

# State of<sup>☆</sup> Education

National survey findings shed light on teachers' concerns and the support they need.

REPORT BY TPT

FEBRUARY 2022

Teachers Pay Teachers

# Introduction



**For even the most experienced educators, the 2021-22 school year has been one of the most challenging of their careers.**

While teachers work tirelessly to engage students, the ongoing pandemic has exacerbated many issues, impacted learning, and surfaced new challenges and opportunities along the way.

As teachers and administrators navigate an ever-changing landscape, understanding the challenges — as well as what’s working for educators — is not only crucial to helping solve problems for students, but also in mitigating the stress and negative impact on educators themselves.

With a global community of over 7 million teachers, including more than 85% of PreK-12 teachers in the U.S., Teachers Pay Teachers (TpT) has a unique vantage point to hear and amplify the voices and expertise of educators.

In this report, TpT completed an analysis of key trends in the industry at the start of 2022 and surveyed thousands of educators to understand their concerns and the promising practices that help them meet this moment.

# Top Findings

## Key Takeaway:

Only 31% of teachers surveyed said they would recommend the profession.

## This is a vital statistic for the health of the profession.

Teachers often enter the profession to improve the lives of students and change the world. They serve as mentors for student-teachers, first-year teachers, and as faculty in teacher education programs, which means they serve a crucial role in recruiting and retaining talent. In January 2022, however, only 31% of teachers surveyed said they would recommend teaching to someone considering joining the profession.

## This is likely due to:

### PANDEMIC-RELATED STAFFING SHORTAGES

62%

of teachers report there is a teacher shortage in their school

### INCREASED DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS

68%

of teachers say student behaviors are worse than pre-pandemic

### LACK OF RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

52%

of teachers say they have the resources and support necessary to engage all students

## Resulting in:

### TEACHERS NOT FEELING VALUED

52%

of teachers feel valued as professionals

### TEACHERS CONSIDERING A CAREER SHIFT

48%

of teachers are considering a job-related change



A healthy system of education remains a fundamental pillar of society in service of children, families, democracy, the economy and so much more. Right now, the system and the educators working within it are overwhelmed. However, there is still time to address the difficult state of education and avoid a worse crisis.

Highlights from our research indicate opportunities for further engaging teachers in decision making, reducing workloads, increasing flexibility, and valuing teachers both through compensation and a supportive school environment.

In the following pages, we'll explore school responses to the COVID Omicron variant, the need for social-emotional support, and teacher shortages — and provide actionable takeaways from our global educator community.

## Key Finding #1:

# School responses to Omicron

The start of 2022 also kicked off the second half of the school year for millions of students and their teachers. And due to the COVID Omicron variant, the return from winter break was different than planned. School leaders across the U.S. and beyond had to make quick decisions on whether to return to in-person instruction or reinstate remote learning.

In the first week of January, the vast majority of school districts remained open for in-person instruction, with only a few districts — like Atlanta and Cleveland — announcing plans to go remote. In fact, 92% of teachers surveyed by TpT reported they were teaching in-person. Of the remaining respondents, 4% reported teaching in a hybrid model, and another 4% reported their school would move to distance learning.

However, throughout the first two weeks of January, as COVID cases peaked and caused staffing shortages, the number of schools moving to remote learning reached just over 7,000 school closures in mid-January according to [Burbio](#)<sup>1</sup>. By the second week of January, teachers surveyed by TpT reported 89% were teaching in-person.

While responses to the Omicron surge have varied, U.S. school districts are generally trying to prioritize in-person instruction (to the extent possible) for the academic and emotional health of students. This marks a significant change in approach from the 2021 school year. However, even though administrators, educators, parents, and students share the same desire to safely engage in in-person instruction, they don't always agree on how to achieve that end.

When polled, those teachers engaged in a hybrid model were most likely to report being unsatisfied with their school's choice of instructional model (21%), compared with those teaching in-person (7%) or remotely (4%). While hybrid instruction allows students to maintain some connection to their teachers and classmates, even when they need to be home, it requires double the preparation for teachers.

---

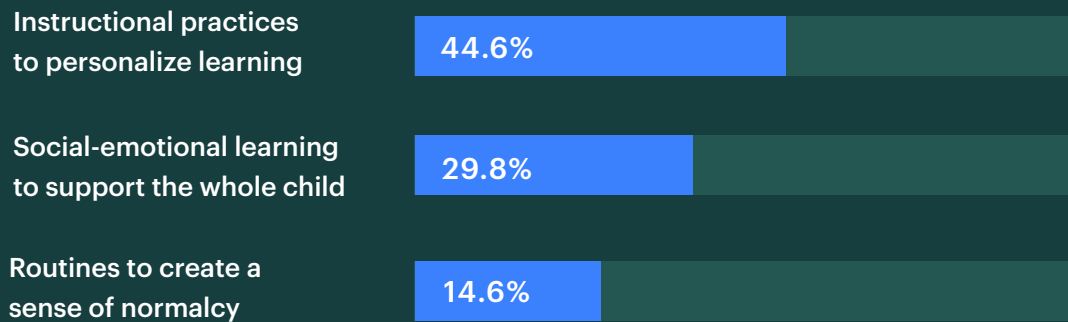
<sup>1</sup> This number does not account for the many individual classrooms within schools that shifted to distance learning, due to a positive test or exposure while the rest of the school continued in-person.

## Expert Insights

### Top 3 Most Helpful Strategies for Teaching During a Crisis

Teachers and administrators are working diligently, in very difficult circumstances, to lead their communities through this crisis. The daily emergencies and COVID wellness checks make it difficult to research and collaborate about what's working in education. So, in an open-ended question, TpT asked teachers to share promising practices for teaching in this phase of the pandemic.

Their responses landed in three main categories:



#### Instructional practices to personalize learning

In order to meet the needs of diverse learners and address unfinished learning, a significant shift in instruction has occurred with teachers increasingly leveraging technology to engage students as they use a range of strategies to design small group and individual interventions. Early in the pandemic, many districts invested in providing teachers and students with devices, internet connectivity, and digital tools. Now teachers rely on that technology to reach and teach students regardless of their instructional model.

One of the promises of tech-integrated learning is that it can help personalize learning and embed the four C's (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity) into instruction. Based on the data from educators, there are signs of progress toward that future promise. Despite a tumultuous year, teacher confidence in the use of digital tools is up with 78% of teachers surveyed by TpT reporting feeling confident using digital tools to engage students.

This shift has happened quickly, especially when we consider that, in 2019, learning management systems were optional and video conferencing was not utilized by most teachers.

“The use of [an LMS] has become common for all teachers and students in our school. That has made getting information to students much better.”



“Using [video conferencing] to do collaboration activities and using breakout rooms was helpful.”

“Making sure my students are able to navigate their technology and are familiar with log in protocols, etc. I accomplish this by making my lessons and follow up activities both paper and technology based. This allows for a smooth transition if we do have to go completely remote or a student is in quarantine.”



### Nurturing students’ social-emotional health

A second promising practice highlighted by teachers is social-emotional learning. Otherwise known as SEL, it’s a framework to help students learn how to manage emotions, improve social skills, and make responsible choices. Educators have implemented a wide range of strategies to support the whole child by leveraging SEL and trauma-informed practices. This vital issue is explored more fully in the next Key Finding section.

## Maintaining a routine to get students back on track

Finally, teachers emphasized the importance of routines as a best practice. With the many disruptions of the pandemic, teachers, students, and families want reliable routines restored. Students feel a sense of safety, security, and confidence when their schedules are predictable and their routines are familiar. (This is even more vital for children who experience disabilities.) To do this, teachers utilize visual schedules, teach clear expectations, and strive to maintain consistent class routines.



As schools continue to shift in and out of distance learning, educators are employing several strategies to adapt quickly to meet students' needs with the knowledge and skills they have gained since March 2020.

### Further Reading

The Associated Press: [What the Return From Winter Break Looks Like for Schools Across the Country](#)





## Key Finding #2:

# Pandemic hardships fuel a need for more student behavior supports

The pandemic has caused a significant disruption — not just to academic progress, but to many students' social-emotional development. In fact, in October 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics declared a national emergency in children's mental health as COVID-19 stressors accelerated pre-pandemic trends. This is understandable as students have experienced trauma, inconsistent peer-to-peer interactions, and interrupted instruction.

Educators are witnessing first-hand the impacts of the collective trauma caused by the pandemic. Many students are struggling with anxiety; some are unable to maintain routines, and even lagging behind in the development of their social and communication skills. 68% of teachers surveyed by TpT say their students' behaviors in class are slightly worse (37%) or much worse (31%) this school year.



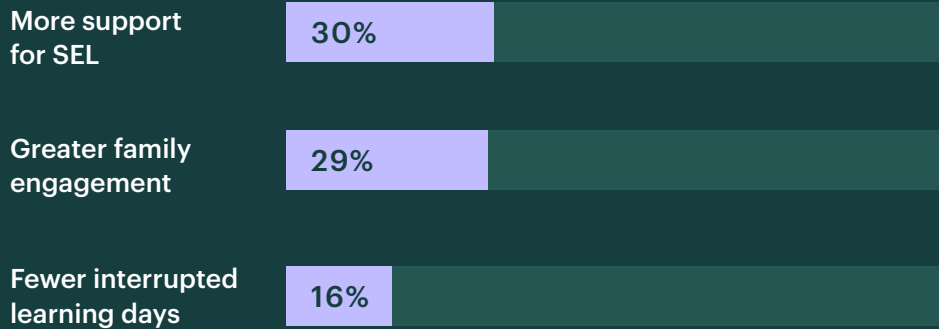
In many schools, student discipline referrals, fights, and anti-social behaviors have increased as ongoing stress triggers fight-or-flight responses in students. Across the nation, students are increasingly acting out. Their disruptive behaviors are also interrupting learning and reducing the sense of safety for students and staff.



## Expert Insights

### Top 3 Ways to Support Student Behavior

When TpT asked teachers for their top recommendations on best practices to improve student behaviors, they reported:



#### Increased attention on social-emotional learning

While SEL, trauma-informed practices, and restorative practices were well-known pre-pandemic, their implementation wasn't considered integral to everyday instruction. In 2022, they're a cornerstone. Teachers often start the day with a community circle and an SEL lesson. Many are creating calming spaces in their classrooms while utilizing check-ins, read alouds, collaborative exercises, and journaling. Teachers, counselors, and social workers are also explicitly teaching students vocabulary to identify feelings and regulate their emotions.

#### More family-school interaction

Having families as partners in each student's education is important to teachers and administrators. Educators work to create welcoming environments, establish strong communication systems, and provide clear information on student progress with plans that families can reinforce at home. Engaging families in a culturally responsive way is key – especially with those who experience poverty, are historically underserved, or are linguistically diverse. It requires intentionally removing barriers to family engagement, such as providing translators, childcare, and meals at school events. A mutual partnership also requires two-way communication so that families have the opportunity to surface unmet needs or problems, as they perceive them, and co-create solutions with educators.

## Fewer interrupted learning days

In addition to directly supporting social-emotional development and engaging families to improve student behaviors, teachers also highlighted a root cause of disruptive student behaviors: interrupted learning. Frequent school closures interfere with teachers establishing predictable routines, maintaining clear expectations, and consistent opportunities for academic and behavioral growth.

Pre-pandemic, [researchers studied](#) the relationship between frequent classroom interruptions and student learning. Common sources of interruptions included: intercom announcements, tardy students, unscheduled visits by other teachers, administrators, or support staff, phone calls, and student cell phones. Researchers found that these interruptions harmed student achievement. Naturally, the more significant interruptions caused by the pandemic have been exponentially more detrimental to student academic and behavioral outcomes.

“Taking time to have a Community Circle or a Morning Meeting sets the stage for the day and helps me to take **the temperature of the classroom** overall. Who needs an extra minute of conversation? Who is ready to learn? Who needs something to eat?”

### Further Reading

The Wall Street Journal: [Schools Confront a Wave of Student Misbehavior, Driven by Months of Remote Learning](#)



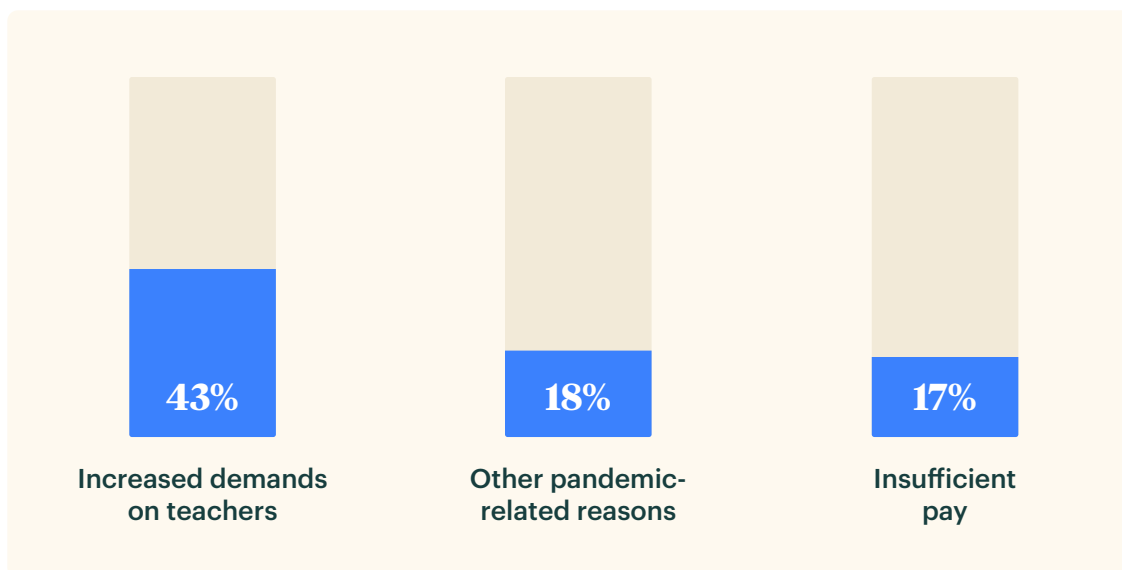
**Key Finding #3:**

# Staffing shortages are taking a real toll on schools

The education industry has historically struggled with staffing shortages, especially in communities that experience high levels of poverty and particularly in high-demand subjects like math, science, and special education. But the COVID crisis has brought the issue front and center.

The stress of the pandemic and a decade of reduced enrollment in teacher education programs has exacerbated shortages. According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals, in December 2021, 68% of principals reported the pandemic has made it more difficult to hire new teachers. In comparison, nearly the same number (62%) of teachers surveyed by TpT in January 2022 reported that their school is experiencing a teacher shortage this year. In addition to contract teachers, support staff and substitute teachers are also in short supply, profoundly affecting schools' abilities to provide services to students and families.

**Among teachers surveyed by TpT who reported there is a teacher shortage in their school, the primary reasons stated are:**



The stress is so significant that nearly half (48%) of teachers surveyed by TpT in November 2021 reported they have considered a job-related change, including 34% that said they've considered changing careers in the past month, up from 23% in an August 2020 TpT poll. The [NEA reported](#) similar findings in summer 2021, with 32% of their members saying the pandemic has led them to plan to leave the profession earlier than they anticipated.

Teacher absences have caused schools to extend breaks, move instruction online, or close altogether. Shortages have also required administrators to shuffle staff on a weekly, daily, or even hourly basis. Often, it also requires leaders to make painful decisions about the best use of the teachers in attendance. School leaders are combining classes and often covering classes themselves. In fact, only 52% of teachers surveyed by TpT said they have the resources and support necessary to teach all their students. The language in educators' job descriptions — "other duties as assigned" — is invoked on a daily basis.



## Top 3 Ways School Leaders Can Support Teacher Retention

Addressing a teacher shortage and retaining teachers with messages of self-care are insufficient without implementing strategies that increase a teacher’s sense of efficacy. With teachers identifying that the shortage has developed due to increased demands on them, as well as due to pandemic-related reasons and insufficient pay, administrators and policy-makers will need to consider strategies to retain teachers such as:

**1** Reducing demands on teachers

**2** Increasing teachers’ sense of safety related to COVID

**3** Increasing compensation

### Reducing demands on teachers

Demands on teachers and associated work-related stress are at record highs. In this phase of the pandemic, teacher shortages mean there are not enough substitutes, so teachers are canceling their own medical appointments, teaching larger combined classes, and giving up planning periods and lunch times to cover for colleagues. Survey participants indicate that reducing demands on teachers is a key strategy to recruit and retain teachers in the profession. What does that look like in practice, according to teachers?

School and district leaders can reduce required meetings, increase planning and collaboration time, reduce class sizes, set reasonable expectations for student achievement, and deprioritize some required tasks. Finding opportunities for flexibility in a traditionally inflexible school schedule can also go a long way to reduce workloads.

“Zoom staff meetings, rather than face-to-face, mean [teachers] can participate from home or school.”

## Increasing sense of safety

Teachers have a range of perspectives and concerns about teaching in-person. The first step in increasing a sense of safety among teachers is for administrators to build relationships with the teachers they serve well. Knowing each teacher's circumstances will allow school and district leaders to provide meaningful support.

With complex and ever-changing guidance from federal and state agencies, administrators have a challenging task to create a sense of safety for teachers. The evolving list of mitigation measures includes: vaccinations, testing, masking, distancing, improved ventilation, and enforcing quarantine periods. A sense of confidence and safety derives from strong relationships, clear, accurate communication, and consistent enforcement of guidelines which is no easy task.



## Increasing compensation

In December, 2021, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona recommended increasing teacher pay as one way to use federal funds to address the teacher shortage.

In 2021, several states either proposed or implemented increases in teacher compensation as a strategy to recruit and retain teachers. Increased pay is one way to signal the value of teachers to society and to those directly in the profession. When surveyed, just 52% of teachers agreed they felt valued as professionals. Of those teachers who reported feeling valued, they were much less likely to consider making a job-related change in the past month (32% of teachers who reported feeling valued were considering a job-related change in January compared with 72% of teachers who do not feel valued).

“Hiring a permanent substitute teacher to be available has been very beneficial. If a sub doesn't pick up our leave day, the building sub is available. This takes a lot of stress off the teachers. If not needed in a classroom, the floating substitute works as an interventionist.”

As leaders develop a comprehensive response to the teacher shortage and look to unlock the resources and support needed during this highly complicated time in education, TpT will continue to amplify the voices of teachers and shine a light on the insights they provide so that students, teachers and administrators can thrive.



#### Further Reading

U.S. Department of Education: [Letter from the Secretary of Education, December 16, 2021](#)





# Survey Methodology

TpT administered three surveys to three samples of active teacher users on the TpT website in January 2022. Teachers who responded to the surveys were primarily based in the U.S., with representation from schools nationwide. Teachers voluntarily completed the survey while engaged on the TpT website. All questions on the surveys were optional for teachers to complete.



## **The first survey:**

Included questions about the instructional model that teachers will engage in after their winter break, questions regarding a teacher shortage, and teachers' experiences with student behavior challenges. The number of respondents ranged from 1,466 teachers responding up to 4,015 teachers responding to the first survey question. A final open-ended question was also included, which asked, "What is a promising practice that is working well during the pandemic?" 336 teachers responded to this prompt.

## **The second survey:**

Asked questions about considerations of job-related changes, how valued they felt as a professional, whether they have the resources and support necessary to teach all students, how confident they felt in using digital tools to engage students in learning, their top concerns as a teacher, how safe they feel in school and why, and gauged their likeliness to recommend teaching to a friend/colleague. Number of respondents ranged from 940 teachers responding up to 1,219 with the first survey question. As in the first survey, a final free response question was also included, which asked, "What is a promising practice that is working well during the pandemic?" 549 teachers responded to the prompt.



## **The third survey:**

Administered included questions about whether teachers are considering a job-related change and gathering updates on the instructional model they are implementing in the second week back from winter break. Number of respondents ranged from 2,469 responding to the first question to 1,306 completing the survey.