

# VIEWS FROM THE SCHOOLHOUSE

GEORGIA EDUCATOR  
WORKFORCE INSIGHTS



**PAGE**

Professional Association  
of Georgia Educators

**2024**

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# Executive Summary

Georgia's educator workforce is the foundation of not only its public education system, but also its economic development and community building efforts. According to a recent member survey conducted by the Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE), many educators throughout the state feel supported by their school leaders and colleagues. Responding educators often find their work with students fulfilling and their jobs satisfying. However, other Georgia educators are showing signs of discontent with their profession. Burnout is a challenge for nearly half of teachers, and about 16% of teachers report their jobs are not satisfying. These findings reflect a mix of concerns that make many educators unlikely to encourage others to enter the profession. Only 21% of teachers participating in the survey said they were very likely or likely to recommend a career in education. To better understand their concerns, the PAGE survey examined issues, both inside and outside of schools, that affect educator attitudes about their work experiences and views of their profession. The survey also explored some issues students face today and how these issues impact educators. Findings include:

## Pressures on the Profession

Educators' work experiences differ considerably and are shaped by structural pressures stretching across the profession. These pressures include difficulty covering living expenses, which is always a challenge for 26% of educators, and student loan debt. Other challenges are school-based and include school leadership and staffing needs.



**More than a quarter of educators find it difficult to cover their living expenses**

## Perceptions of Student Need

Educators considered issues that influence students' ability to thrive academically and developmentally, and many responding educators identified those student challenges as major concerns. These include poverty, student absenteeism, disruptive behavior, and use of cell phones and social media—a major concern for 85% of high school teachers.



**85% of high school teachers say student cell phone and social media use is a major concern**

## Perspectives on the Profession

Teachers vary considerably in satisfaction gained from their work and the level of burnout they experience. Job satisfaction and burnout, which 48% of teachers report feeling, often influence decisions to remain in or leave teaching. Factors that shape their view of their role and the education profession include school leaders, financial stress, and student behavior.



**Nearly half of teachers report feeling burnout**

# Summary of Recommendations

The concerns educators raise reflect many challenges inside and outside school districts. Though there are no easy solutions to these challenges, policymakers can take action to address challenges and build a stronger support system for educators in Georgia, enabling educators to better serve students.

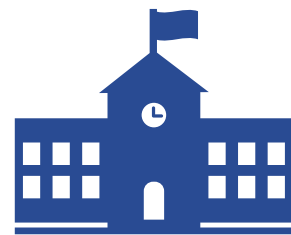
- 1 Restore state funding for professional development and undertake a comprehensive review of professional development needs of principals and other educators to ensure the state's Quality Basic Education formula reflects the cost of high-quality training for principals and all educators.**
- 2 Reduce the financial cost of becoming a teacher by restoring the Promise Scholarship, Teacher Scholarship, and Promise II Scholarship programs, financial aid programs for educators previously provided by the state.**
- 3 Develop and fund a multi-year plan to increase state funding for school counselors, social workers, and psychologists to the recommended best practice ratios.**
- 4 Increase funding for substitutes to ensure teacher planning time is protected.**

## Methodology

PAGE developed the 2024 workforce survey in response to concerns raised by members about their professional experiences. The survey was conducted online in May 2024. In total, 3,698 educators from 169 of Georgia's 180 school districts, as well as state charter schools, state schools, and a private school, participated in the survey. Approximately 69% of survey participants are classroom teachers, and the remaining respondents serve students in a variety of school and district roles and are referred to collectively in this report as "educators." The term "all educators" is used to refer to all respondents of the survey including both teachers and all other roles.



**3,698 Educators**



**169 Districts**

# Pressures on the Profession

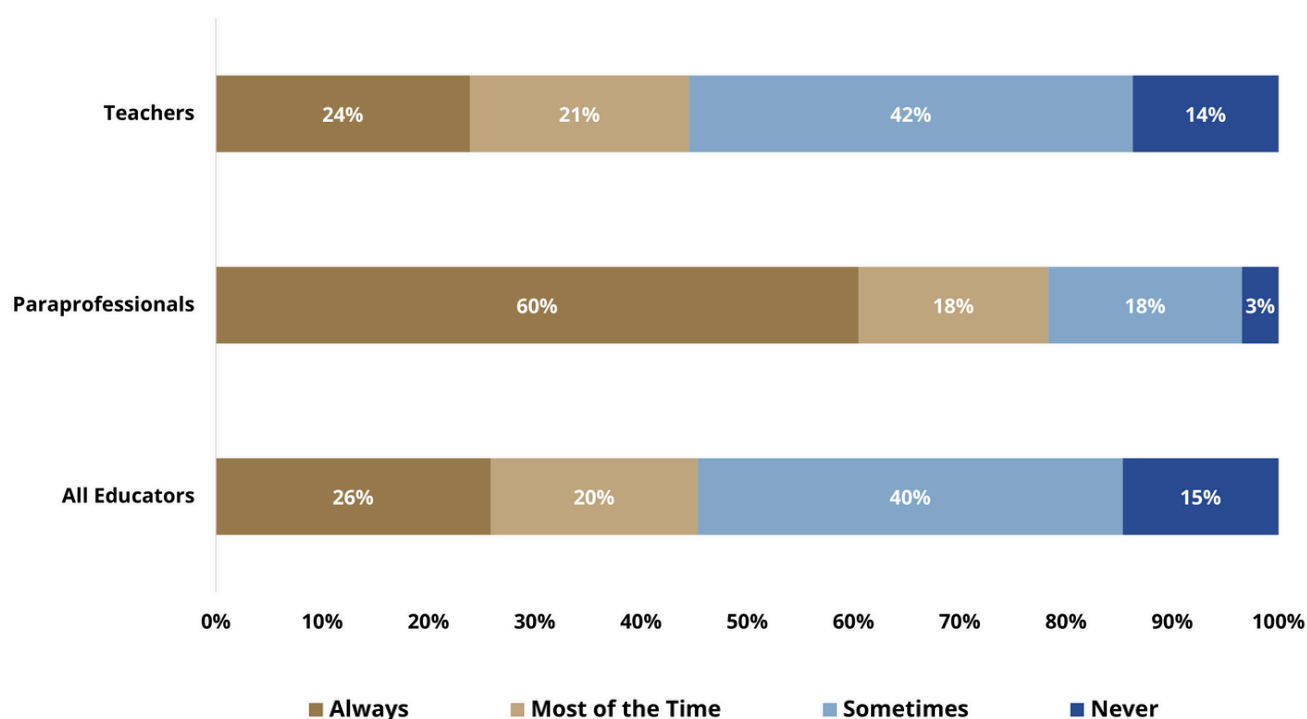
Different pressures shape educators' work experiences and how they view their jobs. Survey respondents report structural pressures stretching across the profession influenced by factors outside of education. These include cost of living, housing affordability, and student loan debt. Other pressures, such as school leadership, school staffing needs, and workload manageability, are based on an educator's specific school or work site.

## Structural Pressures

### Cost of Living

Many educators have difficulty covering their living expenses. Nearly a quarter of all participating teachers report they always have difficulty covering expenses. More than 40% of teachers with five or fewer years of experience indicate covering living expenses is always difficult, but many veteran teachers also struggle. More than 17% of teachers with 20 or more years of experience say covering their expenses is always difficult.

**Figure 1: Percentage of Educators Experiencing Difficulty Covering Living Expenses**

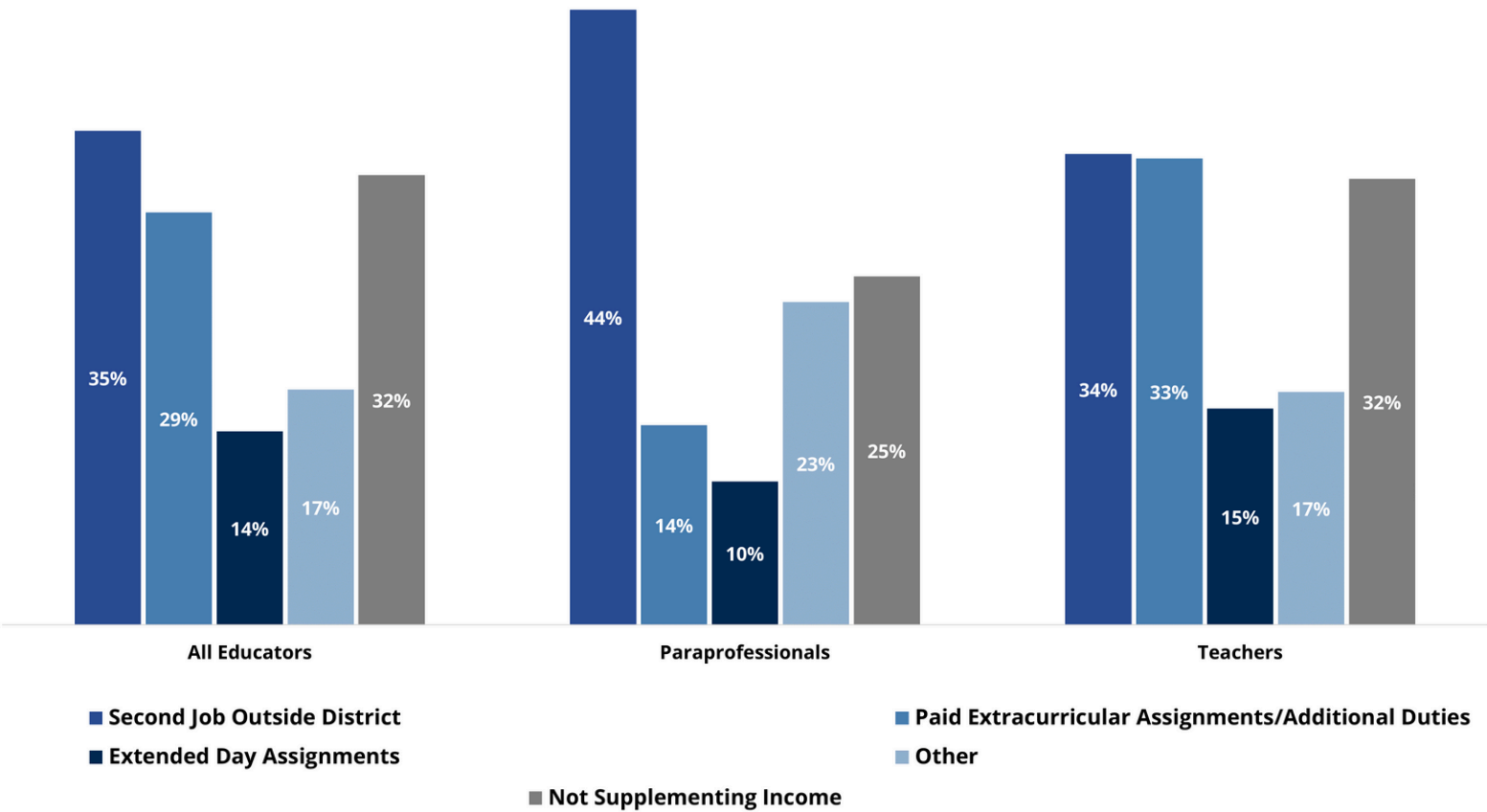


Covering living expenses is particularly difficult for paraprofessionals. Their average salary is \$25,741<sup>1</sup>, but their starting salary can be less than \$20,000.<sup>2</sup> A contributing factor to paraprofessionals' low wages is the state's limited investment in them. The state funds paraprofessionals for kindergarten only, and, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, provides \$17,641 for paraprofessional salary costs.

Recent pay raises for certified teachers and other staff recommended by Gov. Brian P. Kemp and approved by lawmakers along with additional district-funded local salary supplements have proven very valuable. These raises ensure the average teacher salary in Georgia is the highest in the Southeast. However, state raises came after a period—2010 to 2017—in which there were no state teacher pay raises. Recent raises make up much of the ground lost during these years, but their positive impact is diminished by inflation, which soared in the pandemic’s wake.

Many educators supplement their incomes by holding second jobs outside their districts, taking on additional paid assignments or duties within their district, or other activities such as working as a rideshare driver or tutoring.

**Figure 2: Percent of Educators Supplementing Their Income, 2023-2024**



Nearly 34% of teachers reporting a second job in the 2023-2024 school year also took on paid extracurricular or extended day assignments or other paid duties in their districts.

Educators commonly seek additional work. Nearly half of teachers had a second job or paid extracurricular assignment or additional duties between the 2018-2019 and 2022-2023 school years.

In written responses, many teachers note that their spouses' income makes it possible for them to avoid taking second jobs or other paid tasks. However, teachers who are single parents, have medical issues, or face other difficulties often find it particularly hard to make ends meet.

**"I am able to remain a teacher because of my husband's substantially higher income. If something were to happen to him, I would not be able to afford to teach."**

***Middle School Teacher, Rural District***

## Housing Costs

Most participating teachers—71%—say their housing costs are affordable or somewhat affordable. For 8% of teachers and about 9% of all educators, the cost of housing is unaffordable.<sup>3</sup> An additional 18% of teachers and 17% of educators report housing is somewhat unaffordable.

Housing costs are more challenging for less experienced teachers. Nearly 38% of teachers with five or fewer years of experience indicate their housing is somewhat unaffordable or unaffordable as do 32% of teachers with six to 10 years of experience.

While affordable housing may not be a challenge for some educators, for those who do struggle with housing costs, it has a large impact. More teachers with unaffordable housing costs hold a second job than teachers who say their housing is affordable: 43% compared to 30%.

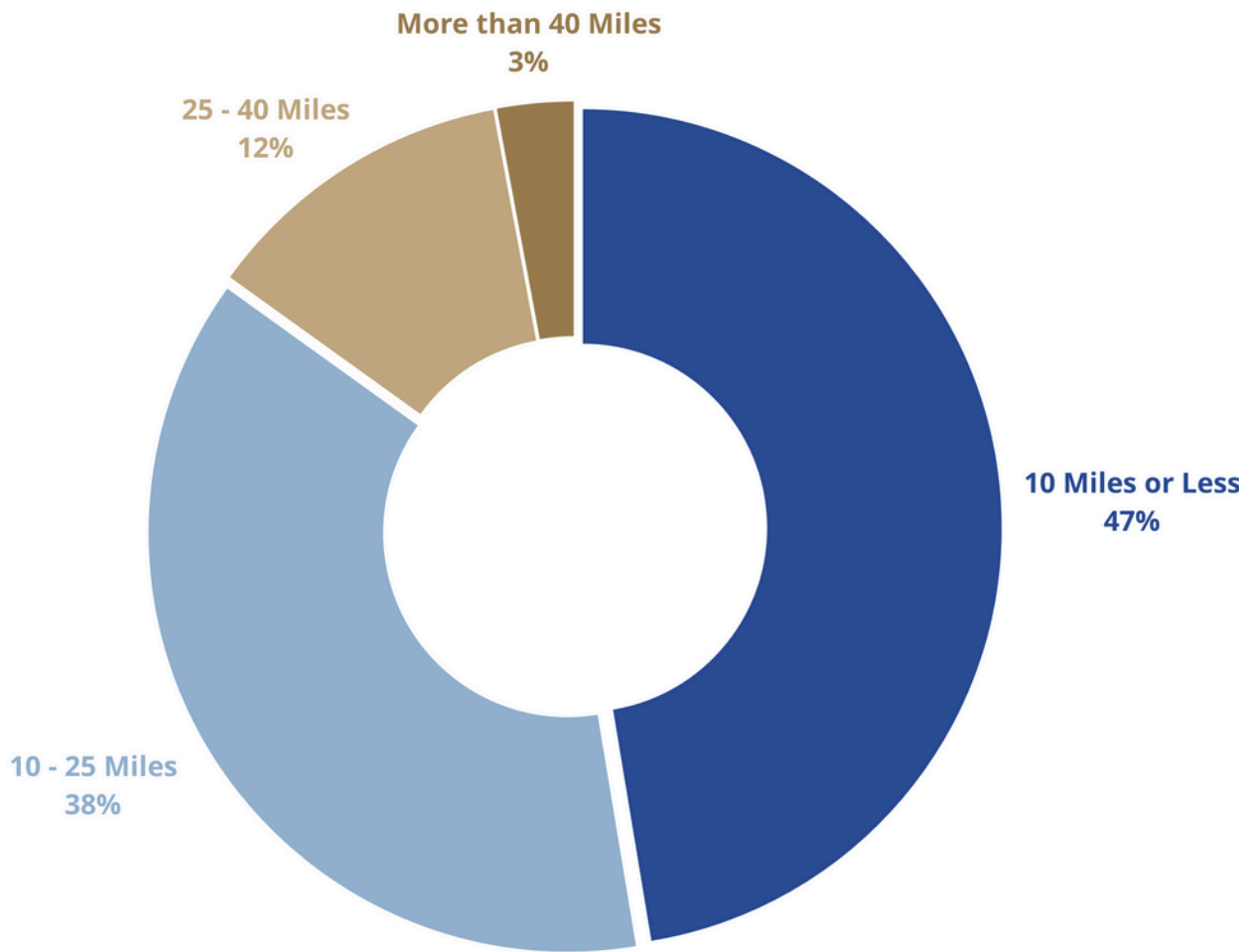
Teachers provided other examples of how high housing costs affect them and their families:

- "Added stress about being able to provide a safe home for my children. High cost of housing limits my ability to provide in other ways for my children. I worry about having to move again and finding something suitable and affordable." - *High School Teacher, Urban District*
- "I am having to live with family despite having a husband, who is also a teacher, and a child. We can't afford a home with our student loan debt and our paycheck." - *Elementary School Teacher, Rural District*
- "My wife and I are constantly stressed about money, and we aren't always able to provide things for our kids that we would want. We spend \$2,000 a month on housing, \$2,400 a month on daycare, and \$1,200 a month on food/formula/diapers. We both have advanced degrees and work hard and are living paycheck to paycheck." - *High School Teacher, Rural District*
- "Heightened anxiety that no matter how hard I work, I'll never be able to afford a home of my own. Bills are paid, and then the worry gets heightened over the next 13 days hoping an unexpected expense doesn't come along and wipe out what little remains until the next pay day." *High School Teacher, Urban District*

Housing costs influence where many educators live. Approximately 28% of teachers and 27% of all educators say a lack of affordable housing is a factor in their decisions about where to live. This is most common among less-experienced teachers. More than 47% of teachers with five or fewer years of experience indicate lack of affordable housing influences their decisions about where to live.

Nearly half of all educators live within 10 miles of their school or work site, but some have long commutes that drive up fuel costs, limit their participation in afterschool events, or interfere with their family activities.

**Figure 3: Educators’ Distance to Work**

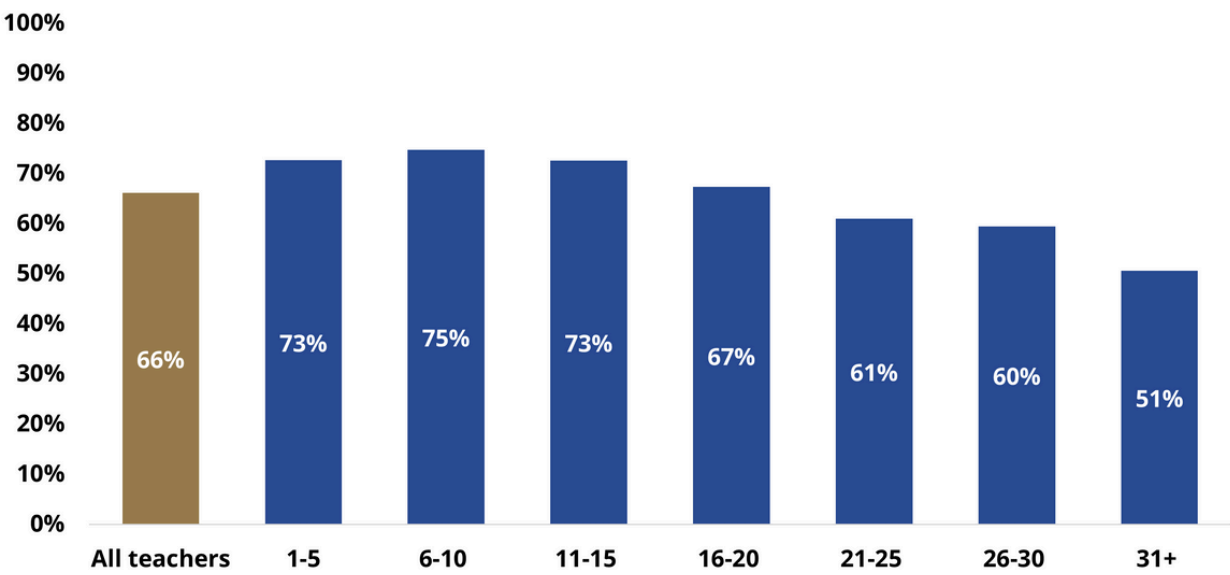




## Student Loan Debt

More than 66% of participating teachers took on student loan debt to earn their education degree and certification, though this varies based on years of experience.

Figure 4: Teachers’ Student Loan Debt by Years of Experience



Nearly 74% of teachers who graduated in 2000 or later have student loan debt, and the amount of that debt differs depending on when they completed their education degrees.

Figure 5: Average Teacher Student Loan Debt

Degree Completion Date	Average Debt
All teachers	\$ 31,055
Before 2000	\$ 24,858
2000-2009	\$ 30,972
2010 & Later	\$ 38,842

Receiving the HOPE scholarship did not prevent teachers from taking on student loan debt. More than 71% of responding teachers who earned their education degrees in Georgia after 2000 reporting receiving the HOPE scholarship, and nearly 69% of these teachers incurred student loan debt.

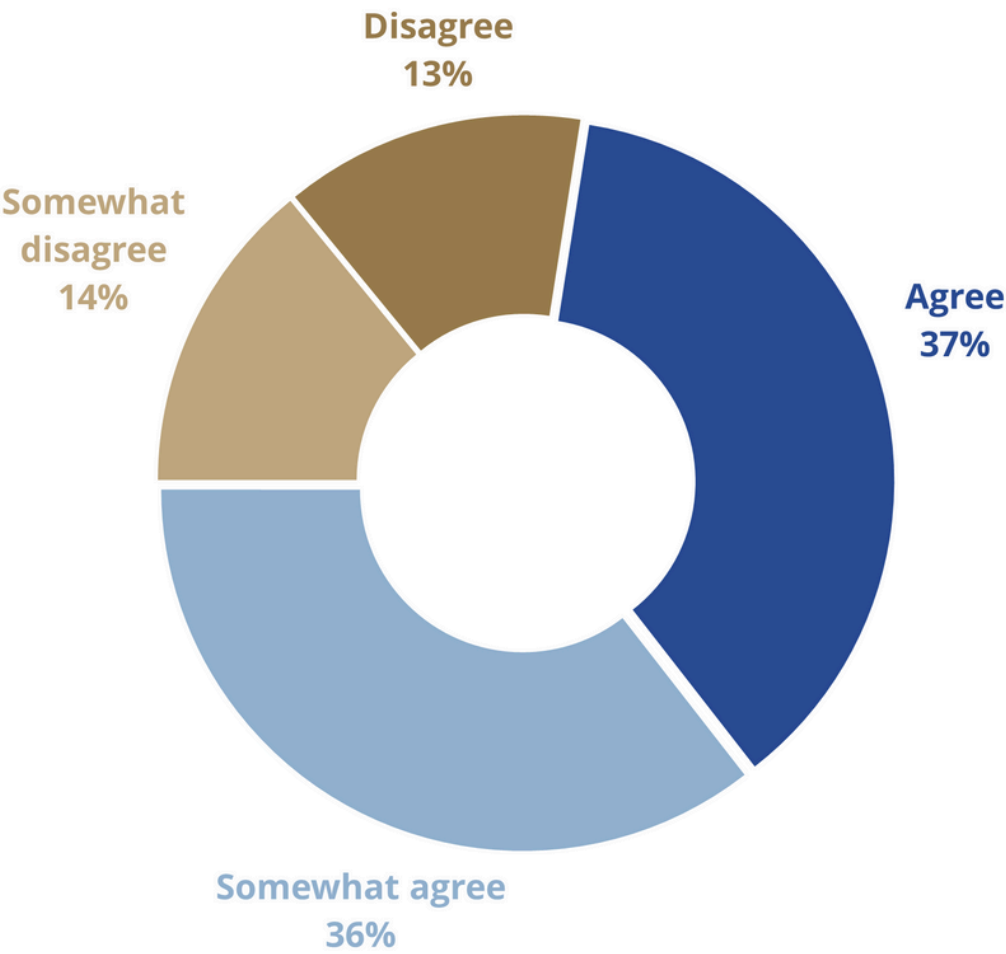
Carrying student loan debt is connected to difficulty covering living expenses. More than 48% of teachers who have student loan debt report difficulty covering living expenses all or most of the time, compared to 36% of teachers who do not carry this debt.

# School-Based Pressures

## School Leadership

School leaders have a significant role in creating the environment in which teachers work and students learn. The quality of support teachers receive from school leaders is often a top factor in teacher decisions to stay or leave.<sup>4</sup> Nearly three-quarters of participating teachers agree or somewhat agree their school administrators are supportive while the remaining 27% said their administrators are not supportive.

**Figure 6: Teacher Agreement that School Administrators are Supportive**

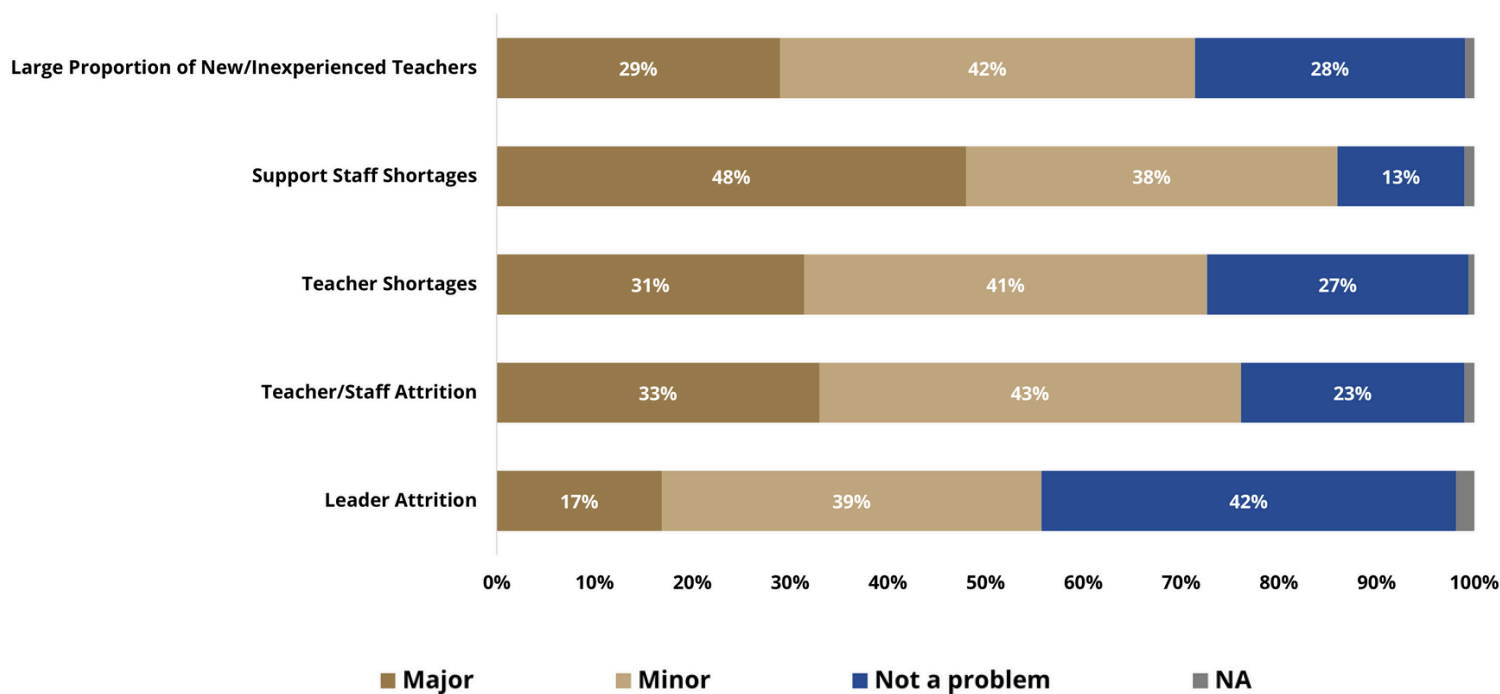


Approximately 87% of teachers also agree or somewhat agree that their colleagues support each other, leaving only 13% who report their colleagues are not supportive.

School Staffing Needs

Staffing challenges, which can lower student outcomes, are a major concern for many teachers. Teacher turnover leads to reduced student achievement.<sup>5</sup> Departing teachers are often replaced by inexperienced teachers who are typically less effective than veteran teachers.<sup>6</sup> Teacher shortages can result in classrooms staffed by teachers who are not certified, which also results in lower achievement.<sup>7</sup> About one-third of participating teachers identify these as major concerns in their schools.

Figure 7: Teacher Feedback on Staffing Issues <sup>8</sup>



“New teachers put a huge burden on veteran teachers, especially ones who are not certified. I spend as much time mentoring as I do preparing for my lessons. I understand the situation, but it does contribute to burnout.”

*High School Teacher, Rural District*

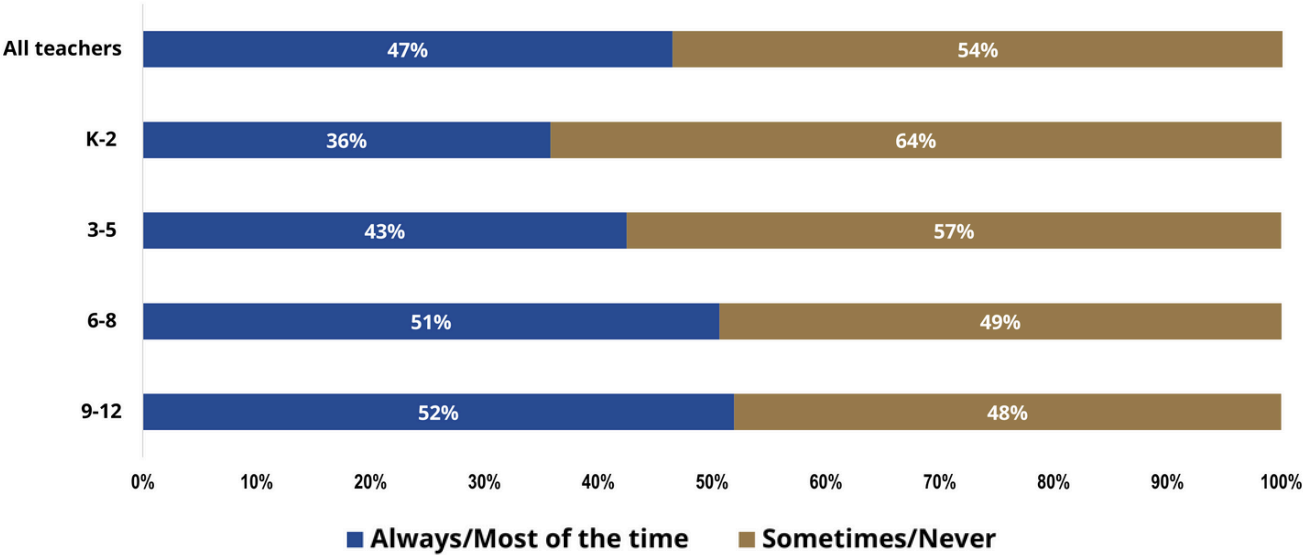
School leadership plays a role in these staffing challenges. About 59% of teachers whose school administrators are not supportive report teacher and staff attrition is a major concern. Approximately 45% of these teachers also indicate teacher shortages, and large portions of inexperienced teachers report major concerns in their schools.

In written responses, teachers also describe challenges presented by the lack of substitute teachers. Teachers report giving up planning time to cover classes for absent colleagues. Paraprofessionals are often pulled from their assigned classrooms to substitute, preventing these paraprofessionals from assisting their own students.

Workload

About 46% of all teachers report their workload is manageable all or most of the time, while 54% say it is manageable only sometimes or never. Grade level is connected to workload manageability. Elementary teachers are less likely than teachers of upper grades to indicate their workload is manageable.

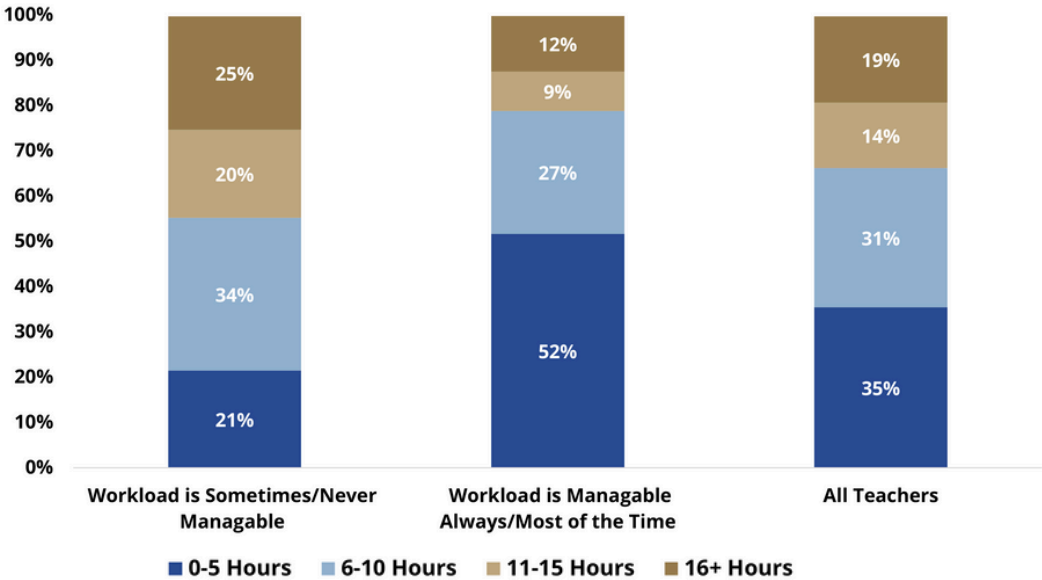
Figure 8: How Often Teachers Feel Their Workload is Manageable



School leadership is also connected to workload manageability. More than 74% of teachers who indicate their school administrators are not supportive of staff say their workload is sometimes or never manageable. A smaller portion—46%—of teachers who have supportive administrators say their workloads are sometimes or never manageable.

Teachers also differ in the average number of extra hours they work per week on required job-related activities outside the normal school day. The number of extra hours they report is linked to the manageability of their workload. Teachers whose workload is sometimes or never manageable are more likely to work extra hours than those whose workload is manageable always or most of the time.

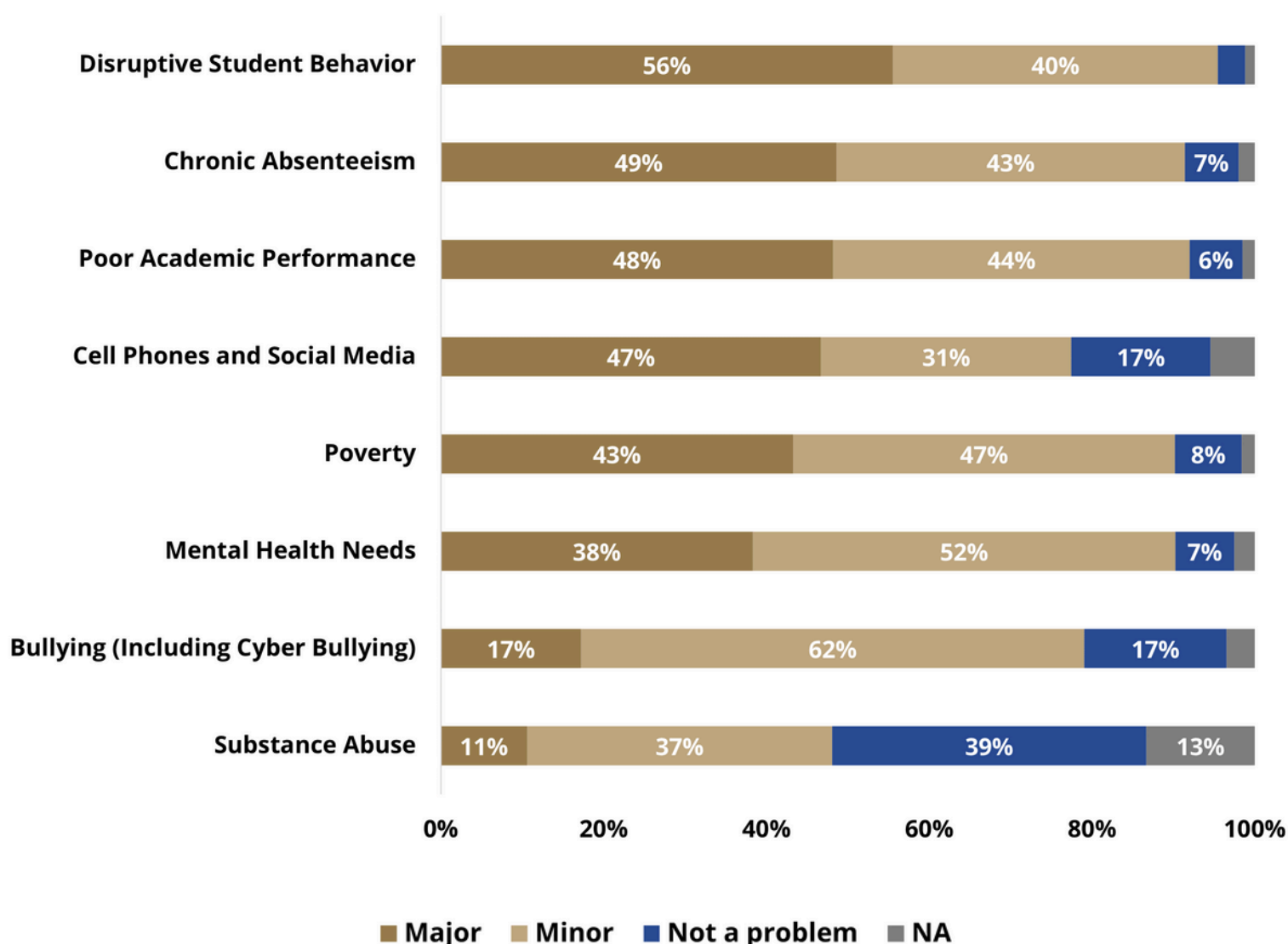
Figure 9: Teachers’ Reported Average Extra Hours Worked Per Week by Views on Workload, 2023-2024



# Perceptions of Student Need

Educators participating in the survey reflected on multiple issues that affect students' academic success and well-being and considered how problematic these issues are in schools.

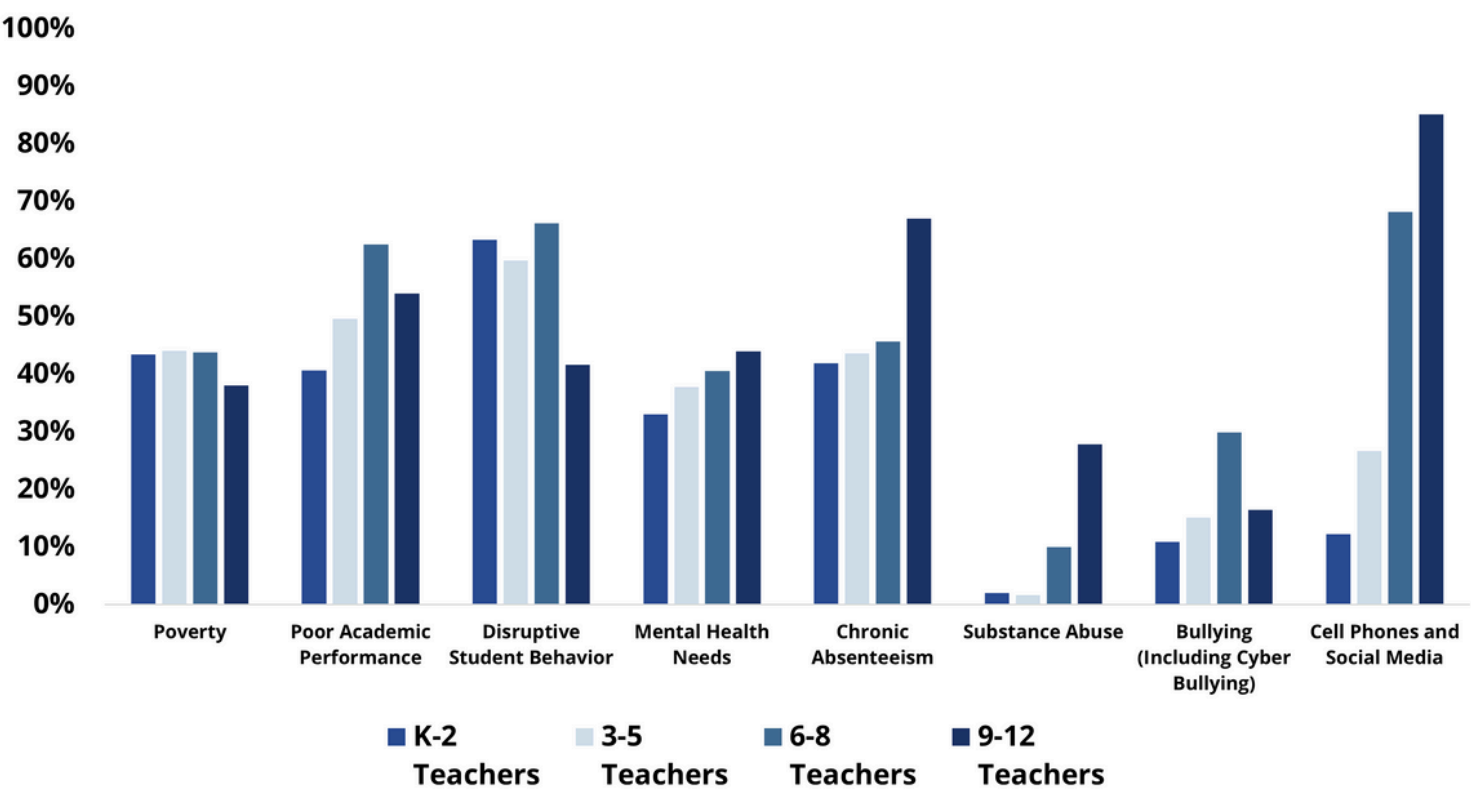
**Figure 10: Student Issues Identified as Major, Minor, or Not a Problem by Educators**



Teachers' perspective on the magnitude of these concerns is connected to the poverty level of their schools. Teachers who describe poverty as a major concern are more likely to also identify other issues as major concerns than teachers who say poverty is a minor concern or not a problem in their schools. One example is poor academic performance. About 74% of teachers in high-poverty schools said poor academic performance is a major concern compared to 38% of teachers in schools where poverty is a minor concern.

The grade level in which teachers work also influences their perception of the degree to which their schools face challenges. For example, substance abuse and cell phone usage concerns are much more common in teachers of older students.

**Figure 11: Percent of Teachers, by Grade Level, Who Identified Student Issues as Major Concerns**



In their written responses, some teachers describe seeing apathy, behavioral issues, and lack of motivation among a rising number of students, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Others express frustration with the lack of support from parents and administrators in developing effective responses to those problems.

**“Parents and administrators not holding the student accountable, but rather expecting the teacher to either give the kid a ‘pass’ or ‘what are you (the teacher) going to do about it?’ I can’t grade what students do not do, and I can’t teach students who are not there, are constantly on their phones, or who do not engage in class.”**

*High School Teacher, Urban District*

# Perspectives on the Profession

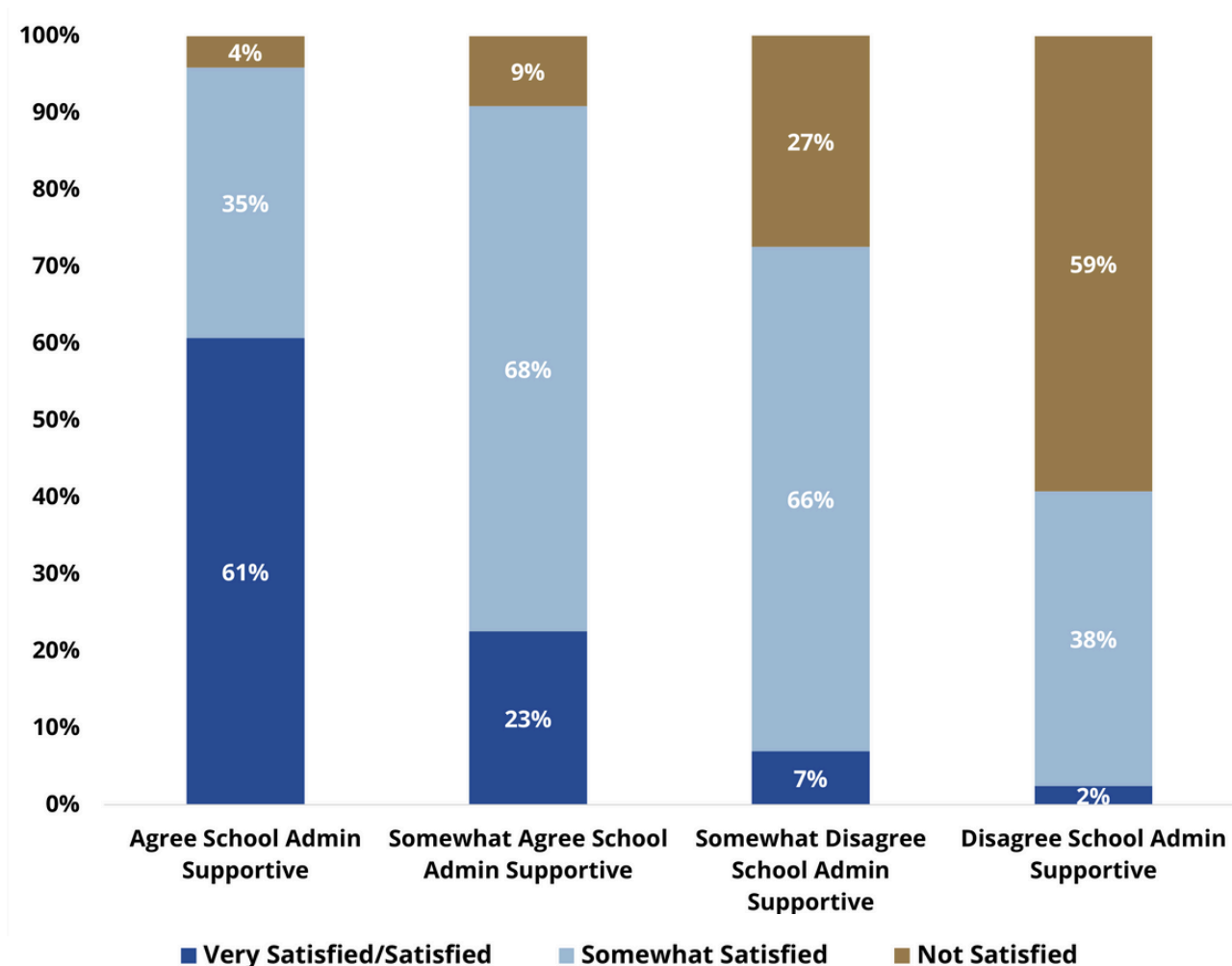
Educators' hold a range of views on their profession. These differences often influence their decisions to stay in the field or leave. Teachers who are more satisfied with their jobs and have lower levels of burnout are less likely to leave than those who are less satisfied or struggling with burnout.<sup>9</sup>

## Job Satisfaction & Fulfillment

Approximately 32% of responding teachers and 37% of all educators find their jobs very satisfying or satisfying, and about half of both groups are somewhat satisfied. About 16% of teachers and 14% of all educators are unsatisfied with their jobs.

The support teachers receive from school administrators affects their job satisfaction. Teachers who agreed their administrators are supportive are more likely to be satisfied in their jobs than those teachers who disagreed that administrators are supportive.

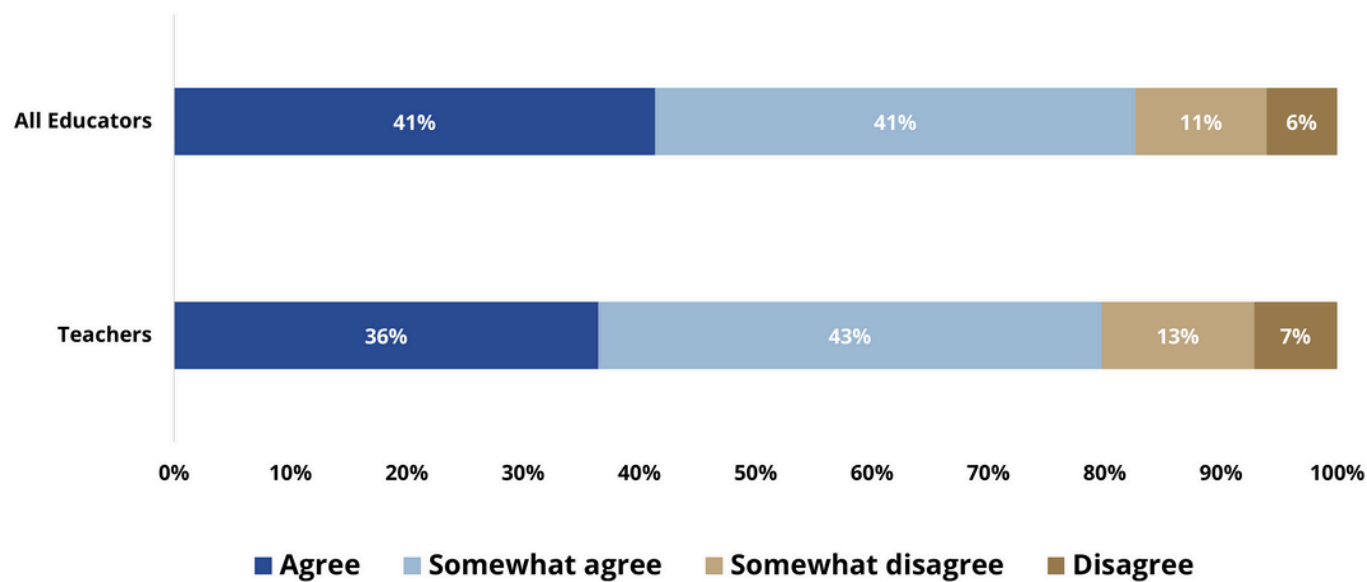
**Figure 12: Teacher Job Satisfaction & Leader Support**



Disruptive student behavior is also linked to teacher job satisfaction. Approximately 24% of teachers who said disruptive behavior is a major problem in their schools indicated they are not satisfied in their jobs compared to 8% of teachers who reported disruptive behavior as a minor problem.

Overall, more than three-quarters of teachers and more than 80% of all educators agree or somewhat agree that their jobs are fulfilling.

**Figure 13: Percent of Educators Who Agree Their Jobs Are Fulfilling**



**Job Burnout**

Educators in all educational settings report experiencing burnout. Approximately 42% of all educators and nearly 48% of all teachers agree that they feel burned out, and about 36% of both groups say they somewhat agree to feeling burned out.

Lack of administrative support and difficulty covering living expenses contributes to greater feelings of burnout. More than 79% of teachers who say their school administrators are not supportive indicate they feel burned out at work, compared to 27% of teachers who report their administrators are supportive. More than 65% of teachers who say they always have difficulty covering living expenses report feeling burned out, considerably more than the 36% of teachers who say they never have difficulty covering their expenses.

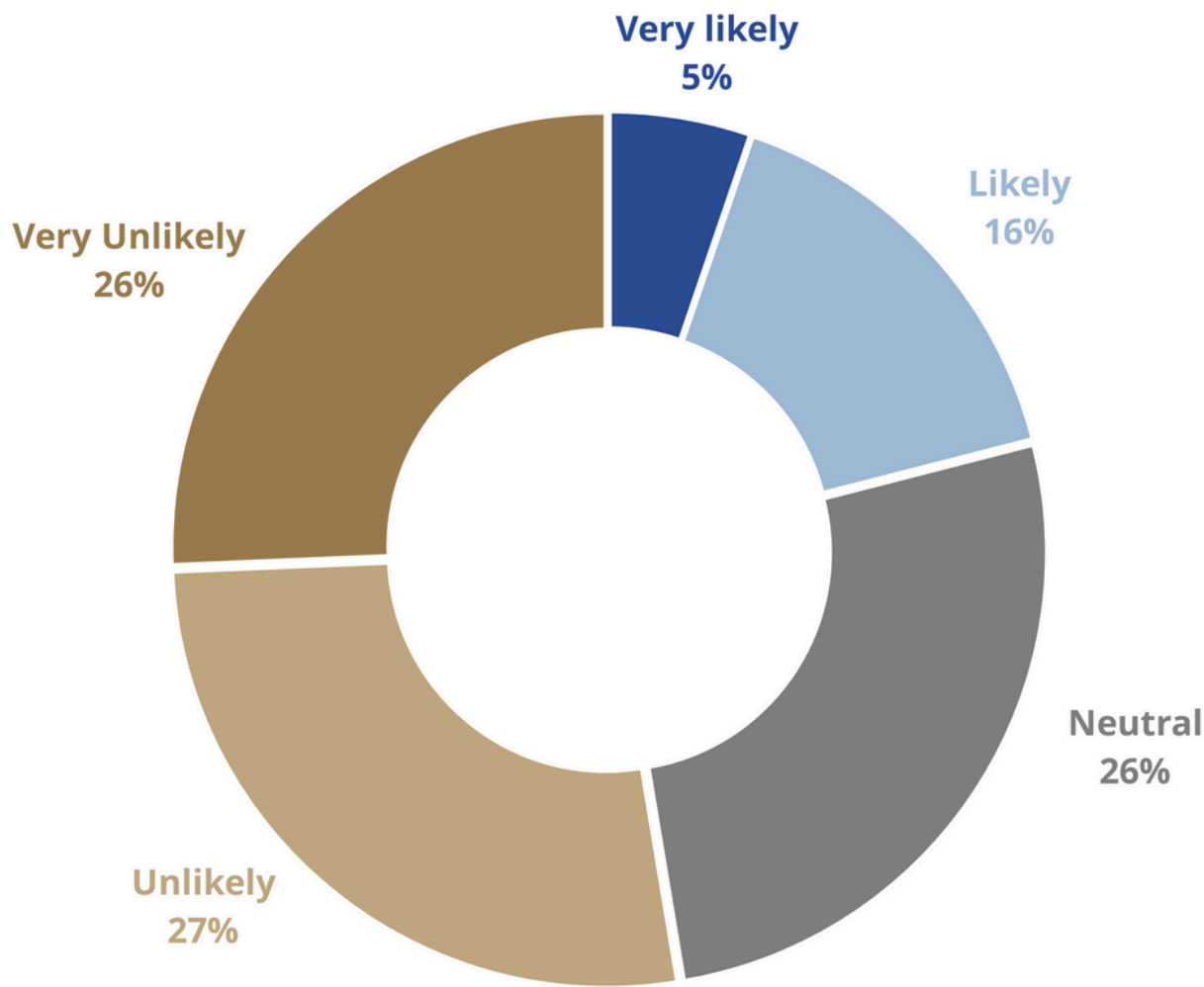
Disruptive behavior is a common challenge. Approximately 60% of teachers who indicate disruptive behavior is a major concern in their schools report feeling burned out compared to 33% of teachers who say disruptive behavior is a minor problem or not a problem at all.



# Recommending Careers in Education

Few educators are very likely or likely to recommend careers in education. 21% of teachers report they are very likely or likely to recommend education, and more than half—53%—say they are unlikely or very unlikely to do so.

**Figure 14: Likelihood of Teachers Recommending Careers in Education**



Even when teachers have positive work circumstances, they report being unlikely to recommend a career in education. Only 34% of teachers who say their school administrators are supportive would recommend a career in education. Even among teachers who indicate their jobs are satisfying, less than half—46%—say they are likely or very likely to recommend education as a career.

# PAGE Recommendations

While it is often very rewarding to work in education, Georgia's educator workforce faces multiple challenges that can make it less fulfilling and nudge educators out. While no single, simple solution exists, there are steps policymakers can take to address these challenges and strengthen the education profession.

1

**Restore state funding for professional development and undertake a comprehensive review of professional development needs of principals and other educators to ensure that the state's Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula reflects the cost of high-quality training for principals and all educators.**

Principals have a central role in shaping educators' work environment and students' learning environment. They need high quality training before assuming this role, induction support as new principals, and coaching to continue building their skills as veteran leaders.

State funding for principal and teacher professional development is limited. Under the QBE formula, professional development funding is calculated as a percentage—currently 0.9%—of the state base teacher salary. The percentage was 1.5% until FY 2003, when the General Assembly reduced it to 1%. Lawmakers lowered it to existing levels in FY 2014.

Funding should be restored to the 1.5% level. In addition, a comprehensive analysis should be undertaken to assess principal professional development needs as well as those of teachers and other educators. The analysis should include an assessment of the cost of providing high-quality training to meet identified needs.

2

**Reduce the financial cost of becoming a teacher by restoring the Promise Scholarship, Teacher Scholarship, and Promise II Scholarship programs.**

Nearly three-quarters of teachers carry student loan debt, which, for many, contributes to difficulty covering their living expenses. To reduce the financial burden of earning a degree and initial teacher certification, the General Assembly should restore service cancellable loan programs it previously eliminated, such as:

- The Promise Scholarship for college juniors and seniors going into teaching, eliminated in FY 2011.
- The Promise II Scholarship for paraprofessionals seeking to complete their degrees and earn certification, eliminated in 2007.
- Teacher Scholarships for individuals pursuing advanced degrees in critical shortage areas such as math and science, eliminated in FY 2011.

Policymakers should also consider providing stipends for student teacher candidates in high-need fields, including special education, math, and science. This would reduce the need for student loans during the teacher preparation period.

**3****Develop and fund a multi-year plan to increase state funding for school counselors, social workers, and psychologists to the recommended best practice ratios.**

Disruptive student behavior often creates a negative environment for students and educators. To effectively address these behaviors, which often reflect unmet student mental health needs, schools must be appropriately staffed with mental health professionals. Currently, school counselors are funded at a ratio of one counselor per 450 students, one social worker per 2,475 students, and one school psychologist per 2,475 students. These funding ratios are much higher than the recommended best practice ratios of one counselor per 250 students,<sup>10</sup> one social worker per 250 students,<sup>11</sup> and one psychologist per 500 students.<sup>12</sup> Due to these ratios, 65 school districts did not receive enough state funding to cover a full-time social worker or a full-time school psychologist in the 2023-2024 school year. Lawmakers should develop and implement a plan to align state funding with these recommended ratios.

**4****Increase funding for substitutes to ensure teacher planning time is protected.**

Teachers need sufficient planning time to design effective and engaging instructional plans, review and provide feedback on student work, and analyze student data. Unfortunately, teachers often lose planning time to cover classes for absent colleagues as districts struggle to find substitute teachers. Similarly, paraprofessionals are often pulled away from serving their assigned students to cover for absent teachers.

The state provides \$150 annually to cover the cost of a substitute for eight days, or \$18.75 per day. This amount has not changed since 1985, and it is well below the amount districts must spend to attract substitutes. To reduce districts' reliance on teachers and paraprofessionals to cover classes and protect teacher planning time, state lawmakers should increase funding for substitutes.

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2. In one rural Georgia district, for example, the starting salary for a paraprofessional without experience is \$17,716 in FY 2025. In another rural district, the starting salary for a paraprofessional without experience was \$14,440 in FY 2024.
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