Job Demands Experienced by South Carolina Teachers in 2023

JANUARY 2024

The 2023 SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey (SCTWCS) collected comprehensive data from more than 17,000 public PK–12 teachers across 44 school districts. This report encapsulates key survey findings related to challenges within the South Carolina education system, which resonate with concerns and recommendations of the Proviso 1.114 Task Force Report.
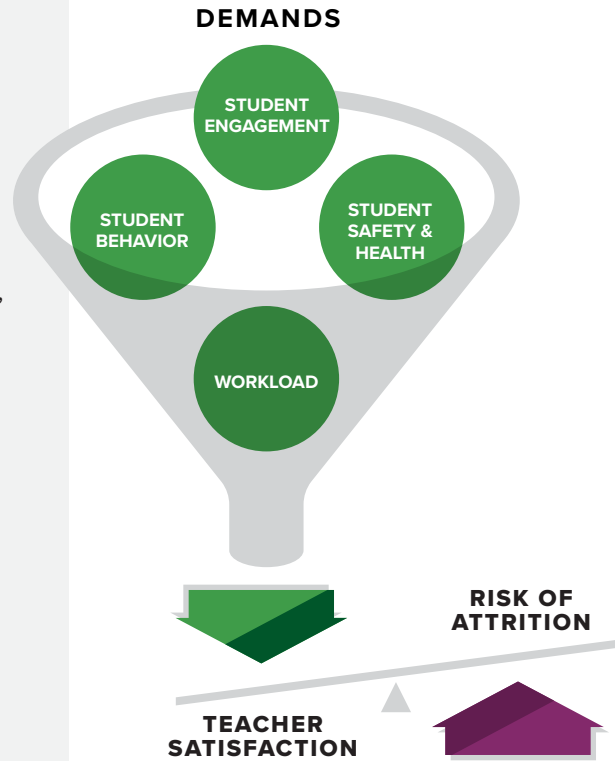
SC TEACHER

An important note on this report

In light of the recent Proviso 1.114 Task Force Report, which underscores the critical need for improved working conditions for educators in South Carolina, this report provides a detailed and focused analysis of the specific obstacles teachers face in the state.

Through extensive research and statewide listening sessions, the Task Force report identified several pivotal areas requiring attention, including providing meaningful planning time, prioritizing learning through assessment, simplifying standards and curriculum adoption, enhancing community engagement, and ensuring accountability for student behavior and family engagement. This report echoes those findings, delving deeper into the daily realities and specific job demands that South Carolina teachers face, such as the impacts of paperwork and student behavior. Without the proper supports, higher levels of these demands relate to lower job satisfaction and, ultimately, attrition.
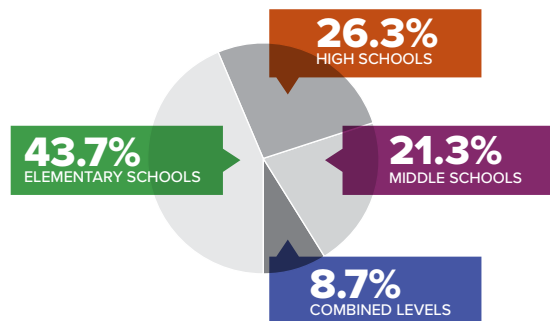
The intention of this report is to provide a clearer understanding of the real-world implications of the issues identified by the Task Force. As well, it emphasizes the direct correlation addressing those issues could have with improving South Carolina's education sector and the welfare of our educators.
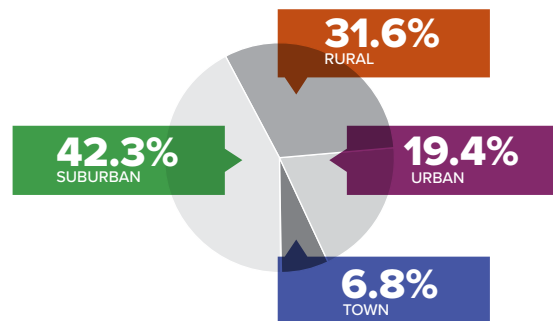
DEMANDS

- STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
- STUDENT BEHAVIOR
- STUDENT SAFETY & HEALTH
- WORKLOAD

RISK OF ATTRITION

TEACHER SATISFACTION

Who are the teachers reporting on job demands?

Data was pulled from 15,428 public PK–12 teachers who answered survey questions related to job demands. Respondents worked in 44 school districts across South Carolina.
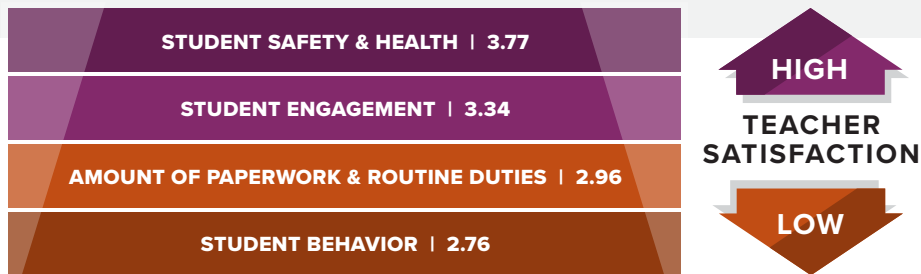
PARTICIPANT SCHOOL SETTINGS

- **26.3%** HIGH SCHOOLS
- **43.7%** ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
- **21.3%** MIDDLE SCHOOLS
- **8.7%** COMBINED LEVELS

PARTICIPANT LOCATIONS

- **31.6%** RURAL
- **42.3%** SUBURBAN
- **19.4%** URBAN
- **6.8%** TOWN

What did rated responses reveal about the demands teachers face?

The investigation of teachers' perceptions of job demands involved 19 items across four areas. For these close-ended survey items, teachers reported their level of agreement on a 5-point scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree or disagree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree. Since job demands have a negative impact on teacher satisfaction, lower ratings imply teachers see demands in the area as more problematic.

AVERAGE TEACHER RATINGS OF JOB DEMANDS

STUDENT SAFETY & HEALTH	3.77
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT	3.34
AMOUNT OF PAPERWORK & ROUTINE DUTIES	2.96
STUDENT BEHAVIOR	2.76

HIGH
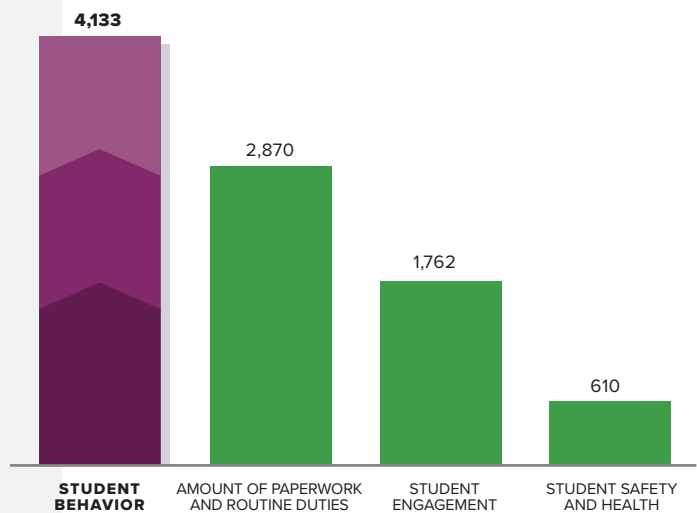
TEACHER SATISFACTION

LOW

What did open-ended responses reveal about the demands teachers face?

As providing open-ended feedback was optional, the information represents important concerns from teachers. Of the 10,230 teachers who provided responses, almost two-thirds mentioned at least one of the four job demands (67.9%), with many discussing more than one demand.

Responses were grouped by aligned themes. This figure shows the number of teachers commenting on each type of job demand.

TEACHER OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES NOTING A SCTWCS DEMAND AREA
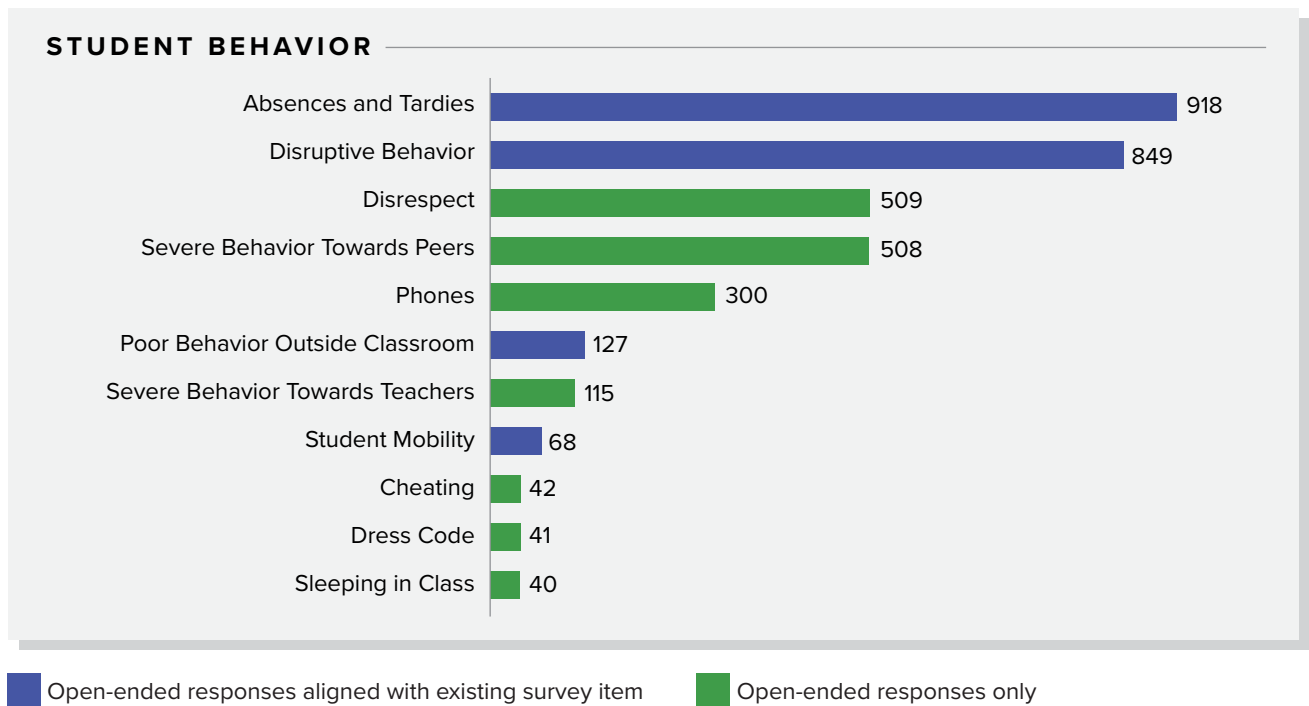

- STUDENT BEHAVIOR: 4,133
- AMOUNT OF PAPERWORK AND ROUTINE DUTIES: 2,870
- STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: 1,762
- STUDENT SAFETY AND HEALTH: 610

Note. The number of individual teachers mentioning at least one demand is 6,947.

What did open-ended responses reveal about each job demand area?

Student behavior

From SCTWCS, *student behavior* measured the level to which teachers agreed that student misbehavior, tardiness, absenteeism, and mobility interfered with teaching. Two survey items measured misbehavior interfering with teaching: one inside the classroom and one at school.

Of the educators responding to at least one open-ended question, 40.4% mentioned at least one aspect of *student behavior*, making it the most noted demand in open-ended responses. Open-ended responses indicated numerous related stressors for teachers, some of which aligned with survey items (blue) and some that were not included in the survey (green).

STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Category	Value
Absences and Tardies	918
Disruptive Behavior	849
Disrespect	509
Severe Behavior Towards Peers	508
Phones	300
Poor Behavior Outside Classroom	127
Severe Behavior Towards Teachers	115
Student Mobility	68
Cheating	42
Dress Code	41
Sleeping in Class	40

■ Open-ended responses aligned with existing survey item   ■ Open-ended responses only

Note. Positive responses about behavior are not included as they do not represent demands. Many comments were also nonspecific. While they were captured in the overall numbers, they are not represented in this graph.
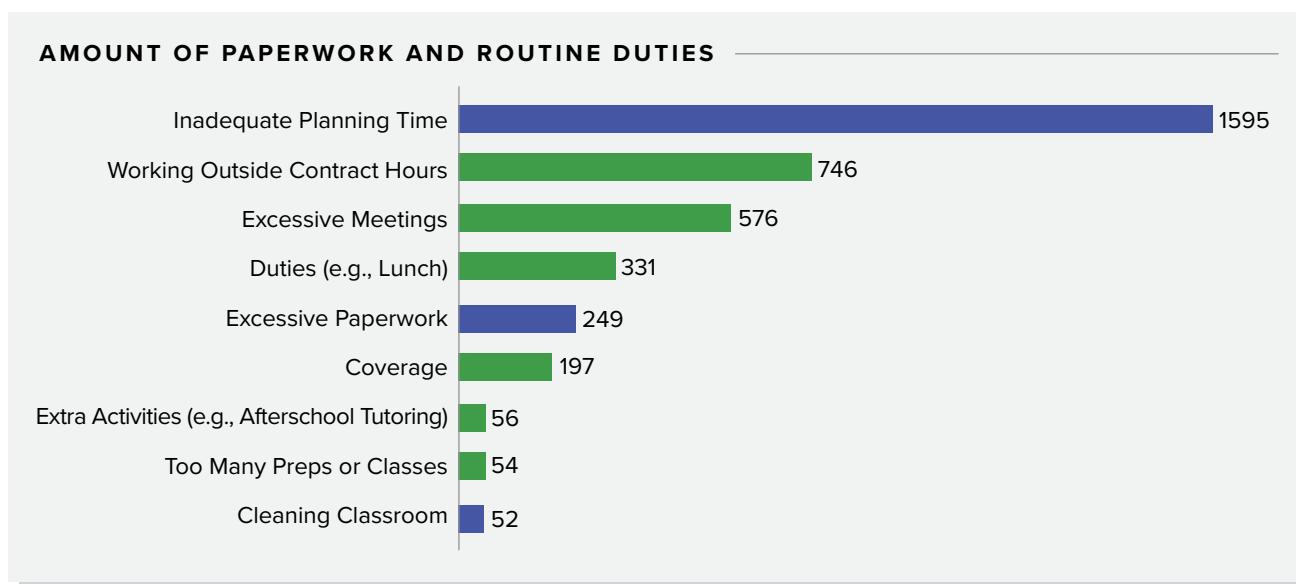
+ TAKEAWAYS

- Issues that appear most stressful to teachers are those affecting the classroom environment, such as absences and tardies and disruptive behavior (captured largely by objective survey items).
- Teachers also prominently mentioned concerns about disrespectful behavior, severe misbehavior (e.g., fighting), and behavior issues related to cell phones.
- Concerns related more to issues outside the classroom and less to the classroom environment (e.g., dress code violations) were noted by teachers, but to a lesser degree.

Amount of paperwork and routine duties

Amount of paperwork and routine duties measured the level to which teachers perceived adequate time to complete paperwork and routine duties during the school day. Four survey items captured administrative work, cleaning classrooms, creating lesson plans, and completing most job-related work at school.

Of the educators responding to at least one open-ended question, 28.1% addressed at least one aspect of *amount of paperwork and routine duties*. Open-ended responses highlighted nine specific workload-related stresses, some of which aligned with survey items (blue) and some that were not included in the survey (green).

AMOUNT OF PAPERWORK AND ROUTINE DUTIES

Category	Value
Inadequate Planning Time	1595
Working Outside Contract Hours	746
Excessive Meetings	576
Duties (e.g., Lunch)	331
Excessive Paperwork	249
Coverage	197
Extra Activities (e.g., Afterschool Tutoring)	56
Too Many Preps or Classes	54
Cleaning Classroom	52

■ Open-ended responses aligned with existing survey item   ■ Open-ended responses only
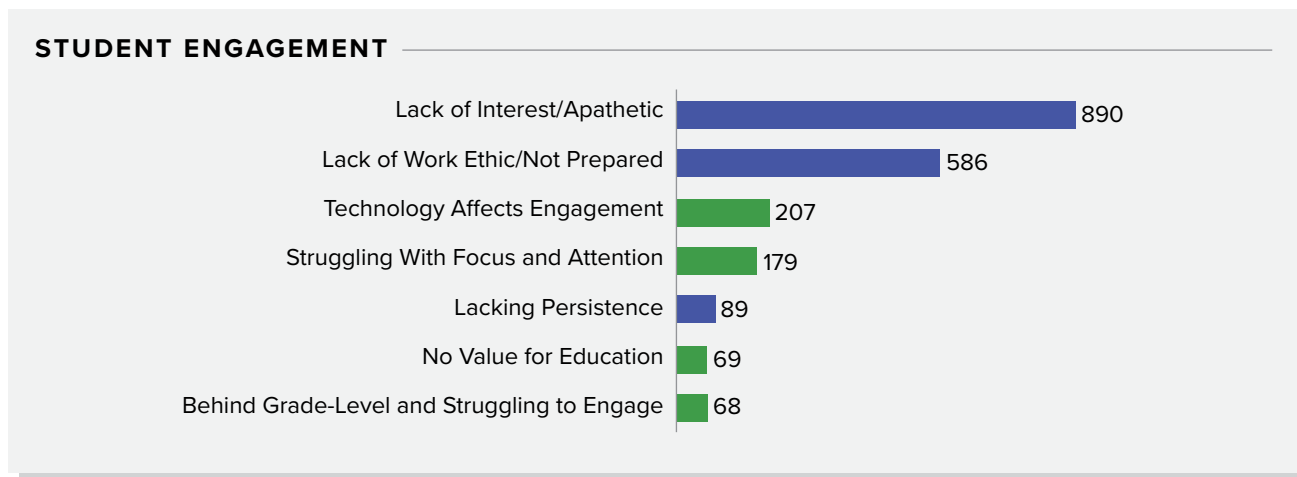
Note. Positive responses related to the amount of paperwork and routine duties (e.g., protected planning time) are not included as they do not represent demands. Many comments were also nonspecific. While they were captured in the overall numbers, they are not represented in this graph.

+ TAKEAWAYS

- Lack of planning time was the most frequent issue raised by respondents related to paperwork and administrative duties. Many respondents indicated having to work outside of contract hours due to a lack of planning time, as well as losing planning time frequently to meetings.
- Comments about various duties (e.g., lunch, parking) indicated that a major concern not measured by SCTWCS items was having to cover duties for absent teachers.
- Fewer responses were regarding extra activities (e.g., after-school tutoring), having too many course preparations, or lacking time to adequately clean classrooms.

Student engagement

Student engagement measured the level to which teachers agreed on students demonstrating positive attitudes, interest, persistence, effort, and preparation. Of the educators responding to at least one open-ended question, 17.2% mentioned at least one aspect of *student engagement*. Open-ended responses highlighted seven challenges with student learning, some of which aligned with survey items (blue) and some that were not included in the survey (green).

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT —————————————————————————————

Category	Value
Lack of Interest/Apathetic	890
Lack of Work Ethic/Not Prepared	586
Technology Affects Engagement	207
Struggling With Focus and Attention	179
Lacking Persistence	89
No Value for Education	69
Behind Grade-Level and Struggling to Engage	68

■ Open-ended responses aligned with existing survey item   ■ Open-ended responses only

Note. Positive responses related to student engagement are not included as they do not represent demands. Many comments were also nonspecific. While they were captured in the overall numbers, they are not represented in this graph.
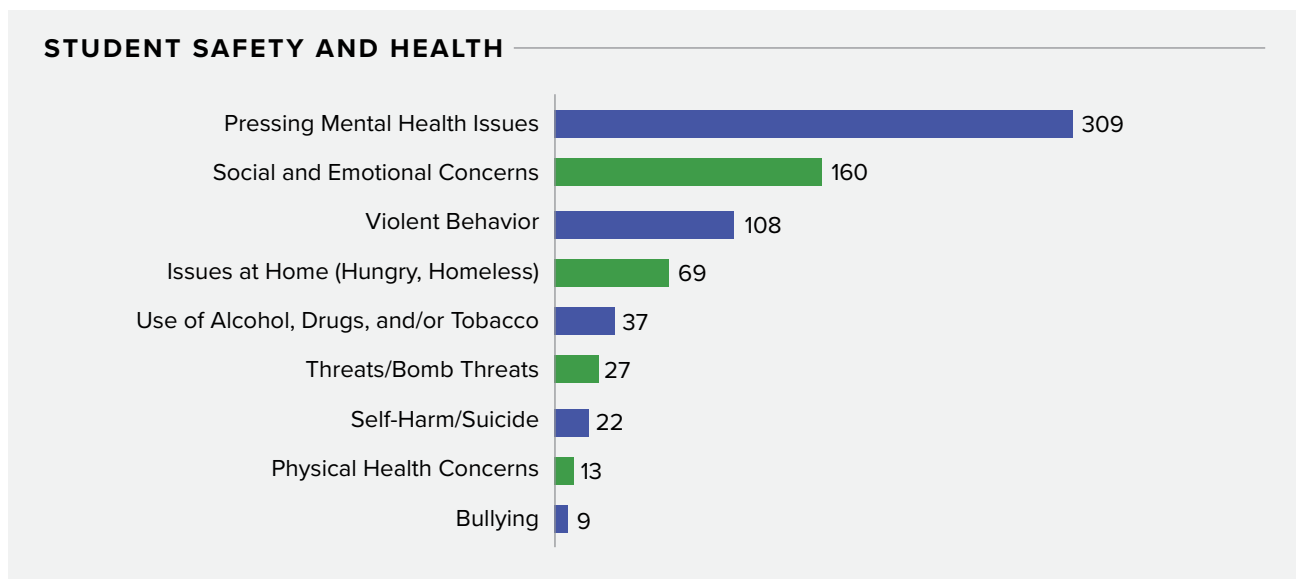
+ TAKEAWAYS ————————————————————————————————

- The most teacher responses regarded students with an apathetic attitude toward learning, students without a strong work ethic, and students not prepared for class.
- Concerns about technology, specifically how it led to disengagement, were frequently noted. In addition to cell phone usage, discussions highlighted additional ways technology interfered with student engagement, such as limited concentration in class due to social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, TikTok).
- Other teachers focused on how students generally struggled to focus and pay attention.
- A smaller set of responses noted how perceptions that students lack persistence, see no value in gaining an education, or struggle to engage because of academic frustration negatively affected teachers' job satisfaction.

Student safety and health

Student safety and health measured the extent to which teachers felt prepared to recognize troubling student behavior. The five objective items aimed to capture whether teachers felt they could detect early warning signs of violent behavior, self-harm or suicidal tendencies, mental health disorders, bullying behaviors, and use of alcohol or drugs.

It is important to note that most of the comments made by the 6.0% of open-ended respondents who addressed this demand were not about their ability to diagnose issues but rather the prevalence of these issues among their school's students. Open-ended responses noted several areas of concern with *student safety and health*, some of which aligned with survey items (blue) and some areas that were not included in the survey (green).

STUDENT SAFETY AND HEALTH

Category	Value
Pressing Mental Health Issues	309
Social and Emotional Concerns	160
Violent Behavior	108
Issues at Home (Hungry, Homeless)	69
Use of Alcohol, Drugs, and/or Tobacco	37
Threats/Bomb Threats	27
Self-Harm/Suicide	22
Physical Health Concerns	13
Bullying	9

■ Open-ended responses aligned with existing survey item   ■ Open-ended responses only

Note. Many comments were nonspecific. While they were captured in the overall numbers, they are not represented in this graph. Some of the issues coded as *student safety and health* reflect those coded as *student behavior*. Comments about bullying behavior (i.e., the perpetrator) were coded as *student behavior*, whereas comments about victims were coded as *student safety and health*. Some comments were coded as both, as fitting the content.

+ TAKEAWAYS

- Concerns about students' mental health and medication were most prominent in responses, followed by responses regarding social and emotional learning and violent behavior.
- While concerns about students' mental health and violent behaviors were related to objective items, it is again notable that teachers generally commented on how many students these issues affected rather than their own ability to diagnose problems.
- Teachers less frequently identified issues related to students' home lives (e.g., lack of nutrition, going hungry), substance use, threatening behaviors, self-harm, physical health concerns, and bullying.

What other job demands did teachers express concerns about?

Teacher responses included areas not related to any of the SCTWCS items or areas, which could be captured more purposefully in future survey iterations. For example, areas such as large class sizes and caseloads might be grouped with other aspects of *amount of paperwork and routine duties* to create a *workload* demand, as higher numbers of students mean more paperwork (e.g., grading).

Other potential organizational demands not being captured by the current survey objective items include a loss of class time for testing, school events, students pulled from classrooms, and extra administrative duties.

How did the survey perform in measuring teachers' perceptions of job demands?

Analyses of the survey items showed that the questions asked were reflective of teachers' work experiences. However, two slight modifications were suggested for future administrations of the SCTWCS: combining two redundant items from *amount of paperwork and routine duties* and two items from *student engagement*.

As a set, items measuring job demands did not capture extreme responses, meaning teachers with very low or high levels of agreement to the statements around demands. Most responses were between 2 and 4 on the 5-point scale. To achieve more precise ratings, future considerations include adding easier items for teachers to rate with an extreme value (1 or 5) or changing the survey scale (e.g., number of scale points, labels). For example, measuring items by agreement may not be as useful as knowing how frequently demands impact teachers' daily workloads.

In addition, the analysis of open-ended data provided many new insights, including areas of job demands currently not measured by the SCTWCS. Those demand items (noted in green) may be constructed and piloted in future administrations of the SCTWCS to better reflect the working conditions of South Carolina teachers.

About the SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey

The SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey (SCTWCS), conducted by SC TEACHER, aims to shed light on the working conditions of classroom teachers in South Carolina. In spring 2023, the SCTWCS was distributed across 44 out of 83 school districts, with a participation rate of 49%, representing 68% of teachers statewide through responses from 17,954 teachers in 849 schools.

The survey investigates 11 aspects of teacher working conditions, including resources and demands. Resources refer to positive aspects of teaching conditions, like support and communication. Demands represent challenges teachers face, such as time spent on paperwork. The survey explores the impact of these conditions on teachers' job satisfaction and intention to remain in the profession, as well as three areas of mentor support for new teachers.

Detailed information about the SCTWCS can be found at www.sc-teacher.org/twc-survey/.

A full description of the analyses used in this report is provided in the Technical Appendix at: www.sc-teacher.org/documents/appx-twc-job-demands.

TEACHER WORKING CONDITIONS