

Stress was leading reason teachers quit before pandemic, and COVID has made matters worse

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Stress was the most common reason teachers cited for leaving the profession before and during the pandemic, according to a RAND

Corporation survey of nearly 1,000 former public-school teachers. Three of four former teachers said work was often or always stressful in the most recent year in which they taught in a public school.

In fact, teachers cited stress nearly twice as often as insufficient pay as a reason for quitting. Most former teachers went on to take jobs with less or equal pay, with 3 in 10 taking jobs with no [health insurance](#) or [retirement benefits](#).

COVID-19 appears to have exacerbated teachers' stress. Almost half of public-school teachers who left the profession early and voluntarily since March 2020 listed COVID-19 as the main reason for their departure. COVID-19 has elevated stress by forcing teachers to work more hours and navigate an unfamiliar remote environment, made worse by frequent technical problems.

"Different COVID-19 stressors affected pandemic teachers differently," said Melissa Diliberti, lead author of the report and an assistant policy researcher at RAND, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization. "Insufficient pay and childcare responsibilities drove out younger teachers under 40, while older teachers were more likely to say [health conditions](#) made them leave."

Those still in education report the top attractions about their new education jobs are more flexibility in their schedules and a better work climate. Of teachers who left the profession and are currently employed, about 3 in 10 hold a non-education-related job, 3 in 10 have a different type of teaching position, and the rest are in non-teaching education jobs.

There is some good news for [school districts](#): A substantial share of former [public-school teachers](#) are willing to come back to the profession under certain conditions.

"Despite the many reasons [public school](#) teachers left, about half of those who left primarily because of COVID-19 said they would be willing to come back once most staff are vaccinated or there was regular rapid COVID-19 testing of staff and students," said Heather Schwartz, co-author and director of the Pre-K to 12 educational systems program at RAND.

The survey was conducted in December 2020 using the RAND American Educator Panels, nationally representative samples of educators who provide their feedback on important issues of educational policy and practice.

More information: "Stress Topped the Reasons Why Public School Teachers Quit, Even Before COVID-19" www.rand.org/

Provided by RAND Corporation

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