

Why Educators Are Leaving the Profession

Qualitative Analysis of Comments from
2019 Launch Michigan Survey



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Introduction

Summary & Method

- Building on the results of the 2019 Launch Michigan educator survey, this work examined the open-ended survey question (Q31): ***“Is there any other reason you are thinking about leaving education?”*** This question was only asked of those who said they would leave education and was answered by 1,287 total respondents.¹
- Each answer was coded into response themes, including emergent themes not already present in the closed-ended questions. The goal was to determine common issues that came up in the written answers provided, and determine any trends or intensity in those responses.
- This report presents the summary of the findings from a secondary qualitative analysis of the responses completed by Public Policy Associates, Inc. (PPA), for the Michigan Education Association (MEA).

¹ Emma White Research, *2019 Educator Survey* (Lansing, MI: Launch Michigan, March 2019), accessed March 28, 2019, <https://launchmichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Launch-MI-Full-Report-2019-FINAL.pdf>.

Considerations

- Each individual response was coded and the percentage of respondents that indicated each coded response or theme (e.g., inadequate pay) was calculated.
- Respondents may have indicated multiple responses to the open-ended question (a respondent may have indicated inadequate pay and workload as reasons they are considering leaving education). Given that one respondent could have indicated multiple reasons (or responses) for considering leaving the profession, the total percentage of respondents that indicated any given response adds up to more than 100 percent.
- Responses were identified by theme and categorized around those themes. The research team met throughout the project and used a code-agreement process to ensure reliability.
- There was a great deal of interconnectivity among the themes and categories, with many of the open-ended responses reiterating response options that were provided for in the previous question (e.g., better salaries in other fields, a lack of support from various stakeholders, and a lack of respect for the profession).

Previous Findings

Only **25%**
of educators would
recommend the career
to others

- In previous findings presented by **Emma White Research (EWR)**, who conducted the survey for Launch Michigan, educators shared several concerns about the future of the teaching profession with 12% expressing a desire to leave education.
- Educators reported that lack of support from policymakers and politicians (72%) and lack of respect for the profession (66%) most negatively affected their professional satisfaction.
- Factors influencing the desire of educators to leave the profession included: class sizes (having larger class sizes predicted a desire to leave); lack of empowerment; and feeling constrained.
- In the statistical analysis, educators also expressed that they felt:
 - Worn down by heavy workloads, bureaucracy, and excessive paperwork
 - There was too much time and effort invested in statewide standardized exams
 - Concerned about their pay

Confirmatory Findings

- The responses included in this report echo previous findings from educators and the 2019 Launch Michigan educator survey's closed-ended questions—with frustrations expressed by educators about inadequate pay and the underfunding of schools.
- Other shared themes include:
 - A lack of respect or feeling valued
 - Concerns about workload and hours
 - A lack of support
 - The erosion of professional rights

Findings

Summary of Findings

- The respondents for this open-ended question reported lacking autonomy to tailor their educational approach to their classrooms—constrained by mandated (sometimes scripted) curricula focused on increasing test scores.
- Educators from this sample reported resentment toward having the evaluation of their professional capabilities tied to the testing and the performance of their students when there are other socioeconomic factors connected to such performance.
- Educators also reported that they lacked the time and resources to address other issues beyond performance with their students.
- Respondents said the amount of effort they put in is not acknowledged or rewarded, their work-life balance is askew, and they are discouraged because they do not believe things will change.

Categories

The following six categories emerged from the responses to this question (Q31) and are explored further in this report:

- Inadequate pay
- Workload, health, and family considerations
- Respect, behavior, and discipline
- Professional rights
- Legislative and other policy requirements
- Other demands and lack of support

Inadequate Pay

31.5%

of respondents

405

total responses

- Educators responding to this question reported considering leaving the profession because they do not feel they are paid in accordance with their level of education and experience—with some reporting not receiving meaningful pay raises in years. In addition, many indicated that the rate of pay was not sufficient to support their family or pay down student loan debt.

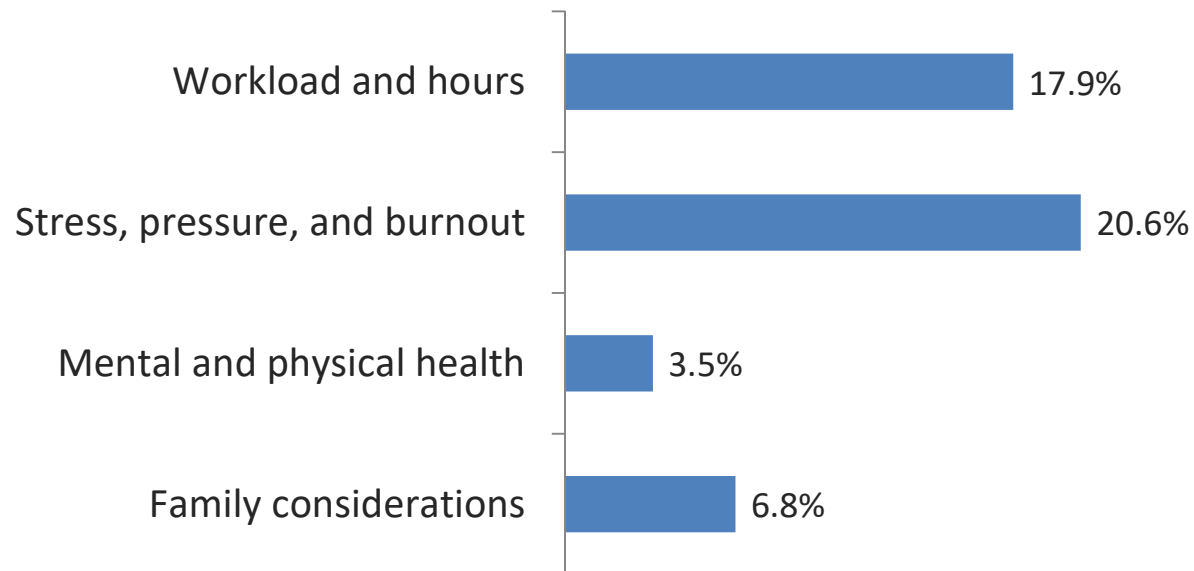
Inadequate Pay

Quotes:

- *“...Our salaries go down every year with more work piled on us daily. I cannot support my own family. The cost of buying things for my classroom...”*
- *“No, the money I make is not equivalent to my education or experience...”*
- *“I cannot support myself. I work 4 other jobs. I work evenings, weekends, summers, and holidays...”*
- *“In a few years, I will need a better paying job to support my family and send my kids to college.”*
- *“Underpaid and unappreciated. Expectations with little support and compensation that doesn’t match the amount of time or social /emotional fatigue that goes into this job.”*

Workload, Health, and Family Considerations

The following themes were grouped together
in this category:



Workload and Hours

17.9%

of respondents

- A majority of these responses were related to the unreasonableness of additional hours (sometimes required) after the end of the school day and on weekends.
- Total responses: 231

Stress, Pressure, and Burnout

20.6%

of respondents

- The pressure and stress identified in these responses is related to the multitude of demands placed on educators; not feeling like they are making a difference; also related to testing and evaluation and feeling pressured to increase test scores while unable to address other socioeconomic barriers that students face.
- Total responses: 265

Mental and Physical Health

3.5%

of respondents

- This category is related to stress—with educators identifying the profession as a contributor to a decline in both their mental and physical health. Educators also have concerns that the profession is beginning to have an impact on their personal well-being more broadly.
- Total responses: 45

Family Considerations

6.8%

of respondents

- This is related to both pay and perceived workload—and responses indicated that the demands of the job leave them with limited opportunities to spend time with their family, and their income-level is insufficient to take vacations or save for college.
- Total responses: 88

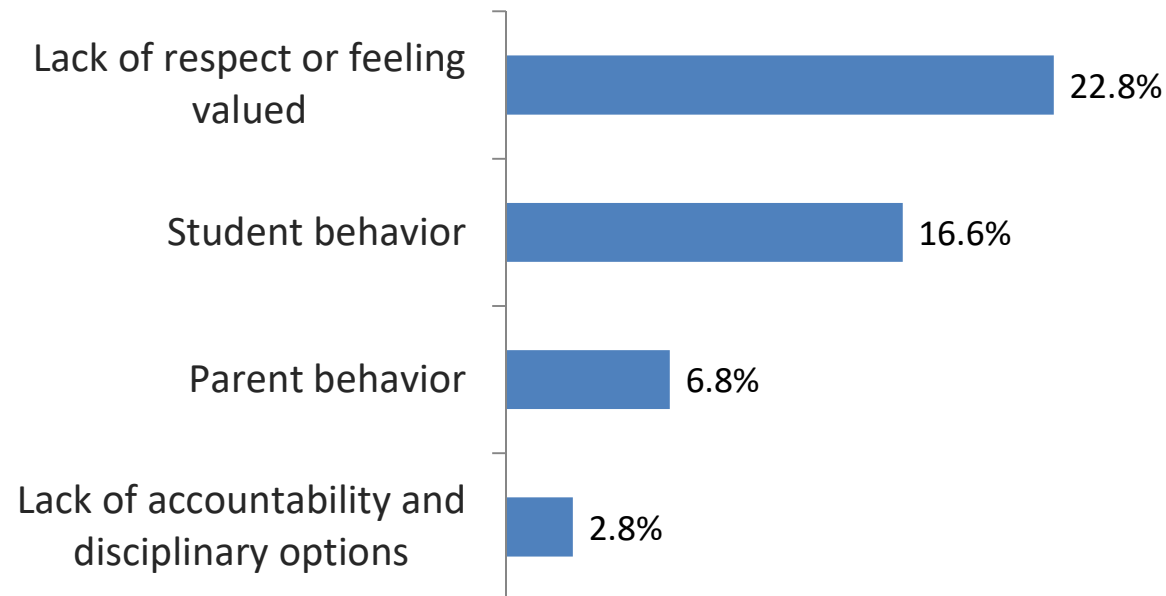
Workload, Health, and Family Considerations

Quotes:

- *...I'm so tired and work 9+ hours a day (and still feel overwhelmed). It's incredibly unhealthy and impacts my relationship with my own family..."*
- *"I am burnt [sic] out. My health suffers from the undue stress and lack of caring from students/parents..."*
- *"Exhausting workload with bigger demands each year. "*
- *"Burnout is the biggest factor. I love teaching, but the emotional toll of lack of respect for [the] profession, growing class sizes, increasing workload, and stagnant or reduction in pay is making it increasingly harder to stay in this profession."*
- *"... I am emotionally depleted because of the trauma my students deal with. I feel like because of my workload, I cannot be a good parent."*

Respect, Behavior, and Discipline

The following themes were grouped together
in this category:



Lack of Respect or Feeling Valued

22.8%
of respondents

- These responses were related to a lack of respect or not feeling valued by students, parents or caregivers, administrators, or their community; and feelings that the profession is not valued.
- Total responses: 294

Student Behavior

16.6%
of respondents

- Many of these responses were related to a lack of respect towards teachers and other school staff by students; a lack of respect toward other students; feeling threatened; and fears of physical violence.
- Total responses: 213

Parent Behavior

6.8%

of respondents

- These responses reflected comments regarding respect toward teachers and other educators by parents and a lack of involvement or communication regarding students.
- Total responses: 88

Lack of Accountability and Disciplinary Options

2.8%

of respondents

- These responses were related to concerns that administrators were catering to the desires of parents; that students were getting away with poor behavior; and educators having few options for dealing with poor student behavior.
- Total responses: 36

Respect, Behavior, and Discipline

Quotes:

- *“...I don't feel safe at work at times. Have been assaulted and it is assumed that I will just stand there and take it. Seclusion and Restraint policies have made it difficult to keep students and myself safe.”*
- *“Behavior in the classroom has become a huge problem. Students have zero respect for the things teachers have to buy out of their own pockets. They also have zero respect for teachers.”*
- *“...I LOVE working with my students, but I am tired of the lack of parental support that results in student apathy, less practice and support at home, and ultimately blaming the teacher.”*
- *“Student behavior issues have increased, and our school seems timid in disciplining students; afraid to offend parents causing them to take their child to another school of choice.”*

Professional Rights and Benefits

The following themes were grouped together
in this category:



Professional Rights

9.3%

of respondents

- These responses are related to not being able to take time off when needed in addition to increases in contributions to benefits and retirement.
- Total responses: 120

Professional Expenses

3.3%

of respondents

- Professional expenses related to both inadequate pay and school funding, and the necessity to pay for continuing education requirements.
- Total responses: 42

Poor Working Conditions

6.7%

of respondents

- These responses related are to a lack of respect and included the physical state of school facilities, workplace discrimination, and perceived harassment.
- Total responses: 86

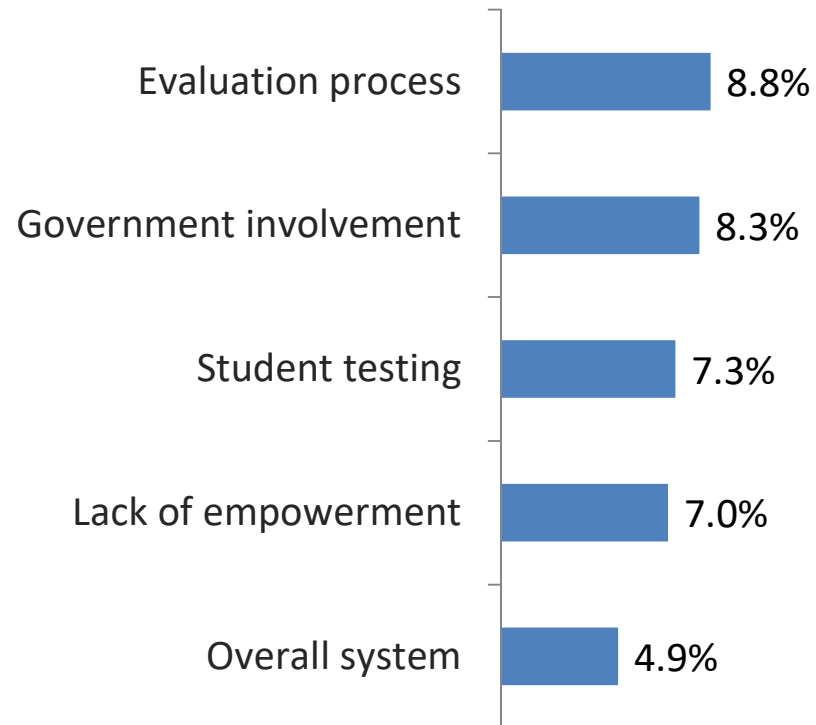
Professional Rights and Benefits

Quotes:

- *“My position limits me to 6 hours each day so the district doesn't need to offer health insurance. This makes other positions elsewhere more appealing [sic] because they offer a benefit package.”*
- *“Spending my salary to fund my classroom.”*
- *“Lack of reimbursement for required coursework.”*
- *“...The demand of the job has increased and over the past 10 years my salary was frozen for 5 years then reduced by 6% and that doesn't include the extra contribution I needed to pay for insurance and retirement. We aren't treated or paid like professionals.”*

Legislative and Other Policy Requirements

The following subthemes were grouped together
in this category:



Evaluation Process

8.8%

of respondents

- Responses related to administrators having too much influence over evaluations—with not enough experience in the classroom—faulting teachers unfairly or showing favoritism. Respondents also reported too much emphasis on student testing while not adequately accounting for those teaching students with higher needs.

Government Involvement

8.3%

of respondents

- Total responses: 113
- These responses related to the government mandating what and how they teach.
- Total responses: 107

Student Testing

7.3%

of respondents

- These responses related to the amount and use of student testing and was reported as a concern.
- Total responses: 94

Lack of Empowerment

7.0%

of respondents

- These responses were related to choices being made by others, such as the legislature and administrators; not being able to make decisions about what or how to teach; and changes being made without their input or against their will.
- Total responses: 90

Overall System

4.9%

of respondents

- Responses indicated disillusionment or dissatisfaction with the educational system as a whole; feeling like the system no longer serves children; or the system is headed in the wrong direction.
- Total responses: 63

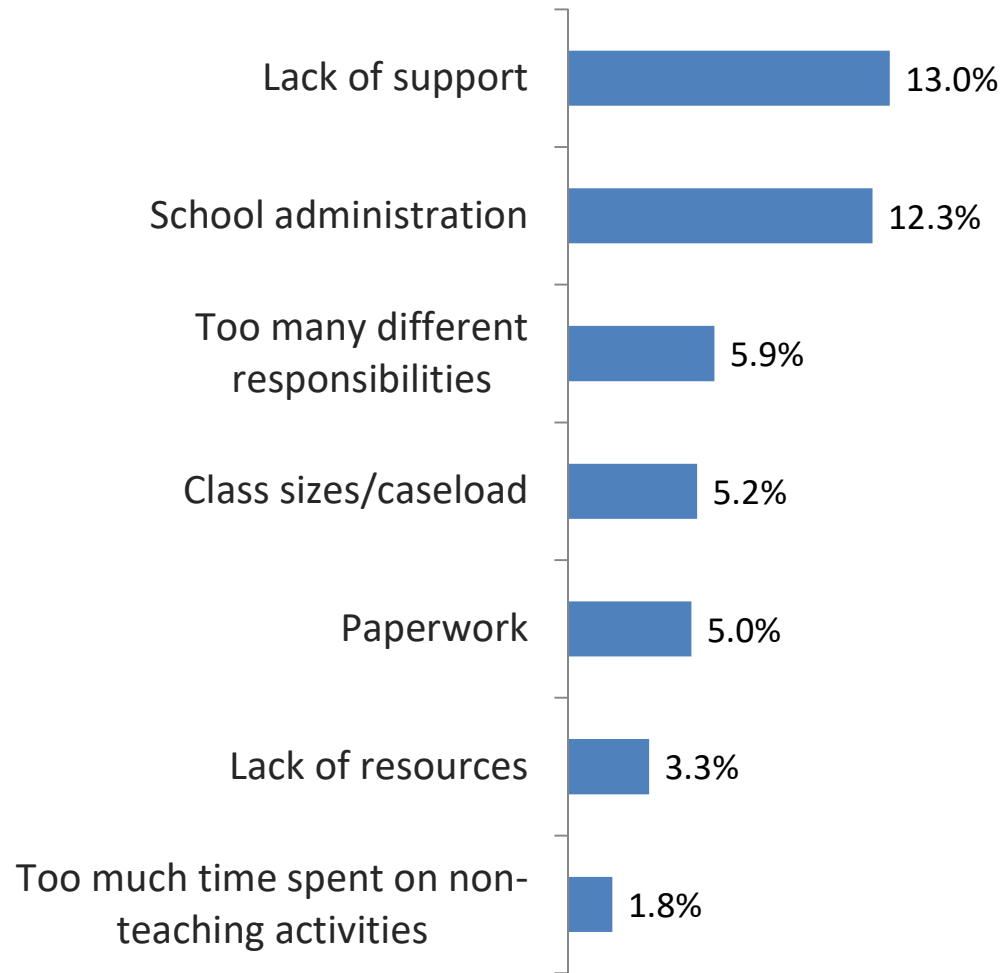
Legislative and Other Policy Requirements

Quotes:

- *“...When I came into this profession, I knew I would never be rich but if I worked hard the pension system and health care would be [sic] take care of me...Lawmakers keep undermining [sic] the system and changing the bar.”*
- *“The ‘model’ of the public schools is no longer effective or relevant to today's students and families. The ascendancy of test scores has crushed virtually all other considerations, including children's developmental needs.”*
- *“Legislators making rules they know nothing about. We have a shortage of teachers due to the legislative rulers vilifying teachers...”*
- *“...cannot deal with the emotional stress and burden of unnecessary paperwork and unfair evaluations such as using standardized testing as part of evaluations.”*

Other Demands and Lack of Support

The following other themes were grouped together in this category:



Additional

Additional responses included:

- Curriculum (1.2% of respondents)
- Teaching not being enjoyable anymore (4.9% of respondents)
- And “others,” for example, those related to politics, corporate culture, continuous change, having another job, having special education students in regular classrooms without necessary supports (representing 9.9% of respondents)

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