



The **State** of Teaching



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Teacher Morale in 2026

Five takeaways from our annual survey

By **Holly Kurtz**
& **Maya Riser-Kositsky**



education Week’s The State of Teaching Project is now in its third year. A key element of the project is an annual survey, informed by the priorities and concerns of a teacher advisory panel and insights from our editorial team.

And at the heart of the survey is the Teacher Morale Index, a metric based on teachers’ responses to questions about the current, past, and future status of their morale. Other topics addressed on this year’s survey include educators’ views of student behavior, class size, compensation, and scheduling. Here are five highlights from this year’s results.

1 Teacher morale is down—but it’s still better than before

After ticking upward in 2025, the average Teacher Morale Index score dropped this school year from +18 to +13. Given that the scale ranges from -100 to +100, that’s not a

huge decline. And +13 is still higher than -13, the average score in 2024. In open-ended comments, teachers shared a wide range of reasons why their morale had declined.

“Morale in our district is not great mainly because voters in the town recently rejected a proposal that would have increased the school’s budget,” wrote a high school English teacher in Massachusetts. “Instead, we had to make some major cuts that resulted in layoffs and increased class sizes.”

A high school social studies teacher in Minnesota said: “I have recently stepped into the political battles during a discussion in my ... class. A parent and then community members got very upset, though a majority of students participating in the discussion felt [the discussion] was appropriate and desired. This has badly impacted my morale as a teacher with decades involved in the school and community. However, the support of students, staff, [and others] make me hopeful for the future.”

In Idaho, a middle school science teacher offered a broader perspective on how educators’ views are shaped by their individual surroundings.

“Working conditions are very nuanced. Not only do they differ from state to state, they differ from district to district, and even from school to school. While I feel great about my morale ... I also do see things from the perspective of other schools, districts, and states. I do not have it bad like they do.”

2 Money matters, but not how you might think it does

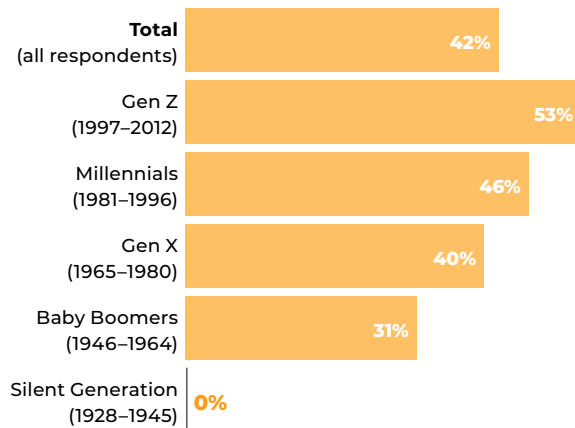
The State of Teaching surveys have not found a direct correlation between higher teacher morale and higher pay. For example, the Northeast region, which includes the mid-Atlantic states and New England, has the nation’s lowest morale score overall (+4). The South’s score is highest (+17). Yet even accounting for its higher cost of living, the Northeast offered substantially higher teacher salaries than did Southern states in 2024, the most recent year for which federal data is available.

Among respondents who took our survey, the average salary was \$68,480. In another example of how higher pay does not necessarily equate to an improved view of the profession, teachers who earned less than that average had an average morale score of +16. Teachers earning at or above that average wage had scores of +8.

Although we did not identify a direct connection between salary and morale, something else did make a difference. Teachers who perceived that their salaries, benefits, and schedules were better than (or about that same as) those of their family members and friends had significantly higher morale scores than teachers who perceived that their compensation, benefits, and work hours were worse.

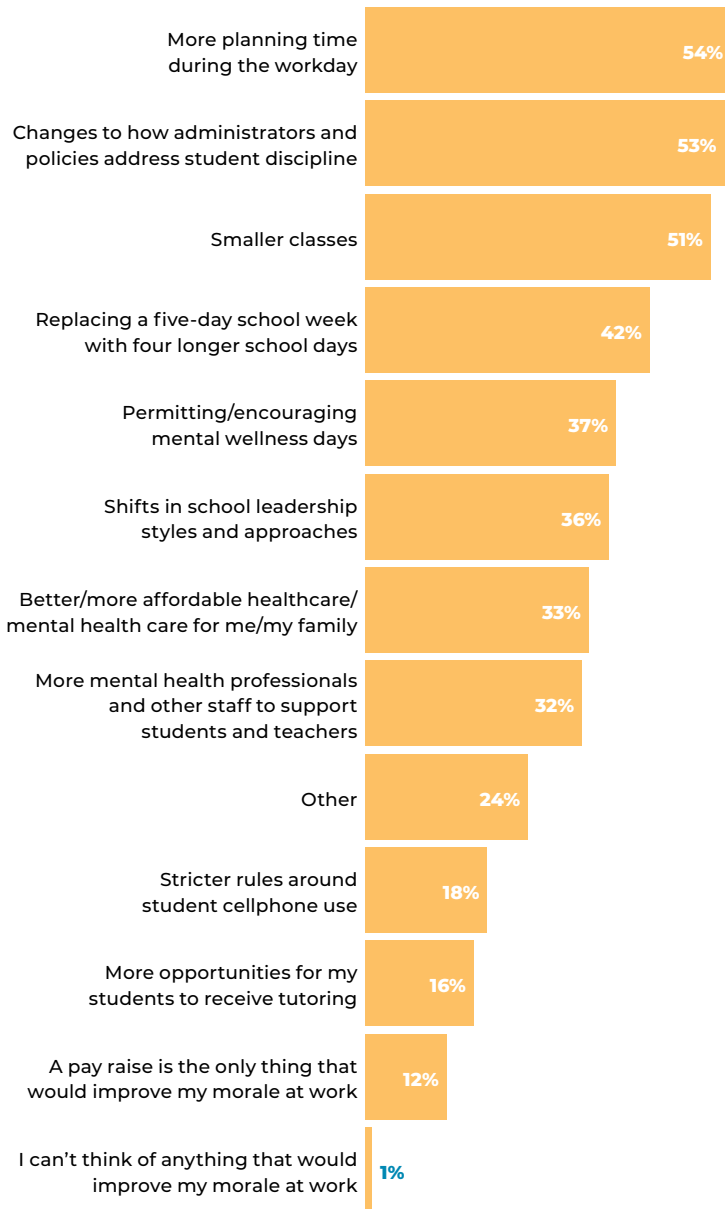
Interestingly, the biggest gap was related not to pay but to schedules: The morale scores of teachers who said their daily

Percent of teachers who say that replacing a five-day school week with four longer school days would have a major impact on improving their morale



DATA SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center, The State of Teaching 2026, nationally representative online survey conducted in August–November 2025 of 5,802 teachers

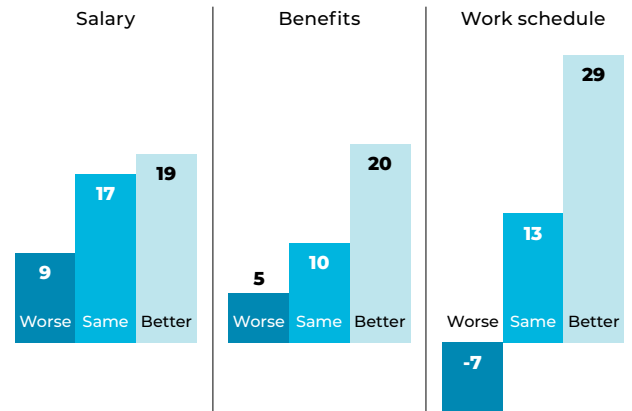
Other than a pay raise, what type of change would have a major impact on improving your morale? Select all that apply.



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In your opinion, how do your salary, benefits, and work schedule compare to those of your closest family members and friends?

Average Teacher Morale Index score for teachers who say their salary, benefits (healthcare, retirement, paid time off), or daily and annual work schedule are better, worse, or the same as those of their closest family and friends.



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and annual work schedules were worse than those of their closest family members and friends on average reported their scores as 36 points lower than those who viewed their schedules as better. That gap was 10 points for salaries and 15 points for benefits.

It's possible that dissatisfaction with salaries and scheduling are related. In an open-ended comment, an early career elementary school arts teacher in Michigan explained:

"I went to school for five years, received two bachelor's degrees, and intend on going for a graduate degree this upcoming school year. I am in one of the highest-paying ... districts in my state. All of this, but I cannot afford to rent an apartment on my own. I see my friends who all graduated the same time as me starting their jobs at twice what I make. My first reaction is frustration and jealousy ... I feel undervalued."

Most jobs in K-12 education do not lend themselves to the remote or hybrid work schedules that have become more common since the pandemic. Although research suggests that they may decrease student achievement without measurably improving teacher retention, four-day school weeks are one increasingly popular solution to teachers' desire for a more flexible work schedule. Forty-two percent of respondents said that four-day weeks would have a major impact on improving their morale, and the perk is especially popular with younger teachers.

3 Yes, teachers want classes to shrink—but by how much?

Most teachers (51%) say smaller class sizes would have a major impact on improving their morale. This is not surprising; class-size reductions have long topped teacher wish lists. So we followed up by asking respondents for their ideal number of students per class (for teachers working with different groups of students throughout the day) or in total (for teachers who work with the same group of students all day). Nineteen was the average response. That's 24% lower than the current class size of the teachers who responded, who averaged 25 students in the classroom at any one time.

Our data can't prove a cause-and-effect relationship, but we did find that teachers who currently have smaller class sizes report substantially higher morale than those who have more students.

"When students are pulled out of my class for special services, the smaller class size makes a remarkable difference," an English/language arts teacher at a Texas elementary school wrote in an open-ended comment. "I think smaller class sizes are the key to better public education."

A high school science teacher in Vermont offered this:

"My school's strength at the moment is its small class sizes, and [the] resulting very close relationships between teachers and students. It's really important to their learning and to my happiness with my job."

4 Teachers' top wish is also one of the more affordable options for district leaders

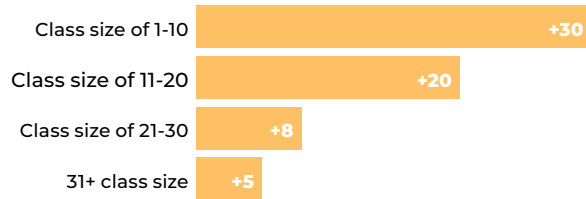
Fifty-four percent of respondents said that their morale would improve a lot if they had more time to plan during the work day. That is a relatively affordable area that district leaders and principals can work to preserve. By contrast, other shifts, such as increasing pay or decreasing class size tend to be far more pricey.

Having more time to plan for their classes was especially popular with Gen Z teachers: Nearly two out of three said that adding planning time would increase their morale.

A Gen Z high school science teacher in Mississippi explained the importance of planning time, saying the district's other meetings were "demeaning" and "redundant."

"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."

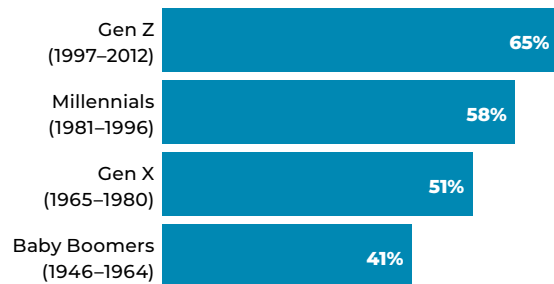
Teacher Morale Index scores by current class size



NOTE: Respondents were asked: What is your current class size? If you teach the same students all day: Enter the total number of students you teach. If you teach multiple different classes/groups of students: Estimate the average number of students per class this year. Teacher Morale Index scores range from -100 to +100.

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Percentage of teachers who say more planning time during the workday would have a major impact on improving their morale



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5 Student discipline remains a top concern, but there's progress in one area

Sixty-four percent of survey respondents say that their students' behavior has gotten worse over the past year. Behavior is an especially big concern at the elementary level, where 76% of teachers report that behavior has worsened over that period. By contrast, 61% of middle school teachers and 54% of high school educators say the same.

Short of additional planning time, changes to policies that could improve student discipline are teachers' second most popular option to boost morale. Fifty-three percent say shifts in this area would improve their morale a lot. When asked what changes that might lead to improvements in discipline, most teachers called for smaller classes, instruction for parents on teaching children how to behave appropriately in school, limits on parents' ability to undermine consequences when their children get in trouble, and reducing the amount of time students spend on devices.

In open-ended comments, teachers spelled out a variety of frustrations about student behavior, many of them focused on "parents behaving badly":

"Parents are a major issue in education today," a high school ELA teacher in Indiana wrote. "So many of them believe that their children are faultless and should not be asked to change their behavior in any way ...When parents are so quick to take away any possible inconvenience from their kids, they hurt our ability to educate them and their ability to thrive in the world."

A middle school English teacher in Arkansas wrote:

"Students last year created fake social media accounts about me, shared my home address, and spammed my personal phone number. In the last three years I have had parents harass me at my other job and threaten me at sporting events. Other teachers in the building have been threatened with lawsuits and had allegations filed against them with the ethics board over minor student behavior issues. I don't understand how anyone in education can have a positive morale at this time."

And an elementary school teacher in Hawaii commented:

"A parent of a student allows her 2nd grader to have a cell phone. This student called her mom to come pick her up from school because the substitute teacher was mean. The parent picked her up and complained to admin. about the substitute teacher."

Although most teachers continue to worry about the impact of screen time on their students' behavior, just 18% of educators now say that stricter rules around student cellphone use would have a major impact on improving their morale.

This is most likely due to the fact that the majority of

In the past year, the behavior of the students I teach has:

- Gotten a lot worse
- Gotten a little worse
- Remained about the same
- Improved a little
- Improved a lot

Total (all respondents)



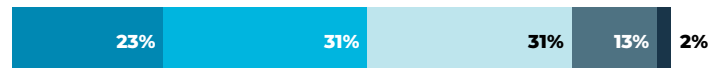
Elementary school (grades pre-K-5)



Middle school (grades 6-8)



High school (grades 9-12)

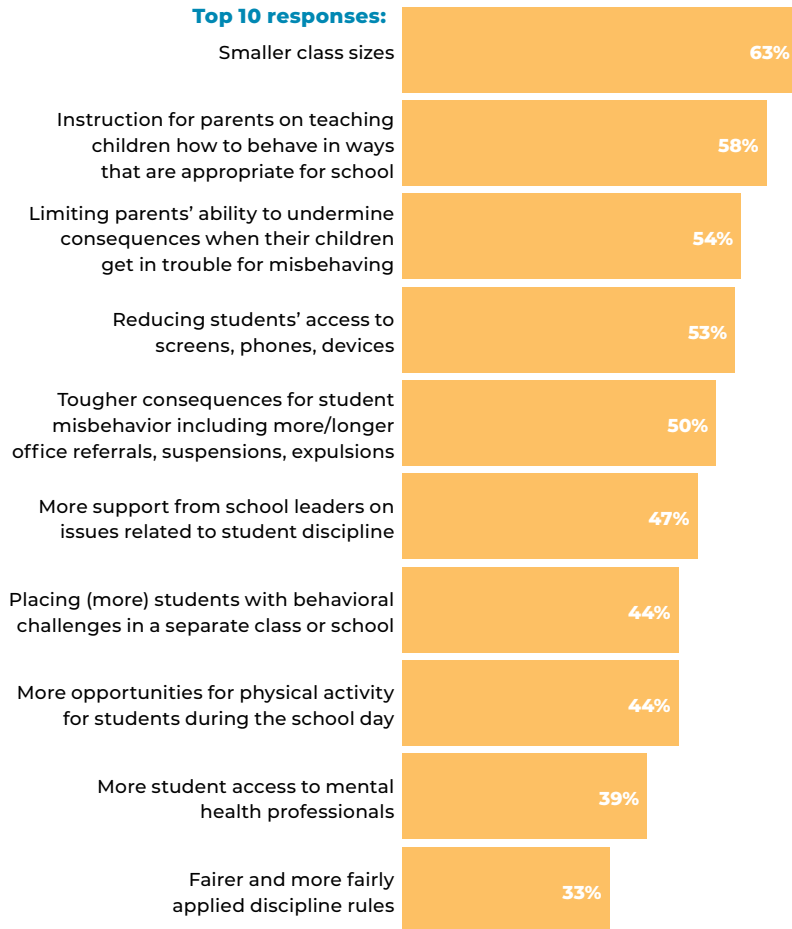


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states and many individual districts and schools now have laws restricting student cellphone use. Many of these policies were approved or implemented in the past year. In open-ended comments, multiple teachers expressed their appreciation for the stricter rules.

“The best thing to happen this year has been the new law in Texas that bans cellphones,” wrote a high school CTE teacher in that state. “It has made a huge positive difference already in the way my students act and participate in class.” ■

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



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Vanessa Solis/Education Week via Canva

A State-by-State Breakdown of Teacher Job Satisfaction in 2026

By **Holly Kurtz**



Teacher morale varies widely from state to state, with educators in Arkansas having the highest level of job satisfaction, and their classroom counterparts

in Pennsylvania having the lowest.

The EdWeek Research Center measures job satisfaction on the Teacher Morale Index, a consistent year-over-year gauge on how teachers view the profession. State-level results on the index are reported on ranges, or 95% confidence intervals, which provide a more accurate view of the level of precision for each estimate.

Scores were highest in Arkansas, where they ranged from +18 to +30 with an estimate of

24. Pennsylvania's score—between -5 and +8 with an estimate of +1—was lowest. Overall, nationwide, teacher job satisfaction dipped slightly during the 2026 school year. For technical reasons, 2026 national results can be validly compared to 2025, but state results cannot be.

The Teacher Morale Index, developed by the EdWeek Research Center, measures teachers' views of their jobs using three survey questions about the past, current, and future status of morale. A total of 5,802 teachers responded to the nationally-representative online survey, which included a total of 30 questions about the profession.

About the Teacher Morale Index

The Teacher Morale Index provides a panoramic view of teachers' prior, present, and predicted perceptions of their workplace conditions.

The Index is scored on a scale of -100 to +100, with negative scores indicating lower morale and positive scores indicating higher morale. Results can be tracked over time and reported by subgroup—such as locale or years of teaching experience.

Calculating the Teacher Morale Index

Teachers responding to the 2026 State of

Teaching Survey were asked to select one of three answer options in response to each of the three questions listed below. A negative response assigned a value of -100 points, a neutral response assigned a value of 0, and a positive response assigned a value of +100.

Points for each of the three survey questions were averaged for each respondent to generate a score ranging from -100 to +100.

1. Compared to one year ago, my morale at work right now is:

- Worse (-100 points)
- The same (0 points)
- Better (+100 points)

2. Right now, my morale at work is:

- Mostly bad (-100 points)
- Equally good and bad (0 points)
- Mostly good (+100 points)

3. One year from now, I expect my morale at work will be:

- Worse (-100 points)
- The same (0 points)
- Better (+100 points)

Teacher Morale Index 2026

State scores on the index are shown below. Each state's estimated score appears in orange along with ranges that are provided to indicate the level of precision for each estimate.



Results from the first state-level State of Teaching survey in 2025 are not comparable to state-level results from subsequent years due to a methodological shift that improved the validity of the analysis.

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Data visualization by Maya Riser-Kositsky