

Results for the South Carolina Teacher Exit Survey from the 2020-21 Pilot Administration

SEPTEMBER 2021



TEACHER EXIT SURVEY

The background image shows a modern, multi-story brick building with large windows and balconies. In the foreground, there is a river with a blue metal bridge crossing it. The sky is overcast with some light clouds. The overall scene is a campus or urban setting.

RESEARCH TEAM

Tammie Dickenson, Ph.D.

Angela Starrett, Ph.D.

Thomas E. Hodges, Ph.D.

Dawn Coleman, Ph.D.

SC TEACHER provides comprehensive research about South Carolina's educator workforce. We are expanding a robust statewide data network to report results that will inform policy and practice.

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Teacher Exit Survey Results

+ HIGHLIGHTS

The pilot administration of the SC Teacher Exit Survey (SC-TEACHER, 2021) from the 2020-21 academic year yielded insights directly from teachers in the state on key reasons for teacher turnover. The sample was limited to five school districts located in the Midlands region. Expanded data collection statewide would provide results that more fully represent the SC teaching population. It should also be noted that the results are comingled with the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Almost half of the departing teachers reported they will teach in another school district next year. Convenience of job location/moving, decision to retire/receive retirement benefits, and dissatisfaction with administration were most often cited as the single most important reasons for leaving. COVID-related concerns associated with reaching all students and lack of support from the local school board as well as the broader community were also important factors to more than a third of the teachers. Those who were not moving to another teaching position cited higher salaries, availability of full-time teaching positions, and smaller class sizes as important factors in consideration of a return to teaching.

Administrative concerns were a key factor for teachers who leave for a teaching position in another school district. Teachers who were making a lateral move more often reported dissatisfaction with administration and lower effectiveness ratings of school leaders compared to those who were not moving to another teaching position. COVID-related reasons of concern for reaching all students and challenges with workload associated with online/hybrid instruction were more prevalent among lateral movers than others.

Teachers with less experience tended to leave their positions because of job location/moving with greater frequency than teachers with more experience. Less experienced teachers also reported greater levels of emotional distress from their work compared to more experienced teachers. In consideration of COVID-related reasons for leaving, more experienced teachers indicated concerns about both their own and their family members' health as important considerations more frequently than teachers with less experience.

An analysis that considered the multivariate nature of the data revealed patterns of responses among groups of teachers. This analysis allowed us to characterize the educators not renewing current contracts and how school issues and support, COVID-related concerns, and emotional burnout interacted to produce patterns. If we take this as a representative sample of SC public school educators, then we can begin to understand the nearly 6,000 teacher departures CERRA reported in their October 2020 report. Highlights from this analysis are as follows:

- Likely half of these educators accepted teaching positions at another school within the state.
- More than one-third of the teachers felt supported, had minimal COVID-related issues, and felt little to no emotional burnout. Half of these teachers simply moved to another classroom in the state.
- COVID, in and of itself, did not seem to create a mass exodus of teachers. Rather, what we saw was that about 15% of the teachers reported major COVID-related instruction, health, and effectiveness issues that led them to leave the classroom with many choosing early retirement.
- We also saw a pattern where COVID exacerbated the frustrations of already discouraged teachers leading to extremely high emotional burnout. About 10% of the educators leaving the classroom reported major frustrations with their school and with COVID-related teaching and support.

+ INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Retaining effective teachers is a challenge in the United States. According to Garcia and Weiss (2019), the teacher shortage is real, large, and growing, indicating that high-poverty schools suffered the most from the shortage of credentialed teachers. Sutchter et al. (2019) showed that the most important driving factor of teacher shortages was high teacher attrition. Attrition rates were much higher for new teachers (i.e., in their first year of practice) and teachers in high-poverty schools and districts compared to teachers with more than one year of experience in low-poverty schools (Loeb et al., 2005). Furthermore, several national polls conducted during the 2020-21 academic year indicated 20-47% of teachers were considering quitting or retiring early due to COVID-related issues (Antonucci, 2021).



To understand and address the issues of teacher shortage, teacher attrition, teacher turnover, and teacher retention, researchers (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2003) focused on the factors associated with these issues.

Ingersoll (2001) indicated that teacher turnover had large associations with job dissatisfaction and pursuing other jobs. Darling-Hammond (2003) found that multiple factors mattered for the recruitment and retention of teachers, including salaries, class size, teaching load, availability of materials, teacher participation in decision-making, strong and supportive instructional leadership from principals, and collegial learning opportunities. In Hughes' (2012) study on teacher retention, she found that teaching experience, student socioeconomic status (SES), salary, workload, parent and student cooperation, and technology made statistically significant contributions to teachers' plans to teach until retirement. A recent study by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) revealed that teachers' high turnover rate was related to teacher salary, lack of administrative support, and alternative certification.

School administration appeared to play an important role in teacher retention. According to Kukla-Acevedo (2009), support from the principal, in terms of communicating expectations and maintaining order in the school, was a protective factor against teacher turnover; and increased administrative support reduced the probability that teachers leave or switch schools. Boyd et al. (2010) studied the influence of school administrators on teacher retention decisions in New York City schools, and they found that teachers' perceptions of the school administration had the greatest impact on their retention decisions. Similarly, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) indicated that lack of administrative support was one of the factors associated with high teacher turnover rates.



SC DATA COLLECTION

This report summarizes results from a survey that sought to understand reasons teachers in South Carolina leave their teaching positions. All SC teachers currently undergo an exit interview designed by the school districts that lacks consistency across the state. These exit interviews are often conducted in-person with their supervisor where teachers might not feel comfortable to share information about their decision to leave their position, particularly if related to school/district administration.

The goal of this study was to pilot a survey yielding anonymous responses with a sample of exiting teachers to provide initial insight on their reasons for leaving.

Members of the South Carolina Teacher Education Advancement Consortium Through Higher Education (SC-TEACHER) research team, with input from school district partners, developed the SC Teacher Exit Survey. This survey was inspired by the Teacher Follow-Up Survey Questionnaire for Former Teachers to the Schools and Staffing Survey through the National Center of Education Statistics (2012). In addition to reasons for leaving from the national survey, we also addressed reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was distributed to 332 exiting teachers from a convenience sample of five school districts in the spring of the 2020-2021 school year, with 224 completing the survey (response rate = 67.5%).



DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive analysis was conducted for the sample of departing teachers that completed the survey. Contextual characteristics from demographic questions were summarized. Items were organized in sets with five-point Likert-type response scales. The percentages of responses within each response category were calculated for all items in each item set. Results are displayed in charts ordered by the percentage responding to the upper two response scale categories. Results from the upper two response scale categories from the various item sets were also examined by teachers who were making lateral vs. non-lateral moves and by teachers with relatively less (5 years or less) vs. more (greater than 5 years) teaching experience. Finally, a latent profile analysis (LPA) was conducted to examine patterns of responses while taking into account the multivariate nature of the various item sets. This report focuses on the descriptive results and an overview of the LPA results.

+ OVERALL SURVEY RESULTS

CONTEXTUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

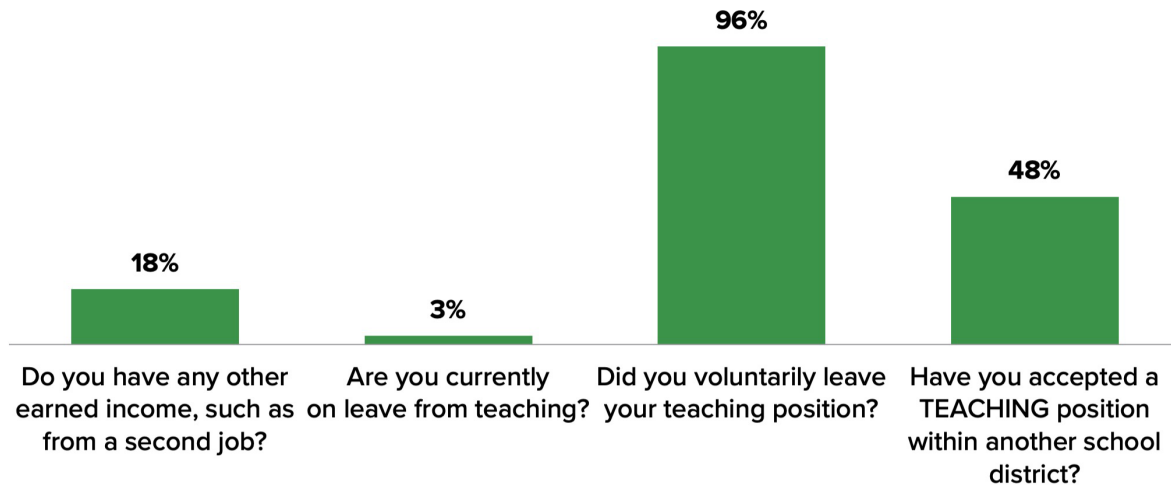
Teachers reported the number of years that they worked at their current school and the total number of years they worked as a certified teacher. Teachers had a mean of about 6 years at their current school and 13 years total with substantial variation for both. Teachers' years at their current school ranged from 0 to 32 with a median of 4, while teachers' total years of experience ranged from 0 to 43 with a median of 10.

Teachers' Years of Experience	Min	25th percentile	Median	75th percentile	Max	Mean	Std Dev	N
Years at most recent school	0	2	4	8	32	6.0	5.8	224
Total years as a certified teacher	0	4	10	21	43	12.9	10.6	226

The figure below shows results for information requested on teacher characteristics. Almost a fifth of teachers (18%) reported an income source in addition to teaching. Very few teachers were out on leave (maternity or paternity, disability, or other). The vast majority of teachers were leaving their positions voluntarily. Almost half (48%) of the teachers accepted a teaching position with another school district for the 2021-22 school year.

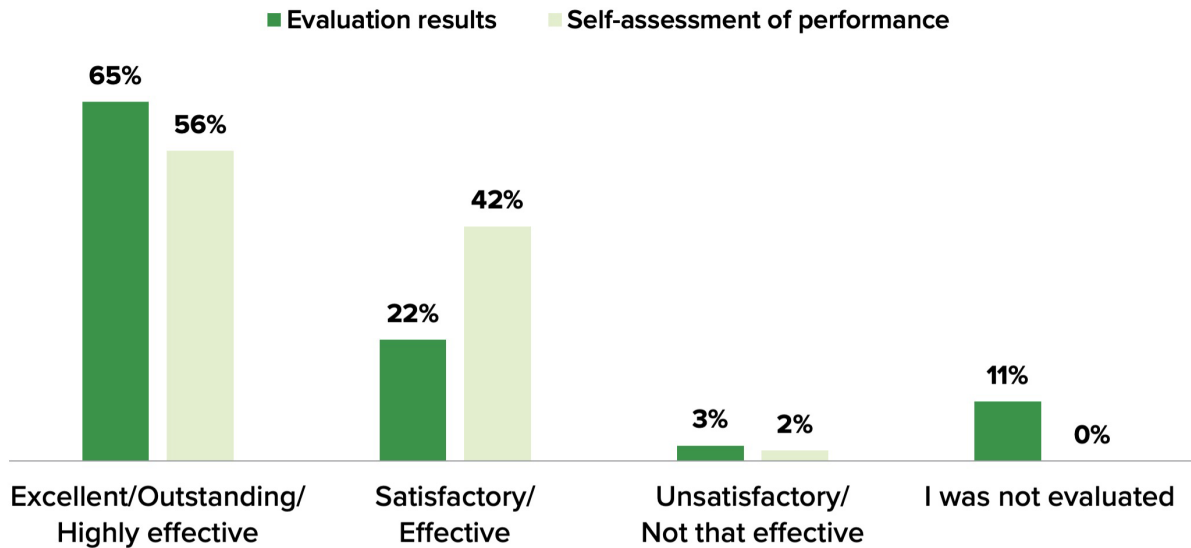
Other Teacher Characteristics

% of teachers responding "yes"



Teachers were asked to provide ratings of their performance from the most recent school year. They were also asked to provide a self-assessment of their performance for the same time frame. The figure below provides a summary of responses to both questions. Teachers tended to rate themselves in the top category at a lower rate and in the middle category at a higher rate than their performance rating as evaluated by school administrators.

Comparison of Teachers' Evaluation Results and Their Self-Assessment of Performance in Most Recent Year

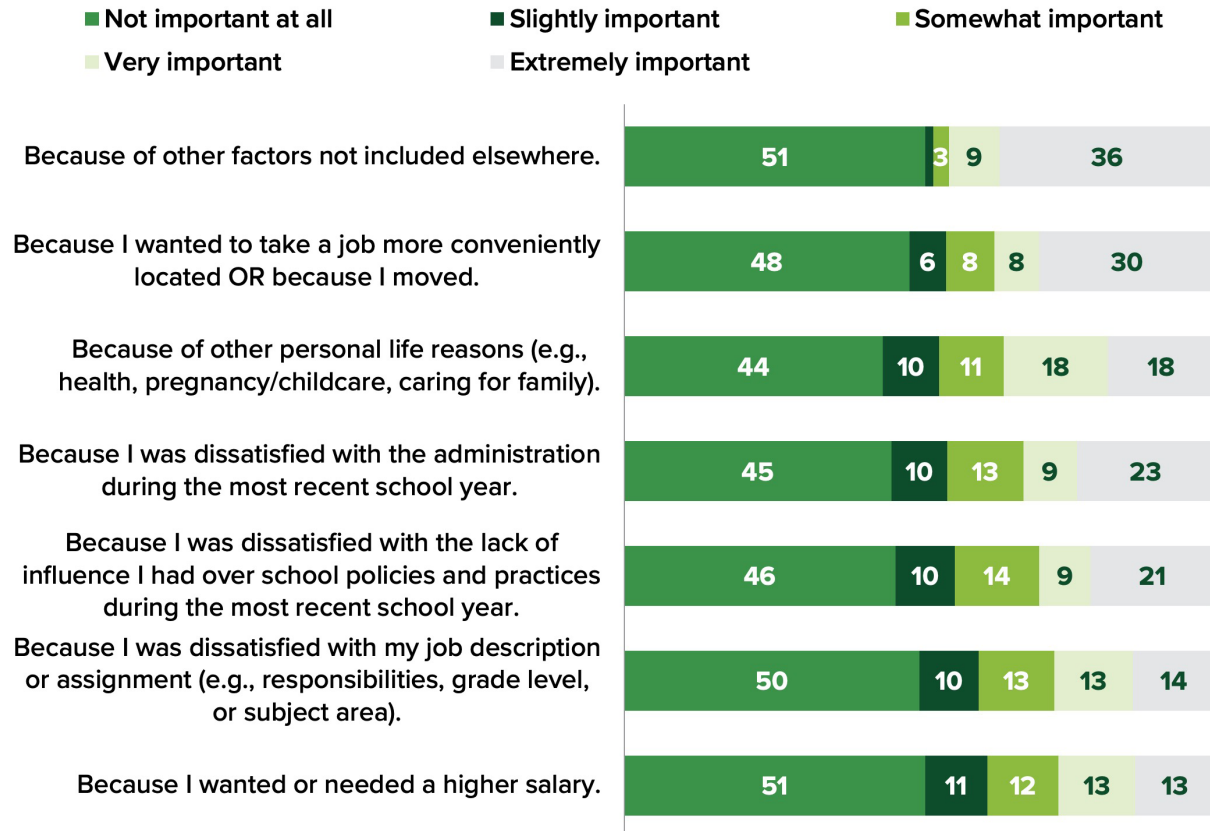


REASONS FOR LEAVING POSITION

Teachers were asked about a variety of reasons (24 total) for deciding to leave their current teaching position. Reasons were categorized as personal matters, career-oriented matters, classroom factors, school factors, and student assessment factors. Teachers were asked about the importance of each reason in their decision. The figure below displays results for seven reasons that were cited by more than 25% of the teachers as very or extremely important to their decision to leave their current teaching position. Teachers most frequently cited other factors not included on the survey (45% indicated very or extremely important). Taking a job more conveniently located or moving had the next greatest relative importance for teachers leaving their positions (38% indicated very or extremely important) followed by other personal reasons (36% indicated very or extremely important). Dissatisfaction with administration was also noted as an important influence on teacher departures (32% indicated very or extremely important).

Reasons Cited as Greatest Importance for Leaving Position

% of teachers in each category

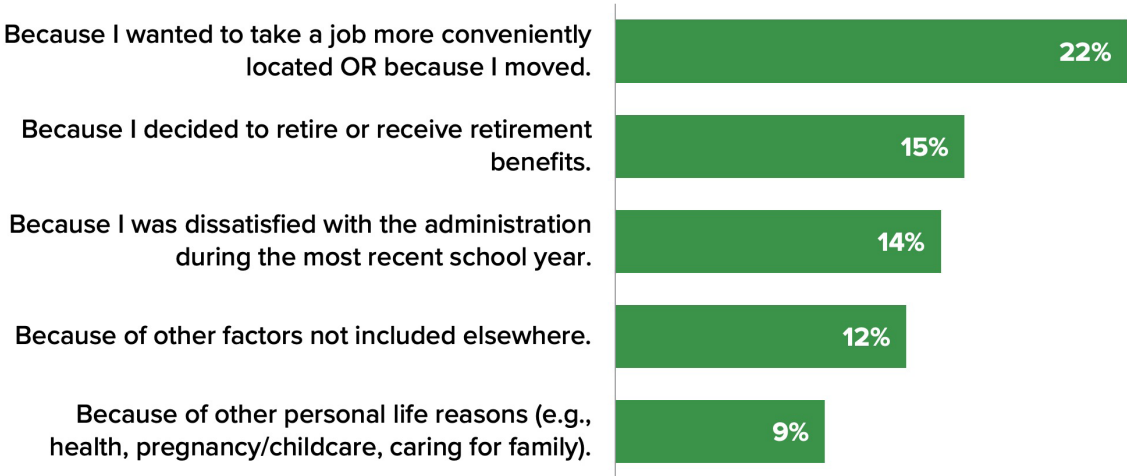


Notes. Reasons are ordered from greatest to least by the percentage of teachers who reported *very important* plus *extremely important*. Between 151 and 210 teachers provided responses to these items.

Teachers were also asked to specify the single most important reason influencing their decision among the 24 reasons. The five reasons with most responses are provided in the figure below. Wanting a more conveniently located job or moving was cited by 22% of teachers, deciding to retire or receive retirement benefits was indicated by 15% of teachers, and dissatisfaction with administration during the most recent school year was expressed by 14% of teachers. The following items were not identified by any teacher as the single most important reason for their decision:

- Because I needed better benefits than I received at my school.
- Because I did not have enough autonomy over my classroom during the most recent school year.
- Because I was dissatisfied with the large number of students I taught during the most recent school year.
- Because I was dissatisfied with how student assessments and school accountability measures impacted my teaching or curriculum during the most recent school year.

Top Five Reasons Cited as the Single Most Important Reason for Teachers' Decision to Leave Their Position



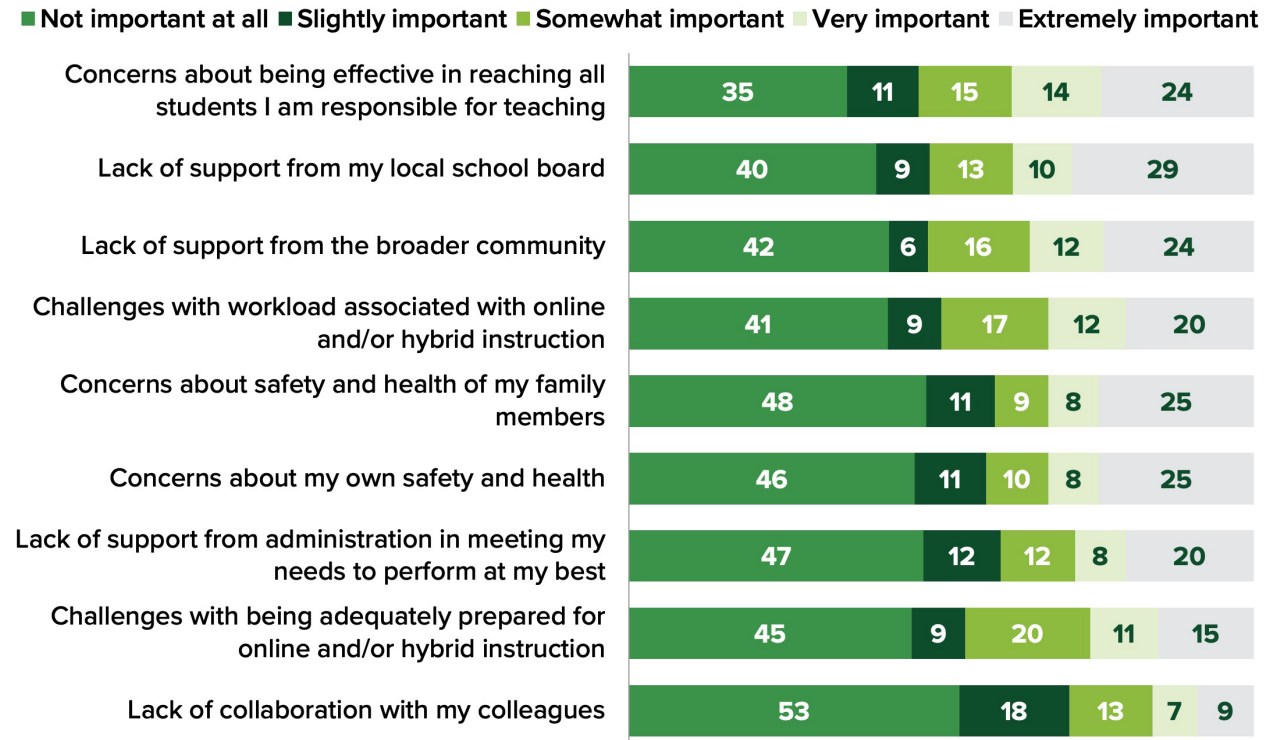
Notes. All other reasons combined account for the remaining 12% of responses with each reason ranging from 0% to 4% of all responses. A total of 203 teachers provided a response to this item.

COVID-RELATED REASONS FOR LEAVING POSITION

Teachers were asked to rate the importance of reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic on their decision to leave their teaching position. Concerns about being able to reach all students they are responsible for teaching and lack of support from their school board were cited as the most important reasons, with 39% of teachers indicating these were very or extremely important for both items. Lack of support from the community was also a top reason cited, with 36% of teachers expressing it as very or extremely important.

Importance of COVID-19 Factors for Teacher Departures

% of teachers in each category



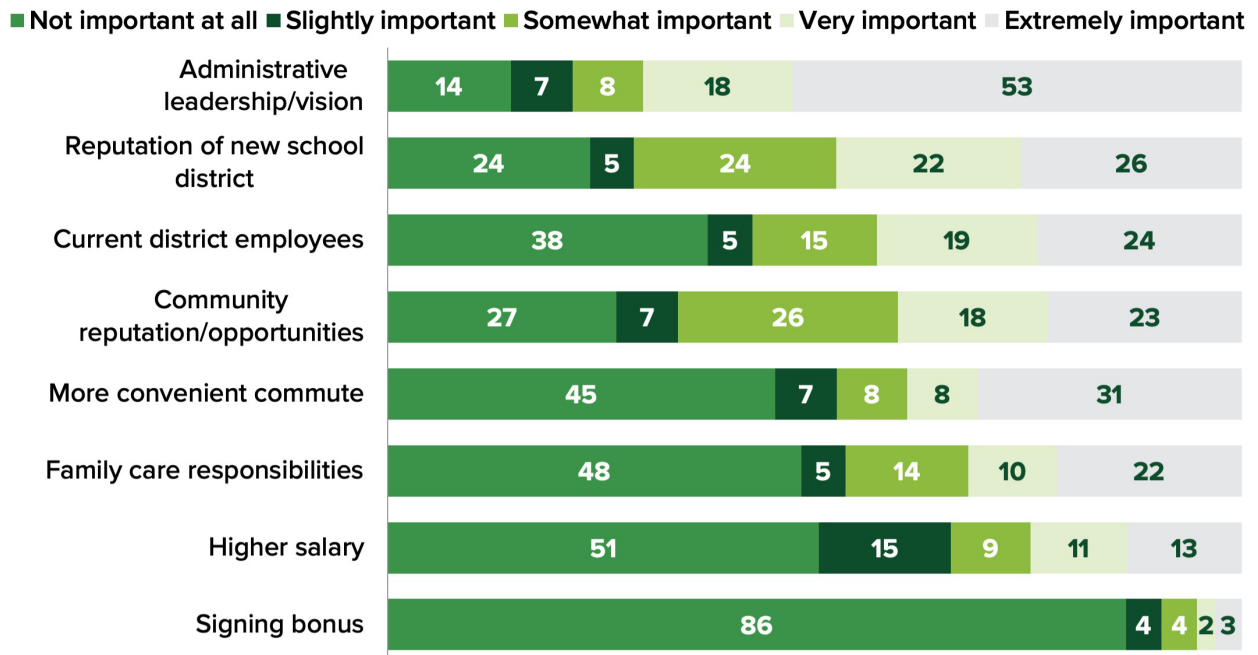
Notes. Reasons are ordered from greatest to least by the percentage of teachers who reported very important plus extremely important. Between 206 and 207 teachers provided responses to these items.

FACTORS FOR LATERAL MOVERS

Teachers who accepted a position with another school district for the next school year were asked about the importance that various factors played in their decision. The reason cited most often was administrative leadership/vision where 71% of teachers reported this as a very or extremely important factor in their decision. Reputation of the new school district was also an important factor with 47% of teachers indicating it as very or extremely important. Signing bonus was seldomly reported as a factor in these teachers' decisions with 86% indicating it was not important at all.

Importance of Factors in Decision to Accept a Teaching Position in Another District

% of teachers in each category



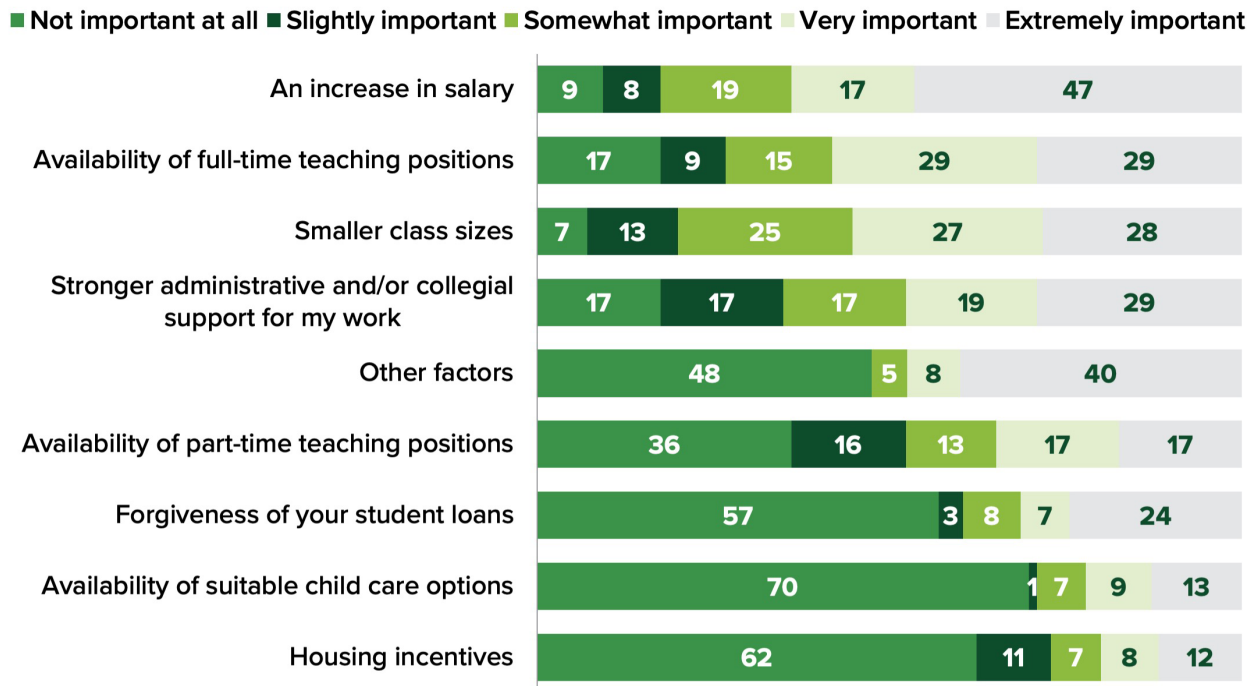
Notes. Reasons are ordered from greatest to least by the percentage of teachers who reported very important plus extremely important. Between 95 and 96 teachers provided responses to these items.

FACTORS FOR TEACHING IN THE FUTURE

When those who were not taking a teaching position in another district were asked if they would consider returning to a teaching position, 39% said yes, 21% said no, and 40% said maybe. These teachers were then asked about the importance of various factors in consideration of their decision to return to a teaching position in the future. Data were summarized for the subset of teachers who indicated they were not leaving their current position to teach in another district. The three reasons noted as greatest importance (i.e., Very or Extremely Important) included an increase in salary, availability of full-time teaching positions, and smaller class sizes, where 64%, 58%, and 55% of teachers, respectively, indicated these reasons as very or extremely important.

Importance of Factors in Considering a Return to Teaching

% of teachers in each category



Notes. Reasons are ordered from greatest to least by the percentage of teachers who reported very important plus extremely important. Of the 117 teachers who indicated they were not making a lateral move, between 40 and 86 teachers provided responses to these items.

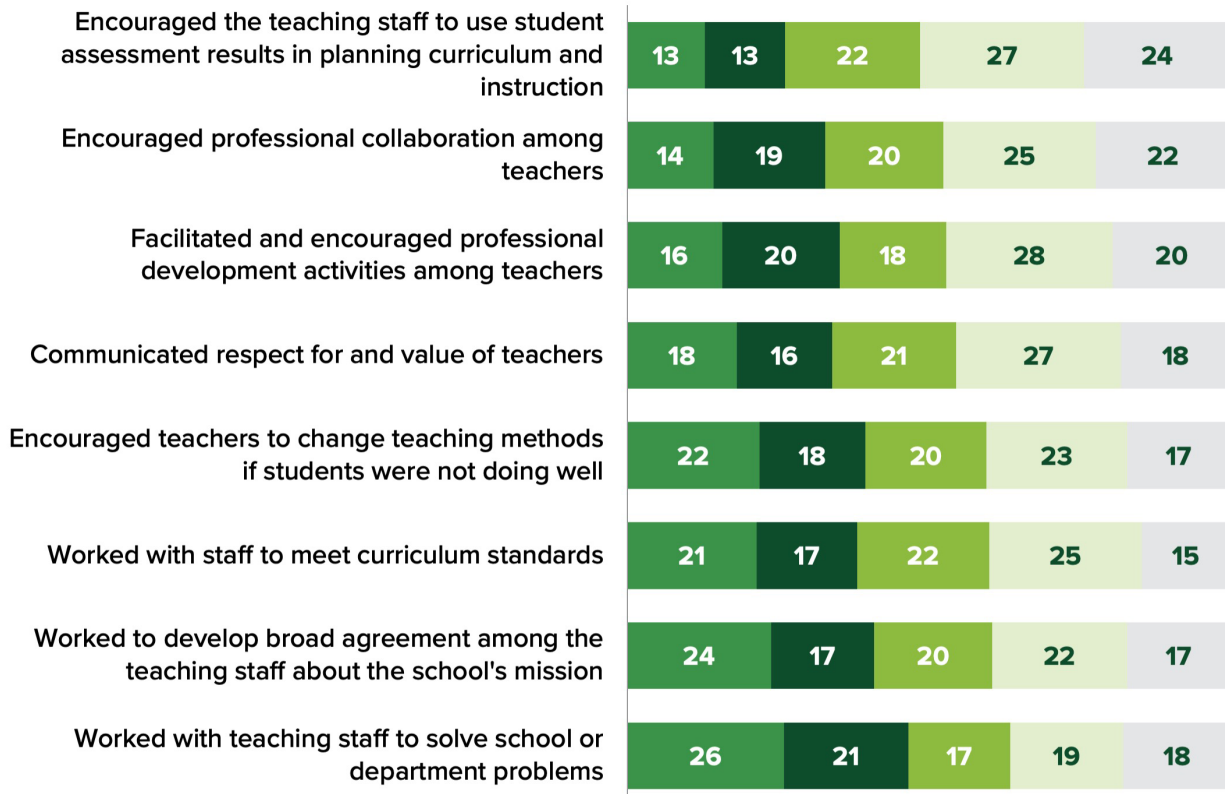
PRINCIPAL/SCHOOL LEADERS EFFECTIVENESS

Teachers were asked to provide ratings of effectiveness of their principal/school leaders on various aspects of school leadership during the most recent school year. The percentage of teachers rating school leaders as very or extremely effective ranged from 37% to 51% across the items. The highest rating was for encouraging teaching staff to use student assessment results in planning curriculum and instruction, while the lowest rating was for working with teaching staff to solve school or department problems.

Effectiveness of Principals and School Leaders in the Most Recent School Year

% of teachers in each category

■ Not effective at all ■ Slightly effective ■ Moderately effective ■ Very effective ■ Extremely effective



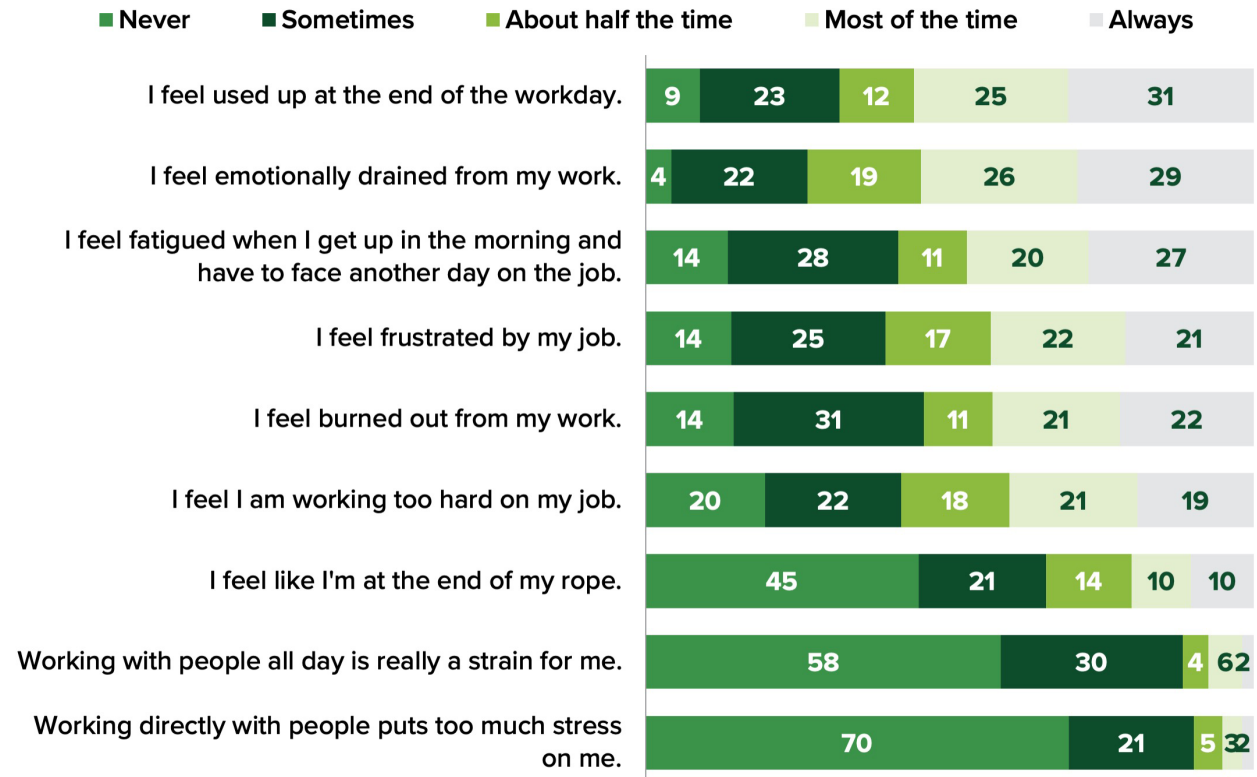
Notes. Items are ordered from greatest to least by the percentage of teachers who reported *very effective* plus *extremely effective*. Between 205 and 207 teachers provided responses to these items.

EMOTIONAL DISTRESS ITEMS

Teachers were asked a series of items about work-related emotional distress. More than half of teachers reported that they mostly or always feel used up by the end of the workday and feel emotionally drained from their work. Very few teachers reported feeling stress or strain related to working with people.

Frequency of Job-Related Emotional Distress

% of teachers in each category



Notes. Items are ordered from greatest to least by the percentage of teachers who reported *most of the time* plus *always*. Between 210 and 211 teachers provided responses to these items.

+ KEY RESULTS BY LATERAL VS. NON-LATERAL MOVERS

Analysis was conducted separately for teachers who indicated they accepted a teaching position at another school (referred to as *lateral movers*) and those who did not (referred to as *non-lateral movers*). In the sample, 107 teachers indicated they were making a lateral move and 117 teachers did not.

When asked about the importance of various reasons for leaving, lateral movers cited the following reasons more often than non-lateral movers:

- Because I wanted to take a job more conveniently located OR because I moved.
- Because I was dissatisfied with the administration during the most recent school year.
- Because I was dissatisfied with the lack of influence I had over school policies and practices during the most recent school year.
- Because I was dissatisfied with workplace conditions (e.g., facilities, classroom resources, school safety) during the most recent school year.
- Because there were not enough opportunities for leadership roles or professional advancement at my most recent school.

Conversely, non-lateral movers reported the following reasons for leaving with relatively greater importance than lateral movers:

- Because I decided to retire or receive retirement benefits.
- Because I decided to pursue a position outside the field of education.
- Because I was dissatisfied with teaching as a career.
- Because I decided to take courses to improve career opportunities OUTSIDE the field of education.
- Because of other personal life reasons (e.g., health, pregnancy/childcare, caring for family).

Lateral movers more frequently reported dissatisfaction with administration as the **single most important** factor for leaving compared to non-lateral movers (20% vs. 8%). Non-lateral movers more often reported deciding to retire or receive retirement benefits as the **single most important** reason for leaving compared to lateral movers (28% vs. 0%).

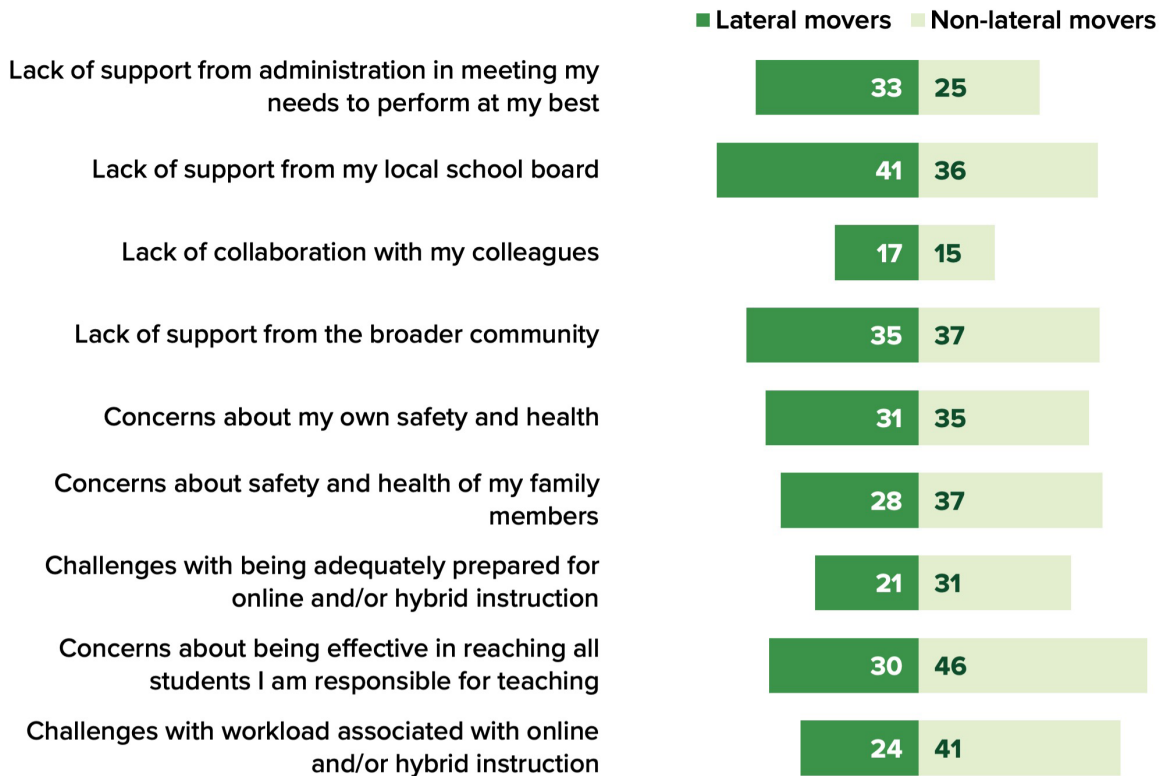
Non-lateral movers cited COVID-related concerns of challenges with workload associated with online and/or hybrid instruction and concerns about being effective in reaching all students as important reasons for their decision to leave their teaching position (see figure on page 16).

Lateral movers rated performance of their principal/school leaders lower than non-lateral movers on all aspects, with communication of respect for and value of teachers having the greatest difference (see figure on page 17).

Results from the emotional distress items did not differ substantially between lateral and non-lateral movers (see figure on page 18).

Importance of COVID-Related Reasons for Leaving

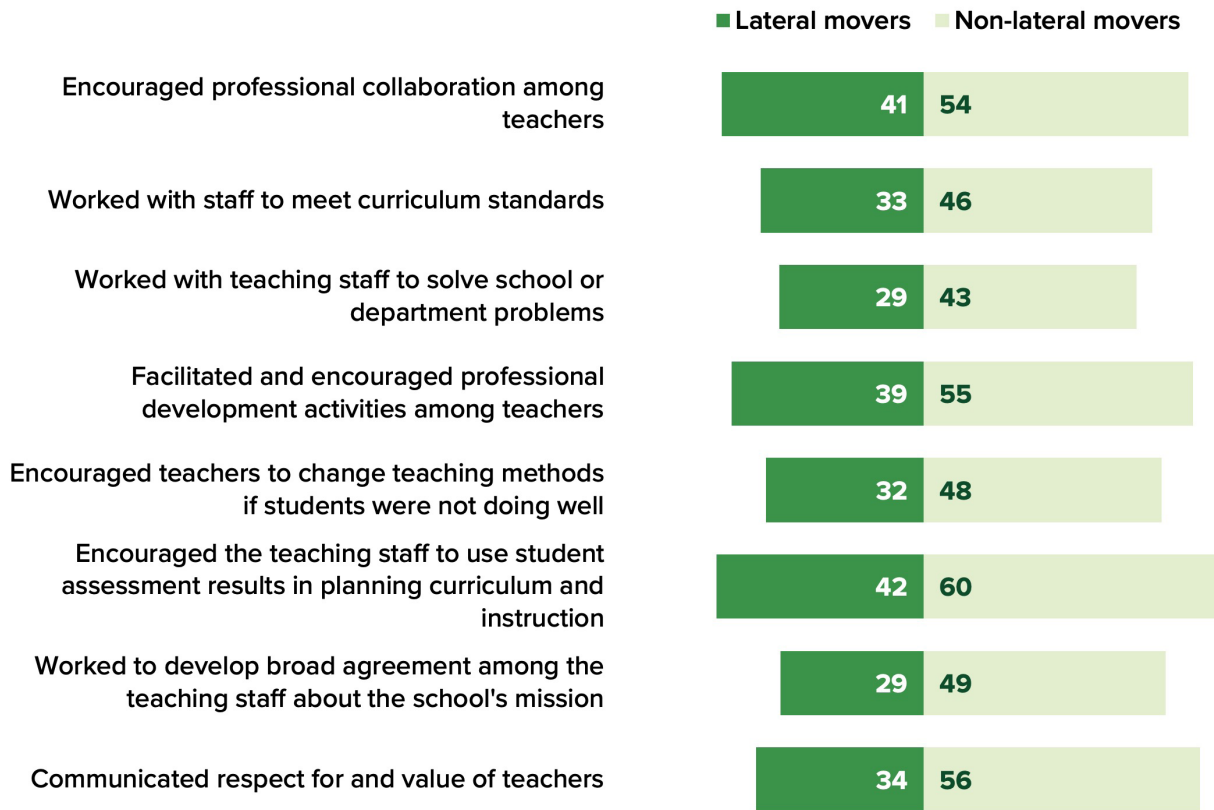
% of teachers who reported *very* or *extremely* important



Notes. Items are ordered from greatest to least by the difference in the percentage of teachers who reported *very important* plus *extremely important* between lateral movers (those taking a teaching position in another school district) and non-lateral movers. Between 99-100 teachers who were lateral movers and 109-110 teachers who were non-lateral movers provided responses to these items.

Effectiveness of Principals and School Leaders in Most Recent School Year

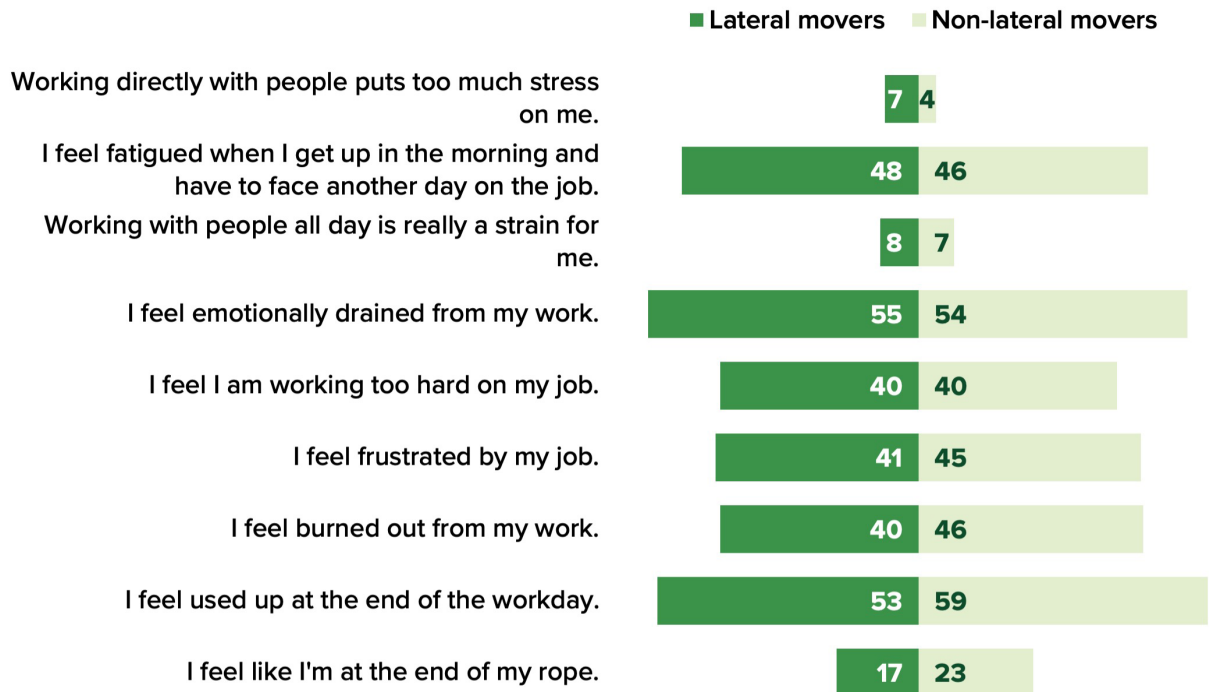
% of teachers who reported very or extremely effective



Notes. Items are ordered from greatest to least by the difference in the percentage of teachers who reported *very important* plus *extremely important* between lateral movers (those taking a teaching position in another school district) and non-lateral movers. Between 99-100 teachers who were lateral movers and 109-110 teachers who were non-lateral movers provided responses to these items.

Frequency of Job-Related Emotional Distress

% of teachers who selected most of the time or always



Notes. Items are ordered from greatest to least by the difference in the percentage of teachers who reported *most of the time* plus *always* between lateral movers (those taking a teaching position in another school district) and non-lateral movers. One hundred two teachers who were lateral movers and 111-112 teachers who were non-lateral movers provided responses to these items.

+ KEY RESULTS BY LESS VS. MORE TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Analysis was conducted separately for teachers who indicated they had five years or less total teaching experience (referred to as *less experienced*) and those who had more than five years total teaching experience (referred to as *more experienced*). In the sample, 72 teachers had five or fewer total years of teaching experience, and 152 teachers had more than five total years of teaching experience.

When asked about the importance of various reasons for leaving, less experienced teachers reported the following reasons more often than more experienced teachers:

- Because I wanted to take a job more conveniently located OR because I moved.
- Because of other personal life reasons (e.g., health, pregnancy/childcare, caring for family).
- Because I wanted or needed a higher salary.

Conversely, more experienced teachers reported the following reasons for leaving with relatively greater importance than less experienced teachers:

- Because I decided to retire or receive retirement benefits.
- Because I changed roles within the field of education (e.g. administrative, instructional coach, district office personnel, etc.).
- Because there were not enough opportunities for leadership roles or professional advancement at my most recent school.
- Because I was concerned about my job security at my school.

Those with less teaching experience more frequently reported wanting a more conveniently located job or moving as the **single most important** factor for leaving compared to more experienced teachers (36% vs. 15%). More experienced teachers reported deciding to retire or receive retirement benefits as the **single most important** reason for leaving with greater frequency than less experienced teachers (22% vs. 0%).

More experienced teachers cited COVID-related concerns about health and safety of their own and of family members as important reasons for their decision to leave their position at higher rates than less experienced teachers (see figure on page 20).

Results from the principal/school leader effectiveness items did not differ substantially between less and more experienced teachers (see figure on page 21).

Less experienced teachers more often reported feelings of emotional distress from their work compared to more experienced teachers (see figure on page 22).

Importance of COVID-Related Reasons for Leaving

% of teachers who reported very or extremely important



Notes. Items are ordered from greatest to least by the difference in the percentage of teachers who reported *very important* plus *extremely important* between teachers with less teaching experience (5 years or less) and more teaching experience (more than 5 years). Sixty-five teachers with 5 or less years' experience and 142-143 teachers with more than 5 years' experience provided responses to these items.

Effectiveness of Principals and School Leaders in Most Recent School Year

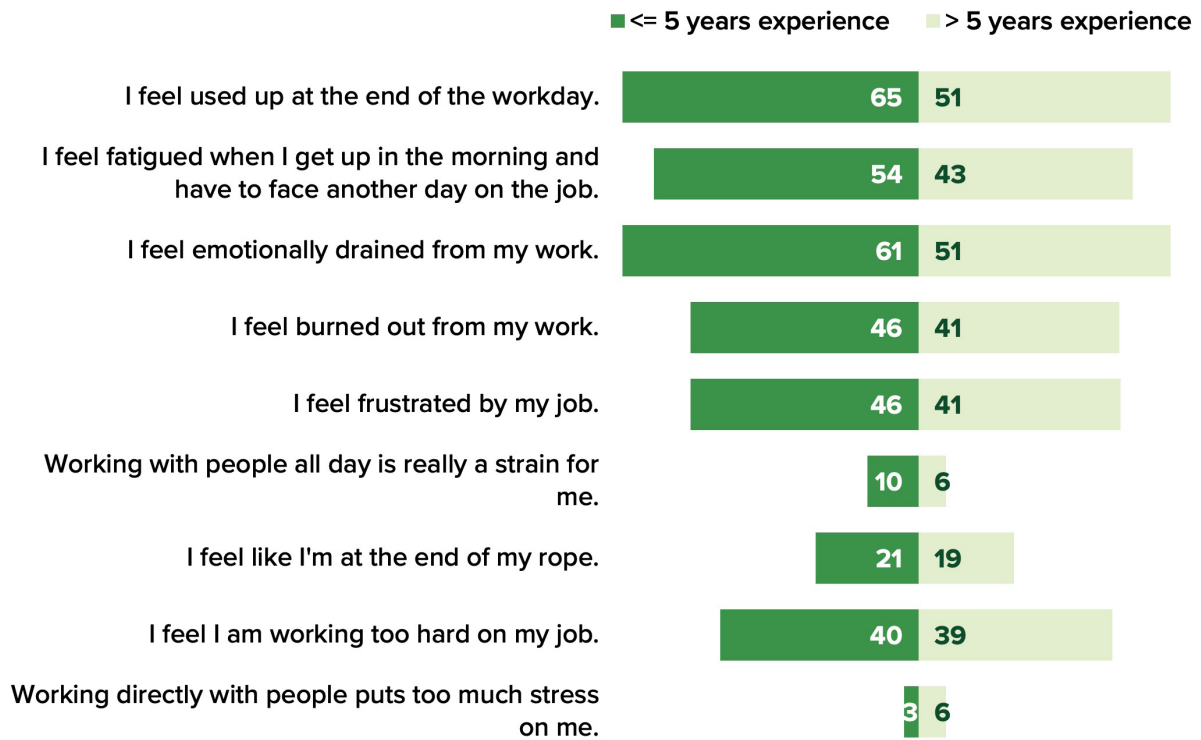
% of teachers who reported very or extremely effective



Notes. Items are ordered from greatest to least by the difference in the percentage of teachers who reported *very important* plus *extremely important* between teachers with less teaching experience (5 years or less) and more teaching experience (more than 5 years). Between 63-65 teachers with 5 or less years' experience and 143 teachers with more than 5 years' experience provided responses to these items.

Frequency of Job-Related Emotional Distress

% of teachers who selected most of the time or always



Notes. Items are ordered from greatest to least by the difference in the percentage of teachers who reported *most of the time* plus *always* between teachers with less teaching experience (five years or fewer) and more teaching experience (more than five years). Between 63-65 teachers with 5 or less years' experience and 142-143 teachers with more than 5 years' experience provided responses to these items.

+ LATENT PROFILE ANALYSIS RESULTS

For teachers with complete data (n=221), we used a person-oriented approach to examine the heterogeneity in educators not renewing their current contract. This statistical method assumes the educator's decision is influenced by interactions between the individual and environmental contexts which affect multiple variables simultaneously.

With this data, we simultaneously considered patterns among educators with regards to professional issues and concerns (i.e., teaching related, school climate, student assessment, and professional evaluation), COVID-specific issues and concerns (i.e., classroom concerns and general support issues), principal support, and emotional burnout. We found four patterns among educators not renewing their current contract including **Supported Teachers, School-affected Teachers, COVID-affected Teachers, and Burned-out Teachers**. The figure on page 24 displays conditional means for the profiles of teachers, and descriptions of the four patterns are provided below.

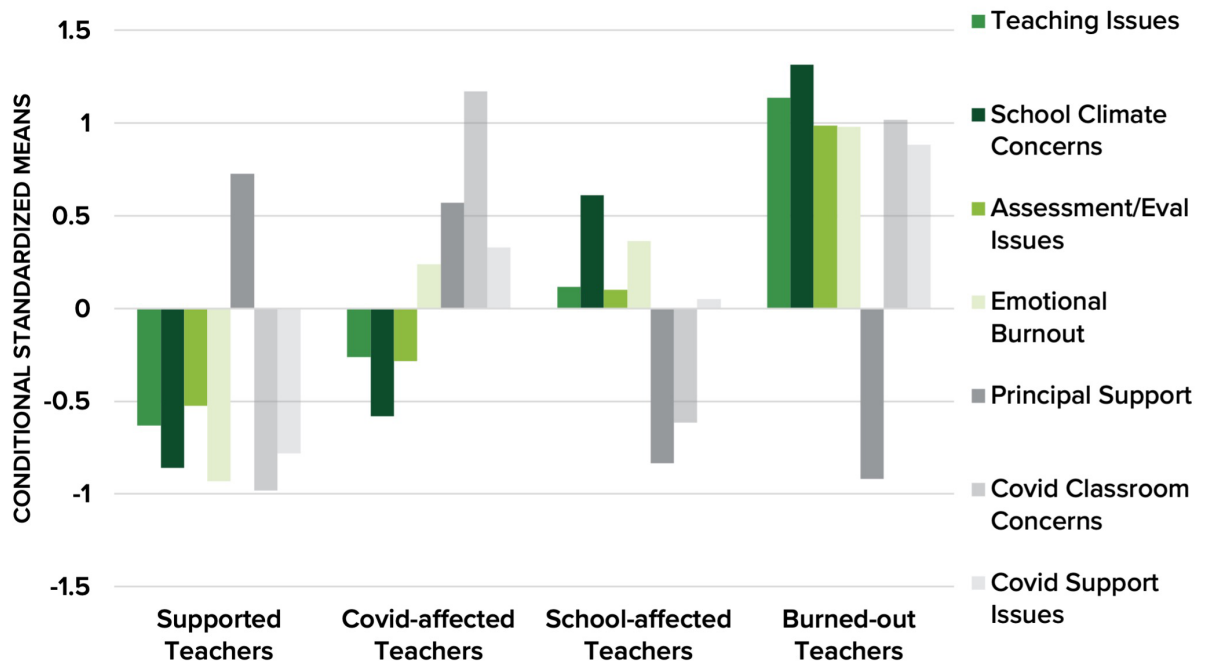
Supported Teachers. Overall, these teachers had very few professional or COVID-related issues and concerns. They also had the lowest emotional burnout and highest principal support. This pattern was also the most prevalent, representing more than 37% of the sample. Of the teachers in this profile, half had accepted a teaching position at another school. These teachers were not likely to cite non-teaching career reasons within education or career reasons outside of education as reasons for not renewing the current contract. As such, we can speculate that personal reasons (e.g., family moving, caring for elderly parent, childcare) played a major role.

School-affected Teachers. These teachers reported above average issues and concerns surrounding general teaching, school climate, student assessment, and professional evaluation. These issues and concerns were combined with very low principal support and above average emotional burnout. However, with regards to COVID, they had low classroom concerns and only average support issues. In other words, individual school issues and concerns (not COVID) may have played a role in these educators not renewing their current contract. This was one of the smallest patterns to emerge, representing 20% of the sample or 1 in 5 educators. Our analyses suggest these teachers based their decision on the current school and did not generalize to the entire profession. In fact, 62% of the teachers in this profile had accepted a teaching position at another school.

COVID-affected Teachers. These teachers reported the highest COVID-related classroom concerns (i.e., challenges with online/hybrid instruction, health concerns, challenges with being an effective teacher), as well as above average support issues (i.e., colleagues, administration, school board, and community). These COVID issues occurred in concert with above average emotional burnout (but lower average burnout than school-affected teachers). However, these educators reported high principal support and few issues or concerns with their school. Like school-affected teachers, this was a smaller profile, representing 20% of the sample or 1 in 5 educators. Only 23% of the teachers in this profile had accepted a teaching position at another school. What can we deduce about the other 77% of educators in this profile? These teachers were significantly older than educators in other profiles, with 17 years of teaching experience on average. They also were not likely to cite career reasons within or outside education as motivations for not renewing their contract. Instead, many of the educators in this profile reported retiring from the profession, which suggests the pandemic may have prompted this decision.

Burned-out Teachers. These teachers reported the lowest levels of principal support and the greatest issues and concerns surrounding teaching, school climate, student assessment, and professional evaluation. With regards to COVID, they had high classroom concerns around instruction, family/personal health, and effectiveness; and these educators had the highest issues of support from colleagues, administration, the school board, and the larger community. They also had the highest emotional burnout among the four profiles. This profile represented about 23% of the sample (or nearly 1 in 4 teachers). Despite the frustrations and emotional strain, 54% of these teachers had accepted a lateral position at another school. However, for the 46% not continuing to teach, these educators were much more likely to cite non-teaching career aims both within and outside of education as reasons for leaving their position.

Item Means for Four Patterns of Teachers Emerging from the Latent Profile Analysis



Notes. Values greater than zero indicate group averages are greater than the average of all respondents. Values less than zero indicate group averages are less than the average of all respondents.

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