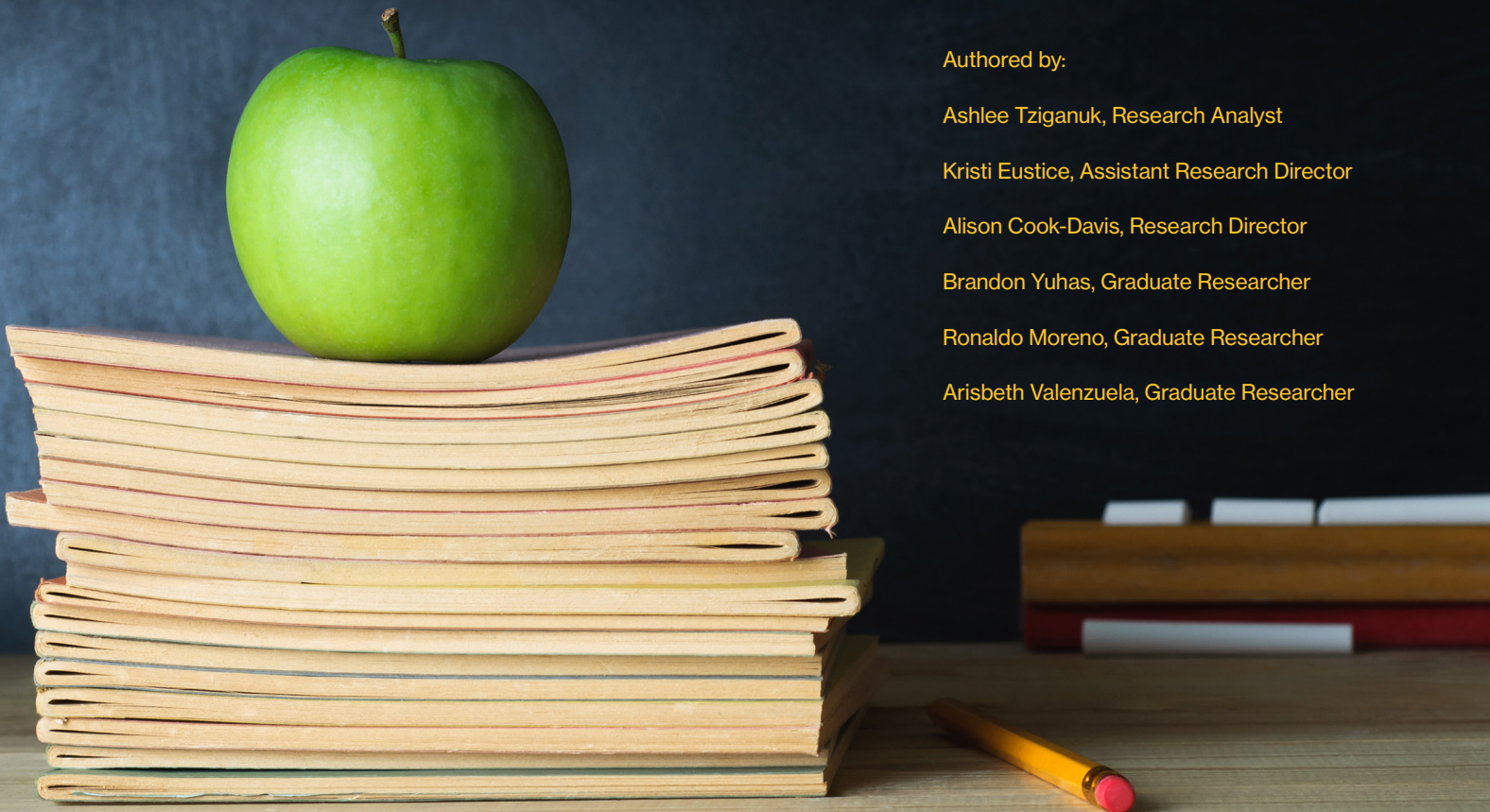## 2023 Arizona

Educator Retention

Working Conditions Study

Summer 2024

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Greetings!

I'm pleased to present to you the 2023 Educator Working Conditions Report. The report was commissioned by the Educator Retention Task Force who led the effort to analyze and make recommendations to improve educator retention in the state. One of their main deliverables was to conduct this report to better understand the many factors that influence why an educator may choose to stay in the classroom or leave for a different profession.

Central to this report was hearing from thousands of educators, former educators and education support professionals who shared their experiences and suggestions to better support our state's education profession. Their input and feedback helps policymakers, education administrators, and other decision makers understand where their challenges exist and gives us the opportunity to discuss how we might find solutions to improve educator retention and better meet the workforce needs of educators across the state.

It is my hope that this report will serve as a catalyst for conversation and action to improve educator working conditions at the state, regional, district, and school levels. I am hopeful that policymakers, administrators and other school leaders will utilize this data to make informed decisions to address the root causes of the retention crisis.

Thank you to the Morrison Institute for Public Policy for conducting this study in partnership with the Task Force. Your efforts made it possible to elevate the voices of educators in this very important work. I would also like to thank the thousands of educators, former educators, education support professionals, and others who participated in this study and openly and honestly shared their feedback. Your voices are critical to ensuring that the scope of the retention crisis is understood and action is taken to improve the working conditions of Arizona's educators.

Sincerely,

Katie Hobbs
Governor
State of Arizona

Contents

Who did we hear from?

Across three surveys, we heard from **7,788** current K-12 educators, **732** former K-12 educators, and **933** Education Support Professionals (ESPs), and other classified staff.

We spoke to **50** current K-12 educators across **nine** focus groups and interviewed another **16** former educators who recently left the profession.

What is the current landscape?

69% of current educators said they have **considered leaving the profession** in the past year.

Conversely, **66% of ESPs** are not likely to leave.

No 31%

Yes 69%
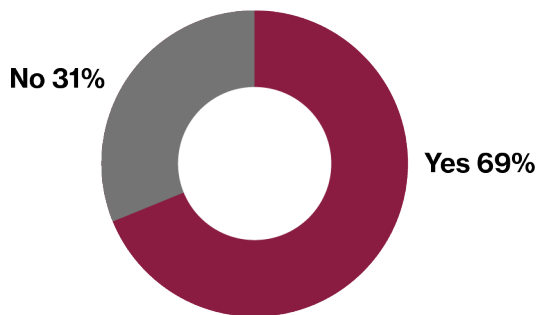
62% of educators have **additional paid responsibilities** at their schools

32% have an **external job**

21% indicated **additional paid responsibilities** *and* **a second job** outside their school

54% or **2,867** current educators are **somewhat to very likely to leave** in the next 1-2 years.

Unlikely 46%

Likely 54%
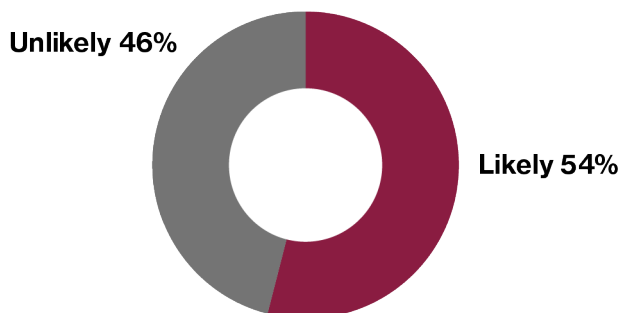
Access to Support Staff

Most current educators **(93%)** said they have special education teachers at their schools. Just under **80%** indicated access to counselors, librarians, media specialists, or similar roles. **Less than 50% reported having social workers, parent/community engagement liaisons, and Title I Specialists.**

What is driving educators to stay?

Educators consistently agreed that they remain in the profession because they feel like they **make a difference in students' lives**.

Supportive leadership and a sense of community were also top factors positively impacting educator retention.

What issues came up the most?

Salary and Job Benefits **Workload** **School Leadership** **Mental Health** **State-Level Policies & Politicization**

Salary and Job Benefits

Only 16% of current educators agreed that a **satisfactory salary** drives them to remain in the profession.*

Salary
Issues impacting retention

- Inadequate salary
- Unpaid duties and hours
- Pay differences
- Salary compression

Solutions from educators

- Offer competitive salaries
- Offer paid student teaching positions, tuition waivers
- Provide compensation for additional duties and off-of-contract hours
- Provide clear expectations in contracts
- Implement a salary schedule
- Provide increased pay for more experience, education, and certifications

Benefits
Issues impacting retention

- Health insurance
- Retirement
- Paid leave

Solutions from educators

- Lower insurance premiums
- Provide better coverage/expand options
- Provide the same coverage across districts
- Provide more robust retirement packages
- Place all schools on ASRS
- Increase paid time off (PTO)

Workload

Only 33% of current educators agreed that a **satisfactory workload** drives them to remain in the profession.*

Issues impacting retention

- Too much work
- Not enough time
- Lack of staff support

Solutions from educators

- Hire more certified and classified staff
- Implement classroom caps and uniform class sizes
- Provide clear expectations of workload and duties in contract
- Compensate certified staff for off-of-contract hours
- Ensure preparation time is available

*Educators were asked, "Thinking about your experience teaching over the past 3 years, please select your agreement with whether the following factors drive you to remain an educator."

School Leadership

Nearly 80% of current educators felt that providing incentives to retain high-quality leadership is very or extremely important for improving retention.

Issues impacting retention

Lack of support

Lack of appreciation and consultation

Solutions from educators

Provide more support via resources and advocate for educators

Provide adequate resources and training for new standards and initiatives

Hire and retain quality leadership

Show more appreciation to educators

Have leadership teach in the classroom

Allow educators to influence the policies and practices that impact them

Allow educators the opportunity to contribute to decision-making, especially over standards and initiatives

Mental Health

Nearly 75% of each survey sample said that providing mental health support to educators and students is very or extremely important for educator retention; **80% of former educators** left the profession because they **felt burned out.**

Issues impacting retention

Poor mental health

Student mental health and behavior

Solutions from educators

Prioritize educator and student mental health

Enable educators to have a healthy work-life balance

Listen to the concerns of educators

Increase expressions of appreciation from leadership

Provide more classroom support to reduce workload and subsequent burnout/stress

Ensure there are dedicated support staff for serious student mental health and behavioral issues

Hold students accountable for poor behavior

Increase school leadership and parental support for student mental health and behavior

State Level Policies

Only 7% of current educators agreed that **feeling supported by state-level policies** drives them to stay;* **70% of former educators** left because they **felt micro-managed by state policies.**

Issues impacting retention

Limited by state policies

Politicization

Solutions from educators

Provide more funding for district schools

Involve educators in policymaking

Re-evaluate ESA program

Increase societal support for K-12 education

*Educators were asked, "Thinking about your experience teaching over the past 3 years, please select your agreement with whether the following factors drive you to remain an educator."

Background

Educator retention is closely connected to working conditions, including educators' working environment, compensation and benefits, and opportunities for professional development. For example, access to classroom resources impacts teacher morale and engagement and is important for establishing a working environment conducive to learning.[1] Administrative and support staff can also help foster a positive work environment and encourage retention by supporting educators through strong leadership and help with workload.[2] Compensation and benefits are also important retention factors. Beyond basic salary considerations, the overall benefits package — including health insurance, retirement plans, and paid leave — contributes to the well-being of educators and can influence their decision to stay in the profession.[3] Finally, access to relevant professional development (i.e., practical training on ever-evolving educational approaches) is another factor associated with keeping educators in the profession.[4]

Current Context

Nationally, educator retention is a topic of concern, as turnover rates have increased in recent years. In 2022, national teacher turnover was reported at 10%, 4% higher than pre-pandemic levels. The same report found that principal turnover also increased during the same time.[5] Arizona is no exception to this trend. According to the Arizona School Personnel Administrators Association (ASPAA), teacher vacancies have risen for nearly a decade. In the 2023-2024 school year, there were 7,518 teacher openings; 30% of teacher vacancies remained unfilled, and 53% were filled with teachers who did not meet the minimum requirement for state certification. This totals 83% of positions being either vacant or filled with "individuals not meeting standard teacher requirements."[6] Arizona also does not offer competitive salaries for educators compared to other states. In 2021-22, the average salary for educators in Arizona ($54,580) was 13% lower than the national average ($62,700), making Arizona the state with the 3rd lowest average teacher pay in the country.[7]

7,518
teacher openings
in Arizona
in the 2023-2024
school year

Arizona ranks
3rd
lowest for
average
teacher pay
in the nation

Current Study

To gauge the current state of the education workforce and explore working conditions that most impact retention in the State, the Office of Governor Katie Hobbs and the Governor's Educator Retention Task Force commissioned the Morrison Institute for Public Policy to conduct a study to gather feedback directly from K-12 educators in district and charter schools. This report aims to inform decision-makers about positive retention factors and policy actions to improve retention identified by current and former educators in Arizona.

Methods

Research Design

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, collecting quantitative and qualitative data from current and former educators. A survey and focus group protocol were developed to gather feedback from current educators. Similarly, a survey and individual interview protocol was created for former educators who left the profession within the last three years. Quantitative and qualitative data collection efforts were not promoted together. However, educators were not restricted from participating in a survey and interview or focus group.

Researchers at the Morrison Institute for Public Policy collaborated with the Office of the Governor, Katie Hobbs, and the Governor's Educator Retention Task Force to recruit K-12 educators in district and charter schools from across

the State to participate in data collection efforts. Survey participants could enter a drawing for one of 78, $25 gift cards. Focus group and interview participants were compensated $40 and $25, respectively, for their time and participation.

Measures

Three surveys were co-developed with the Task Force from May to June 2023: a current classroom educator survey, a survey for Education Support Professionals (ESPs) and other classified staff, and a survey for former educators who left the profession within the last three years for reasons other than retirement. Concurrent with survey development, protocols for current educator focus groups and former educator interviews were co-created. The instrumentation aimed to understand factors motivating educators to remain in the profession and solutions that educators feel are important for improving retention and mitigating the educator crisis in Arizona.

Researchers drafted the surveys by adapting or using existing measures to capture all the factors deemed relevant by the literature and the Task Force. In some cases, new questions were created to measure variables not captured by borrowed or adapted survey items. After gathering demographic and descriptive information, survey items asked educators about their agreement with factors impacting retention. Specifically, they were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement on whether the factors "drive them to remain in the profession." Surveys also asked educators to rate the importance of potential policy solutions for improving retention among current educators and motivating former educators to return. Although the ESP survey followed the same format as the current and former educator surveys, some survey items were removed, and others were adapted to be appropriate to the roles and experiences of ESPs. For this reason, a 2-page spotlight on the ESP survey results is included after the section on lessons from former educators. ESP findings that are parallel to the current and former educator surveys are also highlighted throughout this report.

Focus group and interview questions complemented the surveys and allowed educators to provide more in-depth perspectives about the topics covered. Feedback from the Task Force about the questions and content was incorporated before finalizing the instruments.

Data Collection

Surveys

The surveys were fielded simultaneously using Qualtrics from July 11, 2023, through August 31, 2023. The Task Force facilitated recruitment, along with the support of dozens of partners statewide. The surveys were also featured in multiple local news stories. However, most of these articles did not include a direct link to the survey to avoid false entries and ineligible respondents from participating.

Based on survey logic, participants from private schools and/or those who were about to start their first year as educators were automatically routed to the end of the survey. Thus, these cases were incomplete and removed before analysis. Additional participants who did not provide data beyond their demographic and school descriptive information were also removed.

Researchers also spent time checking for any indication of fraudulent responses (i.e., bots, non-educators). For example, response sets with duplicate IP addresses or IP addresses outside the US or Southwest region were identified. Analysts then looked at the demographic and descriptive variables for various groupings (e.g., duplicate IPs, responses outside the US and Southwest region, and responses before and after the school year started) to ensure no systematic issues were evident that might indicate that responses were from a bot or non-educator. After a thorough data review, no indications of fraud were found, allowing researchers to proceed. Descriptive statistics across variables were also reviewed to ensure data consistency.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were facilitated online via Zoom from July to August 2023. With the help of the Task Force and dozens of partners statewide, online interest forms were used to recruit current educators to the focus groups. Potential participants completed a screening questionnaire, and a subsample of individuals were recruited for focus groups. This subsample was selected to capture as many different types of educators as possible, taking into consideration factors such as how long they had been educators, what types of schools they taught at (district vs. charter), what grade they taught, and how likely they are to leave the profession in the next 1-2 years for reasons other than retirement. To ensure representation from educators around the State, focus groups were also divided by the county educators taught in. Six focus groups were conducted with educators from Maricopa and Pima counties, and three were conducted with those from counties from the balance of state (i.e., all other counties). Two researchers attended each focus group: a lead facilitator and a technical support person/note-taker to allow the facilitator to concentrate on the discussion. Focus groups lasted 60 minutes and ranged in size from two to 12 participants. Focus group participants received a $40 gift card for participating.

Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with former educators via Zoom from July to August 2023. The interview protocol was semi-structured, and follow-up/clarifying questions were asked as needed. With the help of the Task Force and dozens of partners statewide, online interest forms were used to recruit former educators for interviews. Interviews lasted 20-30 minutes, and participants received $25 to complete the interview. Potential participants completed a screening questionnaire, and a subsample of individuals was then recruited for interviews to capture as many different types of former educators as possible, taking into consideration how long they had been educators, what types of schools they taught in (district vs. charter), what grade they taught, and whether they taught in urban or rural areas.

Participants

Surveys

The final survey sample for the current educator survey was 7,788, and the final former educator survey sample comprised 732 educators who left the profession within the last three years for reasons other than retirement. Across both survey samples, most educators identified as regular classroom teachers. Additionally, most participants reported being in District schools and urban areas, and most were from Title I schools. All counties in the state were represented in the current educator sample, and all but one county was represented in the former educator sample. One notable characteristic of former educators is that 69% had been in the profession for more than ten years before leaving, suggesting this group was highly experienced.

Survey sample:

7,788
current educators

732
former educators

Nine-hundred thirty-three (933) Education Support Professionals (ESPs) and other classified staff participated in the ESP survey. The ESP sample primarily consisted of school counselors, paraeducators, and other positions not listed, as indicated by the "other" option. Information about "other" positions was not collected. However, considering this was nearly 25% of the sample, the inability to fully understand the positions of these respondents is a limitation of this study. As with the current and former educator samples, most participants were from Title I schools and reported working in district schools in urban areas. test

Please see the "Appendix" for complete demographic and descriptive information about each survey sample.

Focus Groups

A total of 50 current educators shared their experiences and perspectives across nine focus groups. These nine focus groups enabled enough data collection to reach saturation, meaning the same themes continued to surface even as more participants were included. Most focus group participants were from district schools in Maricopa and Pima counties. Still, the sample also included representation from most counties and a range of geographic regions across the State. Focus group participants primarily reported teaching in urban areas and were fairly experienced regarding how long they had been educators. Please see the "Appendix" for the complete demographic and descriptive information of the focus group samples.

Interviews

Researchers completed semi-structured interviews with 16 former educators who left the profession within the last three years. Most came from district schools. However, there was more balance between urban and rural locality and years of experience among former educators who were interviewed compared to current educators in the focus groups. Please see the "Appendix" for complete demographic and descriptive information on the interview samples.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

During data processing, retention and solution factors were transformed using SPSS 28.0 to group everyone who used the top two ends of the 5-point scales provided.[8] In other words, percentages throughout the report represent people who selected "agree" or "strongly agree" on agreement items or people who selected "very" or "extremely" on items asking about the importance of policy solutions. Additionally, percentages only include people who responded to each question instead of skipping or leaving a question blank (except for demographic and descriptive factors, which indicate the number of non-responders for each variable).

On current, former, and ESP surveys, retention and solution factors were ordered from largest to smallest agreement. Full data tables will be made available on the Morrison Institute website. In the current educator survey, researchers sorted factors among split data files to explore potential differences in retention and solutions among the following subgroups:

1. Maricopa and Pima Counties versus the balance of state (i.e., all other counties);

2. rural versus urban locality (as self-reported by educators);

3. education path (no educator preparation, 4-year degree, masters or post baccalaureate degree, or an alternative preparation program);

4. years in the profession (≤10 years, 11+ years); and

5. educators who have recently considered leaving the profession and those who have not.

Percentages were again ranked to explore whether top priorities differed among subgroups regarding retention and solution factors. Analysts also explored the likelihood of current educators leaving the profession across subgroups to examine potential trends. Quantitative trends were largely consistent across subgroups. This report highlights unique findings and comparisons between subgroups, guided by the qualitative findings.

Qualitative Analysis

Many of the issues surrounding educator retention have been well-studied. This fact and the rigorous project deadline led researchers to develop a deductive codebook based on themes found in the existing literature and known issues impacting educators. It is important to note that deductive analysis can overlook other important themes that may arise outside of known issues. Therefore, after the deductive coding, a round of inductive coding was used to analyze the nuance related to each theme and themes outside the deductive findings.

With permission from participants, all focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions and interview notes were analyzed in two rounds by a research analyst and two graduate student researchers using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.[9] In the first round, a deductive codebook with descriptions and examples for the codes was developed before analysis using information from existing literature. The deductive codebook was then tested on a sample of focus groups and interviews to identify necessary code modifications. In the second round, the researcher and graduate students open-coded the focus groups and interviews inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data, and a codebook could then be formed and tested. To ensure reliability in both rounds of coding, the analyst and graduate researchers coded independently before meeting to compare coding results and reach a consensus on any discrepancies in coding. This approach ensures that multiple people analyze the data and draw the same conclusions.[10]

Survey Results

The Survey Results section begins with data that helps gauge how current educators feel about the education profession, followed by an overview of findings from the current educator, former educator, and ESP surveys. Findings from each survey are presented in their respective sections, along with commonalities and differences between survey results, highlighted throughout. The section ends with a summary of policy solutions ranked as most important across all survey samples.

Current Landscape

Before asking current educators about the reasons they are driven to remain in the profession and the actions needed to improve retention, the survey asked educators to provide information about their plans to stay in the profession, their feelings about recommending the profession to others, the supports and resources available at their schools, and the additional paid responsibilities/jobs that they engage in. These questions were intended to contextualize the findings by providing a brief "temperature check" of the field and career satisfaction among those who responded to the survey.

Plans to Remain in the Profession

To gauge current educators' feelings about being in the profession, they were asked if they had considered leaving the education profession for reasons other than retirement within the last 12 months. Educators who selected "Yes" were then asked about the likelihood that they would leave within the next 1-2 years. The findings show that 69% of current educators said that they have considered leaving in the last year. Among those educators, slightly more than half (54%) said that they are at least somewhat likely to leave within the next 1-2 years. As seen in **Figure 1,** the most common response to the question was "somewhat likely," followed by "somewhat unlikely." Notably, only 6% of educators said they are "very unlikely" to leave versus about twice as many who said they are "very likely" to leave.

69%
of current educators considered leaving the profession within the last year

Figure 1. The frequency of current educators who rated their likelihood of leaving the profession within the next 1-2 years.

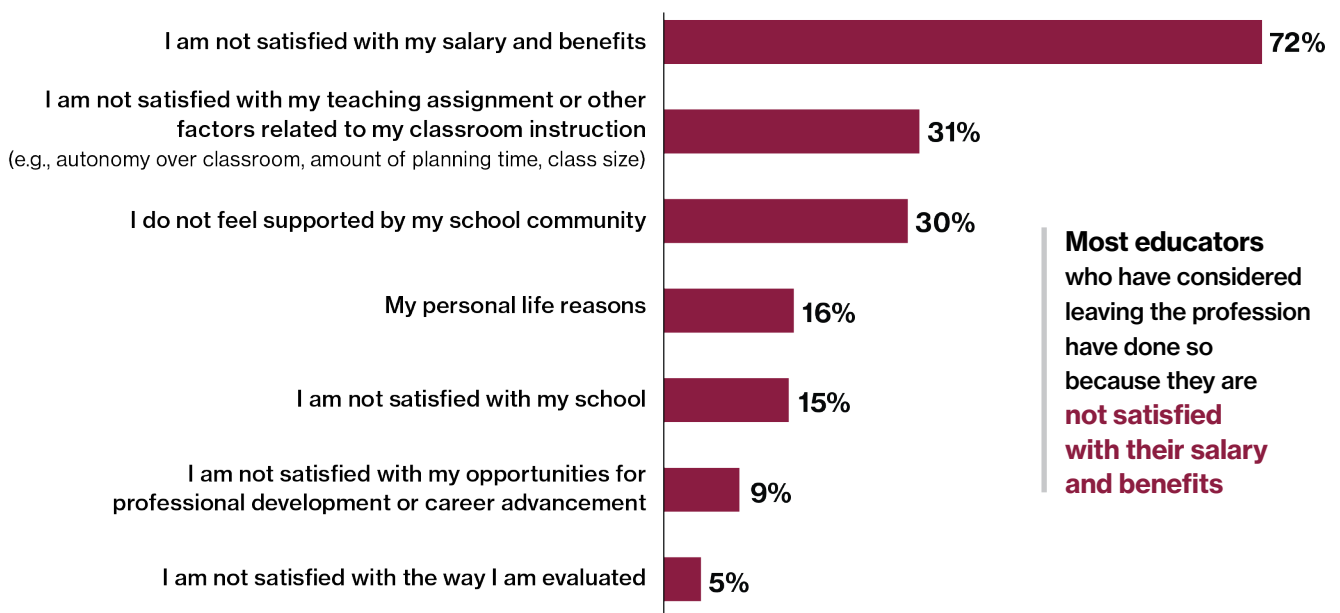| Rating	Count	Percent
Very likely	627	12%
Likely	564	11%
Somewhat likely	1,676	31%
Somewhat unlikely	1,341	25%
Unlikely	852	16%
Very unlikely	301	6%
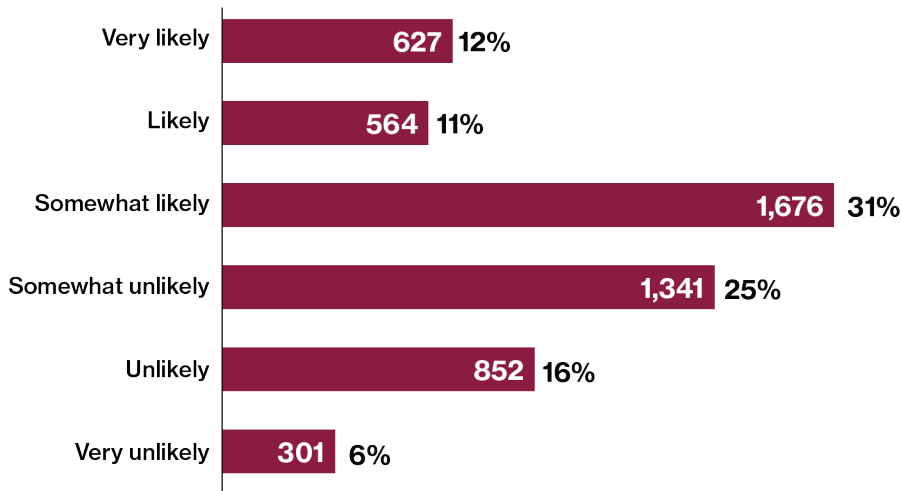
54% of current educators who have considered leaving the profession said they are at least **somewhat likely to leave in the next 1-2 years**

The likelihood of leaving was disaggregated by the following groups: educators in Maricopa and Pima Counties versus the balance of state, rural versus urban locality, years in the profession, and type of educational path. Findings remained consistent across groups, with no clear trends indicating that the likelihood of leaving differed between subgroups.

Next, educators were asked to indicate the top two reasons they have considered leaving the profession (**Figure 2**). Most educators (78%) reported two reasons; however, some (22%) elected to select only one option. Overall, results show that the top factor leading educators to consider leaving the profession is dissatisfaction with salary and benefits (72%). The next most common reasons were dissatisfaction with their teaching assignment or classroom factors (31%) and a lack of school community support (30%), leaving unsatisfactory salary and benefits as the clear front-runner driving current educators to consider leaving the profession.

Figure 2. Reasons why current educators have considered leaving the profession.

| Reason	Percent
I am not satisfied with my salary and benefits	72%
I am not satisfied with my teaching assignment or other factors related to my classroom instruction (e.g., autonomy over classroom, amount of planning time, class size)	31%
I do not feel supported by my school community	30%
My personal life reasons	16%
I am not satisfied with my school	15%
I am not satisfied with my opportunities for professional development or career advancement	9%
I am not satisfied with the way I am evaluated	5%

Most educators who have considered leaving the profession have done so because they are **not satisfied with their salary and benefits**

Recommending the Education Profession to Others

All current educators were asked if they would recommend becoming an educator; two-thirds of respondents said "No."

Figure 3. Responses to "Would you recommend becoming an educator to others?"

Yes 33%

No 66%

Most current educators would **not recommend the profession** to others
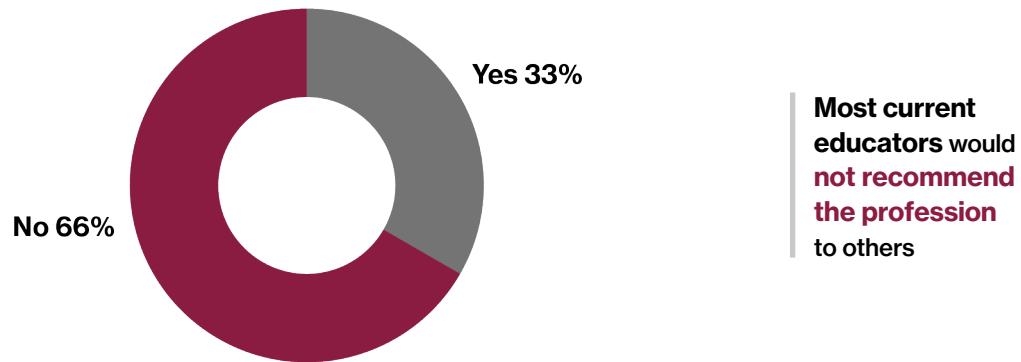
In parallel with the finding that most educators have considered leaving the profession in the last 12 months, findings foreshadow continued challenges with educator recruitment and retention in Arizona.

Personnel Support and Additional Paid Duties

Current educators were asked to select up to 12 support staff positions available at their school. A vast majority (93%) reported having special education teachers at their schools, followed by a steep decline of just under 80% indicating they have access to counselors, librarians, or other media specialists. Roughly two-thirds said that their school provides full-time nurses, English Language Learner (ELL) teachers, and instructional coaches, and over half indicated access to Education Support Professionals (ESPs; 57%) and interventionists (56%). Conversely, less than half of educators reported having support at their schools in the form of social workers, parent/community engagement liaisons, and Title I specialists.

The number of supports reported by educators ranged from zero to 12 (i.e., all options listed). For schools with only one support provided (n=127; 2%), educators most commonly reported that their school provided special education teachers (55%) or counselors (33%). Finally, 63 educators did not select any support options either because they chose to skip the question or because none of the supports listed are provided at their school.

Table 1. Supports provided to current educators by their school

	Count	%
Special education teachers	7,235	93%
Counselors	6,161	79%
Librarians, media specialists, or similar roles	6,137	79%
School psychologists	5,857	75%
Full-time nurses	5,248	67%
English Language Learner (ELL) teachers	5,187	67%
Instructional coaches	5,179	66%
Education support professionals	4,404	57%
Interventionists	4,360	56%
Social workers	3,438	44%
Parent/community engagement liaisons	3,133	40%
Title I specialists	2,512	32%
No selection	63	1%

When asked about additional duties, most current educators (62%) reported having additional paid responsibilities with their district/charter during the school year (e.g., mentor, coach, tutor), and roughly a third (32%) indicated having an additional job outside of their school. Furthermore, 21% reported taking on additional paid responsibilities with their school and a second job outside of their school.

Taken together, findings show that many current educators lack access to necessary support staff at their schools, and most take on additional paid responsibilities within or outside of their schools. Findings also indicate that most current educators would not recommend the education profession to others, and a majority have considered leaving within the past 12 months. These findings provide important context for the issues and opportunities highlighted in this report that emerged from culminating the voices of over 8,500 educators across Arizona.

Factors Supporting Retention

Factors supporting retention among current educators were explored. Specifically, educators were asked to indicate agreement or disagreement with factors that "drive them to remain in the profession." **Table 2** shows the top retention factors that emerged. These topline factors were distinguished by a drop-off between the last item in the table (i.e., satisfaction with vacation time) and the survey item with the next highest agreement (i.e., "I feel safe at my school"), which evidenced 58% agreement among current educators.

Table 2. Top retention factors for current educators

	n	%
I feel like I make a difference in students' lives	6,817	92%
I am satisfied with my job assignment (e.g., grade level, subject area)	5,994	81%
Overall, my school is a good place to work	5,323	73%
I have autonomy over how I manage my classroom	5,404	72%
I feel a sense of community at my school	5,208	70%
I feel supported by my school administration	4,749	65%
I am satisfied with the amount of vacation time I receive	4,803	64%

The clear retention front runner reported by current educators was feeling like they make a difference in students' lives, with 92% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that this drives them to stay in the profession. This was followed by educators being satisfied with their current job assignment (81%) and feeling like their school is a good place to work overall (73%). Other top retention factors identified through the survey were educators having autonomy over managing their classroom (72%), feeling a sense of community at their school (70%), feeling supported by the school administration (65%), and being satisfied with their vacation benefits (64%). Notably, these top retention factors were consistent across almost all subgroups. In other words, these were the top retention factors regardless of educator county (Maricopa and Pima Counties versus the balance of state), locality (rural or urban), or educational path.

92%
of respondents **agreed making a difference in students' lives** drives them to remain educators

Unique findings arose when results were disaggregated by educators who have and who have not considered leaving the education profession in the last 12 months. For simplicity, these educators are referred to as **unsatisfied** and **satisfied** educators throughout the remainder of this report. **Figure 4** shows the retention factors rated at or above 50% agreement for satisfied educators (dark gray bars) and the corresponding agreement among unsatisfied educators (light gray bars). The gold boxes highlight retention factors with discrepancies at or exceeding 25 percentage points.

Notably, the top retention factors in **Figure 4** mirror the top retention factors for educators overall (**Table 2**), except for the item, "I am satisfied with my career as an educator," which only appears as a top factor for satisfied educators when the two groups are looked at separately. Eighty-four percent of satisfied educators reported being satisfied with their career as a positive retention factor, whereas only 44% of unsatisfied educators felt that way. This was the largest discrepancy between satisfied and unsatisfied educators.

The next largest discrepancies were evidenced on the survey items, "I am respected as an educator" and "I am satisfied with my workload," where the differences in agreement between satisfied and unsatisfied educators were 31 percentage points. More on "Respect" and "Workload" can be found in their respective sections of this report. These were followed by discrepancies in feeling supported by the district (28 percentage points), the ability to have a healthy work-life balance (28 percentage points), and feeling like their school is a good place to work overall (25 percentage points).

Figure 4. Differences in retention factors between satisfied and unsatisfied educators

Nearly **twice as many satisfied educators** report **satisfaction with their career** as a positive retention factor

Unsatisfied Educators Satisfied Educators Percent Agreement
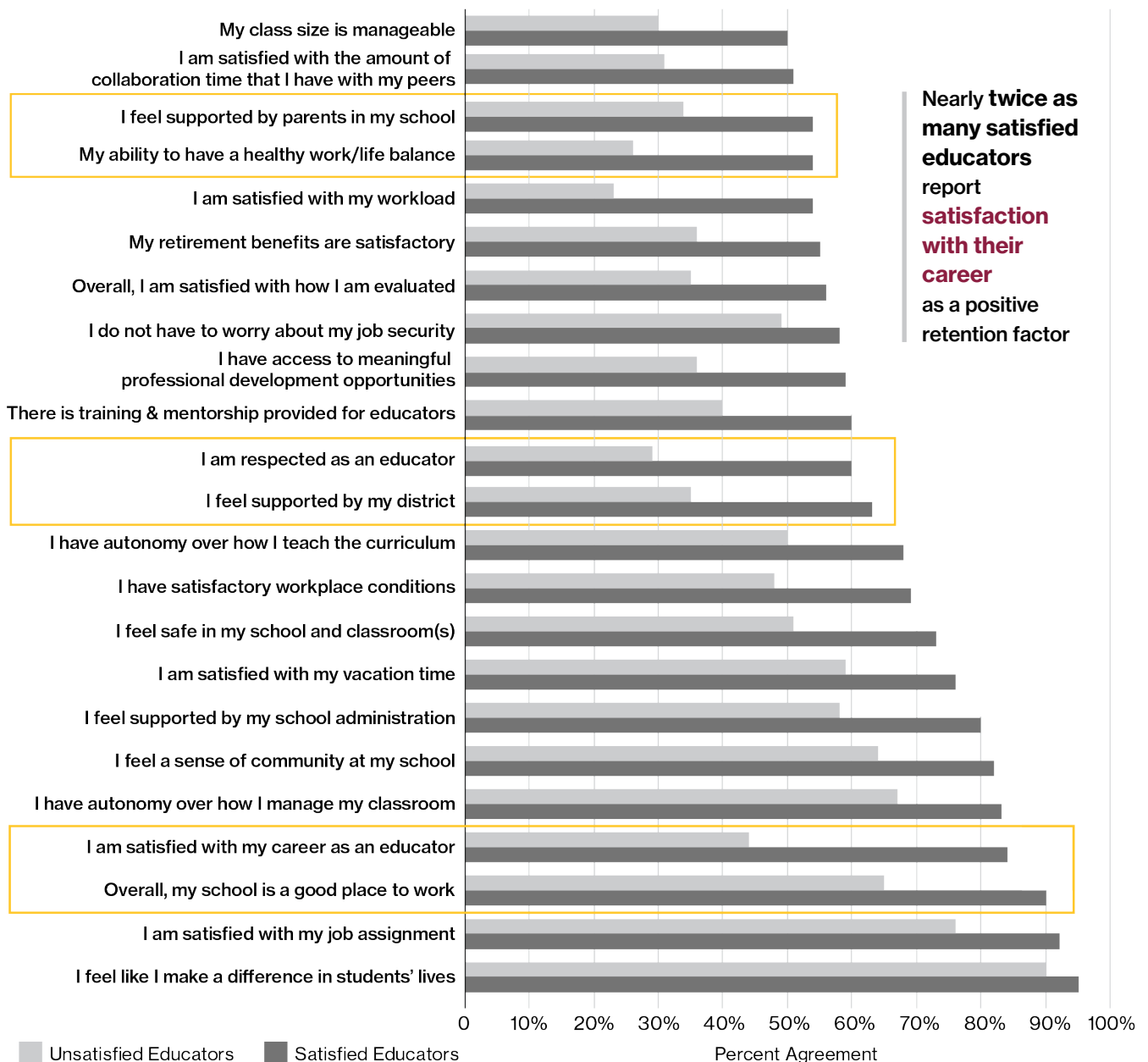
Solutions from Current Educators

Finally, current educators were asked to rate potential policy actions that will improve educator retention in our state. Due to the large sample size and number of solutions presented, **Table 3** shows solutions where nearly 80% of the current educator sample felt the action was very or extremely important.

Current educators rated top solutions as increasing salary, ensuring educators have adequate preparation time (>90%), decreasing class sizes, reducing healthcare premium costs, and increasing retirement benefits (all >80%). Other top solutions were incentivizing high-quality leadership to remain in their positions, increasing support from parents and community members, and reducing educator workload.

Table 3. Topline solutions from current educators

	n	%
Increase salary	6,870	96%
Ensure that educators have adequate preparation time	6,558	91%
Decrease class sizes or student load	6,179	86%
Reduce healthcare premium costs	5,926	83%
Increase educator retirement benefits	5,866	82%
Provide incentives to retain high-quality leadership	5,664	79%
Increase support from parents and community members	5,612	78%
Reduce workload	5,563	78%

Expanding the agreement threshold to 75% adds the following seven policy solutions:

1. Provide clear expectations in contracts (for example, clear start/end time to the workday, class size, limit of extra duties)

2. Decrease focus on standardized testing

3. Provide incentives to retain high-quality leadership

4. Expand healthcare insurance options

5. Improve school safety

6. Allow greater educator influence in the school's policies and practices

7. Re-evaluate the way that student assessments impact educator compensation

Lessons from Former Educators

Next, findings from the former educator survey are explored. Most former professionals (69%) who completed the survey had been educators for more than ten years, with 42% having worked for more than 20 years before leaving. Former educators were asked to indicate the reasons they left the profession within the last three years and what actions would most motivate them to return to the classroom.

The top reasons for leaving reported by former educators were feeling burned out and being unsatisfied with their salary – with roughly 80% of former educators agreeing. Approximately 70% reported leaving the profession because they were unable to have a healthy work-life balance, felt micromanaged by state-level policies, and did not feel respected as educators.

Table 4. Top reasons for leaving the profession

	n	%
Feeling burned out	563	80%
Not satisfied with salary	541	78%
Unable to have a healthy work-life balance	518	73%
Feeling micromanaged by state-level policies	500	70%
Not feeling respected as an educator	482	70%

Former educators were also asked to select up to two actions that would *most* influence their decision to return to being a K-12 educator. Nearly 700 former educators selected at least one factor. More than half indicated that increasing salary is the action that would most motivate them to return, followed by 22% selecting a decrease in class size or student load, and 17% selecting a reduction in workload. These findings suggest that inadequate salaries are the primary factor keeping educators from returning to K-12 education.

What would motivate former educators to return to teaching?

53% Increase salary   **22%** Decrease class size or student load   **17%** Reduce workload

Finally, former educators rated the importance of potential policy solutions in motivating former educators to return to the profession. As seen in **Table 5**, top solutions from former educators largely echoed those of current educators, as denoted by asterisks. Notably, the threshold for agreement was reduced to 75% to provide a comparable number of solutions to current educators, given the much smaller sample size.

Overall, former educators reported that increasing salary and preparation time and decreasing class sizes or workload are most important for addressing retention issues. Other important actions include increasing support from leadership, providing clear expectations in contracts, providing incentives to retain high-quality leadership, reducing healthcare cost premiums, improving school safety, and allowing more educator influence in school policy and procedures.

Table 5. Top-rated solutions from former educators

Solutions rated by former educators	n	%
Increase salary*	623	93%
Ensure that educators have adequate preparation time*	600	88%
Decrease class sizes or student load*	588	87%
Reduce workload*	543	80%
Increase support from school leadership	538	80%
Provide clear expectations in contracts (for example, clear start/end time to the workday, class size, limit on extra duties)	529	78%
Provide incentives to retain high-quality leadership*	518	77%
Reduce healthcare premium costs*	511	76%
Improve school safety	510	76%
Allow greater educator influence in the school's policies and practices	505	75%

Note. Also present in Top Current Educator Solutions

Spotlight on Education Support Professionals and Other Classified Staff

ESPs and other classified staff were asked to rate their agreement on factors that "drive them to remain in the profession." **Table 6** provides a range of retention factors similar to current classroom educators. There was also an apparent drop-off between the last item on this slide and the survey item with the next highest agreement, resulting in these top six retention factors. An asterisk indicates when a factor was evident among current educator topline results.

Table 6. Top retention factors from ESPs and other classified staff

	n	%
I feel like I make a difference in students' lives*	832	89%
Overall, my school is a good place to work*	693	76%
I feel a sense of community at my school*	668	74%
I feel safe in my school	619	68%
I am satisfied with my career	617	67%
I feel supported by my school administration*	594	66%

Note. Also present in Top Current Educator Solutions

As with current and former educators, ESPs and other classified staff are driven to remain in the education profession because of the impact they feel they have on students' lives. Other top retention factors reported by ESPs/other classified staff were that their school is a good place to work and that there is a sense of community at their school. Roughly two-thirds of respondents agreed that feeling safe at their school and having satisfaction with their careers drive them to remain in the profession. Notably, these last two factors do not have asterisks because they did not meet the importance threshold for current educators.

Finally, the last topline retention factor for ESPs and other classified staff was feeling supported by the school administration, evidencing 66% agreement. One unique finding among these survey results is that four top retention factors are specific to the school environment (e.g., feeling your school is safe and a good place to work). Another interesting finding was that the survey item with the next highest agreement for retention was "I feel respected in my position," at 58%. This is compared to only 38% of current classroom educators who felt this way.

As was done in the current educator survey, ESPs and other classified staff were asked about their intentions to remain in the profession. However, converse to the current educator findings, most ESPs and other classified staff reported that they are **likely to stay** in the education profession in the next 1-2 years (66%). In fact, the largest percentage of respondents said they are "very unlikely" to leave (25%). This is in contrast to current classroom educators, where most who have considered leaving (54%) reported they are at least somewhat likely to do so.

58%
of ESPs and other classified staff **feel respected in their position**

whereas only

38%
of current classroom educators feel this way

Figure 5. Likelihood of ESPs leaving the profession

Very likely	78 — 8%
Likely	72 — 8%
Somewhat likely	166 — 18%
Somewhat unlikely	159 — 17%
Unlikely	219 — 24%
Very unlikely	237 — 25%

66%
of ESPs and other classified staff are **not likely to leave** the profession in the **next 1-2 years**
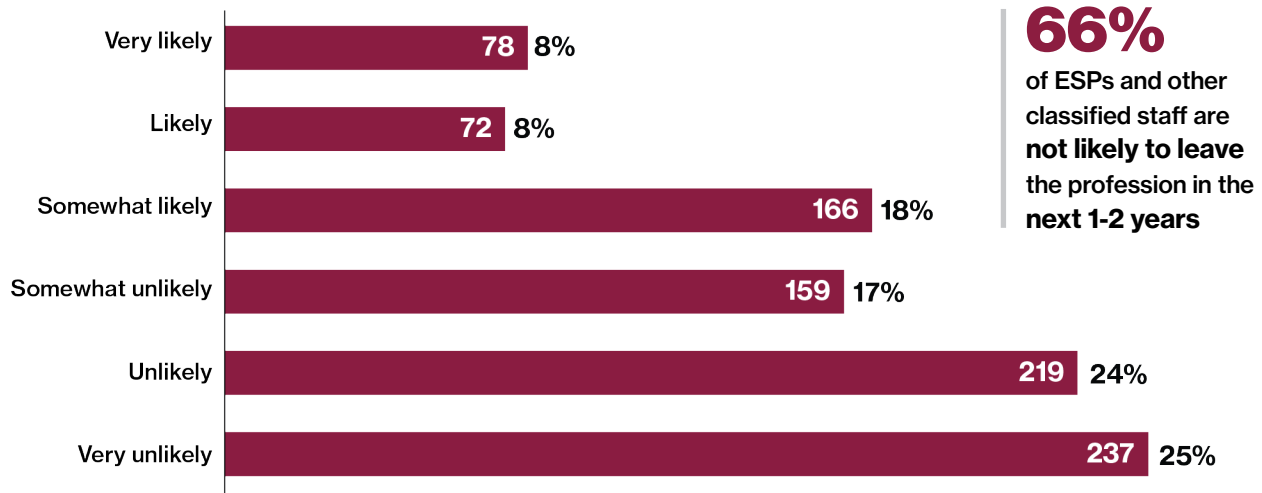
ESPs and other classified staff also rated the importance of potential solutions for improving the retention of ESPs and other classified staff in Arizona. **Table 7** shows the policy actions reported as very or extremely important. Again, similarities with classroom educators are denoted with asterisks. Given the smaller sample size compared to current educators, the solutions below evidenced at least 75% agreement (instead of approximately 80%). For context, "Provide mental health support" evidenced 74% agreement by current classroom educators.

Table 7. Solutions from ESPs and other classified staff

	n	%
Increase salary*	846	96%
Reduce healthcare premium costs*	750	84%
Provide incentives to retain high-quality leadership*	725	82%
Provide mental health support for education support professionals, classified staff, and students	658	75%

Note. Also present in Top Current Educator Solutions

Summary of Survey Findings Across Samples

Overall, many retention and policy solution findings were consistent across all three survey samples (i.e., current educators, former educators, and ESPs/other classified staff). **Table 8** provides a broad summary of the survey results for all three samples. **Table 9** provides an overview of policy solutions with at least 75% support across all three samples (as indicated by maroon plus sign). Black dashes indicate percentages that fell below the 75% threshold. Percentages close to the 75% threshold are also included for context.

Table 8. Summary of survey findings

Current Educators
n=7,788
74% classroom educators

Most would **not** recommend the profession to others.

A majority **have considered leaving** the profession in the last 12 months, with over half of those educators being somewhat to very likely to go within 1-2 years.

Educators who have not considered leaving reported greater satisfaction with their career as an educator.

Current educators are most driven to remain because they feel they **make a difference in students' lives.**

Former Educators
n=732
73% classroom educators

Former educators' top reasons for leaving included **feeling burned out**, not being satisfied with their **salary,** and being unable to have a **healthy work/life balance.**

Current educators' top reason to consider leaving was **dissatisfaction with their compensation and benefits.**

Former educators would be most likely to return if **salaries are increased** and **workload is decreased.**

ESPs and Staff
n=933
24% School counselors
23% Other staff
14% Paraeducators

Most ESPs and Classified staff **have not considered leaving** the profession in the last 12 months.

ESPs were also most driven by **impacting students' lives,** followed by **satisfaction with their job assignment** (grade level, subject area), which aligns with current educator findings.

Table 9. Summary of solutions from surveys

+ 75% or more agreement   − Less than 75% agreement

	Current Classroom Educators	Former Classroom Educators	ESPs and Classified Staff
Increase salary	+	+	+
Ensure that educators have adequate preparation time	+	+	n/a*
Decrease class sizes or student load	+	+	+
Reduce healthcare premium costs	+	+	+
Increase educator retirement benefits	+	−	n/a*
Provide incentives to retain high-quality leadership	+	+	+
Increase support from parents and community members	+	74%	n/a*
Reduce workload	+	+	−
Provide clear expectations in contracts	+	+	73%
Decrease focus on standardized testing	+	74%	n/a*
Increase support from school leadership	+	+	n/a*
Expand healthcare insurance options	+	−	n/a*
Improve school safety	+	+	74%
Allow greater educator influence in the school's policies and practices	+	+	−
Re-evaluate the way student assessments impact educator compensation	+	74%	n/a*
Provide mental health support for education support professionals, classified staff, and students	74%	74%	+

*n/a: Item was not included

Mixed Methods Findings

The remainder of this report includes findings from all data sources, with a primary focus on current and former educators. Authors indicate when data comes from the current educator, former educator, or ESP surveys, current educator focus groups, or former educator interviews. While results are largely parallel across data sources, unique findings are highlighted.

This section of the report is organized into the nine primary themes that arose from the focus group and interview analyses related to retention issues and potential solutions. Survey data that further support the primary themes is also included. The section concludes by discussing the factors educators identified as supporting retention. It is important to note that the focus groups and interviews with educators were emotional in nature, demonstrating the passion for their profession and desire to see improvement for themselves and their students.

Salary and Job Benefits

> **"I loved teaching. I absolutely loved it. I can't afford to be a teacher anymore. I would go back instantly if they paid a salary that was comparable to the private sector."** – *Former educator interview*

Issues with Salary

As noted in the "Background," average educator pay in Arizona is among the lowest in the nation. Therefore, it is unsurprising that salary was a top concern for educators across surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Survey findings showed that only 16% of current educators agreed that a satisfactory salary "drives them to remain in the profession," and this fell to only 10% among unsatisfied educators. Moreover, 72% of unsatisfied educators selected "I am not satisfied with my salary and benefits" as one of the top two reasons they have considered leaving the profession. Among former educators, a majority (78%) agreed that an unsatisfactory salary was a reason why they left. In the focus groups and interviews, current and former educators identified more specific salary-related issues, including inadequate salary, unpaid duties and hours, pay differences, and salary compression.

Inadequate salary

Unpaid duties and hours

Salary compression and pay increases

Pay differences

Inadequate Salary

Many current and former educators felt their salaries were too low and incomparable to the private sector. Some also expressed that their salaries were not equivalent to a livable wage, especially for those with families. Participants mentioned that they were unable to afford living expenses such as housing and other necessities, as this former educator explains:

> **"I can't buy a house. My husband and I have been living with my parents for three years now, and I'm done living with my parents. But I had to get a new job so that we could afford rent and we could move out. Because of student loans, because of medical bills, and all the things, I couldn't stay."**
> – *Former educator interview*

Amidst growing inflation, some educators mentioned working extra jobs to make ends meet. One former educator explained that their wage was too low to support their family but too high to qualify for benefits and assistance.

A lack of classroom resources further compounds issues with pay, as many educators mentioned having to purchase their classroom supplies (see also "Resource Gaps"). Finally, educators felt that their wages did not reflect their levels of education and years of experience.

> **"I think it feels hard to be an expert and so highly educated and have so much experience in an area but not be sufficiently compensated for that."** – *Current educator focus group*

A unique theme that emerged from current educators was regarding unpaid student teaching positions. Some current educators expressed that not paying student teachers for a semester or entire year is detrimental as those students are going to school and still need to pay their bills. This can lead to students taking out more loans or increasing their debt while student teaching.

> **"I think that more high-quality candidates would go to school to become an educator if they didn't have to take that entire semester or, in some instances, an entire year and not get paid. "**
> *– Current educator focus group*

Educators explained that an inadequate salary both causes people to leave the profession and does not help to attract people to it. To address these issues, educators recommended more competitive salaries that are comparable to other professions and that rival those of other states. Among the survey results, 96% of current and 93% of former educators said that increasing salary is critical for mitigating retention issues.

Additional incentives like student loan forgiveness, tax breaks, and less expensive health insurance were also mentioned as ways to offset inadequate salaries. Finally, current educators said student-teacher positions should be paid, or other incentives like tuition waivers should be offered for their time.

Unpaid Duties and Hours

In addition to low salaries, educators expressed that they are not compensated for all the additional duties and training they are asked to complete, especially during off-contract hours (see also "Workload"). Less than 25% of current educators in the survey agreed that they stay in the profession because they are only expected to do tasks within their contractual responsibilities.

> **"We already work a lot, and nobody pays us for that overtime. Nobody pays me extra if I stay until five, six o'clock to do lesson plans, to do grading."** – *Former educator interview*

Some educators mentioned that no stipends are offered for after-school activities to cover things like mileage and childcare, while others said the stipends offered are not nearly enough.

> **"And while there's a stipend for that, it's equivalent to maybe 50 cents an hour by the time I count all the whole year of all the extra time."** – *Current educator focus group*

To address these issues, educators suggested that there be adequate compensation for additional duties and off-contract hours. This would include stipends and extra pay for after-school activities and taking on roles like team leads and mentors. Most current educator survey respondents also rated "Provide clear expectations in contracts" as a top solution for retention.

Pay Differences

Educators are acutely aware of differences in pay by schools, districts, and geography. They mentioned that educators have left for other schools and districts in search of better salaries and, in some cases, other states. Educators in places like Yuma and northeastern Arizona explained that some educators live in Arizona but teach in neighboring states like California and New Mexico because they pay better. To address issues with pay differences, educators mentioned implementing uniform salary schedules and ensuring that salaries rival neighboring states.

"It's like teachers know that there's certain districts that pay more and they want to go... It's like, why are we not all paid the same? I mean, my husband works for the federal government, and he's on a salary schedule, a GS schedule that is the same everywhere. Why is the salary schedule for teachers within the State of Arizona not the same everywhere? I don't understand." – Current Educator focus group

Salary schedule suggestions were specific to current educators, while current and former educators suggested more competitive salaries.

Salary Compression and Pay Increases

To recruit educators, some districts and schools offer stipends and higher salaries to incoming educators. This is a sticking point for veteran educators making the same as or less than incoming educators. In addition to salary compression, educators also expressed how there is little to no increase in pay from year to year, which leaves those with more experience and education feeling undervalued.

"Twenty-two years ago, it paid to stay in a district because every year, there was a percentage increase based on your years of experience. And as they mentioned, the gap between new hires and experienced teachers is small. That respect for years of experience is not there anymore. We don't get rewarded for staying." – Current educator focus group

One current educator further expressed that the lack of pay increases over time has discouraged them from seeking a doctoral degree because they felt they would not be paid accordingly for that additional education. To address pay compression and lack of pay increases over time, current educators, in particular, said they would like those with more experience, education, and certification to receive increased pay over time and to ensure that incoming educators are not making the same or less than them.

Salary Summary

Increasing salary was the top solution identified in the current educator survey, with 96% of participants agreeing that this would improve retention. This was true regardless of county, urban or rural locality, years of experience, or educational path. Similarly, increasing salary was also identified as the top action to motivate former educators to return to the classroom (93% agreement). Further, 53% of former educators reported increased salary as one of the top two factors that would influence them to return to being a K-12 educator in Arizona.

Focus group and interview participants highlighted more specific actions for addressing salary issues, such as compensating educators for additional duties and off-contract hours, using a salary schedule, and compensating educators commensurate with their experience, education, and certifications.

Table 10. Summary of salary issues and solutions from educators

Issues impacting retention	Solutions from educators
Inadequate salary	- Offer competitive salaries - Offer paid student teaching positions, tuition waivers
Unpaid duties and hours	- Provide compensation for additional duties and off-contract hours - Provide clear expectations in contracts
Pay differences	- Implement a salary schedule
Salary compression	- Provide increased pay for more experience, education, and certifications

Issues with Job Benefits

In addition to salary issues, current and former educators raised issues related to job benefits, such as health insurance, retirement, and paid leave.

Among current educators, less than a third of survey respondents (29%) agreed that satisfactory health insurance drives them to remain in the profession, and less than half (42%) agreed that satisfactory retirement benefits motivate them to stay. Additionally, nearly 50% of former educators agreed that they left the teaching profession because of unsatisfactory health insurance benefits.
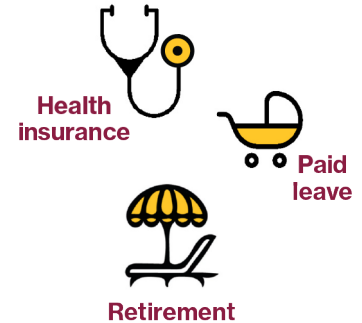
Health Insurance

Educators in the focus groups and interviews expressed that health insurance is expensive and has poor coverage, especially for those with families or who are older and/or have pre-existing health conditions.

> **"It is so expensive to have my family on our school's benefit plans."** *– Former educator interview*

Educators also mentioned that just like salary, healthcare prices and coverage can differ by district. One former educator said they left the profession because they had children and could not afford health insurance.

> **"...if they can't always give us such a huge bump [in] pay, then why aren't they providing good healthcare to incentivize teachers to stay in the workforce so they're not saying that they can't afford healthcare?"** *– Current educator focus group*

To address health insurance issues, educators from the focus groups and interviews suggested having lower healthcare premiums, providing better coverage, and having the same coverage across all districts and schools. In alignment with these findings, over three-quarters of current educators in the survey suggested reducing healthcare premium costs (83%) and expanding healthcare insurance options (76%) as ways to improve retention. Similarly, former educators reported that reducing healthcare premiums (76%) and expanding healthcare options (68%) are essential for motivating former educators to return to the profession.

Retirement

Issues with retirement benefits only arose for current educators in the focus groups. In terms of cost, they mentioned that it can be expensive, especially when compounded with the high cost of health insurance. Additionally, some educators said that their retirement package is not competitive compared to other states and that retirement benefits can be lower if you are in lower-paying districts.

> **"Yeah, somebody that makes less money and they work in the same district for 25 years, that retirement that's mandatory is going to be less than somebody who happens to work in a district that pays better because it's based on your salary."** *– Current educator focus group*

Educators also mentioned that some charter schools do not participate in the Arizona State Retirement System (ASRS) and that the ASRS retirement age has risen. To address retirement benefits issues, current educators in the focus groups recommended more robust retirement packages and ensuring that all schools are on ASRS. In the survey, increasing retirement benefits were rated as important for retention among 82% of current educators and 67% of former educators.

Paid Leave

Current and former educators mentioned insufficient paid time off, including personal days, maternity, and bereavement leave.

> **"And what's sad is like I didn't have enough leave to cover my maternity leave. So, I did not get paid for most of my maternity leave. I got paid the first eight days, and then the rest of the time, they just docked my check."** – *Former educator interview*

In addition to not having enough time off for family events, educators also mentioned not feeling like they can take personal days because they do not have substitutes to cover their classes or because they would be burdening other educators by needing them to cover their classes. Some educators also mentioned how they have had to use their personal days to complete required professional development because they don't have time to do it during the regular school day. To address concerns with paid leave, former educators, in particular, recommended more paid time off.

Table 11. Summary of job benefits issues and solutions from educators

Issues impacting retention	Solutions from educators
Health Insurance	• Lower insurance premiums • Provide better coverage/expand options • Provide the same coverage across districts
Retirement	• Provide more robust retirement packages • Place all schools on ASRS
Paid Leave	• Increase paid time off (PTO)

Salary and Job Benefits Summary

Overall, current and former educators agreed across the surveys, interviews, and focus groups that salary is a significant challenge when it comes to keeping Arizona's educators in the classroom. Accordingly, the most prominent recommendation from educators across the state was to increase salaries to improve retention. Similarly, concerns and challenges related to health and retirement benefits were also highlighted. Educators felt that providing more robust benefits options and reducing healthcare premiums would help Arizona retention.

Workload

> **"I think [one of] the biggest things [was] that more and more was put on teachers' plates with an expectation to kind of be an expert in all of those things. But that wasn't a reality because there was not time nor training nor compensation given to... It wasn't humanly possible."** – *Former educator interview*

Issues with Workload

In the current educator survey, having a manageable class size (36%), a satisfactory workload (33%), satisfactory planning time (26%), and only having to complete tasks within their contractual responsibilities (23%) were all among the bottom half of the retention factors.

In focus groups and interviews, current and former educators expressed feeling overwhelmed by their required work and the time available to complete it. Top among their concerns was being given an excessively large workload without extra time, support, or compensation for completing it in the case of certified staff (i.e., teachers). This resulted in what educators described as an unhealthy work-life balance.

Not enough time

Too much work

Lack of support staff

Too Much Work

Educators noted that while they have always had considerable non-teaching job requirements, including administrative tasks, paperwork, and writing reports, these responsibilities have been growing. They experienced having to substitute teach, facilitate clubs, and participate in unpaid professional development on top of their regular workload. Moreover, educators indicated that extra duties were added to their workloads with the expectation that they would complete more work in the same amount of time without additional resources. Educators expressed that they are expected to perform these extra duties without much leeway as they have become part of educators' performance pay evaluations.

> **"... there are so many extra duties being placed on educators that there's no physical way to get it all done in one workday, and there's no compensation available."** – *Former educator interview*

Educators discussed having heavy teaching loads and having to plan for and teach large classes that may contain many students with individualized education programs (IEPs), thereby increasing the planning and preparation needed to accommodate different learners. Furthermore, educators noted that their primary teaching roles require far more than teaching subject area content. They are responsible for children's social development, behavior management, test scores, and differentiating content and expectations for students with special needs, among other responsibilities.

> **"...the demands of the job are getting so broad. [In] fourth grade, I'm teaching all the subjects and trying to help the kids learn how to socially interact with each other and manage behaviors and support students who have emotional or learning disabilities..."** – *Current educator focus group*

More experienced educators observed that some of their increased workload results from assisting or compensating for newer and less-qualified teachers — a consequence of high teacher turnover and that education has become an undesirable field to enter in Arizona. They discussed having to "pick up the slack" when emergency-certified or newer, inexperienced teachers do not have the requisite knowledge or skills to complete their responsibilities efficiently or effectively or because they are completing teacher certification while already teaching full-time (see also "Professionalization").

Current and former educators cited exceptionally large class sizes and special education caseloads — the result of too few certified staff (i.e., classroom teachers) — as significant contributing factors in creating an unmanageable workload. They noted that large class sizes made it more challenging to teach and more difficult for students to learn.

> **"...these large classroom sizes, as one of the ladies said she's teaching kinder and she's getting ready for 35, 40 kids. That's too many kids in one classroom. And then they expect you to do wonders, teach these kids how to read."** – *Current educator focus group*

Not Enough Time

Current and former educators expressed having insufficient time to complete the additional tasks mentioned above without staying late or doing extra work from home. This impacted their ability to prepare for classes or communicate with parents and caregivers. Special education teachers observed that their prep time is consumed with writing IEPs and planning IEP meetings rather than preparing lessons. Other educators also cited an unmanageable amount of work that needed to be done during a short prep hour. Overall, educators felt their prep hours were not respected since they were often asked to attend meetings or engage in other tasks during that time.

> **"I have no idea how many times, but I don't even think a prep really exists for me to actually use my prep. I'm always being called in for data meetings. I'm always being called in for discipline things. It's like they don't respect our time that we do have for planning, so that is definitely done outside of the classroom."** *– Current educator focus group*

Educators discussed routinely engaging in work-related responsibilities outside of their standard contract day. These included such tasks as making home visits to students' families, attending unpaid meetings, and the expectation that they facilitate or participate in after-school events, such as student concerts. Even after returning home, educators expressed needing to be available to address parent/caregiver concerns and to help students, such as with online tests and quizzes.

> **"...watching the mental health and realizing my own of just how toxic it was that I was working every single second of every day. I was kind of like on call, which I felt like I needed to be for my families. So, they had my cell phone number, for example...because I couldn't accomplish what I was doing without being that person."** *– Former educator interview*

Current and former educators noted that overwhelming workloads result in an inability to have a healthy work-life balance. They described situations in which their dedication to their students and the responsibilities of the job have negatively impacted their personal lives and mental health, including having to shift their attention away from their own families (see also "Mental Health").

Lack of Staff Support

Current educators cited heavier workloads due to administrative, certified (especially teaching), and classified (i.e., support) staff shortages. They noted having to perform or take on additional duties, responsibilities, and students or classes because of position vacancies or the abrupt resignations of colleagues. Educators stated that local leadership often cited a lack of funding as the reason for not hiring more staff, such as behavior specialists, after-school staff, security staff, and coaches. They discussed how this situation often leads to more work for them, as students' concerns are not adequately addressed, leading to more issues with students and complaints from parents and caregivers.

> **"Constantly, we don't have the help that we need working in special education. I see that the pay affects not just teachers, but it affects all staff members, which in turn affect all of our students because we don't have that para[professional] that we need in there. We don't have instructional – additional instructional support and instructional aides within the classroom."** *– Current educator focus group*

The absence of classified support staff, especially classroom aides, was of particular concern for current educators. Educators described growing workloads without additional support staff to assist them. This results in one person having to attempt to do the work of several positions.

> **"I think those support professionals need to be brought back in. But at a higher rate. I think it is too much for any one person to bear now that so much has been cut."** *– Former educator interview*

The solutions offered by current and former educators in the focus groups and interviews mainly centered on hiring more teachers and support staff. This finding was also reflected in the surveys, where over 60% of educators indicated that leadership needs to recruit more educational support professionals to help with retention (see also "School Leadership"). In focus groups and interviews, educators discussed how support staff could make an impossible amount of work manageable by helping them deal with large class sizes and performing many duties that do not require teaching certification, such as coordinating family events. They also recommended increasing funding

to hire staff, such as behavior specialists or assistant principals, based on need. Former educators stressed the importance of compensating certified staff (i.e., salaried teachers) for their hours worked outside of a typical work day, such as attending required meetings and conducting home visits (see also "Salary and Job Benefits").

> **"But having a little bit more funding available to do things that would support these challenging problems or being able to hire somebody who could just help coordinate family events, things like that, those little things would be so helpful because...there's just always more things that keep getting added, but no additional time is added to our day, no additional pay is given to us..."** – *Current educator focus group*

Current educators stressed the need to hire more teachers so that class sizes could be manageable. Former and current educators recommended creating policies to ensure uniform class sizes and creating classroom and caseload caps. They emphasized that this would not only reduce educators' workload and overcrowding in classrooms but also retain teachers and allow them to establish strong reading and other foundational skills in the lower grades (i.e., K-3). This could help address learning gaps observed in older students due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see also "Resource Gaps").

According to survey findings, current educators rated the following workload factors among the top 10 solutions for improving retention. Even more, these were rated among the top six solutions by former educators (**Table 12**).

Table 12. Workload solutions from surveys

	Current Educators	Former Educators
Ensuring adequate preparation time	91%	88%
Decreasing class size or student load	86%	87%
Reducing workload	78%	80%
Providing clear expectations in contracts	76%	78%

Workload Summary

The overall sentiment expressed by educators is that there is too much to do and not enough time to do it – and that this is a trend that has increased over the years, resulting in educators feeling unable to have a healthy work-life balance and unable to meet the needs of their growing and diverse classrooms. Solutions from educators include hiring additional support staff, reducing class sizes and workload, ensuring that educators have adequate preparation time, compensating certified staff for off-contract hours, and providing clear expectations in contracts related to a start/end time to the workday and a limit on extra duties.

Table 13. Summary of workload issues and solutions from educators

| Issues impacting retention	Solutions from educators
Too much work	- Hire more certified and classified staff - Implement classroom caps and uniform class sizes - Provide clear expectations of workload and duties in contract
Not enough time	- Hire more certified and classified staff - Implement classroom caps and uniform class sizes - Compensate certified staff for off-contract hours - Ensure preparation time is available
Lack of staff support	- Hire more certified and classified staff

School Leadership

"I don't blame principals, but many teachers are leaving because they don't feel supported by their building leadership team." – *Current educator focus group*

Importance of Supportive Leadership

School leadership issues were among educators' top concerns across surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents in the current educator survey agreed that feeling supported by school leadership was a positive reason for remaining an educator.

However, feedback around school leadership appeared nuanced across data sources. For example, 80% of satisfied educators reported that "support from school leadership" positively contributed to retention. Conversely, only 58% of unsatisfied educators reported that "support from school leadership" contributed to retention. This discrepancy was even greater when asked about district support – 63% of satisfied educators indicated district support positively contributes to educator retention, whereas only 35% of unsatisfied educators did. Moreover, nearly 30% of unsatisfied educators selected "I do not feel supported by my school community (for example, administration, district, colleagues, parents)" as one of the top two reasons they have considered leaving the profession. The current educator focus groups and former educator interviews illuminated specific issues related to school leadership, such as a lack of consultation, support, and appreciation.

Lack of support

Lack of appreciation and consultation
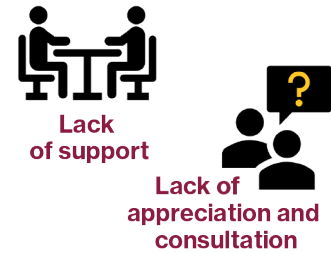
66%

of current educators **agreed that feeling supported by school leadership** was a positive reason for remaining an educator

Lack of Support

Many current and former educators reported that they did not feel supported by their school leadership at the level needed. Educators felt they were not being provided with necessary resources and that their concerns were being ignored. As noted in the "Workload" section, educators struggle to find time to perform their growing list of duties without support staff. Some educators mentioned that their school leadership does not provide solutions or resources to address educators' pleas for help.

Additionally, some educators mentioned that leadership does not assist teachers in the classroom, such as when a substitute is needed. Some also felt that leadership did not "have their back" or support their decisions regarding addressing student behavior or parent complaints.

"If admin[istration] doesn't have my back, when I get an angry parent who complains, then I don't feel supported. And why am I going to keep doing this every day?" – *Current educator focus group*

While current and former educators both mentioned that leadership increases workload by frequently changing and implementing new standards and initiatives, current educators expressed that support and training around these standards are often not provided. For example, not having the resources and tools, such as support staff, to implement new initiatives successfully makes it difficult for educators and students. Some educators mentioned that they are not given enough time to master new standards and initiatives before moving on. Some also expressed that several new standards are sometimes implemented all at once, which makes them even more difficult to master.

"There's always something new to do, something new to add, or we've got to do this a different way now, and I never feel like we get sufficient training on the new thing they want us to do. It's rushed, and it gets so stressful and overwhelming, and then [they're] like, 'Why didn't you do this correctly?' Because you didn't train us like you should have. I mean, that gets really frustrating, and it's also not good for the kids." – *Current educator focus group*

This led to frustration over wanting to implement initiatives for a longer period and with adequate staff and resources rather than frequently changing initiatives, especially for new educators who can struggle more with additional changes so soon in their tenure.

> **"…you cannot put that many new initiatives in and expect them to be successful. So, year after year, we're trying new things, and we're setting ourselves up for failure. You can't get great in a new curriculum if it's going to be replaced every two or three years…"** *– Current educator focus group*

While many educators felt a lack of support from school leadership, some also offered speculation as to why leadership cannot provide necessary support and resources. Reasons include leadership not having access to funding to provide necessary tools and experiencing high stress levels, especially when they must meet broader political demands.

> **"Even if the administrator wants to support, a lot of times, the administrator's hands are tied by what's happening at the district level or what's happening at the state level."** *– Current educator focus group*

Some educators mentioned that these broader-level demands have left leadership unsure of how to handle specific situations, such as parent complaints around classroom issues, which leaves educators feeling unprotected (see also "State-Level Policies and Politicization").

Ultimately, some educators reported leaving or knowing people who have left the profession due to a lack of support from their school leadership. Notably, the former educator survey found that slightly more than half of respondents left the profession at least partly because they felt a lack of support from their school's administration.

51%
of former educators **left the profession** at least partly due to a **lack of support** from their school's administration

Many participants across the surveys, focus groups, and interviews indicated that increasing support from leadership is a critical factor for future retention – and, in the case of the former educator survey, a key factor that could influence former educators to return to the classroom.

Lack of Appreciation and Consultation

Educators expressed other difficulties they experience with their school leadership, such as a lack of appreciation and leadership being out of touch with the classroom experience. Some educators felt they were not appreciated or valued by their school leadership, especially considering the extra responsibilities and time they commit (see "Workload").

> **"So, I see that happen a lot, and it breaks my heart when I see teachers in tears crying because they feel unappreciated and…they're working all hours."** *– Current educator focus group*

In line with a lack of appreciation, some former educators said that their school leadership did not make an effort to retain them when they announced wanting to leave the profession, expressing the sentiment that "teachers come and go."

Some current and former educators also expressed that school leadership is often out of touch with the classroom experience, which can have cascading effects, such as making poor funding decisions, enacting inadequate standards, and asking too much of educators.

> **"And I think that one of the main issues that I've come across is most principals are not dual certified, or they haven't been in the classroom for a really long time. So when it comes down to it, admin[istration] makes decisions based on money."** *– Former educator interview*

In addition to frequently changing standards and initiatives as discussed above, educators felt that leaders who have not taught in the classroom for many years sometimes implement new standards or initiatives that do not make sense for teachers and students. An example is when leadership purchases a new curriculum without understanding classroom contexts, but educators are expected to use the curriculum anyway.

> **"I think teachers just get so frustrated with being kind of jerked around at the elementary level, with all the curriculum and programs and different things that we need to implement. And a lot of them, we know, don't make sense, don't make sense for our students."** *– Current educator focus group*

Many educators expressed that they would like leadership to occasionally teach in the classroom to better understand the needs of teachers and their students.

Another common concern was that educators felt they could not contribute to important decisions that impact their job and felt there was not an avenue for them to provide creative solutions to the issues that predominately affect them. Additionally, some educators in the focus groups and interviews felt that school leadership does not trust educators' professional opinions and decisions.

> **"You don't want to work at a school where the leaders aren't leading in a way that you agree with or making decisions without your autonomy, without your voice, and being involved in that process."** *– Current educator focus group*

Among former educators, 55% of those surveyed said the lack of educator influence on school policies and practices was a reason for leaving, and only one-third of current educators reported their influence over school policies as a positive retention factor. Moreover, more than three-quarters of current and former educator survey respondents indicated that increasing educator influence on school policies is important for improving educator retention.

55%
of former educators said the **lack of educator influence** on school policies and practices was one **reason they left**

While many educators brought up important issues surrounding school leadership, it was also apparent in the focus groups, interviews, and surveys that supportive leadership can positively impact educator retention. Current educators specifically said that turnover in quality leadership can be detrimental to retaining educators and maintaining a positive work environment. A loss of leadership can cause others to follow those who are leaving, while new leadership can sometimes bring in their own staff, which may disrupt the existing school culture. To this end, educators suggested hiring and retaining quality leadership in schools to increase educator retention. This was consistent across all three data sources.

Leadership Summary

Findings about leadership from the educator surveys, focus groups, and interviews highlight some of the complexities surrounding educator retention in our state. Whereas many educators expressed that supportive leadership served as a positive retention factor, others conveyed negative components of leadership that were detrimental to retention, such as feeling a lack of support or experiencing frequent leadership changes. Overall, educators suggested that increasing support from leadership, allowing educators to influence school policies and practices, and hiring/retaining quality leadership would help to address these issues. In addition, educators felt that more appreciation and recognition from leadership would also help keep teachers in the classroom.

Table 14. Summary of leadership issues and solutions from educators

Issues impacting retention	Solutions from educators
Lack of support	· Provide more support via resources and advocate for educators · Provide adequate resources and training for new standards and initiatives · Hire and retain quality leadership
Lack of appreciation and consultation	· Show more appreciation to educators · Have leadership teach in the classroom · Allow educators to influence the policies and practices that impact them at their schools · Allow educators the opportunity to contribute to decision-making, especially over standards and initiatives

Mental Health

"...if you're someone in the beginning of your career, I feel like all these reasons we've listed, like stress and pay and larger class sizes, it just feels...unsustainable." – Current educator focus group

Issues with Mental Health

Mental health was a top concern for educators across surveys, focus groups, and interviews. In the former educator survey, 80% indicated they left the profession because they felt burned out.

This was the most commonly cited factor for leaving among former educators. Moreover, nearly three-quarters of former educators agreed that their inability to have a healthy work-life balance was a reason for leaving. Among current educators surveyed, only 35% reported healthy work-life balance as a positive retention factor. Healthy work-life balance was also one of the retention factors with a large discrepancy between satisfied and unsatisfied educators: 54% of satisfied educators, compared to 26% of unsatisfied educators, agreed that their ability to have a healthy work-life balance was a motivating reason for them to stay in the field.

Current and former educators in the focus groups and interviews provided additional context and insight into issues related to mental health, such as experiences of poor mental health and managing student mental health and behavioral issues.

Poor mental health

Student mental health and behavior

80% of former educators indicated they left the profession because **they felt burned out**

Poor Mental Health

Educators used various terms to describe the impacts of their jobs on their mental well-being. Both current and former educators spoke to issues with burnout, feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, stressed, and exhausted, among others.

Current educators were the only group to explicitly mention issues with anxiety and depression. Some educators also expressed having or witnessing breakdowns, feeling helpless, and feeling isolated from their colleagues. The causes of these mental health issues in educators stem from many of the issues discussed in other sections of this report. For example, issues with workload, such as working too many hours, having too much to do, and not having enough time, were discussed as contributors to burnout, stress, and exhaustion among educators (see also "Workload").

Some educators expressed feeling a lot of pressure to fulfill growing expectations and guilt and shame when they could not meet them. This made educators feel like they had to sacrifice their needs to fulfill expectations, leading to poor work-life balance, which was viewed as unsustainable (see also "Workload").

Educators felt they had to be available at all hours, leaving no time for themselves or their families. In addition to the mental toll of workload, educators expressed how school leadership could exacerbate these negative feelings by making them feel unappreciated, adding to their workload, and putting them under pressure to go above and beyond (see also "School Leadership").

> **"And so, for a new teacher, I feel like that can be really overwhelming in the sense that it's like you need to be a martyr to be a good teacher. Or you need to be so giving of your time and willing to go above and beyond in everything. Your contract hours [are] just too much."** – *Current educator focus group*

One current educator described how school leadership challenges teachers' boundaries by emphasizing, "It's for the kids" and that it is their "calling," causing educators to feel guilty if they don't go above and beyond. Former educators emphasized a general lack of support for educator mental health from leadership, which led to resentment for some (see also "School Leadership").

> **"And just this past couple of years, we had three suicides in one year, and there was no support. We didn't bring counselors in. There was no support to help teachers or students. It was just, 'Oh, well, you guys will be okay. Figure it out' if that makes sense."** – *Former educator interview*

Some educators expressed feeling fearful for their safety due to potential gun or weapon threats or aggressive student behavior, which will be discussed further in the following section. Fears of safety were enough for some educators to leave the profession. Survey results echoed interview sentiments, finding that feeling unsafe at school or in the classroom was a reason for leaving for roughly a third (34%) of former educators.

The solutions offered by educators in the focus groups and interviews around mental health issues primarily included the prioritization of mental health and work-life balance. This includes providing more classroom support staff to reduce workload and subsequent burnout/stress, ensuring educators have breaks, allowing space for educators to discuss their struggles, and actively checking in on people.

> **"...we just have to check in on people and make sure they're doing okay, whether they're a first year teacher, a fifth year teacher, an eighth year teacher, I've seen the gamut where the job can just literally break people's spirits."** - *Former educator interview*

Moreover, nearly 75% of current and former educators felt that prioritizing the mental health of educators and students is important for improving educator retention, and 76% of current and former educators indicated that improving school safety will improve retention.

Finally, one former educator also emphasized the need for collaboration with colleagues to reduce feelings of isolation, and some current educators expressed the need to feel more appreciation from leadership (as noted in "School Leadership") and the community at large. Notably, 64% of former educator survey respondents (and 60% of current educators) rated increased collaboration time with colleagues as an important mechanism to improve educator retention.

75%
of current and former educators felt that **prioritizing the mental health of educators and students is important** for improving educator retention

Student Mental Health and Behavior

Former educator interviews and current educator focus groups also emphasized the importance of the mental well-being of students, who can directly impact educator well-being on a daily basis. Some educators expressed that students are experiencing a mental health crisis and that they are suffering and in need of emotional support.

Educators speculated that the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a significant shift in student mental health and behavior, leading to students who are lagging academically and emotionally. Educators felt that this shift in behavior was due to students having spent a significant amount of time in online learning, away from their peers, and in a more flexible environment that allowed additional breaks from school activities. This led to students having shorter attention spans and fewer social and emotional skills when returning to classroom learning.

> **"I'd be walking the hallways, and students were incredibly disrespectful in a way I'd never seen before because they were hurt so much by being socially isolated at a time when, developmentally, what they needed more than anything was constant physical contact with their peers, and they didn't get it."** – *Former educator interview*

Educators also described some students as being "high-needs" and requiring a higher level of intensive emotional support that they could not independently provide, often resulting in a significant disruption to class instruction. These students were described as having childhood trauma or issues at home with little to no support from parents, many of whom are not on individualized learning plans despite educators believing they should be. Some educators noted a rise in the number of high-needs students over time.

> **"Five, 10 years ago you might have one kid in a grade level that was just very intense, high needs, needed some very specific planning around managing their behavior. And now we're looking at three or four in a class, and I don't know what you do about that."** – *Current educator focus group*

Related to student mental health are other behavioral issues that educators find challenging to manage, especially without additional staff support. Such issues include aggressive behavior and difficulties navigating discipline. Both general and special education teachers reported increasingly aggressive behaviors from students, including physical and emotional abuse towards teachers, such as throwing desks and chairs.

Some educators mentioned that no training, such as crisis prevention training, is available to show them how to handle extreme student behavior. Additionally, some said that new teachers can be especially impacted by poor student behavior due to a lack of mentorship and knowledge of classroom management (see also "Professionalization"). In addition to aggressive behavior, educators noted that students can be disrespectful and disruptive, distracting others from learning.

A key issue for educators around student behavior was how to discipline students who act out. Some complained that there is a lack of consequences for poor behavior.

> **"But the way that we're responding to behaviors [is] also changing up here. We've gone to restorative practices, which leads us feeling like there are no consequences. When a kid is disruptive every single day, and I try every day to have conversations and redirect, and I finally send them out of the room, and they just get sent back with a, 'Well, you need to build that relationship more.'"**
> – *Current educator focus group*

Multiple educators expressed frustration over not being able to remove disruptive students from their classrooms and not being able to implement social and emotional learning techniques due to state mandates (see also "State-Level Policies and Politicization"). They were also frustrated over not having adequate support for students, such as counselors and other trained staff.

"...we don't have the staff to support students with some of the severely disruptive discipline issues that are happening. So even if our principal was supportive, the solution might be to suspend or expel the student, which is not necessarily the solution that student needs." *– Current educator focus group*

A lack of support staff can be particularly detrimental at rural schools, where it is also hard to direct families to local community support outside of school because they often don't exist in these areas.

Key solutions from focus groups and interviews that educators believe will help to prioritize and alleviate mental health issues in students include: providing more dedicated support staff for serious behavioral and mental health issues; holding students accountable for poor behavior; having more support from school leadership and parents around student mental health and behavior. Additionally, as noted above, nearly three-quarters of current and former educators suggested prioritizing the mental health of educators and students to improve educator retention.

Mental Health Summary

Mental health concerns are negatively impacting educator retention in Arizona. In general, current and former educators feel that the profession takes a toll on the mental health of educators, with some current educators explicitly discussing their struggles with anxiety and depression in the focus groups. Respondents across all data sources (surveys, interviews, focus groups) indicated that educators need additional support in the form of support staff and classroom support. Respondents across all data sources also indicate that prioritizing the mental health of educators and students is key to retaining educators. Finally, educators recommend increased guidance and support for handling disruptive and challenging student behavior.

Table 15. Summary of mental health issues and solutions from educators

Issues impacting retention	Solutions from educators
Poor mental health	- Prioritize educator and student mental health - Enable educators to have a healthy work-life balance - Listen to the concerns of educators - Increase expressions of appreciation from leadership - Provide more classroom support to reduce workload and subsequent burnout/stress
Student mental health and behavior	- Ensure there are dedicated support staff for serious student mental health and behavioral issues - Hold students accountable for poor behavior - Increase school leadership and parental support for student mental health and behavior

State-Level Policies and Politicization

"I think that it needs to start from the top down, in many ways, and that needs to be support from our government, our legislature, [and] the budget." – Current educator focus group

Issues with State-Level Policies and Politicization

Educators across data sources indicated challenges with state-level policies and politicization in the classroom. Among survey respondents, only 7% of current educators agreed that they are driven to remain in the profession because they feel supported by state-level policies, and 70% of former educators agreed that they left the profession because they felt micro-managed by state-level policies. Feedback from educators in the focus groups and interviews provided additional context related to this issue.

State-level policies

Politicization

State-Level Policies

In focus groups and interviews, current and former educators expressed frustration over a lack of state support for K-12 education and state policies that impact their daily lives in the classroom. The primary area of frustration centered around a general lack of funding for education. Educators felt that a lack of state funding is the source of many of the issues discussed in this report, such as not having enough support staff, which negatively impacts student achievement and contributes to high workloads and educator burnout.

"And then, even though we can share how frustrating and how difficult it is and that we need support, the money's just never there it seems like. We want to add another behavior specialist at our site, but there's just no money for it." – Current educator focus group

Educators felt that state funding is not only unequal between schools and districts across the state (see also "Resource Gaps"), but that the lack of funding also hinders creative solutions to current issues, such as providing compensation outside of salary to offset low pay. Some educators felt they must "fight" for state funding every year.

"Also, we had a veteran teacher come here from another state and was shocked. We actually had two of them, shocked. They said, "Why do you guys fight over funding every year here for education? Every year, it's a fight." I was shocked to know that's not how it is in every state. So politics are huge. Teachers talk about being burnt out on the politics." – Current educator focus group

One educator mentioned that it can take a long time for contracts to come through once the school has received funding. In some cases, contracts are offered too late, and educators do not sign before the start of the school year. Finally, educators recognized that the Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) program impacts school funding, and they expressed frustration over public funding being directed out of public schools via the ESA program. Overall, educators felt that the lack of funding support from the state implies that the state does not value education or its educators. Solutions offered for funding issues include providing more funding for district schools and involving educators in policymaking. Current educators also suggested reevaluating the ESA program.

70% of former educators agreed one reason they **left the profession was feeling micromanaged** by state-level policies

In addition to funding issues, current educators brought up other state policies impacting the profession, such as English-only instruction. Some current educators felt that English-only instruction does not match the needs of their students and is not beneficial for learning. They also discussed fearful rhetoric that is impacting district-level decisions, particularly around practices such as positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) and social-emotional learning (SEL). A frequent talking point was being discouraged from using practices like SEL

in the classroom and having fear over being reported to the State's "Empower Hotline," which exists to "report about inappropriate lessons that detract from teaching academic standards such as those that focus on race or ethnicity, rather than individuals and merit, promoting gender ideology, social emotional learning, or inappropriate sexual content."[11]

> **"People in my district are afraid to talk about PBIS because they don't want to get reported to the hotline. And that's just really disappointing, because we've seen it have such a positive impact on our students, on our staff, and our school community."** *– Current educator focus group*

Educators felt that this type of rhetoric can create fear for educators, which can drive them away. One former educator also felt that existing state policies are not data-informed, making them harmful to students.

> **"We know all of the data about what it takes to teach young people in a high-quality public education context. We have information on how to do it effectively, and at every turn, there were fights about what was true and not true, about what was best for children. And I found that really, really frustrating as someone who is a scholar of education, to constantly be in a context in which we did not see data informing the work that we did."** *– Former educator interview*

Politicization

In addition to issues with State policies, educators also felt the ramifications of the politicization of education. Educators felt that changes in national and state politics and society were beginning to impact them as people and in the classroom. One former educator explained how the social milieu around certain curricula has led to anger from parents at school board meetings and in classrooms despite these curricula not being taught.

> **"And so, people latch onto these buzzwords, and then they hear anything and it sets them it out on teachers, as if we have some kind of these hidden agendas. So again, the politicization I spoke of earlier, that's starting to hit teachers more personally and more directly."** *– Current educator focus group*

Educators felt that these misconceptions are further spread by media outlets that present educators in a negative light, leading to changes in how society views K-12 education. Educators felt that the general perception of teachers now is that they are lazy or are trying to indoctrinate children.

> **"And I think the way that media speaks about teachers in not every news outlet, but I hear so many just horrible things said about teachers, about us indoctrinating kids, like we've got time to do that. I hear that teachers are pushing agendas at kids. And I think that, that kind of slander of our profession does not help our public image."** *– Current educator focus group*

Educators said this shift in how society and media talk about teachers and education has also changed how parents interact with them. Educators described parents as being empowered by national and state politics, making them more demanding and wanting control over what teachers do. Educators felt that this has led to a general lack of respect and support from parents towards educators, as evidenced by actions such as challenging what books are read in the classroom and how to discipline students (see also "Respect").

> **"Part of it's the whole political environment we're in that ... I don't know. It's just they feel that they have the right to make decisions, just like in every other field of life. They feel like that it's not the people that have the knowledge that should be able to make those decisions, and especially with books in the classrooms."** *– Former educator interview*

This pressure from parents has led to policies around what books can or cannot be read and what curriculum can be taught.[12] This has made some educators feel like they cannot truly express their passion for education in the classroom, which can take away the joy of being an educator.

> **"I just also think that I almost feel threatened to teach what... You can't teach this, but you can teach this. And if you read this book aloud to your classroom, then you're going to get in trouble, and we have to sign a waiver saying, yes, I'll be liable or sued or whatnot. So I just think some of that is also the joy is lacking sometimes when we can't read a book or something like that."**
> *– Current educator focus group*

Finally, some educators expressed that it has become challenging to deal with the reality of politics coming into the classroom, as they have no guidance on dealing with specific situations, such as student and parent conflicts over certain issues, such as gender identify. One educator provided an example where a student asked to use certain pronouns in the classroom, however, when their parent became aware of this, they threatened to sue the educator if they followed the student's request.

Current educators expressed that they don't know how to address the politicization of education but that they want to find ways to increase societal support for K-12 education.

State-Level Policies Summary

Overall, educators did not feel that State policies were supportive of education, and as such, were generally not positive for educator retention. Educators in the focus groups and interviews commonly noted a general lack of funding for education that directly impacts several issues that educators are currently experiencing (burnout, high workload). Some educators felt that State policies such as the ESA program and English-only instruction, and fearful rhetoric around social-emotional learning are not beneficial for students. Finally, educators discussed how the politicization of education has led to new and unique issues such as a general lack of support and respect from parents and society at large. Furthermore, educators indicated that some of these policies have led to increased interactions with demanding parents who feel emboldened to assert control over what is taught in the classroom. Solutions from educators include more funding for district schools, involving educators in policymaking, re-evaluating the ESA program, and increasing societal support for K-12 education.

Table 16. Summary of state-level policy and politicization issues and solutions from educators

Issues impacting retention	Solutions from educators
Limited by state policies	- Provide more funding for district schools - Involve educators in policymaking - Re-evaluate ESA program
Politicization	- Increase societal support for K-12 education

Career Factors

> *"I realized it just wasn't something I loved doing and I didn't have the time to do it the way I wanted to do it. And so then I became frustrated with myself and the whole profession."*
> – Former educator interview

Issues with Career Factors

Educators in the focus groups and interviews highlighted numerous issues related to their careers as educators, including a lack of training and mentorship, a lack of meaningful professional development and opportunities for career advancement, and dissatisfaction with their careers as educators. Educators also discussed the impacts of frequent student testing, the absence of a sense of a professional community, and concern with how evaluations are conducted. Many of the findings are also supported by the current and former educator survey results, which are incorporated throughout this section where relevant.

Professional development and career advancement

Training and mentorship

Student testing

Dissatisfaction with career

Teacher evaluations

Sense of professional community

Training and Mentorship

Educators brought up several issues around training and mentorship at their schools. In the current educator survey, less than half (46%) of current educators remain in the profession because "there is training and mentorship provided to educators." However, among satisfied educators, agreement is reported as 60%, compared to 40% for unsatisfied educators.

Training

Educators mentioned that there was insufficient training for handling student behavior or implementing all the additional initiatives and curriculums being added to their workload. The lack of training was particularly felt by new teachers, who expressed they were thrown into the classroom with little preparation.

> *"There was such a shortage that I trained half a day, and then the next day I was just teaching. I just jumped in. And so, it was teaching all subjects, Math, English...things that I didn't learn growing up."*
> – Former educator interview

For training that is required or provided, educators discussed issues with the amount of time they have to spend doing it. Not only are some trainings long and span over multiple days, but they can also take away from other professional activities like classroom preparation, collaboration with colleagues, or other professional development.

> *"There's supposed time for professional development, but many districts have taken it away for you've got to go to this training, that training, and the other training related to them changing curriculum over and over and over and over."* – Former educator focus group

Some educators expressed that they are also expected to do training in their free time or after hours because there is no built-in time during their contract hours. Additionally, some felt that the training provided was inadequate, rushed, or irrelevant to what they do. One example was related to online learning during the pandemic.

> *"We had two days of training, but it was like the trainers didn't know what they were doing, because nobody knew what they were doing. Nobody was fully prepared for this online learning that we were doing, so we were kind of just building the plane as it was flying."* – Former educator focus group

Finally, educators expressed frustration over the cost of training, explaining how sometimes they are required to pay for training, pay for endorsement exams, and/or are not paid for the time spent on training.

> **"Our new teacher training for new teachers isn't paid and it's five days...They just come back and they spend five extra days than any other teacher and they don't get paid anything more for those days."**
> *– Current educator focus group*

To address training issues, former educator interviewees would like to see more training provided, and current educators would like training to be relevant to the type of educator and the current issues they face. Current educators in focus groups also mentioned building in additional contract time for training, resulting in educators being compensated for their time and not being asked to stay after hours to participate.

Mentorship

In addition to training issues, current educators also expressed the lack of mentorship for new teachers, which can cause them to leave. Educators explained that some mentoring programs have disappeared, leaving new teachers unable to observe experienced teachers in the classroom and receive guidance and support.

> **"I think another reason why people are leaving the profession is they're just overwhelmed and they don't have the support of a really good mentoring through three years of their first three years mentoring program, or a good support at their school to help them through those really difficult first couple of years."** *– Current educator focus group*

Due to the lack of mentoring programs, some new teachers may not be assigned a mentor until late into the beginning of their teaching career, or not at all. Former educators also expressed that veteran teachers can often be too busy to provide mentorship due to the increasing demands on educators (see also "Workload").

> **"And I was not connected with mentors, I had to beg for them, and that really sucked. And then the mentors that I needed and wanted were absolutely unable to care for me and provide me with what I needed because of the level of work that they had."** *– Former educator interview*

Former educators also expressed that those who did receive a mentor did not always receive one that was supportive and helpful. One former educator also said in addition to not being assigned a mentor teacher until six months after they started teaching, their mentor teacher was not in the same content area, creating another layer of frustration. In some cases, educators said mentors created more work for teachers or did not provide any actual mentoring.

> **"I had a mentor last year because I was new to the district. I wasn't a new teacher, but I don't think the guy ever met with me. And being new, you're not going to tattle on someone, you're trying to forge good relationships. But it was non-existent, and I was okay, but if I was a brand new teacher, if it was my first year, I would've really wanted to use him."** *– Current educator focus group*

The primary solution to mentorship issues offered by educators in the focus groups and interviews was establishing and continuing mentorship programs, and ensuring that new teachers are matched with experienced and veteran teachers. Former educators also suggested making sure that assigned mentors are supportive and available. Similarly, nearly 70% of current educators from the survey indicated that providing mentorship and support for educators is important for improving retention, and 63% of former educators felt this would motivate them to return to the profession in Arizona.

Professional Development and Career Advancement

Some educators expressed dissatisfaction with their opportunities for professional development and career advancement.

Professional Development

Current educators felt that there was a lack of opportunities for professional development, especially within their district. Some described their professional development opportunities as "unfulfilling" or a "waste of time," often because they are irrelevant to the educator's content area.

> **"I feel like, at times, teachers are stuck, and there's no advancement for opportunities to continue to grow, and so we get bored and then tend to leave the profession. There's a lot of times where it's like, "Oh, well, since you've been here this long, why don't you do this?' It's like, 'Well, no, I don't want more added to my plate. I want other opportunities to develop my practice or my skillset.'"** *– Current educator focus group*

Survey findings align with this sentiment while also providing some nuance, suggesting that, similar to leadership, professional development opportunities can be a positive retention factor. Less than half (43%) of current educators agreed that access to meaningful professional development opportunities is a reason they remain in the profession, while 28% of former educators agreed that this was a reason they left the profession. At the same time, agreement about professional development as a retention factor rose to 59% among satisfied educators (and shrunk to 43% among unsatisfied educators). This suggests that educators with more access to meaningful professional development opportunities for their classroom and career stage may be more satisfied in the profession.

A lack of professional development opportunities was especially prevalent among current educators in rural areas, who noted in focus groups that they often have to drive to Phoenix or other places on weekends to receive professional development that is not facilitated by colleagues.

Some current educators also expressed that they have to pay for professional development opportunities like conferences out of pocket.

> **"As far as professional development, if we want to go to conferences, most of us are paying that out of pocket. The district's like, 'No, we're not sending you to that. Even though we want you to be a better teacher, we're not going to pay for that conference, that is specific to your content area.'"**
> *– Current educator focus group*

Similar to the training issues discussed above, educators shared that districts have also taken away built-in time for professional development, leaving educators to attend these opportunities outside their normal work day. Some educators even mentioned using professional or personal days so they could attend.

To address professional development issues, educators want more meaningful and relevant opportunities within and outside their districts. They also want professional development to be built into contract days. This is supported by survey data finding that 64% of current educators felt that meaningful professional development is important for improving retention, and 59% of former educators indicated this is important for bringing former educators back into the classroom.

Career Advancement

Educators also expressed a lack of career advancement opportunities. Some said there are limited options for growth if you do not want to become a school administrator.

> **"A reason for leaving was upward mobility. So, I think part of my decision was related to, okay, I'm in year six as a teacher. I'm making $46,000 as I approach my thirties and now I am 30. Is this sustainable for me?"** *– Former educator interview*

Educators also expressed that it can take a long time for advancement opportunities to arise, even for those who desire administrative roles.

> **"Well, there was the salary, and then it seemed as though there was a lot of time before I could grow in my role. So, I would have to teach for a few years before even being considered into an administrative role...I understand that...it's a ladder to climb, but I had some skillsets that I could contribute, coming from an administrative, nonprofit background."** *- Former educator interview*

In the current educator survey, less than 25% of respondents agreed that opportunities for career advancement drive them to remain educators. Fifty-seven percent of former educators left the profession due to frustration over their career trajectory, and 49% agreed that one reason they left was a lack of opportunities for career advancement.

Overall, educators felt that more people would be encouraged to stay in education if more opportunities for advancement existed outside of teaching. This solution was consistent across focus groups, interviews, and survey participants, where 61% of current and former educators felt this was important.

57%
of former educators **left the profession due to frustration** over their career trajectory

Dissatisfaction with Career
Participants in the current educator survey and focus groups expressed dissatisfaction with their careers in education. Overall, 57% of educators agreed that satisfaction with their career as an educator drives them to remain in the profession. When looking at only satisfied educators, this percentage increases to 84% and rises to the top five retention factors for satisfied educators overall. However, among unsatisfied educators, agreement falls to only 44%, a difference of 40 percentage points (see also "Current Landscape").

Several educators in the focus groups expressed feeling dissatisfied with their careers and wanting to leave. Educators were unhappy with how they were being treated and the lack of support they received. Some also expressed how hard it was to persist in a profession with so many withstanding issues.

> **"So, I was really shocked at not only how unhappy people were with teaching, but how willing folks were to share that amongst the group at department meetings and otherwise. So, it was just a general sense of 80% of people in this room are not happy and don't want to be here, but either we're so close to retirement or we don't see any other option career-wise that we're stuck here."**
> *– Former educator interview*

As this quote suggests, current educators expressed thoughts of quitting their jobs or staying only for reasons such as retirement or lingering passion. Some educators used terms such as "falling out of love" with teaching or feeling like it is "not worth it."

> **"My pension is one big reason I'm staying because it has gotten bad enough. There are four of us who can retire at the same time, and every one of us is saying it's the pension keeping us there. But it's been bad enough in recent years, each of us has taken a turn thinking, do I really need that pension? Just to be totally honest, that's how bad it is."** *– Current educator focus group*

Outside of monetary reasons such as retirement or student loan forgiveness, some educators said they stay for the children, the sense of community with colleagues, or because it works with their personal life schedule (see also "Factors Supporting Retention"). A culmination of the solutions listed in the summary table below has the potential to impact educators' career satisfaction.

Survey findings concur, showing that regardless of category (satisfied or unsatisfied), feeling like they make a difference in students' lives was the retention factor with the highest agreement for current educators overall and across subgroups (see also "Factors Supporting Retention"). In other words, this finding remained consistent regardless of satisfaction with Career, County, Locality, or Educational path.

Sense of Professional Community

Educators expressed feeling a lack of community at their schools among peers and leadership and explained that this is sometimes due to high turnover. Some educators mentioned feeling isolated from their peers and not having a culture of support at their school. One former educator said it is easy to isolate when students are not around, while another said they felt like no one cared about them. Educators felt that this lack of community can negatively impact learning, especially when there is no time for peer collaboration.

> **"I had a great co-teacher where we actually did co-teaching, like full 100%, two teachers in the room, and it was the best year ever. And then the admin[istration] said, 'Nope, we're not doing that anymore.' And then I was alone, and it was very isolating."** *– Former educator interview*

Educators also mentioned how leadership can negatively impact a school's sense of community by creating or enabling negative work environments where people are unhappy or toxic or by disrupting the existing community by bringing in new staff or leaving for a new position (see "School Leadership").

> **"Because I worked with so many administrators that all their intent was to bring in who they wanted and get rid of everybody else, and that lost a lot of…You have a community in a staff… and the families realize what's going on there too."** *– Former educator interview*

Finally, some educators in focus groups and interviews mentioned that a sense of community among districts is also missing. Educators feel this is a result of districts poaching educators, not communicating with each other, or comparing data. As solutions to a lack of community, educators felt that there should be a focus on building community within and among districts, fostering relationships and collaboration among peers, and ensuring a positive school culture.

In the current educator survey, a sense of community was one of the top five retention factors (see also "Factors Supporting Retention"). Moreover, 37% of former educators agreed that lacking a sense of community at school was one of the reasons they left the profession. Moreover, current and former educators indicated that it is important to increase collaboration time among colleagues (61% and 64%, respectively) to address the ongoing retention issue.

Teacher Evaluations and Student Testing

Educators expressed frustration with how they and their students are evaluated. The issues that educators discussed included how teacher evaluations are tied to monetary incentives and student academic performance and how frequent student testing does not set teachers or students up for success.

Teacher Evaluations

Current educators from focus groups were the only ones to express issues with teacher evaluations. They felt that evaluations were not based on intrinsic motivations but were instead motivated by monetary incentives like raises or bonuses.

> **"I don't know that it's helpful, even though they think if you dangle a carrot in front of us, we're going to run faster and work harder for it. It's like we're there for the kids, so it really doesn't matter."**
> *– Current educator focus group*

Educators felt that basing evaluation outcomes on monetary motivations negatively impacts their passion and creativity in the classroom because they are focused on meeting certain requirements to receive higher pay. They also expressed frustration with how evaluations can be based on how much kids improve academically, which can be challenging because of the issues related to student testing discussed below.

In the survey, only 42% of current educators agreed that their satisfaction with the evaluation process motivates them to remain an educator. Again, it was evident that satisfaction with the educator evaluation process was more of a positive retention factor for educators who have not considered leaving the profession (i.e., satisfied educators), who reported 56% agreement compared to 35% agreement from their unsatisfied peers.

Current educators also felt that their relationship with the evaluator can heavily impact evaluation outcomes.

> **"Because it is so much based on your relationship with that person and your personality. And I know people who were fine and switched schools, and then they weren't fine, and they were the same teacher. And I don't know a teacher that, every year, doesn't stress out about that because... [it's like] I'm a kid they're trying to catch doing something."** – *Current educator focus group*

Moreover, evaluations can often leave educators feeling on edge, causing stress, and reducing their willingness to share resources among peers to do better on evaluations.

> **"I hate to think about pitting teachers against one another just so you can look better to earn a bonus. We should all be collaborating and working for the best for our students."** – *Current educator focus group*

To address issues with teacher evaluations, current educators felt that the evaluation system needs to be re-evaluated to include more intrinsic motivation and provide clear expectations to those being evaluated. Similarly, 68% of current educators and 60% of former educators indicated a need to develop alternative ways to evaluate educator performance. Further, approximately 75% of current and former educators also felt that the way student assessments impact educator compensation needs to be re-evaluated.

Student Testing

Outside of student academic performance impacting educator evaluations and compensation, educators in focus groups and interviews discussed other ways student testing negatively impacts students and educators. Current educators expressed that testing is too frequent, leaving little time to cover the necessary material to prepare students. This leads to material being rushed and students not retaining information.

> **"...you're giving all these assessments. When do you actually have time to teach the material? I mean, you're spending all the time testing, and of course, they're doing poorly because you haven't had the opportunity to actually teach. So, it's very, very frustrating."** – *Current educator focus group*

Some educators also said that tests are not always applicable to the material that has been covered. Additionally, educators felt that districts and schools were too focused on test scores, which placed a large amount of pressure on students and educators to meet high expectations. This is particularly difficult for younger students who have trouble sitting for tests and students who come from other places, like the Navajo Nation, which has several public schools governed by separate Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) standards.

> **"It's just test, test, test. I've never worked in a position where children in elementary school are tested so much, and they do get burned out..."** – *Current educator focus group*

Some current educators said test results are not representative of where students are academically but are rather just snapshots. One current educator said if a student has a bad morning, they will not do well on their test. These issues with testing leave educators feeling stressed, frustrated, and guilty when students do not perform well.

> **"...why take a test for the sake of taking a test? It doesn't really honestly assess what our students know. And then the students get frustrated, and then they speed through it, and then we get yelled at, and it's just a really crappy cycle, to be honest, and nobody ever feels good about it when we get those district emails. And then we get data shamed. I do not like that. Nobody should be data shamed."**
>
> *– Current educator focus group*

For solutions to student testing issues, educators would like to see reductions in testing and more focus on improving student scores rather than making comparisons across students or schools. Similarly, roughly 75% of current and former educators in the surveys indicated a need to decrease the focus on standardized testing.

Career Factors Summary

Overall, findings from the focus groups, interviews, and surveys indicate several career factors that negatively impact educator retention. Educators emphasized the need for more professional training and mentorship programs as well as relevant and meaningful opportunities for professional development and career advancement. Educators also felt that changes to student testing and teacher evaluations would help retain educators and develop a strong sense of professional community among districts and schools.

Table 17. Career factors issues and solutions from educators

| Issues impacting retention	Solutions from educators
Lack of training and mentorship	- Provide more relevant trainings - Provide built-in contract time for training - Establish and continue mentorship programs - Ensure mentors are available and supportive
Lack of professional development and opportunities for career advancement	- Provide more meaningful and relevant professional development opportunities - Provide more opportunities within and outside of districts - Provide built-in contract time for professional development - Provide more opportunities for advancement outside of the classroom
Absence of a sense of professional community	- Focus on building community within and among districts and schools - Enable educators to foster relationships and collaborations - Ensure a positive school culture
Dissatisfaction with teacher evaluations and student testing	- Re-evaluate the teacher evaluation system - Provide clear expectations for evaluations - Reduce student testing requirements - Focus on how to improve scores for students versus comparing students
Career dissatisfaction	- No specific solution; however, all solutions listed in this report are likely to have a positive impact on educator satisfaction

Resource Gaps

> **"There's just so many gaps. And the disparities are, if you live in a rich neighborhood and a nice neighborhood, then you're going to get a better education. You're going to get better teachers because they're going to stay because they have all the resources they need in the classroom."**
>
> *– Current Educator Focus Group*

Issues with Resources

In the current educator survey, 55% agreed that satisfactory workplace conditions, such as facilities and classrooms, are components that keep them in their positions. At the same time, 15% of current educators who have considered leaving the profession within the last 12 months selected workplace conditions as one of the top two reasons they have considered leaving. Among former educators, just under half (48%) reported that workplace conditions were one of the reasons they left the profession. Educators in the focus groups and interviews provided specific insight into the issues related to workplace conditions and resources.

Physical conditions

Inequitable resources

Inadequate support for students

Issues in rural areas
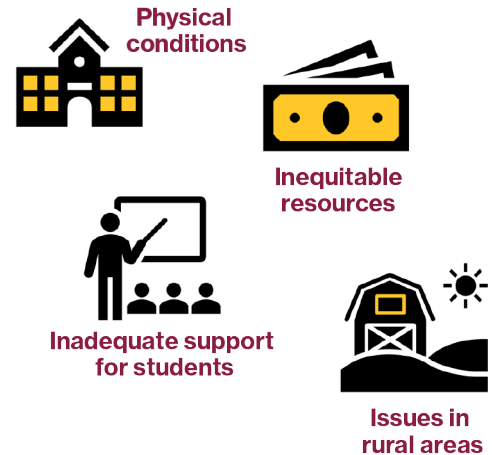
Poor Physical Conditions

Educators expressed that their schools' lack of supplies and poor physical conditions were detrimental to their teaching experience. A lack of supplies was mentioned, including desks, chairs, books, technology, and other essential school supplies like Post-it notes and pens.

> **"I just want to say when it's teacher appreciation week, when it's back to school, when my principal gives me a gift of school supplies, it's insulting. School supplies should be in a cabinet where I can access them whenever I need them. Giving me Post-its and flare pens is not a present that appreciates me. Don't give me any more school supplies. Let us have access to school supplies."**
>
> *– Current educator focus group*

In addition to not having supplies available, educators said they typically pay out of pocket for supplies — and, in some cases, food — for students. Current educators also mentioned having to fund-raise for supplies like Chromebook computers for students. Educators felt that a solution to these supply issues is to ensure that supplies are always provided and available free of charge.

> **"This year I noticed it more than I have any other year, the number of teachers that put an Amazon wishlist on Facebook last week...it's just insane to me that so many of my teacher friends have to have a wishlist. And they have things on there like highlighters and Post-it notes. It's just absurd that we have to pay for that out of pocket or ask our family and friends to buy that for our students."**
>
> *– Current educator focus group*

In addition to a lack of free, accessible supplies, educators talked about their school buildings' poor and deteriorating conditions. Educators mentioned buildings falling apart, with issues like water leaks and collapsing ceilings. Some educators shared that their schools had no hot water or air conditioning.

> **"And our school, we have been trying to get air conditioning now for two years at our site. And that's just such a simple thing that ... And when things are broken, it takes forever to get them fixed."**
>
> *– Current educator focus group*

The lack of timely maintenance of school facilities was a talking point for some educators who felt that having their physical school environment ignored contributed to them feeling unvalued and unimportant.

In the surveys, 70% of current educators and 62% of former educators indicated that improving school facilities was an important solution to mitigate Arizona's educator retention problem.

Inequitable Resources

Educators spoke about the differences they see between districts and schools across the state. Differences primarily centered around resources and funding, with the overall sentiment being that the education system is inequitable in this regard. Large districts and schools or those in higher-income areas were perceived to have more resources and receive more funding than those that are smaller, lower-income, and/or from rural areas of the State.

Educators felt that districts and schools in lower-income areas have less staff, including instructional coaches and other support staff, as well as fewer qualified staff. These districts and schools were also seen as having fewer programs available for students and fewer supports in place for students, which can deter educators from choosing to work there due to the additional stress and workload associated with fewer resources.

> **"That's a big issue for teachers that they are struggling with if they decide to go teach at a school that is low income or in one of those areas, they know that the cost, the stress, and the workload is double than another teacher who's working at another school where all their resources are provided."**
> *– Current educator focus group*

Some educators felt that the inequitable distribution of resources among districts and schools was unfair, especially for students.

> **"'It's only fair if we get one, everybody else gets one.' But I disagree with that. I think we need equity. Our school needs one, yours doesn't. So, can we please have one so that our school can be at the same level of your school?"** *– Former educator interview*

Educators also noted differences between public district and charter schools. Some felt that the limited education dollars have led to competition for resources among schools, as they want to enroll and keep as many students as possible to maximize funds from the State. In some cases, educators noted that some charter schools will keep students enrolled until state funding is received and then encourage parents of struggling students to move them to district schools that may have more specialized resources.

> **"Up here, at least, a lot of our charters...there's no busing, there's no free-and-reduced lunch, they have no special-ed programs. If a student has an issue, they will tell the kid and the parent, 'We don't have the things to support you here, so why don't you try this school?' So, it divides the community, the competitive nature."** *– Current educator focus group*

Educators also noted differences in pay and benefits between district, charter, and private schools, with charter and private schools often offering higher salaries. As discussed in the "Salary and Job Benefits" section, some educators mentioned that charter schools may not always be part of the state's retirement system. Finally, educators said that certification requirements can be less strict at charter schools than at district schools.

Educators called for a more equitable distribution of funding and resources across the state to alleviate issues around funding and resources among schools and districts.

Inadequate Support for Students

Educators felt that the lack of resources, among other issues discussed in this report, has negatively impacted students' academic well-being. Many current and former educators noted the growing number of students who are years behind their peers, with examples of students frequently failing benchmark quizzes and tests and being severely behind on reading levels.

> **"[A teacher from Pittsburgh] said, 'Why are these kids that are all failing...and their reading is below grade level, and their math is so far below grade level, why are we pushing them onto eighth grade? Why are we pushing eighth graders onto high school?' And I said, 'That's just how it works here.'"**
> *– Current educator focus group*

As the quote exemplifies, many students are still being advanced to the next grade despite being woefully behind academically. Some former educators also mentioned how having students who are far behind in the same classroom with students who are on level or advanced makes it difficult to adequately provide for all students, especially with high workloads (see "Workload").

In addition to learning loss experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, educators mentioned several other factors they feel are contributing to a lack of student academic well-being. The primary factor discussed was a lack of support and services for students who need more individualized attention, especially those in special education. As mentioned in the previous section, students in smaller, low-income, and/or rural districts and schools also do not have the same access to academic support as those in other areas. Former educators attributed inadequate student support to low staffing and insufficient funding (see also "State-Level Policies and Politicization"). Current educators posited that the frequent turnover in teachers is disruptive for students, and former educators said that replacement teachers are not always qualified and effective.

Finally, current educators felt that the mixed messages they receive from the State on education policy, like English language models of instruction, are also hindering student success. Current educators felt mastery-based learning would benefit students as a solution to the issues mentioned in this section.

> **"So, I really do think that a move towards a less age-based system, a less traditional sitting in a classroom, in a class for a certain amount of time system is the problem. One of the things I really love about more virtual schools is it's less that. So, students can take the classes that they're actually at the level for...They can do the work when it works for them at the pace that works for them, whether that's slower or faster. "** *– Current educator focus group*

Issues in Rural Areas

Current and former educators expressed that rural districts and schools can have unique issues. As mentioned earlier in this section, educators believe rural schools receive less funding and resources than other areas of the State.

> **"I mean, when you look at schools in the Valley, there's schools with pools and beautiful weight rooms and gymnasiums that are named after people and all of these brand-new facilities. And our rural students, because of the nature of funding schools...simply do not have those types of facilities.**
> *– Current educator focus group*

One former educator said they felt ignored, and it was like the state did not care about their school because they were in a rural area. Despite the smaller amounts of funding and resources available, former educators emphasized that they're still asked to do the same things as everyone else. Lower salaries offered in rural areas also mean that rural districts and schools have a more challenging time recruiting and retaining staff, making it even harder to

accomplish what is needed with fewer resources. Some former educators expressed that those in rural areas can take on multiple roles at their schools to keep things afloat.

> **"I mean, they're the testing coordinator, they're the art teacher. They're also the second-grade teacher. They're also being asked to take this professional development so they can build capacity for literacy instruction so they can help support the science of reading in their schools."**
> *– Former educator interview*

As noted at the beginning of this section, survey results showed that 55% of current educators agreed that workplace conditions are a reason they stay in the profession. This percentage did not change when current educators were disaggregated by those who reported teaching at urban versus rural schools. Likewise, improving workplace conditions was similarly rated among rural and urban educators; however, a slightly higher percentage of rural educators (72%) compared to urban educators (67%) said that improving workplace conditions was an important solution to address educator retention. Educators in the focus groups and interviews would like to see more investment in rural schools and more equitable distribution of funding and resources.

Educators also discussed how diverse the student population in rural areas can be, with students often traveling from other places to attend. For example, a boarding school system in Flagstaff allows students from places like the Navajo Nation to attend school there.[13]

> **"So, I have students from Hopi and Navajo Nations, I have Latino students who are newly immigrated to the area, I have families who have been living there for years, and we have white children as well, and then, of course, other demographics. So, just the racial and socioeconomic and the cultural backgrounds that are represented in my classroom are not seen in other places in Arizona. And that is uniquely rural."** *– Former educator interview*

Current educators also expressed that such a diverse student pool can present unique challenges to rural schools. For example, new students who travel from elsewhere have often learned different standards and are now behind according to their new school's standards. These students can also experience issues such as language barriers and frequent moves due to their parent's jobs or a lack of affordable housing. Transportation can also be a significant issue for rural students, as some can live far away from school, making attending a challenge.

> **"The methods of transportation are much more challenging than an urban school district for the basic fact that some of the children in my classroom literally lived an hour and a half to two hours away from the school that they attended."** *– Former educator interview*

Similarly, checking in with families about students' attendance or other issues can be difficult when they live far from the school campus. It also becomes more challenging for students to benefit from after-school activities.

Finally, current educators also expressed that parents in rural areas can be less involved with their child's school or may place less importance on school compared to urban areas. In addition to language barriers and transportation issues, educators said that parents sometimes have to take time off from work to make school meetings or events.

> **"Sometimes, I have parents who one parent works the night shift and the other one works the day shift, and so, they don't even see each other. And then I ask them to come at 7:00 PM for a fun movie night or whatever, or a literacy event. And parents are struggling so much that it's hard to get that engagement and it's hard for us to effectively support families."** *– Current educator focus group*

Resource Gaps Summary

Most data related to resource gaps came from the current educator focus groups and former educator interviews. Educators expressed concerns about their schools' physical condition and relayed the impact of teaching in poor and under-resourced conditions on students. Educators also felt that funding and resources are inequitably distributed across districts and schools across the state, with a majority of funds going to larger, higher-income districts and urban areas. Similarly, educators highlighted a need for more investment in rural schools.

Table 18. Resource gaps issues and solutions from educators

Issues impacting retention	Solutions from educators
Poor physical conditions	• Provide educational supplies free of charge • Improve depreciating school buildings and facilities
Differences between school funding	• Implement equitable distribution of funding and resources across the state and by school type
Inadequate support for students	• Provide more support staff • Implement mastery-based learning
Rural issues	• Increase investment in rural districts and schools

Professionalization

> **"I've noticed a huge rise in the number of long-term subs and teachers coming through alternative pathways and things like that in our district. So, positions are getting filled, but they're not always getting filled with people with the same kind of qualifications or people who are there permanently."**
>
> *– Current educator focus group*

Issues with Professionalization

Current educators in the focus groups and former educators who were interviewed identified the following issues and solutions related to professionalization. Specifically, educators felt challenges and barriers to retention related to educator certification, pre-service education, and novice educator quality.

Certification and Education

Educator Quality

Certification and Education

Educators expressed frustration with certifications and endorsements required by the State, including challenges to obtaining them and their cost. Former educators with families felt it was hard to return to school to obtain certification while working full-time and being parents.

> **"I couldn't find time to juggle work, juggle taking care of two people, plus going to school. And that really made it hard."** *– Former educator interview*

One former educator felt it should be easier for people to return to school. In addition to difficulties returning to school to obtain certification, current educators said there are so many ways to become an educator that it can be confusing to choose the best pathway or program. For example, degree programs are often inconsistent in what they include, leading to graduates with professional deficiencies and without certification and certain endorsements (i.e., subject area, special education). Current educators felt that all Arizona education degree programs should be uniform and consistent in their offerings, resulting in graduates with the competency and certifications needed to be effective educators.

> **"I don't know if it's something the state can do, but maybe looking into the programs offered, and discussing with the universities and saying, 'Here's the requirements for a full certification with no deficiencies. You need to meet all of those requirements.'"**
>
> *– Current educator focus group*

Some educators also felt frustrated by certification requirements for those who have degrees and experience teaching in the classroom.

> **"If I wanted to move to a different school, I had to go and pay for a program to get a little piece of paper saying that although I've taught for 11 plus years and I have a master's degree, I can't teach at a public school because I don't have my certification. So, just all of these little legislative loopholes and hoops that you have to jump through in order to teach makes it difficult."**
>
> *– Current educator focus group*

Former educators suggested that people with experience teaching in classrooms should be offered different routes to certification. Educators were also frustrated with the cost of obtaining certifications and endorsements. This was especially true for those who have to pay for required certifications despite having degrees and experience in the classroom.

> **"So, those additional certificates that we have, we have to pay for, and that just doesn't make sense to me, to have these credentials and you have to pay for it. That's just insane to me."** *– Current educator focus group*

Frustration over costs was also felt by those who graduated with deficiencies and those who had to renew certifications. Overall, educators felt these costs could deter people from entering the profession. Notably, 24% of former educator survey respondents agreed that the cost of renewal was a reason for leaving the profession.

Poor Educator Quality

Educators also expressed concerns related to the quality of educators entering the profession. There was a perception that many educators enter the profession without knowing how to manage a classroom, without mastery of their teaching content, and that these educators come in and do the bare minimum.

> **"We have teachers on our campus...that probably shouldn't be there anymore. For example, a social studies teacher that gets to the eighth week of a nine-week quarter and hasn't entered a single grade yet and doesn't leave sub plans and things that I just am like, 'oh my gosh, how can you do these things?'"** *– Current educator focus groups*

Educators feel that these educators are not invested in the profession and making a difference and are ultimately not meeting the needs of students.

Poor or limited pre-service experiences were discussed as causes for the lack of high-quality educators. Educators felt that new teachers did not always receive adequate pre-service education and training, such as student teaching, which left them unaware of what to expect. Educators shared that the student teaching experience does not always prepare people for their own classroom since these experiences don't always include learning about how to manage a classroom. In some cases, student teachers lack quality mentorship because veteran teachers do not want to take on the additional work that comes with a mentee (see also "Workload").

> **"I don't think the student teaching experience really prepares teachers for what they're getting themselves into."** *– Current educator focus group*

Another challenge is that educators transitioning from another career lack adequate classroom experience. To address issues with pre-service education, current educators felt it is necessary to support student teachers with good mentors and to design coursework in degree programs that prepare educators for the realities of the classroom.

Participants also discussed the drop in professional standards as another cause for poor quality educators. For example, educators mentioned that a degree is no longer required to teach. They also noted an increase in the number of long-term subs and those coming into the profession through alternative pathways, such as uncertified para-professionals being asked to teach due to educator shortages. Educators also felt that emergency certification does not lead to effective educators.

> **"Also, the emergency certification and how you were valuable in another field doesn't necessarily equate to making you being able to teach reading. And I think that we're asking too much from some people to try and learn the science and pedagogy of being a teacher and also teach at the same time. And that just devalues the profession."** *– Former educator interview*

The overall sentiment was that the drops in standards devalue the profession and negatively impact veteran teachers who compensate for the lack of quality of novice educators.

> **"I wish they would stop sending the message that everyone can teach. 'Oh, just quit your job, come, easy two years, and you can be a classroom teacher.' I think that lowers the level of professionality."**
> *– Current educator focus groups*

To address the issues identified around professionalization, educators felt that the standards for becoming an educator should be increased and that incentives should be provided to those committed to teaching, such as funding national board certification and further education.

Professionalization Summary

Educators expressed frustration around the certifications required for teaching in Arizona. They discussed how the cost and burden of obtaining credentials are issues impacting retention and how educators with degrees and/or teaching experience should be offered alternative ways to obtain certification. Educators also felt that teachers are entering the profession unprepared and under-qualified and that the lack of consistent education training programs across the state contributes to this issue. Educators would like to see standards raised for becoming an educator and incentives provided to those who commit to the profession.

Table 19. Professionalization issues and solutions from educators

Issues impacting retention	Solutions from educators
Certification and education	- Make it easier for educators to go back to school - Make degree programs uniform and consistent, resulting in full certification with no deficiencies - Offer educators with prior degrees and experience in the classroom alternative routes to certification
Poor educator quality	- Support student teachers with quality mentors - Include classroom management and other skills into degree coursework - Increase the standards for becoming an educator - Provide incentives to those who are committed to the profession

Respect

> **"...in most other countries, educators are considered a very well-respected profession and are venerated in a way as experts in their field. And we've moved away from that somehow in this country."** – *Current educator focus group*

Issues with Respect

Over 60% of current educators did not agree that feeling respected was a factor that encouraged them to stay in the profession. A few differences among subgroups of educators emerged. For example, respect was one of the retention factors with the largest discrepancy between satisfied and unsatisfied educators. As seen in **Figure 6**, 60% of satisfied educators (i.e., those who have not considered leaving the profession in the past 12 months) agreed that feeling respected was a reason they remain in the profession. In contrast, only 29% of unsatisfied educators agreed.

Figure 6. Satisfied educators reported higher agreement than unsatisfied educators when asked about respect as a retention factor.

"I feel respected as an educator"
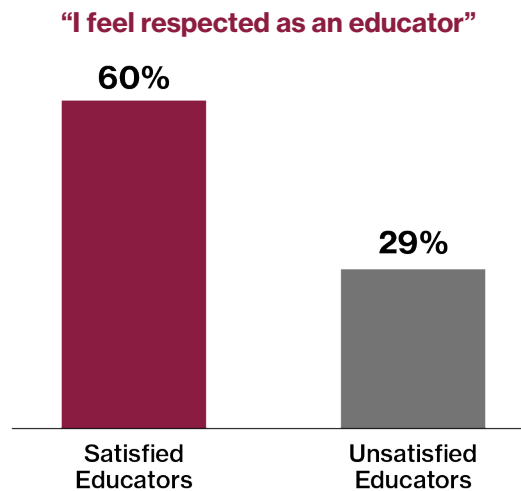
Additionally, 44% of rural educators said respect was a positive retention factor, whereas 36% of urban educators agreed. This was one of four items with the largest discrepancy in agreement between rural and urban educators (eight percentage points).

Figure 7. Rural educators reported higher agreement than urban educators when asked about respect as a retention factor.

"I feel respected as an educator"
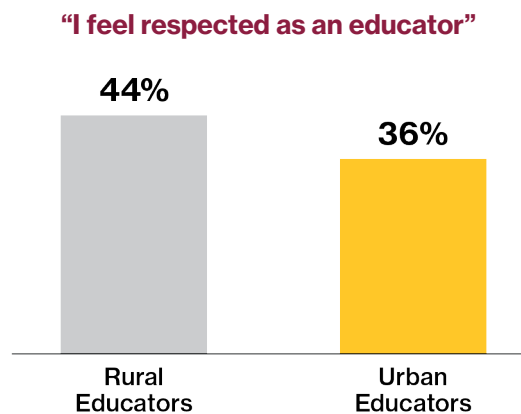
Moreover, 69% of former educators indicated that not feeling respected as an educator was a reason they left the profession – and this was one of the top five factors with the highest agreement among former educators. Additional perspectives on issues of respect from current educator focus groups and former educator interviews are described below.

Respect

Educators felt that many of the issues they experience stem from a general lack of respect for educators. This lack of respect could be felt at all levels – from society at large, their local community, and parents at home. Some educators expressed that their communities do not enthusiastically support them because of a poor outlook on the profession and incorrect assumptions about what educators do. Part of this negative outlook stems from national media and political discourse on K-12 education that frames educators as lazy and public district schools as failing children (see also "State-Level Policies and Politicization"). Educators felt that this larger narrative has resulted in a loss of trust in the educator's professional discretion by parents, who think they should have control over the classroom. Educators also expressed that many parents view educators as "glorified babysitters" rather than important figures in their child's development.

> **"We're doing real work in the classroom. And we need to be viewed as that, not just, 'There's a place that we can dump our kids all day long, and they're going to be safe for a few hours.'"**
> *– Current educator focus group*

Outside of their local communities, educators also felt a lack of respect for their profession via things like inadequate salaries and how they are treated by leadership. Educators expressed that the lack of funding from the state for increased educator salaries and resources reflects the state's lack of valuing and respecting educators (see also "Salary and Job Benefits"). Further, educators said they do not feel valued and respected by their local district and school leadership, who do not treat them as professionals regarding discretion in the classroom and involvement in school and policy decision-making (see also "School Leadership").

> **"I think a big reason is just the loss of respect for the profession that we've seen over the last four or five years and maybe beyond that. It feels like we're no longer viewed as professionals who have gone through college and training and extensive hours of professional development to be there as an expert to teach and guide children."** *– Current educator focus group*

Some educators also felt that the profession is looked down upon due to the lack of rigor required to become an educator today. The idea that "anyone" can become an educator through emergency certifications and other alternative avenues has left some educators feeling like the profession is being devalued (see also "Professionalization").

Finally, some educators felt they were not treated as human beings with needs like everyone else. For example, they are expected to sacrifice the needs of their own families and well-being to do all that is expected of them as educators.

> **"I feel like, as teachers, we're not treated like we're human beings. Of course, we're here for the kids, but we also have our own kids that we need to take care of. We have our own families, we have our own lives and our own medical things, and I feel like with everything that's going on, people have forgot that we need things too."** *– Current educator focus group*

Educators believe we need to find ways to increase respect for the profession at all levels (national, state, local), although methods for doing so require further discussion.

"...more community support for the profession and a realization that we are teaching the future. We're teaching the leaders of the future, and that has weight, and that's an incredibly important job...if there were no teachers, there would be no other professions. I just wish that, that positivity was spread more so than the negativity." – *Current educator focus group*

Respect Summary

Educators discussed how respect is an underlying factor contributing to many of the issues negatively impacting retention in Arizona. A prominent theme across data sources was the perception that neither educators nor the education profession are respected by society, local communities, and parents. Furthermore, educators associated the issue of respect with many other issues discussed in this report that are harmful to educator retention.

Table 20. Respect issues and solutions from educators

Issues impacting retention	Solutions from educators
Lack of respect	- Identify ways to increase respect for the profession at all levels (national, state, local)

Factors Supporting Retention

Findings from focus groups and interviews mirror the survey results regarding positive retention factors. Current educators indicated that they are staying in the profession because they feel they are making a difference in students' lives, feel a sense of community with their colleagues, and have supportive school leadership.

"It's just the rewards from the first day of school until you see them graduate. For example, I was just invited to the high school graduation of a student in my first class. And that's what we do this for."

– Current educator focus group

Other positive retention factors identified in focus groups and interviews were access to professional development opportunities and mentorship, and that the education career was a good fit for their personal lives. This was often the case for educators with children who wished to have a work schedule similar to their children's school schedule.

Summary

Educators' primary motivation for remaining in the profession is feeling like they make a difference in students' lives. This was the clear retention front-runner across the surveys, focus groups, and interviews. In addition, supportive leadership and feeling a sense of community at school were also among the top factors identified as positive for educator retention.

The table below provides an overview of the issues and potential solutions for strengthening educator retention in Arizona, illuminated through data collected from over 8,500 current and former educators across the state.

Table 21. Issues impacting retention and solutions identified by educators

Salary and Job Benefits

Only 16% of current educators agreed that a satisfactory salary drives them to remain in the profession.*

Issues impacting retention

Salary
- Inadequate salary
- Unpaid duties and hours
- Pay differences
- Salary compression

Benefits
- Health insurance
- Retirement
- Paid leave

Solutions from educators
- Offer competitive salaries
- Offer paid student teaching positions, tuition waivers
- Provide compensation for additional duties and off-of-contract hours
- Provide clear expectations in contracts
- Implement a salary schedule
- Provide increased pay for more experience, education, and certifications

- Lower insurance premiums
- Provide better coverage/expand options
- Provide the same coverage across districts
- Provide more robust retirement packages
- Place all schools on ASRS
- Increase paid time off (PTO)

Workload

Only 33% of current educators agreed that a satisfactory workload drives them to remain in the profession.*

Issues impacting retention

- Too much work
- Not enough time
- Lack of staff support

Solutions from educators
- Hire more certified and classified staff
- Implement classroom caps and uniform class sizes
- Provide clear expectations of workload and duties in contract
- Compensate certified staff for off-of-contract hours
- Ensure preparation time is available

School Leadership

Nearly 80% of current educators felt that providing incentives to retain high-quality leadership is very or extremely important for improving retention.

Issues impacting retention

- Lack of support
- Lack of appreciation and consultation

Solutions from educators
- Provide more support via resources and advocating for educators
- Provide adequate resources and training for new standards and initiatives
- Hire and retain quality leadership
- Show more appreciation to educators
- Have leadership teach in the classroom
- Allow educators to influence the policies and practices that impact them
- Allow educators the opportunity to contribute to decision-making, especially over standards and initiative

*Educators were asked, "Thinking about your experience teaching over the past 3 years, please select your agreement with whether the following factors drive you to remain an educator."

Mental Health

Nearly 75% of each survey sample said that providing mental health support to educators and students is very or extremely important for educator retention, 80% of former educators left the profession because they felt burned out.

Issues impacting retention

- Poor mental health
- Student mental health and behavior

Solutions from educators

- Prioritize educator and student mental health
- Enable educators to have a healthy work-life balance
- Listen to the concerns of educators
- Increase expressions of appreciation from leadership
- Provide more classroom support to reduce workload and subsequent burnout/stress
- Ensure there are dedicated support staff for serious student mental health and behavioral issues
- Hold students accountable for poor behavior
- Increase school leadership and parental support for student mental health and behavior

State-Level Policies

Only 7% of current educators agreed that feeling supported by state-level policies drives them to stay;* 70% of former educators left because they felt micro-managed by state policies.

Issues impacting retention

- Limited by state policies
- Politicization

Solutions from educators

- Provide more funding for district schools
- Involve educators in policymaking
- Re-evaluate ESA program
- Increase societal support for K-12 education

Career

Less than half of current educators agreed that they remain in the profession because of the training and mentorship available or professional development provided. Less than 25% said opportunities for career advancement drive them to stay. 57% of former educators left the profession due to frustration over their career trajectory, and 49% agreed that one reason they left was a lack of opportunities for career advancement.

Issues impacting retention

- Lack of training and mentorship
- Lack of professional development and opportunities for career advancement
- Amount and frequency of student testing
- Absence of a sense of professional community
- Dissatisfaction with teacher evaluations
- Career dissatisfaction

Solutions from educators

- Provide more relevant trainings
- Provide built-in contract time for training
- Establish and continue mentorship programs
- Ensure mentors are available and supportive
- Provide more meaningful and relevant professional development opportunities
- Provide more opportunities within and outside of districts
- Provide built-in contract time for professional development
- Provide more opportunities for advancement outside of the classroom
- Reduce student testing requirements
- Focus on how to improve scores for students vs. comparing students
- Focus on building community within and among districts and schools
- Enable educators to foster relationships and collaborations
- Ensure a positive school culture
- Re-evaluate the teacher evaluation system
- Provide clear expectations for evaluations

Resource Gaps

55% of current educators agreed that satisfactory workplace conditions, such as facilities and classrooms, keep them in their positions. Almost half (48%) of former educators reported that workplace conditions was one of the reasons they left the profession.

Issues impacting retention

- Poor physical conditions
- Differences between districts and schools
- Inadequate support for students
- Rural issues

Solutions from educators

- Provide educational supplies free of charge
- Implement equitable distribution of funding and resources across the state and by school type
- Provide more support staff
- Implement mastery-based learning
- Increase investment in rural districts and schools

Professionalization

24% of former educators agreed that the renewal cost was a reason for leaving the profession.

Issues impacting retention

- Certification and education
- Poor educator quality

Solutions from educators

- Make it easier for educators to go back to school
- Make degree programs uniform and consistent, resulting in full certification with no deficiencies
- Offer educators with prior degrees and experience in the classroom alternative routes to certification
- Support student teachers with quality mentors
- Include classroom management and other skills into degree coursework
- Increase the standards for becoming an educator
- Provide incentives to those who are committed to the profession

Respect

62% of former educators did not agree that feeling respected drives them to remain in the profession. Respect as a retention factor evidenced higher agreement among satisfied (60%) versus unsatisfied (29%) educators.

Issues impacting retention

- Lack of respect

Solutions from educators

- Identify ways to increase respect for the profession at all levels (national, state, local)

Appendix

Table 22. Demographics of survey participants: current and former Arizona educators

		Current educators		Former educators	
		n	%	*n*	%
By County	Maricopa and Pima Counties	5,638	72	601	82
	Balance of State	2,150	28	131	18
Locality	Urban	5,388	69	594	81
	Rural	2,336	30	132	18
	No response	64	<1	6	1
Years in the Profession	1 year	209	3	13	2
	2-3 years	523	7	33	5
	4-6 years	896	12	75	10
	7-10 years	1,157	15	100	14
	11-20 years	2,512	32	197	27
	20+ years	2,491	32	310	42
	No response			2	<1
Education Path	No degree or preparation program	63	<1	7	1
	4-Year Degree	3,806	49	346	47
	Masters or Post-Baccalaureate	3,603	46	355	48
	Alternative, Grow-Your-Own, or Other	303	4	23	3
	No response	13	<1	1	<1
School Type	District (including CTE districts)	7,152	92	661	90
	Charter	636	8	71	10
Title I status	Yes	5,372	69	X	X
	No	2,351	30	X	X
	No response	65	<1	X	X
Age	18-24	160	2.1	6	0.8
	25-34	1,285	16.5	103	14.1
	35-44	2,004	25.7	156	21.3
	45-54	2,562	32.9	133	18.2
	55-59	878	11.3	88	12
	60-64	595	7.6	103	14.1
	65-74	241	3.1	124	16.9
	75 or older	11	0.1	9	1.2
	Prefer not to say	47	0.6	10	1.4
	No response	5	0.1	X	X
Gender	Woman	6,028	77	593	81
	Man	1,566	20	121	17
	Non-binary	23	<1	1	<1
	Transgender Woman	2	<1	0	0
	Transgender Man	1	<1	0	0
	Not listed	2	<1	0	0
	More than one identity	23	<1	15	2
	Prefer not to say	105	1	1	<1
	No response	38	<1	1	<1
Race	American Indian	129	2	10	1
	Asian	177	2	21	3
	Black or African American	182	2	21	3
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	14	<1	0	0

		Current educators		Former educators	
		n	%	*n*	%
Race (continued)	White	6,117	79	579	79
	Not listed	544	7	35	5
	Multiracial	165	2	14	2
	Prefer not to say	392	5	47	6
	No response	68	1	5	1
Hispanic or Latino	Yes	1,427	18	106	14
	No	5,985	77	588	80
	Prefer not to say	323	4	32	4
	No response	53	<1	6	1
Position	Regular classroom teacher	5,757	74	536	73
	Itinerant teacher	143	2	13	2
	Long-term substitute	57	1	5	1
	Special education teacher	852	11	74	10
	Interventionist	360	5	17	2
	ELL teacher	159	2	29	4
	Master teacher	393	5	55	8
	No response	67	1	3	<1
Certification	Elementary education	4,143	53	423	29
	Secondary education	2,607	33	268	18
	Middle grades	1,260	16	181	12
	Subject matter expert	1,196	15	147	10
	Special education	1,174	15	108	7
	Early childhood	1,046	13	124	8
	Career and Technical Education (CTE)	555	7	47	3
	Specials/Electives	544	7	58	4
	Substitute	383	5	71	5
	Emergency	157	2	13	<1
	I am not certified	127	2	5	<1
	Athletic coaching	122	2	13	<1
	Alternative (intern or teacher in residence)	116	1	7	<1
	Specialized STEM 6-12	47	1	14	1
	International	42	1	3	<1
	JROTC	17	<1	1	<1
	No selection	11	<1	0	0
National Board Certification	Yes	759	9.7	X	X
	No, I'm not interested	4,639	59.6	X	X
	No, but I am interested	2,038	26.2	X	X
	My certification is in process	304	3.9	X	X
	No response	48	<1	X	X
School-provided resources	Special education teachers	7,235	93	643	88
	Counselors	6,161	79	502	69
	Librarians, media specialists, or similar roles	6,137	79	514	70
	School psychologists	5,857	75	496	68
	Full-time nurses	5,248	67	411	56
	English Language Learner (ELL) teachers	5,187	67	420	57
	Instructional coaches	5,179	66	402	55
	Education support professionals	4,404	57	352	48
	Interventionists	4,360	56	304	42
	Social workers	3,438	44	255	35
	Parent/community engagement liaisons	3,133	40	207	28
	Title I specialists	2,512	32	263	36
	No selection	63	1	14	2

Table 23. ESP survey descriptive statistics

Position		n	%
	School counselor	224	24%
	Other	218	23%
	Paraeducator	133	14%
	School psychologist	104	11%
	Speech-language pathologist	89	10%
	School social worker	45	5%
	Clerical services	43	5%
	Health and student services	26	3%
	Transportation services	14	2%
	Technical services	13	1%
	Skilled trades	8	1%
	Security services	7	1%
	Food services	6	1%
	No response	3	0%
Title I Status		n	%
	Yes	616	66%
	No	292	31%
School Type		n	%
	District	889	95%
	Charter	44	5%
	Urban	627	67%
	Rural	293	31%
	No response	13	1%

Table 24. Demographics of Focus Group and Interview Participants

		Focus Groups	Interviews
By County	Maricopa and Pima Counties	34	12
	Balance of State	16	4
Locality	Rural	17	9
	Urban	33	7
Years in the Profession	1 year	0	2
	2-3 years	0	1
	4-6 years	7	3
	7-10 years	10	3
	11-20 years	19	6
	20+ years	14	1
Gender	Woman	45	14
	Man	5	2
	Other	0	0
Race	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0
	Asian, Asian American, or Asian Indian	1	0
	Black or African American	3	3
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0
	White or European American	38	10
	Not listed	5	2
	Prefer not to say	2	1
Hispanic or Latino	Yes	12	4
	No	37	12
	Prefer not to say	1	0
School type	District (including CTE schools)	43	12
	Charter	6	4
Teacher type	Itinerant teacher	2	0
	Long-term substitute	1	0
	Special education teacher	9	3
	Interventionist	3	0
	ELL teacher	2	0
	Master teacher	12	1
	Classroom teacher not listed above	20	12
Likelihood of leaving in next 1-2 years (focus groups only)	Very likely	1	X
	Likely	5	X
	Somewhat likely	14	X
	Somewhat unlikely	13	X
	Unlikely	9	X
	Very unlikely	**7**	**X**

Endnotes

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2023 Arizona

Educator Retention

Working Conditions Study

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