



The K–12 Employee Experience

Stability Doesn't Tell the Whole Story.

What national evidence reveals about the experience of working in America's public schools — and what K–12 leaders can do with it.

Stability doesn't tell the whole story.

Retention is a valuable and widely used indicator of workforce stability — it tells leaders whether employees are remaining in their roles, schools, and districts from one year to the next. But retention alone cannot answer a more pressing question: **what is the experience of those who stay?**

Workforce stability and workforce health are not interchangeable. An employee can remain in a role while experiencing chronic stress, unsustainable workload, or low satisfaction. Leaders who rely solely on retention data risk missing the conditions employees encounter every day while doing the work. Understanding those conditions requires additional, targeted measures.

84%

Remained at the same school

NCES, 2020–21 to 2021–22

59%

Report frequent stress or burnout

RAND, 2022

49 hrs

Average teacher workweek

NCES, 2023

18%

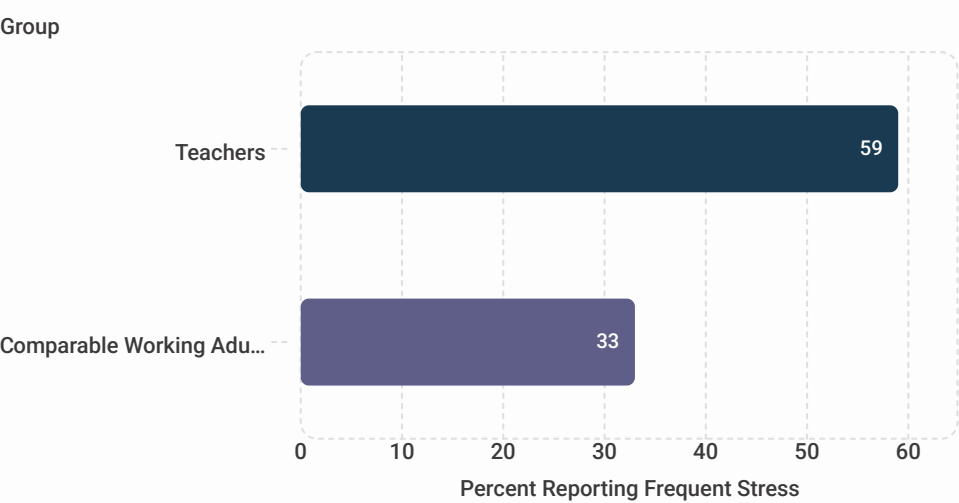
Report being very satisfied

PDK Poll, 2023

❏ **LEADER RESPONSE:** Do not use retention as a standalone measure of workforce health. Pair retention and turnover data with measures of workload, satisfaction, leadership support, autonomy, and intent to stay.

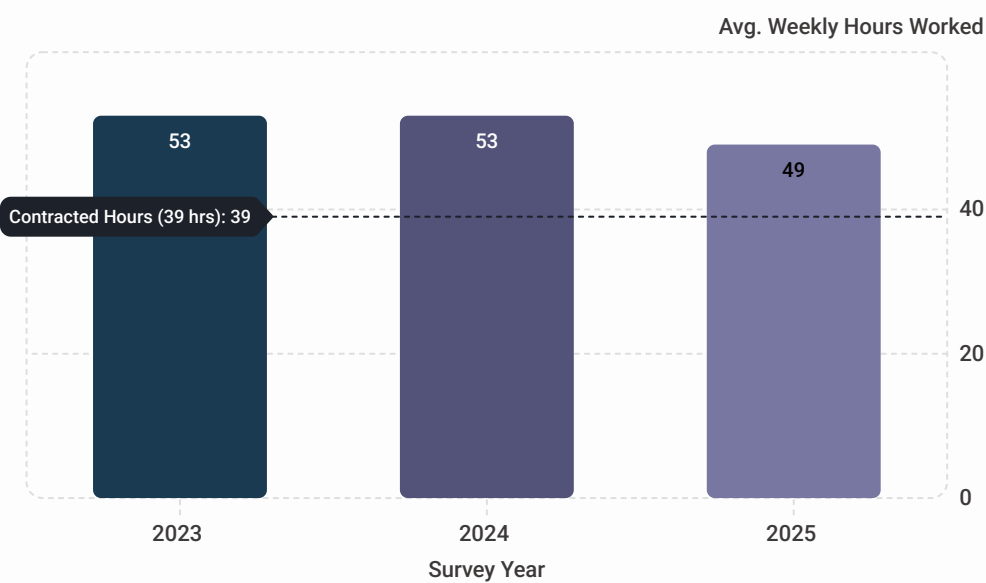
Signal 01: The Work Remains Demanding

Frequent Job-Related Stress or Burnout



Source: RAND Corporation, State of the American Teacher Survey, January 2024. Comparable working adults are college-educated workers, 35+ hours/week in other industries.

Average Weekly Hours: Actual vs. Contracted



Source: RAND Corporation, State of the American Teacher Survey, January 2023–2025. Hours reported declined from 2023–24 to 2025, but remained approximately 10 hours above contracted hours.

Even as reported hours declined in 2025, teachers continued to report working approximately 10 hours per week beyond their contracted hours.

FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION: Conduct a Workload Audit

Do not stop at asking employees whether they feel overworked. Identify where employee time is actually going. Examine meetings, documentation, planning requirements, coverage responsibilities, communication demands, administrative tasks, and other non-instructional work.

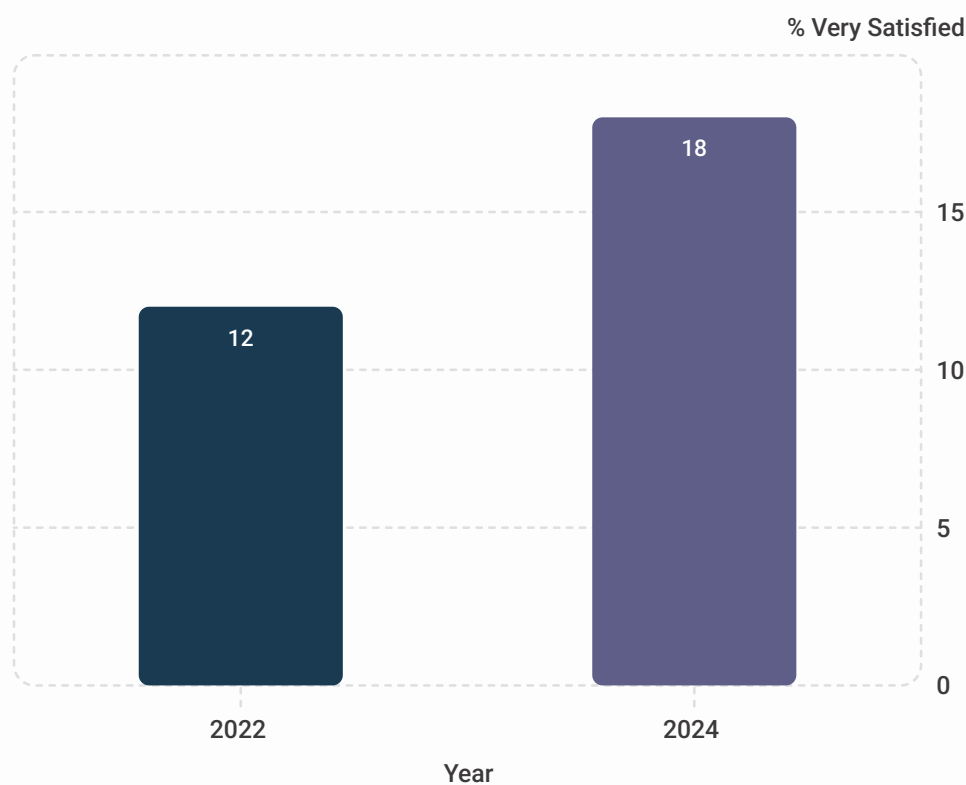
Categorize work into:

- **Essential** — directly supports the role or student outcomes
- **Necessary but redesignable** — must occur but could be simplified
- **Duplicative** — repeats another process or requirement
- **Low-value** — consumes employee capacity without a clear organizational benefit

Use the audit to identify work that can be **eliminated, consolidated, automated, reassigned, or redesigned**.

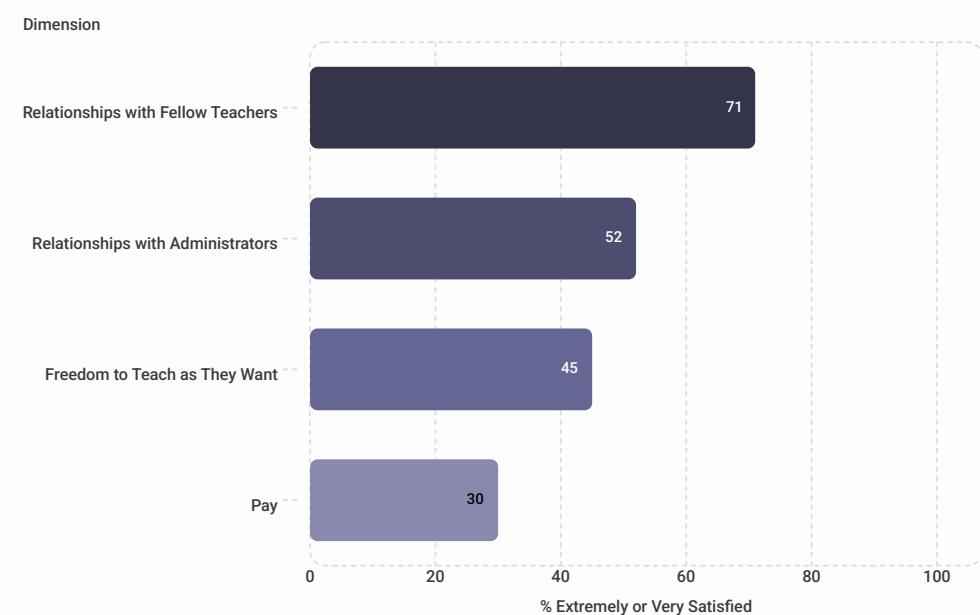
Signal 02: Satisfaction Is More Complicated Than a Single Score

Overall Job Satisfaction Trend — Teachers Reporting "Very Satisfied"



Source: EdWeek Research Center, Teacher Morale survey, January–March 2024.

Satisfaction with Specific Dimensions — "Extremely or Very Satisfied"



Source: Pew Research Center, October–November 2023. Note: This measure ("extremely or very satisfied") differs from EdWeek's "very satisfied" measure above.

The employee experience is multidimensional. Teachers report high satisfaction with collegial relationships but substantially lower satisfaction with compensation and autonomy. Overall satisfaction measures may obscure these important distinctions.



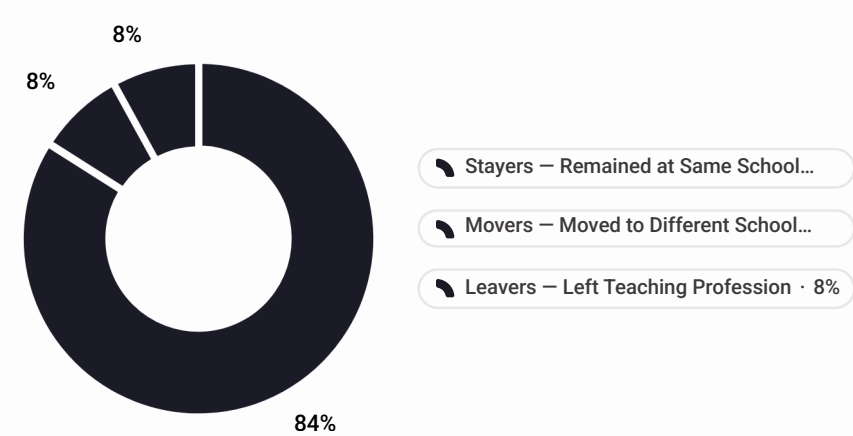
FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION

Stop relying on a single satisfaction or engagement score. When measuring employee experience, separately examine dimensions such as: **workload and capacity, leadership support, autonomy, collegial relationships, trust, compensation, belonging, and intent to stay.**

A districtwide average can improve while an important dimension of employee experience deteriorates. Where possible, segment results by school, role, and tenure.

Signal 03: Staying Isn't the Same as Thriving

Public School Workforce Status (2021–22)



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2021–22.

What Former Teachers Report About Their New Positions

66%

Better Work-Life Balance

60%

Greater Autonomy

58%

More Manageable Workload

Source: NCES, Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2021–22. Former teachers employed but no longer teaching.

FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION

Study your stayers before they become leavers. Conduct confidential stay interviews or structured employee listening sessions with a representative sample of current employees.

Examine:

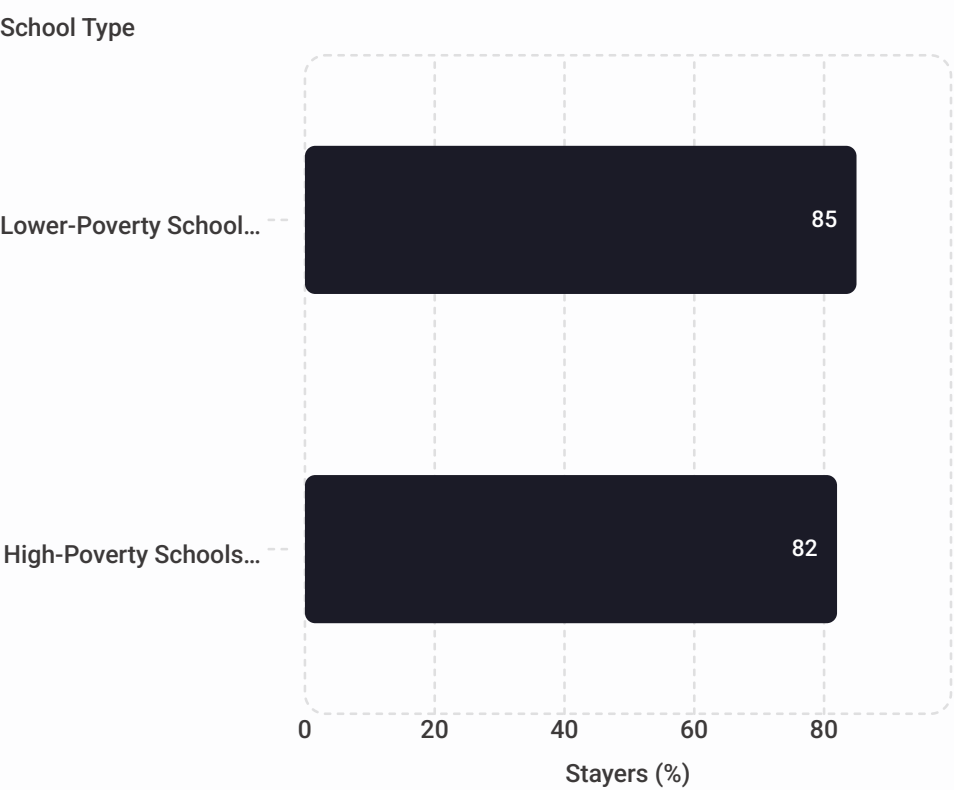
- What makes the work sustainable?
- What consumes unnecessary time or energy?
- What organizational processes create recurring friction?
- Where do employees feel they have meaningful autonomy?
- What support from leadership is most useful?
- What conditions would make the role more sustainable over the next 1–3 years?

Do not limit stay interviews to high performers or employees believed to be flight risks. Look for recurring organizational patterns rather than isolated complaints.

Signal 04: The Average Hides Variation

Retention (Stayers) by School Poverty Level (2021–22)

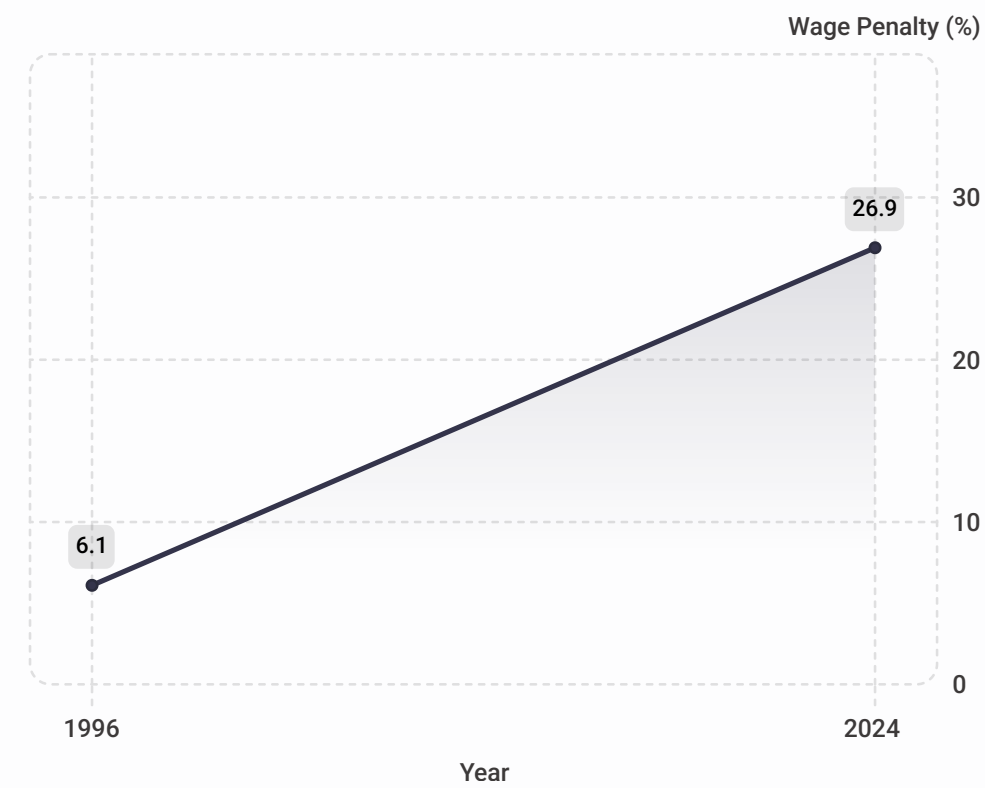
Retention rates differ by school poverty level — a 3-percentage-point gap.



A 3-point gap may appear small in aggregate, but it compounds over time: in a district of 1,000 teachers, it translates to approximately 30 additional departures annually concentrated in the highest-need schools — the schools that can least afford turnover.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2021–22. Lower-poverty defined as fewer than 35% FRPL eligibility; high-poverty defined as 75% or more FRPL eligibility.

The Growing Teacher Pay Penalty — Regression-Adjusted Weekly Wage Gap vs. Similarly Educated Professionals



Source: Economic Policy Institute, September 2025. Regression-adjusted measure comparing weekly wages of teachers with college graduates in other professions, controlling for education level and experience.

Even modest differences in aggregate retention can signal where deeper investigation may be warranted. Districtwide averages can also obscure meaningful variation across individual schools and employee populations.

FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION — Build a school-level workforce dashboard. Do not examine workforce health only at the district level. Where data is available, compare across schools and employee groups: **retention and turnover, vacancies, absenteeism, employee-experience measures, intent to stay, and workload indicators.** Identify bright spots as well as areas of concern. When one school produces meaningfully stronger workforce outcomes than a comparable school, investigate the organizational conditions that differ before assuming the explanation.

FROM FINDING TO ACTION

A practical starting point for diagnosing K–12 workforce conditions.

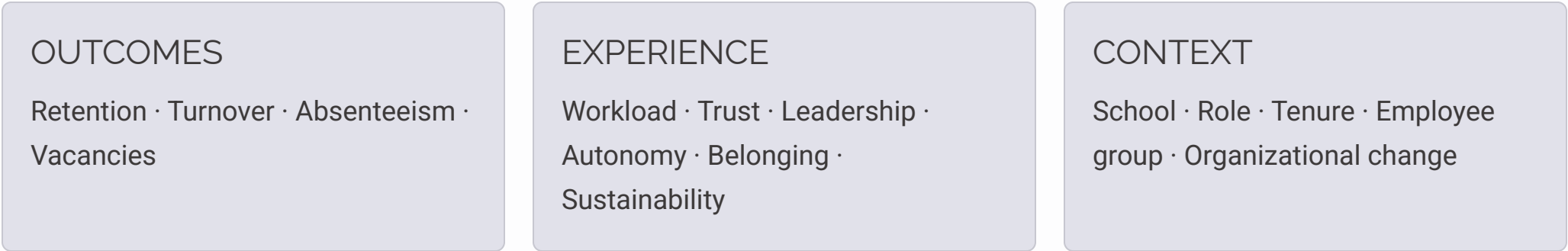
1	MEASURE EXPERIENCE BEFORE TURNOVER Use short employee-experience pulses 2–3 times annually to monitor workload, leadership support, autonomy, belonging, perceived sustainability, and intent to stay.
2	AUDIT WORKLOAD, NOT JUST PERCEPTION Map where employee time goes and identify requirements that can be eliminated, simplified, consolidated, reassigned, or redesigned.
3	SEGMENT BELOW THE DISTRICT AVERAGE Examine workforce outcomes and employee-experience measures by school, role, tenure, and other meaningful organizational groups.
4	STUDY YOUR STAYERS Use confidential stay interviews and employee listening to understand what supports sustainability and what creates recurring friction among employees who remain.
5	INVESTIGATE BRIGHT SPOTS Identify schools or teams producing stronger workforce outcomes and examine what organizational conditions distinguish them from comparable environments.
6	ESTABLISH A BASELINE BEFORE INTERVENING Before launching a workforce initiative, document current conditions, determine what indicators should change, and measure again after implementation.

These recommendations are presented as evidence-informed research and management practices. They are not proven interventions, but rather approaches grounded in the distinction between workforce outcomes and employee experience documented in this evidence review.

DON'T WAIT FOR TURNOVER TO TELL YOU THERE'S A PROBLEM.

Turnover is one workforce outcome. By the time it changes, the organizational conditions underneath it may have been developing for months or years.

A Three-Level Diagnostic Framework



MEASURE THE OUTCOME. DIAGNOSE THE CONDITIONS UNDERNEATH IT. ACT ON WHAT THE EVIDENCE REVEALS.

Methods & Limitations

Warren Research synthesized publicly available national evidence from five authoritative sources: RAND Corporation (American Educator Panels), National Center for Education Statistics (Teacher Follow-up Survey), Pew Research Center, EdWeek Research Center, and the Economic Policy Institute. The underlying studies use different samples, survey questions, methodologies, and data collection years. They should not be interpreted as one combined dataset. All findings are descriptive unless otherwise noted and should not be interpreted as establishing causality.

Primary Sources

RAND Corporation. Doan, S., Steiner, E.D., & Pandey, R. (2024). *Teacher Well-Being and Intentions to Leave in 2024: Findings from the 2024 State of the American Teacher Survey* (RR-A1108-12). Published June 18, 2024. [rand.org](#)

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