



# Teacher Well-Being and Intentions to Leave

## Findings from the 2023 State of the American Teacher Survey

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## Summary of Key Findings

**Teachers reported better well-being in January 2023 than in prior years, and rates of job-related stress have returned to pre-pandemic levels. However, teachers continue to report worse well-being than the general population of working adults.**

- Female teachers reported significantly higher rates of frequent job-related stress and burnout and were less likely to report feeling resilient to stressful events than male teachers. Black teachers reported significantly higher rates of burnout than White teachers.
- Managing student behavior, supporting student academic learning, and administrative work were top sources of job-related stress for teachers. Black teachers and male teachers were especially likely to report low salaries as a source of stress.

**Twenty-three percent of teachers said that they were *likely* to leave their job at their school by the end of the 2022–2023 school year.**

- Black teachers were significantly more likely to intend to leave than their peers.
- Teachers who intended to leave were most likely to cite the stresses and disappointments of the job not being worth it, their salary, and the number of working hours as top reasons behind their decision.
- Teachers who reported poor well-being were more likely than their counterparts to say that they intended to leave their job.

**Seventy-seven percent of teachers said that they were *unlikely* to leave their job by the end of the 2022–2023 school year.**

- Teachers who intended to stay said that their ability to positively affect students and positive relationships with students and other teachers were the top reasons. Salary was a top reason to stay for about half of teachers who intended to stay.

**Twenty-five percent of teachers reported that their school or district directed them to limit discussions about political and social issues in class; 65 percent decided on their own to limit such discussions.**

- Half of the teachers who decided on their own to limit such discussions reported that they did so because they were unsure whether school and district leaders would support them if parents expressed concerns.

**Twenty-six percent of teachers indicated that they sometimes or often feared for their physical safety at school.**

- About half of teachers who feared for their physical safety at school said that students misbehaving or having verbal altercations and fear of an active shooter coming into their school were top reasons.

**More teachers reported access to at least one type of well-being or mental health support in 2023 than in 2022.**

- Three-quarters of teachers reported that they had access to at least one well-being or mental health support (e.g., mental health care) in 2023, but only slightly more than half of all teachers indicated that these supports were adequate.
- Lack of class coverage and paid leave to access supports were the top reasons teachers said that their supports were inadequate.
- Beyond formal supports, strong relationships with other teachers and supportive school leaders were the most commonly cited aspects of school environments that contributed to positive well-being and mental health.

## Overview

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic elevated the well-being of K–12 public school teachers to a national concern. In 2021 and 2022, teachers were twice as likely to report experiencing frequent job-related stress and difficulty coping with that stress than the general population of working adults (Steiner et al., 2022, Agyapong et al., 2022). For teachers, stress on the job is linked to absenteeism, turnover, and intentions to leave their job (Ryan et al., 2017). *Teacher turnover* is the combination of *mobility*—leaving a school but remaining in teaching—and *attrition*—leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017). Turnover can negatively affect student achievement, and the cost of replacing teachers can be high (Watlington et al., 2010).

National data are critical for understanding the state of the workforce, but they mask subgroup differences. In 2022, teachers who identify as people of color or female experienced worse well-being than their counterparts (Steiner et al., 2022). When considered with other evidence about the adverse working conditions experienced by teachers of color, this raises the concern that teachers of color might continue to leave their jobs at higher rates than their White peers (Dixon, Griffin, and Teoh, 2019; Simon and Johnson, 2015).

Poor well-being is not the only reason teachers might consider leaving their jobs. Working conditions—such as the quality of leadership support; relationships with colleagues; feelings of safety, order, and discipline; and pay—are all strong predictors of teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson, 2005; Kraft, Marinell, and Yee, 2016). State, district, or school policies related to politicized topics, and the tensions that might arise from such policies, are also a source of job-related stress for teachers and are linked with their intentions to leave (Steiner et al., 2022; Woo et al., 2022). Intentions to leave are an imperfect predictor of turnover (Grant and Bratlinger, 2023), but teachers who state such an intention are more likely to resign than those who do not (Nguyen et al., 2022). In addition, the relationship between teacher well-being and working conditions is bidirectional—teachers’ reports of their well-being can be influenced by school conditions and vice versa (Hamilton and Doss, 2020).

Restoring teacher well-being could improve job performance and job satisfaction and boost retention for teachers of all backgrounds (Greenberg, Brown, and Abenavoli, 2016). Recent media reports suggest that many districts and schools are adopting new programs—or expanding existing offerings—intended to promote well-being and retention (e.g., Casey, 2022). This Data Note presents selected findings from the 2023 State of the American Teacher (SoT) survey related to teacher well-being, the availability of mental health and well-being supports, and teachers’ intentions to leave their current teaching jobs. The findings in this Data Note are descriptive and intended to inform federal, state, and local education leaders and policymakers about the state of the teacher workforce. Thus, we do not discuss implications or present recommendations.

## Data

We use data from three sources: (1) the 2023 SoT survey, which is a nationally representative survey of 1,439 K–12 teachers, (2) the 2023 American Life Panel (ALP) companion survey, which is a nationally representative survey of 527 working adults (Doan, Steiner, and Woo, 2023), and, when relevant, (3) the 2021 and 2022 administrations of the SoT and ALP companion surveys (Steiner and Woo, 2021; Doan et al., 2022). Black teachers and Hispanic teachers were oversampled in the SoT survey. More details about our data and analysis can be found in the “How This Analysis Was Conducted” section at the end of this Data Note.

## Limitations

First, as with all survey research, the SoT data are self-reported responses and subject to reporting bias. This might be especially true for sensitive topics, such as individual well-being and teaching about political and social issues, that are covered in these surveys. Second, we measure teachers’ intentions to leave their jobs rather than actual turnover. Third, our results are intended to be purely descriptive of patterns and trends in the data and should not be interpreted as evidence of causal relationships or effects. Lastly, we display responses from the 2021 and 2022 SoT surveys as a comparison point for some 2023 SoT results, but these surveys are not longitudinally weighted to account for the changing composition of the survey sample year over year. Therefore, we are unable to perform tests of statistical significance to compare survey responses across years.

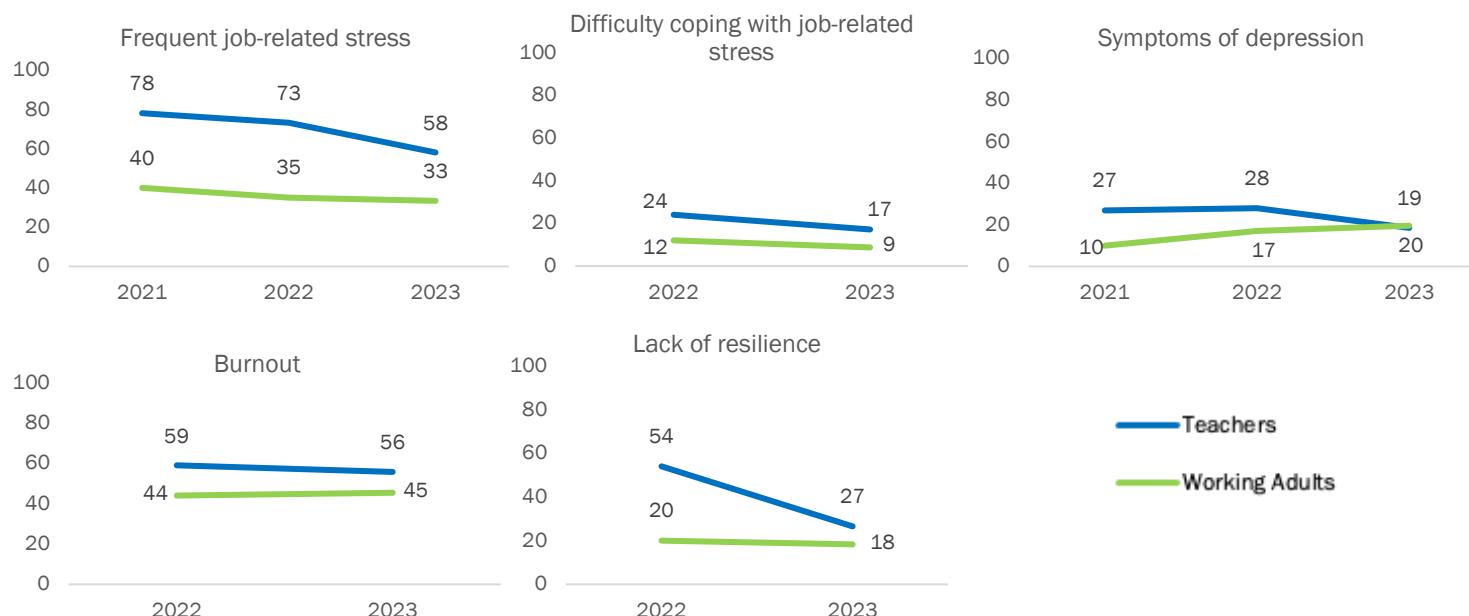
## How to Read the Figures in This Data Note

**Line charts** display the percentage of teachers reporting a given survey response across different years of the SoT survey. **Bar charts** display the percentage of teachers reporting a given survey response. At the end of each bar, we display the 95-percent confidence intervals as black lines for each estimate. Lastly, **heat maps** display the percentage of teachers reporting a given survey response, using variation in color to emphasize differences in percentages. Numbers of respondents are unweighted.

Figures 1–13 show results from the surveys pertaining to teacher well-being and intentions to leave their jobs. Each figure is followed by a brief description of key findings. **Asterisks (\*)** indicate that values for that subgroup are significantly different from those of a reference group, indicated in the figure, at the  $p < 0.05$  level. We provide information from tests of statistical significance to identify noteworthy differences in teacher well-being and working conditions that could be relevant to education policymakers,

researchers, and practitioners. These tests are not intended to be used as evidence of any causal effect of any teacher or school characteristic on the indicators we present in this Data Note.

**Figure 1. Well-Being of Teachers and Working Adults**

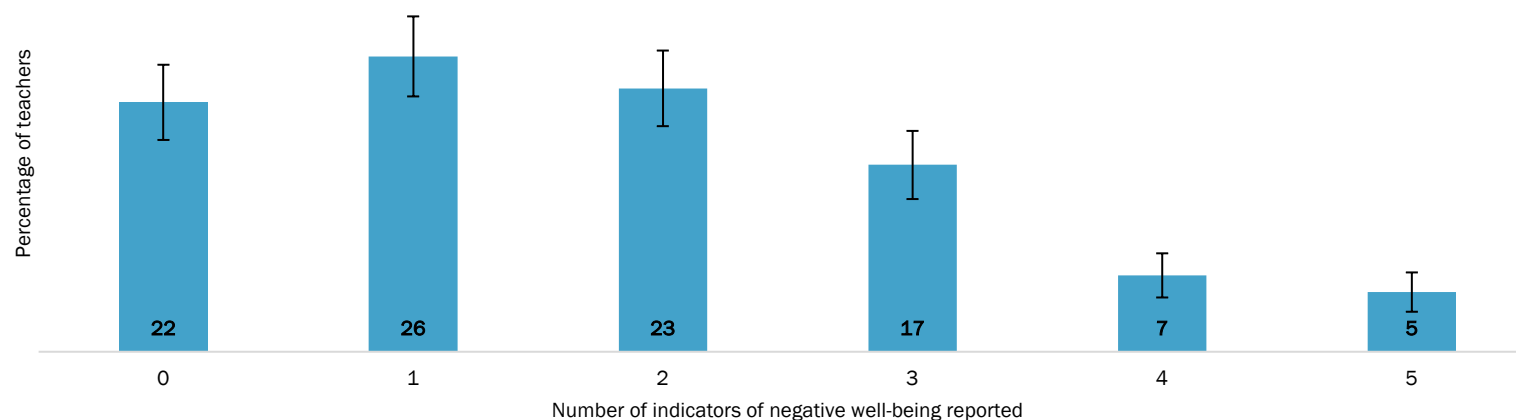


NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentage of teachers (in blue) and the weighted percentage of the general population of employed adults (in green) coded as having or experiencing each of the indicators of well-being, based on their survey responses. How we measured each well-being indicator is described in the “How This Analysis Was Conducted” section at the end of this Data Note. Teacher *N* = 1,439; working adults *N* = 527.

Figure 1 shows K–12 public school teachers’ self-reported well-being compared with that of working adults in the United States since January 2021, which was the first year we measured some of these indicators. In spring 2023, fewer teachers reported experiencing job-related stress, difficulty coping with job-related stress, and symptoms of depression, and more teachers reported feeling resilient to stressful events than in prior years. Teachers’ experiences of burnout did not change. Although the SoT survey was not administered prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the percentage of teachers experiencing job-related stress reported in Figure 1 is comparable to the percentage obtained from a sample of American Federation of Teachers members across the United States responding to the same survey question in 2017, suggesting that job-related stress might have decreased to pre-pandemic levels

(American Federation of Teachers and Badass Teachers Association, 2017). Although teacher well-being has improved, teachers were still more likely than the general population of employed adults to experience poor well-being on some indicators. For example, in 2023, teachers were still almost twice as likely as employed U.S. adults to experience frequent job-related stress.

**Figure 2. Co-Occurrence of Indicators of Poor Well-Being Among Teachers**



NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentage of teachers reporting that they experienced multiple indicators of negative well-being. Error bars depict 95-percent confidence intervals around each estimate.  $N = 1,439$ .

Seventy-eight percent of teachers reported experiencing at least one of the indicators of negative well-being shown in Figure 1, and 52 percent of teachers reported that they experienced two or more indicators. Echoing findings from the 2022 SoT survey (Steiner et al., 2022), teachers were significantly more likely to report experiencing any one of these negative well-being indicators if they also reported experiencing any other indicator, as shown in Figure 2. For example, teachers who experienced frequent job-related stress were significantly more likely to report experiencing burnout than teachers who did not experience frequent job-related stress. This pattern holds true for any combination of indicators of negative well-being.

**Figure 3. Teacher-Reported Well-Being, by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Grade Band**

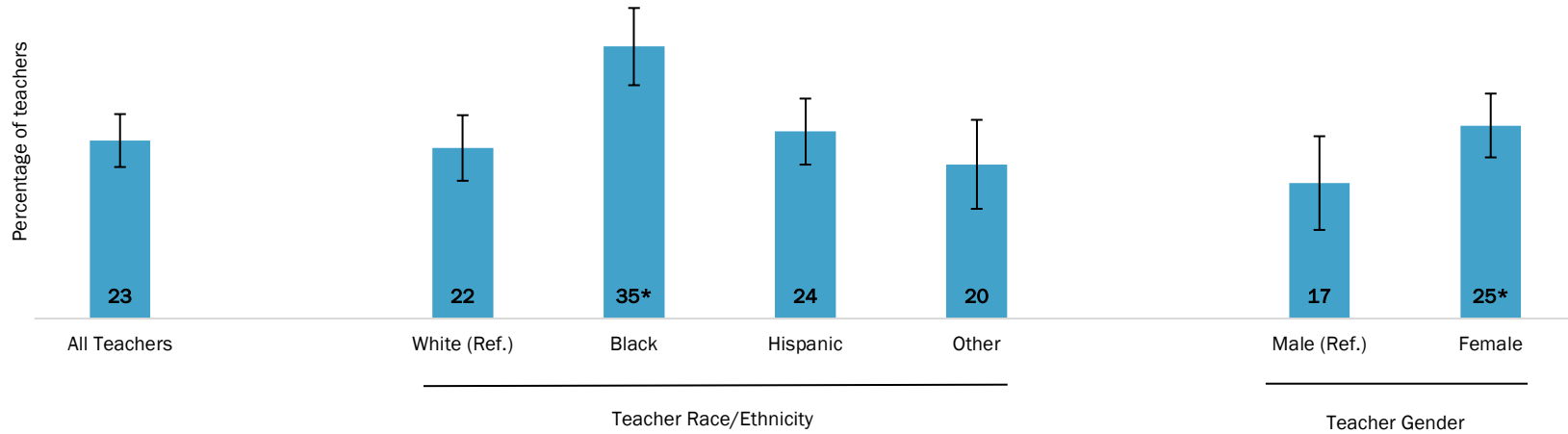
	Teacher Race/Ethnicity					Teacher Gender		School Grade Band		
	All Teachers (%) (N = 1,439)	White (Ref.) (%) (n = 395)	Black (%) (n = 396)	Hispanic (%) (n = 443)	Other Race/ Ethnicity (%) (n = 205)	Male (Ref.) (%) (n = 303)	Female (%) (n = 1,067)	Elementary (Ref.) (%) (n = 679)	Middle (%) (n = 281)	High (%) (n = 441)
Frequent job-related stress	58	58	55	59	58	46	61*	65	55	51*
Burnout	56	55	63*	59	54	45	59*	61	55	49*
Lack of resilience	27	27	23	29	24	17	30*	26	33	23
Symptoms of depression	19	18	23	21	20	18	19	19	24	16
Difficulty coping with job-related stress	17	17	19	21	16	15	17	19	20	14

NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentage of teachers in different groups who reported having or experiencing each of the five indicators of well-being. Asterisks (\*) indicate that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the  $p < 0.05$  level from the reference group, which is indicated by (Ref.).

Figure 3 shows that there are few differences in teachers’ self-reported well-being across teacher race or ethnicity and school grade band. Consistent with prior years, female teachers were significantly more likely than male teachers to report poor well-being—specifically job-related stress and burnout—and were less likely to say that they felt resilient to stressful events. Black teachers were significantly more likely than White teachers to experience burnout, a difference that could be attributable to differences in school context. Black teachers might be more likely than their White colleagues to teach in challenging settings: For example, teachers of color are more likely than their White colleagues to teach in schools serving high percentages of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) (Hansen and Quintero, 2018). It is also possible that the different working conditions that Black teachers experience are related to their reports of burnout. For example, Black teachers are more likely than their White colleagues to report experiencing racial discrimination at school (Steiner et al., 2022). Factors that we did not measure in this study, such as experiences of racial discrimination, could also contribute to the higher levels of burnout reported by Black teachers. Elementary teachers were more likely than high school teachers to experience frequent job-related stress and burnout.



**Figure 4. Teachers’ Intentions to Leave Their Jobs by the End of the 2022–2023 School Year, by Teacher Race/Ethnicity and Gender**



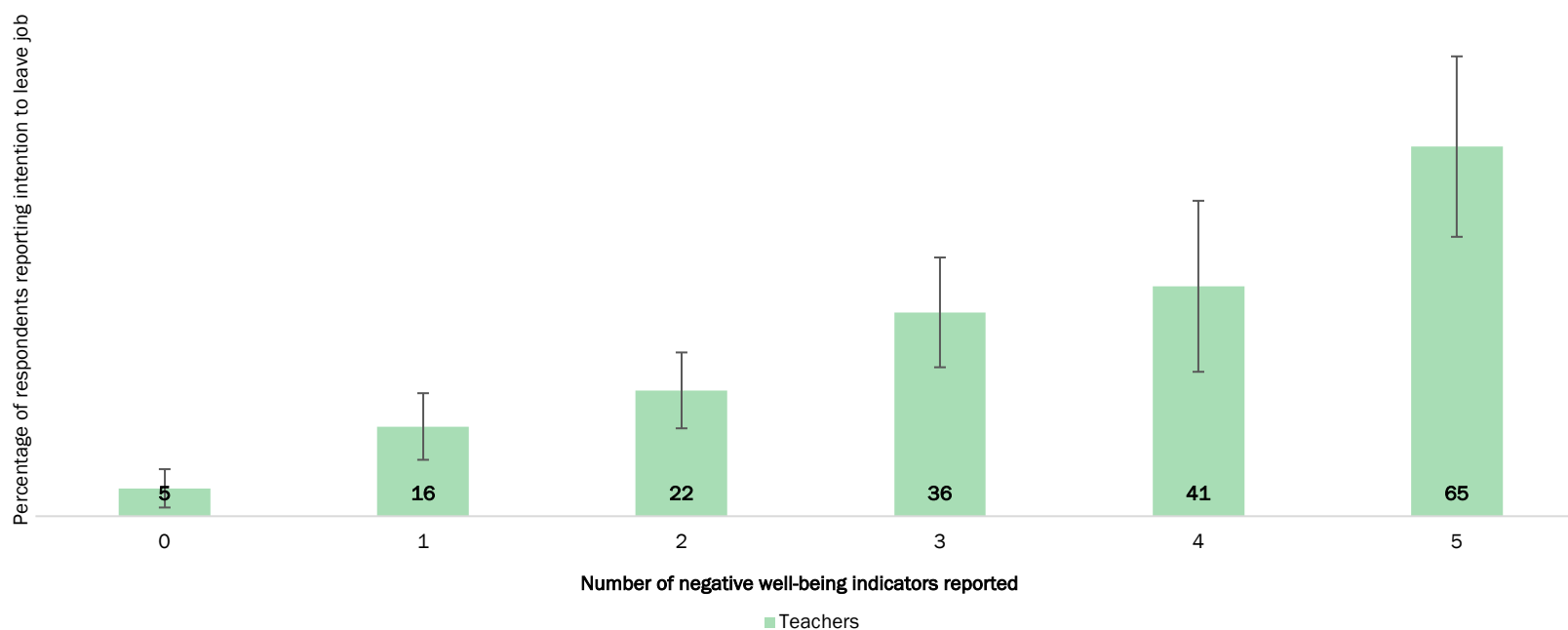
NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentage of teachers who responded “somewhat likely” or “very likely” in response to the question, “What is the likelihood that you will leave your job at your school by the end of the current school year (2022–2023)?” Results are shown for all teachers and disaggregated by teacher race/ethnicity and gender. An asterisk (\*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the  $p < 0.05$  level from the reference group, which is indicated by (Ref.). Error bars depict 95-percent confidence intervals around each estimate.  $N = 1,392$ .

Figure 4 shows that one-quarter of teachers said that they were somewhat or very likely to leave their job at their school by the end of the 2022–2023 school year. Before the pandemic, about 16 percent of teachers, on average, left their current jobs within the school year (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Consistent with results from 2021 and 2022, Black or African American teachers were significantly more likely than White teachers to report intending to leave their jobs. Female teachers were 8 percentage points more likely than male teachers to report intending to leave their jobs.

Intentions to leave are an imperfect predictor of whether teachers resign (Grant and Bratlinger, 2023). At the same time, teachers who state an intention to leave are more likely to resign than those who do not state such an intention (Nguyen et al., 2022). Intentions to leave might signal job dissatisfaction rather than actual resignations (Steiner et al., 2022). Thus, policymakers should use caution

when interpreting these results. This survey item differs from the survey items used to measure teachers’ intentions to leave their jobs reported in the 2021 and 2022 SoT surveys. Responses from prior years are not comparable to these results, so we do not discuss them here. More information about the implications of this change can be found in the “How This Analysis Was Conducted” section of this Data Note.

**Figure 5. Percentage of Teachers Who Reported Intending to Leave Their Jobs, by Number of Indicators of Poor Well-Being**



NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentage of teachers who indicated that that they were “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to leave their job by the end of the current school year (2022–2023), disaggregated by the number of negative well-being indicators reported by each respondent. The indicators of negative well-being are (1) frequent job-related stress, (2) symptoms of depression, (3) burnout, (4) not coping well with job related stress, and (5) lack of resilience; all of which are defined in the “How This Analysis Was Conducted” section of this Data Note. Error bars depict 95-percent confidence intervals around each estimate.  $N = 1,392$ .

As shown in Figure 5, we continue to find that teachers who reported poor well-being were more likely to say that they were considering leaving their jobs than their counterparts. Among teachers who reported at least one indicator of poor well-being (who accounted for 78 percent of teachers overall), 28 percent indicated intending to leave their jobs by the end of the year; teachers who reported experiencing a larger number of indicators of poor well-being were more likely to intend to leave their jobs than teachers who experienced fewer indicators of poor well-being. Only 5 percent of teachers who did not experience any of our indicators of poor well-being in 2023 were considering leaving their jobs by the end of the year. Consistent with our findings in 2021 and 2022, teachers who experienced multiple indicators of poor well-being were especially likely to report that they were considering leaving their job in 2023. Among the teachers who reported experiencing only one indicator of poor well-being, 16 percent were considering leaving. Although only 5 percent of educators experienced all five indicators of poor well-being, 65 percent of them were considering leaving their job.

**Figure 6: Top Reasons Teachers Want to Leave or Stay in Their Current Teaching Job**



NOTE: The green bars show the weighted percentages of teachers who responded to the question, “How important are each of the following things to your thinking about leaving your current teaching job?” Teachers who responded to this question previously responded that they were very likely or somewhat likely to leave their jobs at their school by the end of the 2022–2023 school year. The blue bars show the weighted percentages of teachers who responded to the question “How important are each of the following things to your decision to stay in your current teaching job?” Teachers who responded to this question previously responded that they were “very unlikely” or “somewhat unlikely” to leave their job at their school by the end of the 2022–2023 school year. Respondents were asked to rank the five most important factors contributing to their decision from among the list shown in the figures. The figures show the weighted percentage of respondents who ranked each factor within their top five reasons. Respondents who were likely to leave and likely to stay were each provided with analogously worded factors (e.g., “my ability to positively impact the students I teach” and “I am not able to positively impact the students I teach”). The wording for each factor is condensed for brevity in the figure; readers interested in the full item text should refer to the 2023 SoT technical appendix (Doan, Steiner, and Woo, 2023). Error bars depict 95-percent confidence intervals around each estimate. Teachers intending to leave  $n = 353$ ; teachers intending to stay  $n = 1,037$ .

Figure 6 shows the top reasons teachers cited in their thinking about their intentions to leave (green bars) or to stay (blue bars) in their current teaching jobs. Among the 23 percent of teachers who were considering leaving, the most common factors influencing their thinking were low morale (i.e., agreeing that the stress and disappointments of teaching were not worth it), low salary, and working too many hours outside the school day. In results not shown, Black teachers and less experienced teachers were more likely than their counterparts to say that low salary was a top reason they were considering leaving. Seventy-two percent of Black teachers who were considering leaving selected low salary as a top reason, compared with 57 percent of White teachers. Nearly all teachers with 0–5 years of experience (98 percent) and two-thirds of teachers with 6–10 years of experience selected low salary as a top reason they were considering leaving, compared with 55 percent of teachers with more than 21 years of experience.

Among the 77 percent of teachers who intended to stay in their jobs, the most common factors influencing their thinking were their ability to positively affect the students they teach, positive relationships with their students and other teachers at their schools, and their health and retirement benefits. In additional subgroup analyses not shown, we found that male teachers were more likely than female teachers to say that their salary was a top reason they planned to stay in their job. Teachers with more experience were more likely to say that their salary and their health and retirement benefits were reasons they planned to stay than teachers at the beginning of their careers. For example, only 29 percent of teachers with 0–5 years of experience said that their health and retirement benefits were a top reason they planned to stay, compared with 68 percent of teachers with 21 or more years of experience.

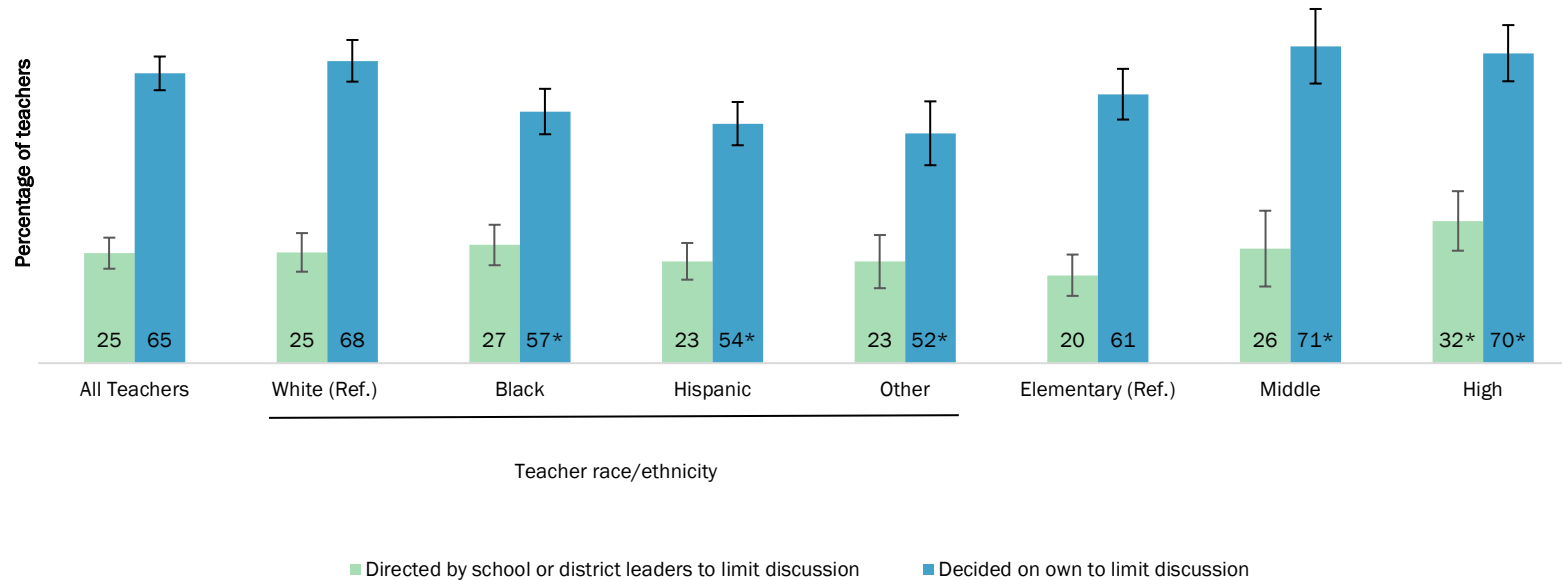
**Figure 7. Teachers' Top-Ranked Sources of Job-Related Stress, by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Experience**

	All Teachers (%) (n = 1,410)	Teacher Race/Ethnicity				Teacher Gender		Teacher Experience			
		White (Ref.) (%) (n = 390)	Black (%) (n = 388)	Hispanic (%) (n = 437)	Other Race/Ethnicity (%) (n = 195)	Male (Ref.) (%) (n = 298)	Female (%) (n = 1,047)	0-5 Years (%) (n = 45)	6-10 Years (%) (n = 322)	11-20 Years (%) (n = 573)	21+ Years (Ref.) (%) (n = 429)
Managing student behavior	46	47	38*	38*	43	45	46	67*	50	42	45
Supporting my students' academic learning because they have lost instructional time during the COVID-19 pandemic	34	33	38	38	39	32	35	24	28*	31*	43
Administrative work outside of teaching (e.g., paperwork, teacher evaluation)	29	29	28	35	28	28	30	39	32	28	28
My salary is too low	28	26	35*	31	29	35	26*	26	35*	28	22
Supporting my students' mental health and well-being	27	28	24	21*	24	20	29*	31	21	31	25
I spend too many hours working	26	26	24	30	31	21	27	14	32	23	26
Taking on extra work because of staff shortages	21	21	21	21	20	23	20	25	19	24	17
Preparing students for state standardized tests	17	16	22*	19	18	17	17	21	16	18	15
Feeling like the goals and expectations of the school are unattainable	17	16	22	18	14	17	16	9	14	19	17
The intrusion of political issues and opinions in teaching	16	18	12*	12*	11*	23	15*	16	11*	17	20
Lacking support from school administrators	14	14	14	14	15	10	15	17	12	15	14
Limited voice in decision-making at my school	10	10	9	8	14	12	9	4*	8	10	13
Working in an environment in which I feel physically unsafe	5	4	5	6	2	4	5	1*	6	4	5
Lack of adequate coaching or mentoring	3	2	5	5*	2	2	3	0*	3	2	3

NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentages of teachers who responded to the question, "What are the top three sources of stress in your job right now?" shown for all teachers and teachers disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, and experience. Teachers were instructed to rank up to three sources; the figure shows the weighted percentage of teachers selecting each source among their top three. An asterisk (\*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the  $p < 0.05$  level from the reference group, which is indicated by (Ref). One percent of teachers responded "other"; these responses are not shown in the figure.

Figure 7 shows teachers' top three sources of job-related stress in January 2023. Managing student behavior was a top source of stress for nearly half of teachers and supporting students' academic learning because of lost instructional time was a top source of stress for about one-third of teachers. About one-quarter of teachers said that administrative work, low salary, and long working hours were top job-related stressors. White teachers and novice teachers were especially likely to report that managing student behavior was among their top three sources of job-related stress. Male teachers were more likely than female teachers to experience stress about low salaries and the intrusion of political issues and opinions in teaching, and female teachers were more likely to experience stress about supporting students' mental health and well-being. Mid-career teachers (those with 6–10 years of experience) were especially likely to report that their salary being too low was a top-ranked source of job-related stress. White teachers were slightly more likely than Hispanic teachers and Black teachers to report that the intrusion of political issues and opinions in teaching was a top source of job-related stress.

**Figure 8. Percentage of Teachers Who Have Limited Discussions About Political and Social Issues in Class, by Race/Ethnicity and School Grade Band**



NOTE: The green bars show the weighted percentage of teachers who responded “yes” to the question, “Have your school or district leaders ever directed you to limit discussions about political and social issues in class?” The blue bars show the weighted percentages of teachers who responded “yes” to the question, “Have you ever decided on your own, without being directed by school or district leaders, to limit discussions about political and social issues in class?” Responses are shown for all teachers and disaggregated by teacher race/ethnicity. An asterisk (\*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the  $p < 0.05$  level from the reference group, which is shown by (Ref.). Error bars depict 95-percent confidence intervals around each estimate.  $N = 1,397$ .

Politicized topics intruding in teaching is a source of stress for one in six teachers, as shown in Figure 7. One example is state, local, or school policies that direct teachers to limit discussion of political and social issues in class. Figure 8 presents the percentages of teachers who reported that they were either directed by school or district leaders to limit discussion about political or social issues in class (green bars) or decided on their own to limit discussion of these topics (blue bars). Consistent with results from 2022, 25 percent of teachers reported that their school or district leaders directed them to limit discussion about political and social issues in class. Nearly two-thirds of teachers reported that they decided to limit discussions about political and social issues in class on their



own, without being directed to do so by school or district leaders. Teachers of color were significantly less likely than White teachers to report deciding on their own to limit discussion. Furthermore, middle school (71 percent) and high school teachers (70 percent) were significantly more likely than elementary school teachers (61 percent) to decide on their own to limit discussion of such topics in class. High school teachers were also significantly more likely than elementary school teachers to say that school or district leaders had explicitly directed them to limit discussion of such topics in class. The survey question did not address the topics teachers chose to limit discussion about, or the specific limits teachers decided to enact.

**Figure 9. Top Three Reasons Teachers Decided, on Their Own, to Limit Discussions About Political and Social Issues in Class**

Reasons	All Teachers (%) (n = 818)	Teacher Race/Ethnicity			
		White (Ref.) (%)	Black (%) (n = 218)	Hispanic (%) (n = 223)	Other (%) (n = 104)
I am not sure that my school or district leaders would support me if parents expressed concerns	49	49	49	51	44
I am afraid of verbal or physical altercations with upset parents	36	37	24*	37	27
I don't feel confident that I know enough about these topics to address them with my students	32	32	27	37	38
I am afraid of losing my job or teaching license	32	31	34	36	29
My school or district leaders have not issued any guidance about how to address these topics	26	25	41*	29	37*
I'm not sure what topics I am allowed to address in the classroom	25	24	33*	30	35*
I have to get my instructional materials or lesson topics approved	10	10	19*	5*	13
I have to notify parents about the content of my lessons	4	3	7	6	8

NOTE: This figure shows weighted percentages of teachers who responded to the question, "What are the top three reasons you decided, on your own, to limit discussion of political and social topics in your classroom?" Teachers who responded to this question previously indicated that they decided on their own, without being directed by school or district leaders, to limit discussions about political and social issues in class. Respondents were instructed to select their top three reasons, shown for all teachers and teachers disaggregated by race/ethnicity. An asterisk (\*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the  $p < 0.05$  level from the reference group, which is shown with (Ref). Twenty-six percent of teachers responded "other"; we do not display those responses.

Figure 9 shows responses among the 65 percent of teachers who said that they decided on their own, without being directed by school or district leaders, to limit discussions about political and social issues in class. Among these teachers, nearly half said that not

being sure that their school or district leaders would support them if parents expressed concerns was one of their top three reasons. The second-most-common reason was being afraid of verbal or physical altercations with upset parents. Relative to White teachers who opted to limit discussions about political and social issues, Black teachers were significantly less likely to say that being afraid of verbal or physical altercations with upset parents was a top reason for limiting discussions. At the same time, Black teachers were significantly more likely than White teachers to report that one reason they opted to limit such discussion was because school and district leaders had not issued guidance on how to address these topics.

About one-quarter of the teachers who selected “other” and provided a write-in response said that they limited discussion about political or social topics in class because such topics were not relevant to their subject matter or part of their curriculum. About one in five of the teachers who said that such topics were not relevant mentioned that they teach math or science. As one such teacher said, “There is no reason to include political topics in a science classroom.” About one in five teachers who wrote in a response said that discussing political topics was not part of their job as a teacher, wanted to avoid discussing their personal views in class, or wanted to avoid being perceived as persuading students. One teacher said, “I want to teach academics, not political issues or put my opinion or views on students.” The third-most-common response, provided by about one in six teachers, was that their students were too young to discuss such topics. A few teachers (ten or fewer) wrote that political or social topics were not appropriate for school, that their students did not know how to have thoughtful discussions about such topics, or worried that discussing such topics would put them at odds with the larger political environment in their district.

**Figure 10. Top Three Reasons Teachers Say That They Fear for Their Physical Safety at School, by Race/Ethnicity and School Poverty Level**

Reasons	Teacher Race/Ethnicity					School Percentage Eligible for FRPL	
	All Teachers (%) (n = 877)	White (Ref.) (%) (n = 214)	Black (%) (n = 250)	Hispanic (%) (n = 292)	Other (%) (n = 121)	Less Than 50% (Ref.) (%) (n = 279)	50% or More (%) (n = 588)
Students misbehave or have verbal altercations	53	55	45*	48	57	52	55
I am afraid of an active shooter coming into my school	52	52	49	55	48	58	45*
I am afraid of hostile, unauthorized people who are not active shooters (e.g., upset parents) coming into my school	34	33	40	41*	38	35	33
Students get in physical fights	33	34	35	27	32	21	45*
Students bring weapons to school	29	29	39*	27	29	29	30
I am afraid of getting into verbal or physical confrontations with students' family members	22	21	27	27	23	23	22
Students bring drugs and/or alcohol to school	21	22	14*	20	17	24	18
I don't feel safe in the neighborhood my school is in	8	6	17*	9	9	4	12*
I am afraid of getting into verbal or physical confrontations with teachers or administrators at my school	4	3	5	6	6	5	3
I am afraid of being sexually harassed at school in a way that threatens my physical safety	2	2	2	1	1	1	2

NOTE: This figure shows weighted percentages of teachers responding to the question, “This school year, (2022–2023) what are the top three reasons you fear for your physical safety when you are at school?” This item was asked only of respondents who indicated that they often, sometimes, or rarely feared for their own physical safety when they were at school. Teachers who responded that they never feared for their physical safety at school were not asked this question. Teachers were instructed to select their top three reasons; responses are shown for all teachers and teachers disaggregated by race/ethnicity and school FRPL eligibility. An asterisk (\*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the  $p < 0.05$  level from the reference group, which is shown with (Ref.). Seven percent of teachers responded “other”; we do not display those responses.

Twenty-six percent of teachers reported that they feared for their own physical safety sometimes or often when they were at school. Another 31 percent of teachers reported that they rarely felt unsafe at school, and 43 percent of teachers reported that they never feared for their physical safety at school. Using responses among teachers who reported that they rarely, sometimes, or often feared for their physical safety at school, Figure 10 displays the top cited reasons for this concern. Slightly more than half of teachers

said that students misbehaving or having physical altercations and fear of an active shooter coming into the school were among the top three reasons they felt physically unsafe at school. Teachers in low-poverty schools (where less than half of students are eligible for FRPL) were more likely than their counterparts in higher-poverty schools to report that students getting into physical fights was a top reason they feared for their safety at school. Teachers in low-poverty schools were also slightly more likely than their counterparts to be afraid of an active shooter in their school and to not feel safe in the neighborhood their school was in, although these differences were no longer statistically significant after controlling for other teacher and student characteristics. Federal data suggest that serious incidents of violence in schools—such as active shooters—are relatively rare, while instances of student misbehavior or verbal or physical altercations are more common (Irwin et al., 2022).

**Figure 11. Aspects of School Environment That Helped Teachers Maintain Positive Well-Being and Mental Health, by Teacher Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Experience**

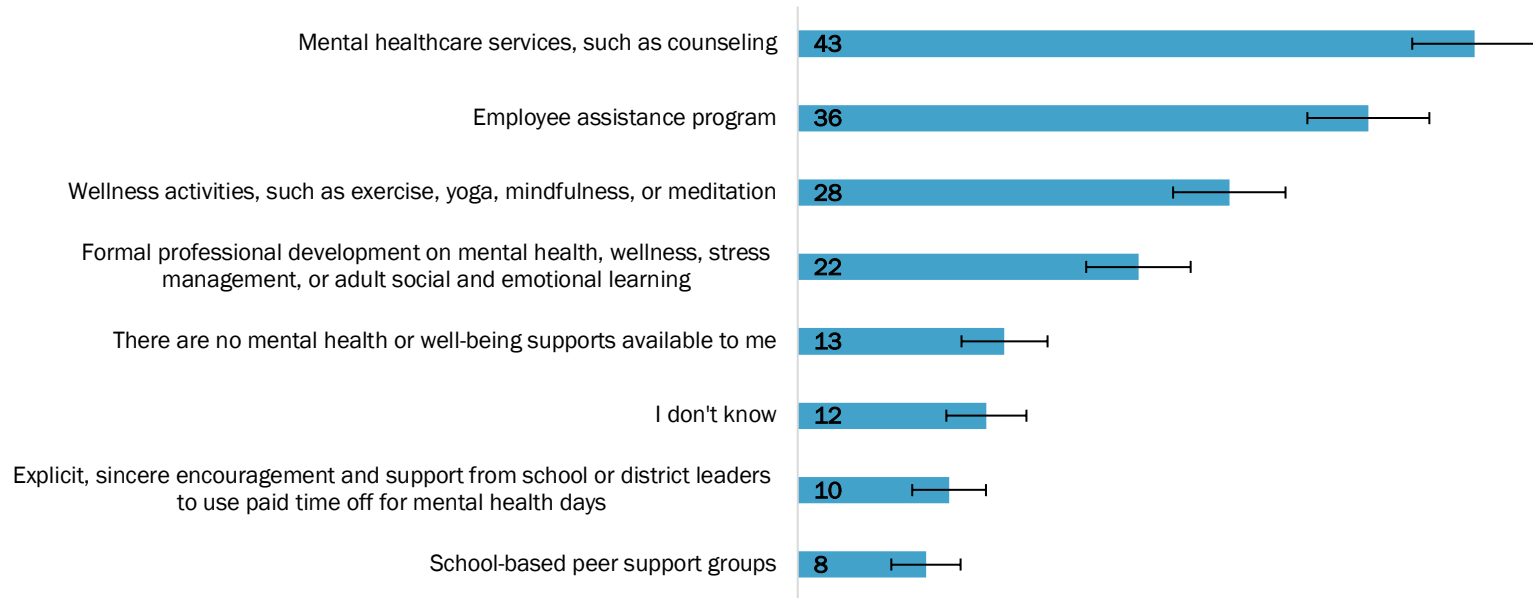
	Teacher Race/Ethnicity					Teacher Gender		Teacher Experience			
	All Teachers (%) (n = 1,408)	White (Ref.) (%) (n = 390)	Black (%) (n = 386)	Hispanic (%) (n = 432)	Other Race/ Ethnicity (%) (n = 200)	Male (Ref.) (%) (n = 302)	Female (%) (n = 1,062)	0–5 Years (%) (n = 47)	6–10 Years (%) (n = 325)	11–20 Years (%) (n = 581)	21 or More Years (Ref.) (%) (n = 436)
Strong positive relationships with other teachers	67	69	56*	58*	66	61	69	63	72*	68	61
Supportive school leaders	40	41	34*	33*	41	43	39	24	45	42	36
Autonomy in the classroom over instructional decisions	39	42	23*	26*	39	47	36*	24	45*	41	34
Enough sick time and/or personal leave	38	40	30*	27*	34	48	35*	32	31*	36*	47
Frequent opportunities to collaborate with my peers (e.g., common planning, professional learning communities)	36	38	30*	30*	30	28	38*	36	38	34	37
School leaders who care about my mental health and well-being	28	29	26	22*	29	25	30	32	33	23	31
A reasonable amount of meetings (e.g., professional development or other staff meetings)	25	27	23	17*	22	25	25	39	26	26	23
Access to mentoring or coaching	17	18	18	13*	16	18	17	14	19	18	16
Enough planning or preparation time to get my work done	17	17	18	13	20	23	15*	27	20	16	16
Enough academic support staff (e.g., paraprofessionals, special education teachers) in my classroom	12	13	10	9	13	14	12	23	15	10	12
Enough support from non-teaching staff (e.g., counselors, nurses) to address student mental health and well-being	12	12	11	13	10	12	13	9	13	11	14
Coverage for my classes so I can take a break	8	8	10	10	15*	9	8	19	7	7	9

NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentage of teachers who responded to the question, “What aspects of your job or school environment are present in your school and help you maintain positive well-being and mental health?” Teachers were instructed to not include benefits, such as counseling, that are available through their employer, health insurance, or professional association. Teacher responses are disaggregated by race/ethnicity, teacher gender, and teacher experience. An asterisk (\*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the  $p < 0.05$  level from the reference group, which is shown by (Ref.). One percent of teachers responded “other”; those responses are not shown.

Figure 11 shows that two-thirds of teachers named positive relationships with other teachers as an aspect of their school environment that was present *and* helped them maintain positive well-being and mental health. Supportive school leaders, which was selected by 40 percent of teachers, was the second-most-common response option. However, we found that Black teachers and Hispanic teachers were less likely than White teachers to endorse these aspects of their school environment as being present and helping them maintain positive well-being and mental health. Black teachers and Hispanic teachers were less likely than White teachers to endorse many of the elements of school environment that we asked about, including opportunities for peer collaboration and autonomy over instructional decisions. We hypothesize that one reason for these differences is that Black teachers and Hispanic teachers might be less likely to say that these elements were present in their school environment rather than because they were less likely to find these aspects helpful for maintaining positive well-being (Bristol and Shirrell, 2019).

Female teachers were less likely than male teachers to say that enough sick time and/or personal leave and enough planning and/or preparation time to get their work done were aspects of their school environment that helped them maintain positive well-being and mental health.

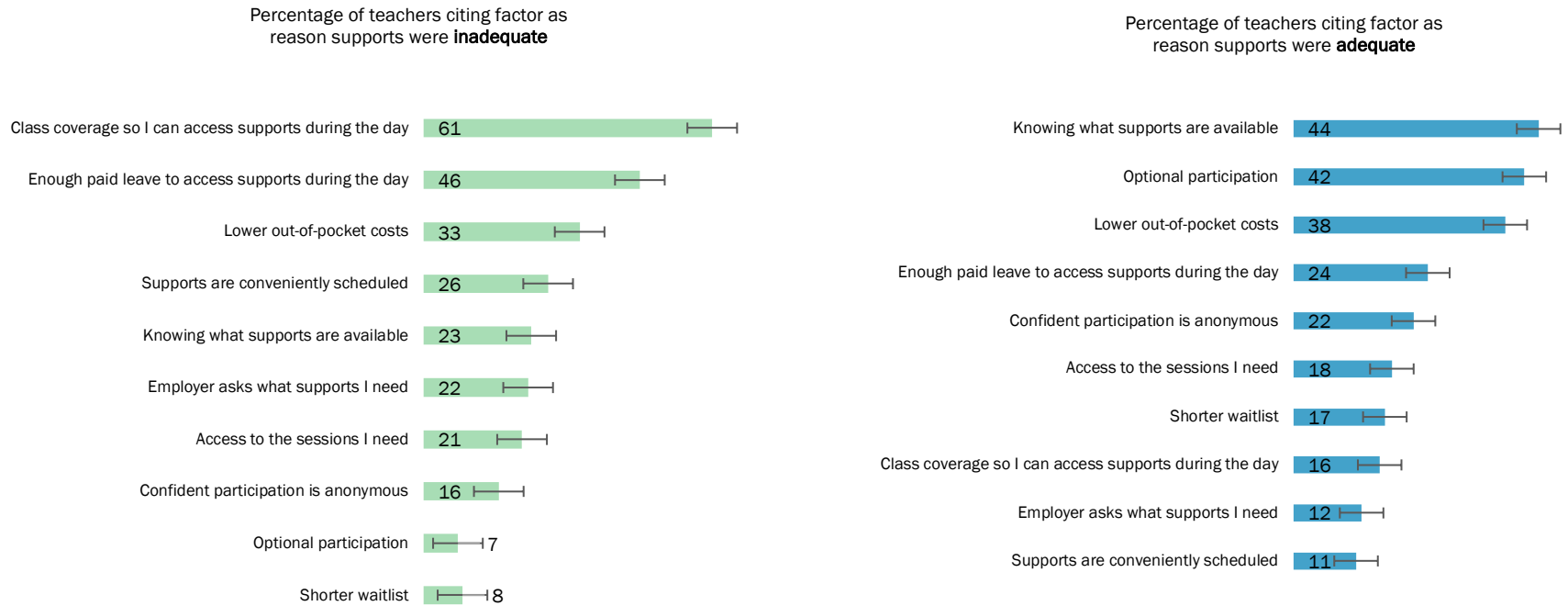
**Figure 12. Well-Being and Mental Health Supports Available to Teachers Through Their Employer, Health Insurance, or Professional Association**



NOTE: This figure shows the weighted percentage of teachers responding to the survey question, “What well-being and mental health supports are currently available to you (whether you have used them or not) as benefits through your employer, your professional association, or your health insurance?” Respondents were instructed to select all that apply. Error bars depict 95-percent confidence intervals around each estimate. Two percent of teachers selected “other”; those results are not shown in the figure. *N* = 1,413.

Seventy-five percent of teachers reported access to one or more mental health or well-being supports through their employer, health insurance, or professional association. As shown in Figure 12, the most commonly reported supports were mental health care services, employee assistance programs, and wellness activities. The remaining 25 percent of teachers reported that they either did not know whether they had mental health or well-being supports available to them or that there were no supports available to them. In 2023, more teachers reported access to well-being or mental health supports (75 percent) than in 2022 (64 percent). Slightly higher percentages of teachers in 2023 reported access to employee assistance programs, wellness activities, and encouragement to take time off than in 2022.

**Figure 13. Perceived Adequacy of Well-Being and Mental Health Supports**



NOTE: The green bars show weighted percentages of teachers who responded to the question, “What are the top three things that would make the well-being and mental health supports available to you through your employer, health insurance, or professional association completely adequate?” Teachers responding to this question previously indicated that such supports were “completely inadequate” or “somewhat inadequate.” The blue bars show weighted percentages of teachers who responded to the question, “What are the top three things that make the well-being and mental health supports available to you through your employer, health insurance, or professional association completely adequate?” Teachers responding to this question previously indicated that such supports were “completely adequate” or “somewhat adequate.” Respondents were asked to select the top three factors contributing to their perception of their well-being and mental health supports from among the list shown in the figure. The figure shows the percentage of respondents who selected each factor among their top three. The wording for each factor is condensed for brevity in the figure; readers interested in the full item text should refer to the 2023 SoT technical appendix (Doan, Steiner, and Woo, 2023). Error bars depict 95-percent confidence intervals around each estimate. Teachers citing supports as inadequate  $n = 427$ ; teachers citing supports as adequate  $n = 621$ .

We asked teachers whether the mental health and well-being supports available to them through their employer, health insurance, or professional association were adequate or inadequate, and why. Fifty-four percent of teachers responded that the mental health and



well-being supports available to them were adequate, and 46 percent said that they were inadequate. As Figure 13 shows, teachers who reported that the well-being supports available to them were *inadequate* were most likely to name more staff to cover their classes, enough paid leave to access mental health and/or well-being supports, and access to affordable out-of-pocket costs for mental health care as factors that, if available, would lead them to consider their well-being supports to be adequate. Teachers who reported that the well-being supports available to them were *adequate* cited knowing which supports were available to them, the optional nature of participation in such supports, and their out-of-pocket health insurance costs for mental health care being affordable as top reasons for their decision.

## How This Analysis Was Conducted

Data for this Data Note were primarily drawn from two surveys: the 2023 SoT survey fielded to the RAND Corporation’s American Teacher Panel (ATP) and the 2023 SoT companion survey of working adults in the United States fielded to the RAND Corporation’s ALP. The SoT survey has been administered yearly to K–12 teachers in January via the ATP since 2021. The survey was developed by RAND to generate nationally representative data on teacher perspectives of their well-being and working conditions. The 2023 SoT and ALP companion surveys were completed by 1,439 and 527 respondents, respectively, in January and February 2023.

Each SoT survey respondent was assigned a weight to ensure that estimates reflect the national population of teachers. Characteristics that factor into this process include descriptors at the individual level (e.g., gender, professional experience) and school level (e.g., school size, level, locale, socioeconomic status). The 2023 SoT survey purposefully oversampled African American or Black and Hispanic or Latinx teachers, allowing for representative estimates of survey responses from these groups. Similarly, each ALP respondent was assigned a weight to ensure that estimates reflect the national population of working adults. More information about SoT survey sampling and weighting is available in our technical report (Doan, Steiner, and Woo, 2023).

This Data Note highlights several survey items fielded in the 2023 SoT survey and, when relevant, analogous measures fielded in the 2021 and 2022 SoT surveys. The 2023 SoT survey examines teachers’ reports of well-being, compensation, and hours worked; working conditions (e.g., mental health and well-being supports, administrator supports); teacher retention and decisions to exit; perceptions of physical safety; and teaching about social and political topics. The five measures of teacher well-being used in this Data Note and previously fielded in the 2021 SoT and 2022 SoT surveys are constructed as follows:

1. *Frequent job-related stress* refers to the percentage of respondents who indicated “often” or “always” to the question, “Since the beginning of the 2022–2023 school year, how often has your work been stressful?”
2. *Difficulty coping with job-related stress* refers to the percentage of respondents who, on a 1–5 scale ranging from 1 = not well at all to 5 = very well, indicated responses of 1 or 2 to the question, “How well are you coping with the stress of your job right now?”
3. *Symptoms of depression* refers to the percentage of respondents with Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2) scores of 3 or above. PHQ-2 scores are determined by asking respondents to use a scale of 0 = not at all, 1 = several days, 2 = more than half the days, and 3 = nearly every day to report their frequency of the following events: (1) little interest or pleasure in doing things and (2) feeling down, depressed, or hopeless. We calculate a PHQ-2 score for each respondent by summing their values across both items, resulting in a minimum score of zero (i.e., a respondent selecting “not at all” for both items) to a maximum score of 6 (i.e., a respondent selecting “nearly every day” for both items).
4. *Burnout* refers to the percentage of teachers who “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree” to at least two of the following four statements: (1) “The stress and disappointments involved in [my job] aren’t really worth it,” (2) “I don’t seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began [my job],” (3) “I look forward to [my job] in the future,” and (4) “I am glad I select[ed] [my job] as a career.” Items 3 and 4 were reverse-coded to match the directionality of items 1 and 2.
5. *Lack of resilience* refers to the percentage of respondents who indicated that they “strongly disagree” or “disagree” to both of the following statements: (1) I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times, and (2) it does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.

The measure of teachers who are considering leaving their jobs used in Figure 4 in this Data Note is not comparable to the intentions to leave results presented in the 2022 and 2021 SoT because we asked a different question in 2023. The 2021 and 2022 versions of the question asked teachers how likely they were to leave their current teaching jobs either before or since the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 and 2022, we combined the weighted percentages of teachers who said they were “unlikely to leave [before the COVID-19 pandemic], but likely now” and “likely to leave both [before the COVID-19 pandemic] and now” into an overall percentage of teachers who were considering leaving. The question we asked in 2023 did not reference the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, it asked teachers how likely they were to leave their current teaching jobs before the end of the school year. As shown in Figure 4, we combined the responses of teachers reporting that they were “somewhat likely” or “very likely” into an overall percentage of teachers who were considering leaving their jobs.

We fielded the pandemic-anchored item in 2023 to examine the effect of the differences in item wording. Using the pandemic-anchored item, we found that 37 percent of teachers indicated that they were likely to leave their jobs. This is 14 percentage points higher than the percentage we obtained when using the non-pandemic-anchored item reported in Figure 4. We found the same significant subgroup differences across the two forms of the intention to leave item. Specifically, Black teachers and female teachers

were significantly more likely to report intending to leave on both items. Although both items asked teachers to report the likelihood that they will leave their jobs by the end of the school year, the pandemic-anchored item might prompt teachers to consider additional challenges or difficulties associated with teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic that might influence their responses. We opted to use the non-pandemic-anchored item in this Data Note because our sample now includes increasing shares of novice teachers who were not teaching prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus would not be able to answer the pandemic-anchored item, and also because of the substantial decrease in pandemic-related school shutdowns and use of preventative measures, such as masks, during the 2022–2023 school year.

In this Data Note, we compared teacher responses across subgroups defined by various teacher and school characteristics, testing for whether average responses for certain subgroups differed from a specified reference subgroup. We do not report exhaustively on all subgroup estimates on all survey items because the purpose of this Data Note is to provide readers with figures and tables highlighting a selection of substantively important findings on the topic of teacher well-being. The categories of teacher and school characteristics we examine in this Data Note are as follows, with reference categories within those characteristics bolded:

- teacher race/ethnicity: **White**, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx, other races/ethnicities
- teacher gender: **male**, female, other gender
- teacher experience: 0–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–20 years, **21 or more years**
- school percentage enrollment of students eligible for FRPL: **below 50 percent**, at or above 50 percent
- school percentage enrollment of White students: **below 50 percent**, at or above 50 percent
- school locale: **urban**, suburban, town or rural
- school grade band: **elementary**, middle, high.

All estimates presented in this Data Note are sample-wide or subgroup-specific estimates that are unadjusted for statistical controls. We used linear regression models to test whether estimates for a particular subgroup differ at the  $p < 0.05$  level from estimates for the reference subgroup in that category without the use of any statistical controls. Subgroup estimates that are statistically significantly different from reference group estimates are denoted with an **asterisk (\*)** throughout this Data Note. Because the intent of this Data Note is to provide exploratory, descriptive information rather than to test specific hypotheses, we did not make statistical adjustments for multiple comparisons. Readers should not interpret subgroup differences that are statistically significant as evidence of an “effect” of any specific teacher or school characteristic because there is substantial evidence that many teacher and school characteristics of interest are correlated with one another (Hansen and Quintero, 2018). Rather, our results are intended to

highlight differences in reported experiences across subgroups of teachers and encourage additional research on the sources and causes of these differences.

We conducted qualitative coding of one survey item that allowed teachers who selected “other” in a list of structured response options to write in an open-ended response. The survey item we analyzed is “What are the top three reasons you decided, on your own, to limit discussion of political and social topics in your classroom?” We analyzed the write-in responses for this question because about one-quarter of teachers who responded selected the “other” response. One hundred and seventy-nine teachers provided a written response; 11 responses were not interpretable (e.g., “N/A”). We reviewed the 168 remaining responses and categorized them into common themes. We did not apply survey weights to these open-ended survey responses that we qualitatively coded. These qualitatively coded responses are intended to illustrate the perspectives and experiences of a subset of responding teachers and cannot be interpreted as nationally representative.

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## About This Data Note

In this Data Note, we draw on surveys of teachers from the American Teacher Panel (ATP) conducted in January and February 2023. We present selected findings from the 2023 State of the American Teacher survey related to teacher well-being, availability of mental health and well-being supports, and intentions to leave their current teaching job.

The ATP is a nationally representative sample of more than 22,000 teachers across the United States. The ATP is one of three survey panels that make up the American Educator Panels (AEP), which are nationally representative samples of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders across the country. The panels are a proud member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research's Transparency Initiative.

The AEP Data Note series is intended to provide brief analyses of educator survey results of immediate interest to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. If you would like to know more about the data set, survey recruitment, administration, and sample weighting, see *State of the American Teacher Survey: 2023 Technical Documentation and Survey Results* (RR-A1108-7, available at [www.rand.org/t/RR-A1108-7](http://www.rand.org/t/RR-A1108-7)). If you are interested in using AEP data for your own surveys or analysis or in reading other AEP-related publications, visit [www.rand.org/aep](http://www.rand.org/aep) or contact [aep@rand.org](mailto:aep@rand.org).

### *RAND Education and Labor*

This study was undertaken by RAND Education and Labor, a division of the RAND Corporation that conducts research on early childhood through postsecondary education programs, workforce development, and programs and policies affecting workers, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy and decisionmaking. This Data Note is based on research funded by the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers.

More information about RAND can be found at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org). Questions about this Data Note should be directed to [esteiner@rand.org](mailto:esteiner@rand.org), and questions about RAND Education and Labor should be directed to [educationandlabor@rand.org](mailto:educationandlabor@rand.org).

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