 2025 data from the National Education Association describing state minimum and maximum teacher salaries (National Education Association, 2026). We did not systematically correct working adults’ reports of their base salaries because we had no detailed information about their occupations that would allow us to identify reasonable upper or lower bounds. Second, we applied a small number of manual corrections to reported base pay, additional pay, extra pay, or total household income where respondents appeared to enter reports in thousands of dollars (e.g., they wrote $100 to mean $100,000). These corrections changed less than 1 percent of records for any given variable. We corrected total household income for teachers by comparing teachers’ reported values of household income with their individual total pay, which we calculated by summing reported base pay and additional pay. We replaced reported total household income with calculated total pay in instances where reported total household income was missing or was less than calculated total pay. This correction changed total household income values for 11 percent of teacher responses.

On the 2026 survey, we also asked teachers about their base pay from the previous school year, 2024–2025, using similar phrasing to the 2025–2026 base pay definition: “During the last school year (2024–2025), what was your base teaching salary for the entire school year? Your base salary is your salary before adding any additional compensation for extracurricular or additional activities, summer job, merit pay, bonuses, or pay supplements from your state or school system.” We estimated pay increases for teachers and

similar working adults by subtracting responses to the question from the base pay teachers reported they received in the 2025–2026 school year.

We used teachers' and similar working adults' reports of their base salaries over two 12-month periods to calculate nominal and inflation-adjusted (real) changes in base pay. We defined *current year* pay as reports of pay from September 2025 through September 2026 and *prior year pay* as reports of pay from September 2024 through September 2025. We calculated *nominal pay changes* as the simple difference between a respondent's reported current year pay and their reported prior year pay. To calculate *real pay changes*, we converted prior year pay into current year dollars using the CPI-U, a monthly consumer inflation measure from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Specifically, for each survey wave, we calculated an inflation adjustment factor as the ratio of the CPI-U value in January of the current survey year to the CPI-U value in January of the prior survey year. Therefore, each real pay change reflects the change in base salary between the current and prior years, expressed in the respective current year's dollars.

We asked teachers to estimate the hours they spent on the following activities in a typical seven-day week during the 2025–2026 school year: (1) contracted work within the school system, (2) total work within the school system (i.e., all teaching and school-related activities during the school day, before and after school, and on weekends), (3) work outside the school system, (4) household duties (including caring for children, adult relatives, or friends), and (5) sleep. Figure 6 displays the average weekly hours spent on each activity, as well as leisure, which we calculated as the remaining hours in a 168-hour week after accounting for other categories. We found that 26 percent of respondents implausibly reported total hours of work within the school system that were less than their reported contracted hours. These responses lowered the sample-wide average for total school system work (39 hours) well below estimates from prior surveys (approximately 50 hours). Response patterns (see Table 1) suggested that these respondents misinterpreted the total hours item as asking for *additional* hours worked beyond their contracted time rather than an all-inclusive total.

Table 1. Teacher Reported Total School Contract Hours and Total School Working Hours

Respondent Group	*N*	Mean Contract Hours (Uncorrected)	Mean Total School Hours (Uncorrected)
Reported plausible total hours (total hours >= contract hours)	604	37.4	49.8
Reported implausible total hours (total hours < contract hours)	211	38.2	10.2

For Figure 6, we restricted the sample to respondents who reported plausible values, which we defined as teachers who reported total hours of work within their school systems that equaled or exceeded their reported contracted hours. Average values among this subset closely matched estimates from prior surveys. As a robustness check, we also tested an imputation approach in which we replaced implausible total hours values with the sum of contracted hours and the misinterpreted total hours; this approach produced highly similar results to our preferred, more conservative restriction.

In this report, we compare teacher responses across subgroups defined by various teacher and school characteristics, testing for whether average responses for certain subgroups differed from a specified reference subgroup. We do not report exhaustively on all subgroup estimates on all survey items because the purpose of this report is to provide readers with figures and tables highlighting a selection of substantively important findings on the topic of teacher well-being. We examine the following teacher and school characteristics, with reference categories bolded:

- teacher race: **White**, non-White
- teacher gender: **male**, female
- teacher experience: 0–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–20 years, **21 or more years**
- teacher highest degree earned: **bachelor's degree**, master's degree or higher
- school poverty:[3] high (IPR < = 200), **middle (IPR 201–400)**, low (IPR > = 400)
- school grade band: **elementary (grades kindergarten–5)**, middle (grades 6–8), high (grades 9–12)

[3] The income-to-poverty ratio (IPR) is the average percentage of family income that is above or below the federal poverty threshold in the school's neighborhood. IPRs range from 0 to 999, where 100 is the federal poverty threshold; this means that low values indicate a high degree of poverty (Geverdt, 2019).

- state bargaining status: **bargaining required**, bargaining allowed, bargaining prohibited
- school student racial composition: **majority White**, majority non-White.

The National Education Association provided the information we used to construct our categories of state-level collective bargaining by indicating the states where collective bargaining is required if teachers choose to vote for union representation (Alaska; California; Connecticut; Delaware; Florida; Hawaii; Idaho; Illinois; Indiana; Iowa; Kansas; Maine; Maryland; Massachusetts; Michigan; Minnesota; Missouri; Montana; Nebraska; Nevada; New Hampshire; New Jersey; New Mexico; New York; North Dakota; Ohio; Oklahoma; Oregon; Pennsylvania; Rhode Island; South Dakota; Vermont; Washington, D.C.; Washington; and Wisconsin), the states where collective bargaining is allowed but not required (Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, Louisiana, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming), and the states where bargaining is prohibited (Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas). We grouped Tennessee (where collaborative conferencing is permitted) with states where bargaining is allowed but not required.

We present all estimates in this report without adjusting for statistical controls. Because the intent of this report is to provide exploratory, descriptive information rather than to test specific hypotheses, we did not make statistical adjustments for multiple comparisons. Readers should not interpret statistically significant subgroup differences as evidence of an effect of any specific teacher or school characteristic because there is substantial evidence that many teacher and school characteristics of interest are correlated with one another (Hansen and Quintero, 2018). Rather, our results highlight differences in reported experiences across subgroups of teachers and encourage additional research on the sources and causes of these differences.

Abbreviations

AEP	American Educator Panels
ALP	American Life Panel
ATP	American Teacher Panel
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CPI-U	Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers
IPR	income-to-poverty ratio
NTPS	National Teacher and Principal Survey
PHQ-2	Patient Health Questionnaire-2
SoT	State of the American Teacher

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About This Report

In this report, we present results from the State of the American Teacher survey and the companion American Life Panel (ALP) survey administered to K–12 public school teachers and similar working adults across the country from January to February 2026. The American Educator Panels (AEP) are nationally representative samples of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders across the country. The panels are a proud member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research's Transparency Initiative. For more information, visit the AEP website at www.rand.org/aep.

The AEP Data Note series is intended to provide brief analyses of educator survey results of immediate interest to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. If you would like to know more about the dataset, survey recruitment, administration, and sample weighting, see *Technical Documentation for the 2026 State of the American Teacher Survey* (RR-A4404-3, available at www.rand.org/t/RRA4404-3). If you are interested in using AEP data for your own surveys or analysis or in reading other AEP-related publications, visit www.rand.org/aep or contact aep@rand.org.

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