

# Insights for District Leaders: How to Better Support Teachers

A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR DISTRICT LEADERS AND THEIR TEAMS

Education Week’s State of Teaching project offers valuable insights for district leaders – superintendents, members of their cabinets, those focused on recruitment and retention of staff talent, and others – on how they can support educators. The project is based on a nationally representative survey conducted by the EdWeek Research Center from August-November of 2025 of 5,802 teachers; and on reporting from Education Week’s editorial team.

Overall, the Teacher Morale Index – a metric created by our research center—finds that educators’ morale fell slightly over the past year from a score of +18 to +13, though the score is still above what it was two years ago. Beyond that topline score, the project provides takeaways for K-12 leaders who are trying to figure out effective strategies to attract and retain teachers, and ensure that they feel professionally rewarded in their work.

## KEY FINDING 1:

More planning time, and support with discipline are keys to improving teacher morale



Asked about the most important policy or administrative change that would improve their morale, the largest share of educators surveyed said more planning time. (Respondents were asked to select from options other than teacher pay.) Additional planning time is especially popular with Gen Z teachers: Nearly two out of three said it would increase their morale.

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Our district has now

stripped state-tested teachers of about **80% of their planning time weekly.**

Instead, we are forced to attend meetings that have little to no value for our classrooms.

**These meetings just stockpile work onto us.**

We are expected to do **double the work in 20% of the time.** ... Although it may sound like

I’m complaining, this initiative will be **the reason that I leave the school.**

It’s simply not feasible to redirect my planning time to these meetings and expect gains in data.”

— Gen Z high school science teacher in Mississippi

OTHER than a pay raise, what type of change would have a MAJOR impact on improving your morale? Select all that apply.



DATA SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center nationally representative August-November 2025 survey of 5,802 teachers

Images: Getty

## KEY FINDING 2:

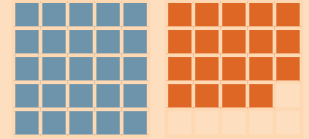
Teachers with lower class sizes have higher morale. And there's a preferred number



More than 50 percent of teachers surveyed say that smaller class size would have a major impact on their morale. As many district leaders know, lowering class sizes has long been a

popular goal among classroom educators, who believe it would make their classes more manageable and make the process of teaching and learning more effective.

Teachers in the survey, on average, said they have **25 students** in their classes. Asked what their ideal class size is, **19 students** was the average response.



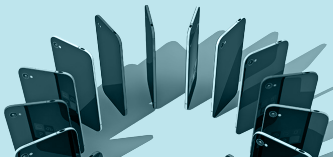
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When students are pulled out of my class for special services, the **smaller class size** makes a remarkable difference. I think smaller class sizes are **the key to better public education.**”

English/language arts teacher at a Texas elementary school.

## KEY FINDING 3:

To support teachers, district leaders can help them with student discipline and behavior

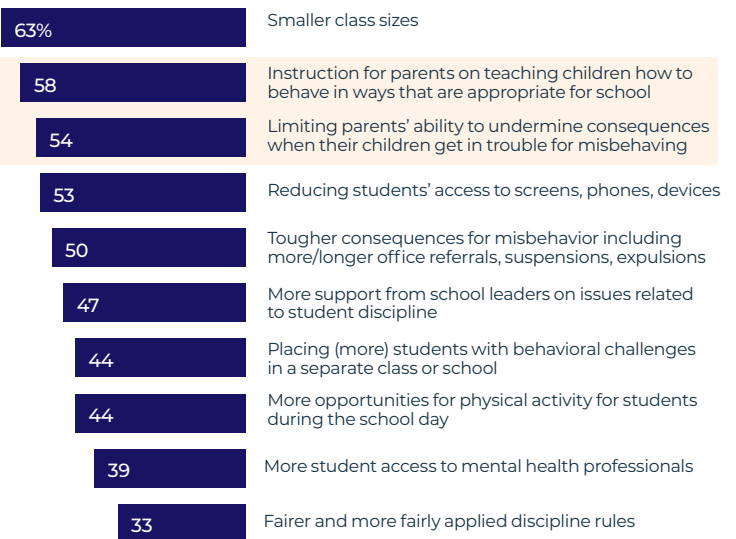


A majority of teachers said that their morale could be significantly improved with changes to policies and administrative practices focused on improving student behavior. When the EdWeek Research Center asked specifically what would improve student behavior and help teachers manage classrooms, two of the top responses related to getting more support from students' families. Fifty-eight percent said student discipline would improve with instruction for parents on how to guide their children on appropriate school behavior; 54 percent said positives would come out of limiting parents' ability to undermine consequences when their children get in trouble for misbehaving.

Reducing students' access to screens, phones, and devices would also help improve student behavior, teachers said. Many states and districts have, in fact, taken steps to restricts students' in-school access to cellphones.

## TOP 10 RESPONSES

What—if anything—would have a MAJOR positive impact on your students' behavior and ability to manage your classroom? Select all that apply.



DATA SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center nationally representative August–November 2025 survey of 5,802 teachers

Images: Getty

**64%**

of teachers surveyed said that the behavior of students they teach has **gotten worse over the past year.**

Just **36%** said it's the same or gotten better.