

EducationWeek

# The State of Teaching



## 5 Strategies for Supporting K-12 Teachers

**Lessons From Texas.** At a forum in San Antonio, district and school leaders talked with classroom educators about strategies that will keep teachers in the profession



From left, Alicia Simba, a transitional kindergarten teacher; Eric Lewis, a science teacher; Vito Chiala, a principal; Chris Hoffman, a school superintendent; and moderator Diana Lambert of EdSource appear on a panel during the April 14 State of Teaching event.



In April 14, Education Week and Texas Public Radio co-hosted a forum in San Antonio, Texas, with classroom teachers, school leaders and district administrators to discuss issues affecting Texas' educator workforce. The Texas education system is a complex landscape, characterized by high-stakes testing requirements, stagnant state funding for public schools, a large number of alternatively certified and uncertified teachers, and the increasing politicization of K-12 education by state officials.

The event in San Antonio was connected to the release of Education Week's 2026 [State of Teaching project](#), a major reporting and research effort based in part on a nationally representative online survey, conducted last fall, of more than 5,800 teachers across the nation. The survey asked teachers to reflect on factors, well beyond compensation, that could improve their morale, and it asked about other aspects of their professional lives and working conditions.

As part of the project, the EdWeek Research Center created a Teacher Morale Index. It found that teacher morale nationally stands at +13, on a scale of -100 to +100, down slightly from +18 last year. The state score for Texas was +17, on a range of +11 to +23, meaning teachers, on the whole, viewed their jobs more positively than negatively.

But Texas teachers also face challenges. The report highlights dissatisfaction among the state's educators when it comes to the quality of their benefits, with Texas ranking lowest in the country in this area.

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*This paper was written by David Saleh Rauf, a freelance education writer whose work has appeared in Education Week and EdWeek Market Brief.*

Sixty-four percent of Texas teachers—an estimate that fall within a range of 59-69%—say their work schedule s are better or at least as good as their closest family members and friends, compared with the national average of 69%.

The San Antonio event, which was supported by the Gates Foundation, featured discussions on strategies to improve teacher morale. A panel of Texas administrators and educators used the State of Teaching survey findings as an entry point for a broader discussion on why Texas teachers tend to leave the profession and what districts should do to keep them. The panel was moderated by Texas Public Radio education reporter Camille Phillips and included Shawn Bird, deputy superintendent at the San Antonio Independent School District; Joaquin Hernandez, principal of MacArthur High School in the North East Independent School District; Elizabeth Sanchez, executive master teacher at the Somerset Independent School District outside of San Antonio; and Hallie Gelabert, teacher and instructional facilitator at CAST Teacher High School, in the Northside Independent School District.

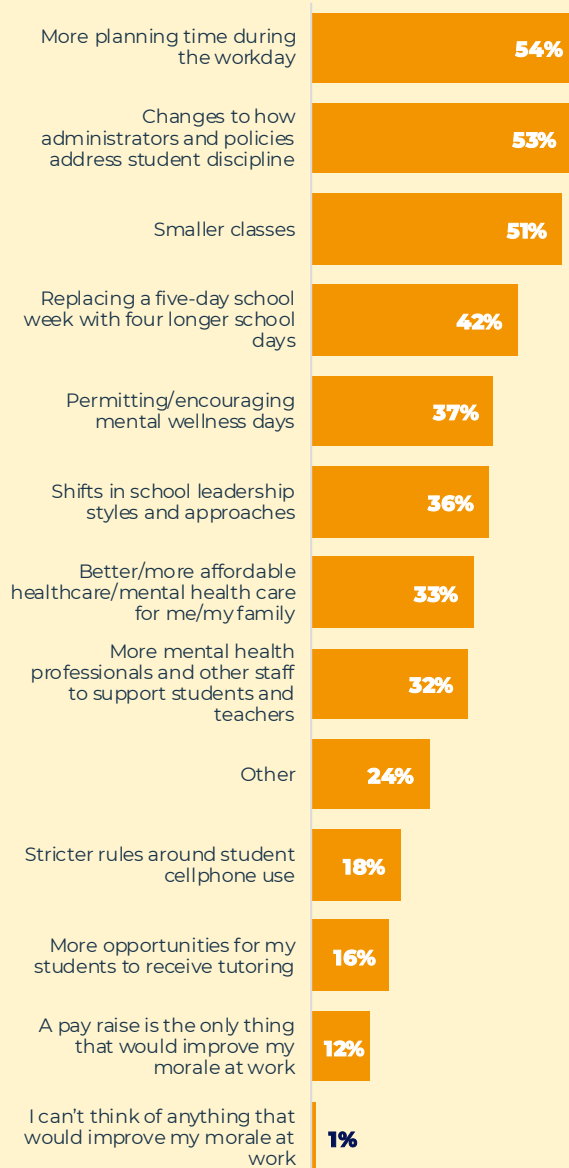
The journalists at the event also led several individual roundtable discussions. Each roundtable focused on a specific theme around how districts can better support teachers, in areas such as preparation for entering the classroom to workplace conditions to professional development.

The discussions during the event focused on an array of topics. Five key takeaways emerged on how district and school leaders can create conditions for teachers to succeed. They can:

- **Prioritize teacher preparedness for the rigors of the profession.**
- **Expand training and supports to address classroom disruptions.**
- **Build trust and morale with teachers through small actions.**
- **Address teacher concerns about health care benefits.**
- **Equip teachers with training to handle difficult conversations with parents.**

## Nationally, Educators Prize Planning Time

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, The State of Teaching 2026, nationally representative online survey conducted in August-November 2025 of 5,802 teachers.

# 1. Prioritize teacher preparedness.

Texas has one of the nation's highest shares of alternatively certified or uncertified teachers.

State lawmakers passed legislation last year requiring districts to reduce the uncertified teachers in core subjects by the 2029-30 school year. But the reality is that Texas districts will have to continue to deal with teachers who land in classrooms without pursuing a traditional teacher training pathway, panelists at the event said, as the state grapples with teacher shortages.

At the same time, classroom educators in the Lone Star state are being asked to do more than before — take on additional roles, assignments, and learn new instructional material while contending with the state's accountability system, which relies heavily on student test scores to evaluate schools and districts.

Many new teachers are simply not trained to handle so many varying responsibilities, and it's creating extra pressure that can negatively affect morale, said Gelabert, the teacher and instructional facilitator on the panel. She called the layered-on burdens "role creep."

"We wear a lot more hats, and are responsible for a lot more, accountability-wise," she said. "But we don't necessarily have control over a lot of those pieces that we're accountable for."

That high-stakes accountability environment "makes it very challenging for teachers," in particular those that landed in classrooms without pursuing traditional certifications, said Hernandez, the principal on the panel.

Hernandez said his district has partnered with San Antonio College, a public community college, and the University of Texas at San Antonio, to help train teachers. The district, he said, also received a grant that



Participants during the State of Teaching Event in San Antonio, Texas on April 14, 2026

will provide funding for additional teacher training professional development over the summer.

"We're finding that the biggest thing that we have to do to make our folks successful is create student teaching pathways before they get into the classroom," he said, "and then create onboarding pathways before they take over the classroom."

Bird, the deputy superintendent on the panel, said that in nearly three decades in public education, he has never seen teachers as underprepared as they have been in the years since the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the San Antonio Independent School District, a program with a public community college to support teacher training and certification has proven beneficial, he said.

"There's nothing wrong with alternative certification," Bird said. "We just know that we have to nurture those people in a different way."

## 2. Expand training and supports to address classroom disruptions.

Across the country, a minority of teachers, about one-third surveyed as part of the State of Teaching project, say that student behavior has stayed the same or improved over the past year.

In Texas, 36% of teachers (an estimate that falls within a range of 33-39%) agreed.

Because many teachers in Texas are not pursuing a traditional certification pathway, and often enter classrooms without student-teaching experience, they are arriving on the job “without the skills necessary to handle the students they have,” said Bird, the SAISD deputy superintendent. When that lack of training is combined with the lingering effects of pandemic-era school disruptions, it has contributed to many behavior issues districts are facing, he said.

To deal with those challenges, the district’s superintendent formed an advisory council made up of high school students. For three consecutive years, Bird said, the group has identified mental health resources as the top need among students.

Sanchez, an executive master teacher on the panel, said some classroom discipline issues stem from unprepared teachers—educators who have not fully planned their lessons or who second-guess themselves in the classroom. Even a minor interruption in the flow of learning can lead to disruptions.

Students “can smell fear,” she said.

The district trains new teachers to maintain momentum throughout lessons, keep activities prepared and ensure students remain engaged, which Sanchez said makes classroom behavior easier to manage.

“You have to have everything planned for every second,” Sanchez said.

Fifty-two percent of Texas teachers surveyed (on a range of 48-56%) said tougher consequences for student misbehavior, including more or longer office referrals, suspensions, or expulsions, would have a major impact on student behavior and classroom management. The national average was 50%.

Meanwhile, 48% of Texas respondents (on a range of 44-52%) said reducing students’ access to screens, phones and devices would have that same effect. The national average is 53%.

Texas lawmakers took action on both fronts last year.

In response to reports of more violent classroom disruptions after Covid, the legislature approved a bill that gives schools more power to discipline disruptive students. Lawmakers also passed a measure banning cellphones in public K-12 schools.

Both laws are being implemented for the first time during the current school year.

**When that lack of training is combined with the lingering effects of pandemic-era school disruptions, it has contributed to many behavior issues districts are facing.**

—Shawn Bird, deputy superintendent at the San Antonio Independent School District

### 3. Build trust and boost morale with teachers through small actions.

Texas teachers are not as happy with their schedules as some of their peers around the country. And school leaders and district officials understand they are going to have to be flexible—when feasible.

A substantial share of Texas teachers say their schedules are either better than or at least as good as their family and friends. At the event, EdWeek Assistant Editor Sarah Sparks noted that Gen Z teachers were most likely to say that more planning time during the school day would significantly improve morale.

That’s partly a generational issue, Sparks said, as Gen Z teachers have shown more willingness to push for work-life balance and for flexibility in their job compared to older generations of educators.

Panelists agreed this is a key point.

For several years, teachers have described the job as “unmanageable,” said Bird, the SAISD deputy superintendent. Part of the strain, he said, reflects changing expectations among newer teachers.

“The Gen Z teachers, they’re young parents and they’re at a point in their life where they need more flexibility. We have to respond to that,” he said, “because the days of the 30-year career educator ... those days are gone.”

In his district in San Antonio, Bird said district officials asked the school board for three additional teacher planning days to support a new curriculum adoption and improve teacher retention. The district plans to request those three additional days again next year.

“They’re not boomers like me ... we would just work. That’s just not how young people think anymore about work-life balance,” he said. “It’s those kinds of things to help manage their workload and make this job a little more manageable.”

Small actions can make a big difference in helping teachers feel appreciated, panelists said.

District and school leaders do not control some big-ticket items—such as the number of periods in a school day or

**Gen Z teachers were most likely to say that more planning time during the school day would significantly improve morale.**

—EdWeek Assistant Editor  
Sarah Sparks

state decisions about course requirements. But administrators can control smaller situations, such as allowing a teacher to step out of class for an emergency call or leave for a doctor’s appointment.

In her role as a teacher and instructional facilitator, Gelabert of CAST Teacher High School said she spends half the day teaching and the other half handling administrative duties. Her advice for district leaders: Be open when teachers ask for help—it is one way to build goodwill.

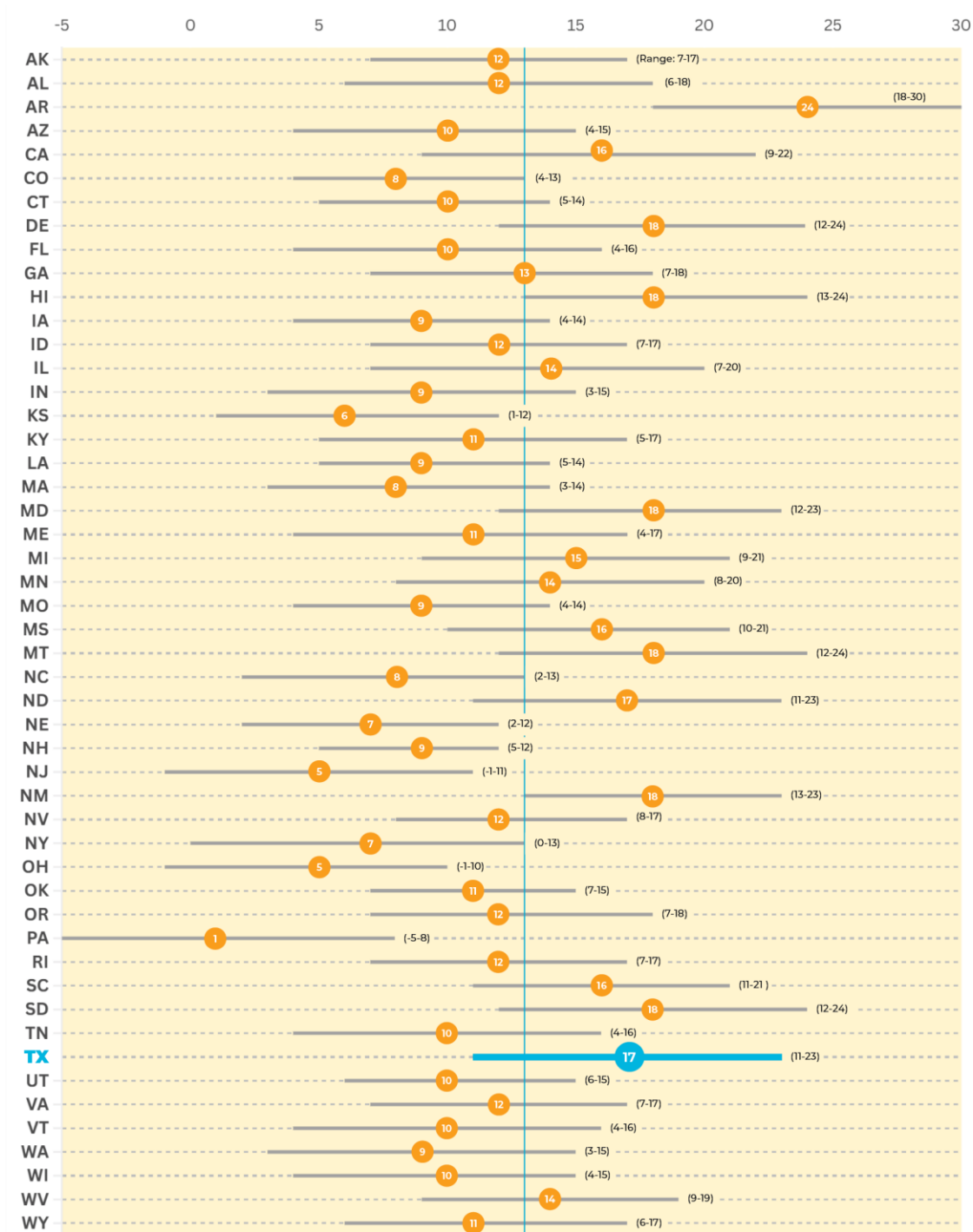
“If, as the administrator, I have the opportunity to say, ‘I can cover your fourth period class so that you can make that appointment in the middle of the day and you don’t have to take a half day, that’s a positive [thing] for that teacher,’” said Gelabert. “Then when I need that teacher on a Saturday morning to help me ... that teacher is going to be more likely to help.”

Hernandez, principal of MacArthur High School, agreed, calling those types of doable actions by administrators “small emotional credits.”

“It’s a give and take, a two-way road,” he said. “This job is tough, so we need to make it as palatable as possible so that people do stay in the business.”

# 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.

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

Data visualization by Maya Riser-Kositsky

## 4. Address teacher concerns about health care benefits.

At one of the roundtable discussions following the panel, school officials discussed one of the more eye-opening findings from the report: The share of teachers in Texas reporting that their benefits (healthcare, retirement, paid time off) are at least as good as those of their family and friends is far below several states, such as Alabama and New Jersey.

A little more than one-third of Texas respondents, 35% (on a range of between 26-45%) said their benefits (healthcare, retirement, paid time off) are at least as good as those of family and friends. The national average from the survey was 68%.

EdWeek Research Center Director Holly Kurtz said this is the second consecutive State of Teaching project report in which many Texas teachers have expressed a desire for better and

more affordable health care and mental health care for their families.

Ben Muir, the assistant superintendent for human resources at Northside ISD in San Antonio, said that data point stood out, but he did not know why the discrepancy between Texas and the rest of the country was so vast.

It also caught the attention of Nadine Espinosa, the human resources director at Boerne Independent School District, outside of San Antonio. She said she was surprised by the report's findings.

"I didn't think that we were that far off," Espinosa said.

At Muir and Espinosa's roundtable, the discussion focused on what school districts could do to address employee health benefits.



Reporter Sarah Sparks during the State of Teaching Event in San Antonio, Texas on April 14, 2026.

(continued) **4. Address teacher concerns about health care benefits.**

Muir said in his district there has been discussion about keeping our health-care providers “on their toes.” He said the district is planning to go out for a new bid for health insurance next year.

“At some point they get real comfortable, and we need to let them know that they need to bring it and they need to bring it for our employees,” Muir said.

Over the last three years, Northside ISD has not increased health insurance costs, so the district has not heard much negative feedback, he said. “But the minute you increase costs ... that’s when you hear from people. Could we always do better? Absolutely.”

One potential way to help improve health-related benefits would be to bring wellness programs—from vaccines to mammograms—directly to teachers, said Espinosa of Boerne ISD.

“A teacher’s time is so limited during the instructional day sometimes they don’t have time to make certain appointments,” she said. “Whether it’s at the campus or maybe a district central office it helps make that option a little bit easier.”

The roundtable also discussed the idea of districts allotting more personal days to teachers. Currently, state law allows teachers to take five personal days off during the school year, Muir said. Individual school systems can then provide more days—both Northside ISD and Boerne ISD give educators another five additional days—at a cost to the district.

“Everybody in here would admit we’d love to do better on that end,” Muir said.

Espinosa noted that the state would likely need to fund additional personal days because districts already absorb the costs of substitute teachers on days when regular classroom educators are out. The option to have additional personal days would give teachers more “peace of mind,” she said.

## The State of Teaching in Texas | By the Numbers

**Texas’ overall score on the Teacher Morale Index is +17, on a range of +11-23. The national average is +13.** Arkansas teachers’ morale was the best of any state at +24 (the range was +18 to +30), and Pennsylvania was the worst at +1. (the range was -5 to +8).

**Texas teachers generally had similar views as their classroom peers in other states when it comes to the types of changes that would influence their morale:**

- **56%** of Texas educators (on a range of 53-58%) said having more planning time during the school day would influence their morale.
- **52%** of them (on a range of 45-59%) said smaller class sizes would influence their morale.
- **56%** of Texas teachers (on a range of 51-62%) said changes to how administrators and policies affect student discipline would shape their morale.
- One area where Texas teachers’ views appear to break sharply from many of their peers around the country: How they perceive the benefits they receive from their job. Asked in a survey how their salary, benefits and work schedules compare with those of their closet family members and friends. **Just 35% of Texas educators (on a range of 26-45%) said their benefits are no better or at least as good.** That contrasts greatly with several states, such as Alabama (86% on a range of 81-91%) and New Jersey (85% on a range of 78-92%).

The numbers in parentheses are error terms that indicate how state-level estimates might have been different if, through the luck of the draw, a different set of teachers had taken the survey.

## 5. Equip teachers with training to handle difficult conversations with parents.

David Bellesen, a career and technical education teacher for the Austin Independent School District, has been an educator for 22 years.

But in that time, he said there has never been professional development focused on a growing area of concern for teachers: how to have sensitive conversations with parents.

“I never learned how to do it. I just ripped the Band-Aid off,” said Bellesen, who attended the San Antonio event.

At the roundtable that included Bellesen, the conversation focused on student behavior, with particular attention to the role parents play.

In Texas, parents have been granted more authority over their children’s school day, ranging from curriculum to extracurricular activities. Lawmakers last year passed a so-called Parental Bill of Rights that restricts discussions of gender identity, limits student clubs based on sexual orientation and bans programming related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Schools must also provide parents, upon request, with teaching materials and access to online learning portals.

In an age of increased parental involvement, teachers say they often do not know how to talk with parents about behavior or other challenges. That gap comes down to professional development—specifically, a lack of training in this area, Bellesen said.

When he’s mentored other teachers, and the topic has come up Bellesen said he’s been unsure about what advice to give.

“I’ve just kind of gotten to the point where it’s like I a just going to be very brutally honest,” he said, noting that conversations with parents can quickly become “pretty uncomfortable.”

For Erika Bacon, the principal of West Ridge Middle School in the Eanes Independent School District in Austin, parents in her district not only have high expectations but are very involved in their children’s schooling.



A participant connects with Beth Frerking, editor in chief for Education Week, during the State of Teaching Event in San Antonio, Texas, on April 14, 2026.

(continued) **5. Equip teachers with training to handle difficult conversations with parents.**

Sometimes, parents do not always recognize the increased demands on teachers, she said. But maintaining open communication with parents is important in building trust, she said. “So that when difficult conversations arise, that’s not the only thing you have ever talked to a parent about,” Bacon said. “This way you can have those difficult conversations later down the road.”

Her school has had training sessions for teachers about speaking with parents, but Bacon said it’s been several years. After the roundtable discussion, she said she was motivated to revisit that type of professional development for her teaching staff.

“It could be a good solution to help ease some of that tension,” she said. “It could help some teachers just have the confidence to engage in those conversations.”

## Gates Foundation

Education Week’s The State of Teaching project is supported in part by a grant from the [Gates Foundation](#).



Explore the full array of Education Week’s **2026 State of Teaching** reporting and survey data.

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