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TEACHING FOR TOMORROW

Educators on the Future of Their Profession



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Executive Summary and Key Findings

According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#),¹ nearly 4 million U.S. adults are employed as teachers in kindergarten through 12th grade classrooms. These teachers serve not only as educators, but also as role models and mentors to the roughly 50 million students in American K-12 schools.

Through [prior research about the life, school and workplace experiences of Gen Z](#),² the Walton Family Foundation and Gallup quantified the importance of an engaging K-12 experience to young people's outlook on the future, as well as their confidence in their ability to achieve their goals. Middle and high school students consistently share that their experiences in the classroom often do not feel interesting, important or motivating — but that when their schoolwork *is* engaging, it is often due to their teachers making it so. Students with inspiring and exciting teachers are more likely to succeed in the classroom and are more confident and prepared as they transition into their postgraduation lives.

While the research underscores the critical role teachers play in their students' futures, being an educator is perhaps as difficult as it has even been. These data arrive in the wake of significant, pandemic-era declines in American student achievement, which have failed to recover — or worse, declined further — in 2024.^{3,4} At the same time, teachers themselves were severely impacted by pandemic-related changes in education: In 2022, teachers were more likely than any other industry workforce [to report feeling burned out](#),⁵ with 44% of educators reporting they “always” or “very often” felt burned out. This poses a risk for schools struggling to retain talented, experienced educators, as Gallup research finds that workers who report high levels of burnout are [2.6 times more likely than their peers to be actively seeking a new job](#).⁶

Meanwhile, as teachers contend with burnout and learning loss, technological advancements such as artificial intelligence have the potential to positively disrupt the current classroom environment — provided teachers are given the resources and support needed to do so effectively.

Meeting this moment requires a full understanding of the support teachers need to not only thrive in their own roles, but ultimately, to meet their students' needs in an unprecedented and rapidly changing learning environment. To do so, the Walton Family Foundation (WFF) partnered with Gallup to conduct the Teaching for Tomorrow study, a multiyear, nationally representative study of thousands of U.S. elementary, middle, and high school teachers. The study will identify what teachers need most from their leaders, from the school level to state and national policymakers. It will also highlight the key factors that best support teachers in fulfilling their core mission: Preparing the next generation for successful lives and careers.

1 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (n.d.). Occupational employment and wage statistics. U.S. Department of Labor. https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm

2 Gallup. (n.d.). State of students research. Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/506663/state-of-students-research.aspx>

3 National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). NAEP reading: National trends and student skills. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reports/reading/2024/g4_8/national-trends/

4 National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). NAEP mathematics: National trends and student skills. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reports/mathematics/2024/g4_8/national-trends/

5 Marken, S., & Agrawal, S. (2022, June 13). K-12 workers have highest burnout rate in U.S. Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/393500/workers-highest-burnout-rate.aspx>

6 Wigert, B., & Agrawal, S. (2018, July 12). Employee burnout, part 1: The 5 main causes. Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/237059/employee-burnout-part-main-causes.aspx>

Key findings from the first iteration of the Teaching for Tomorrow study include:

01.

Two-thirds of teachers

are extremely (22%) or somewhat (45%) satisfied with their current school as a place to work. Moreover, nearly one in five teachers do not plan to return to their classroom (5%) or are unsure whether they will (13%).

02.

Just under one in three teachers (30%)

say they do not have the opportunity to do what they do best every day. This directly contributes to job satisfaction: Teachers who have the opportunity to do what they do best every day are over 50 percentage points more likely to be satisfied with their jobs than those who do not (82% to 31%).

03.

Teachers are 23 percentage points more likely

to be extremely satisfied at work (40% vs. 17%) if they report regularly collaborating with their peers about best practices, resources and curriculum implementation.

04.

Nearly four in 10 teachers (38%)

do not agree their students are on track to succeed in school, and 40% are not satisfied with their students' academic achievement.

05.

19% of high school teachers

say their college-bound students are not prepared for college, and 35% say their students who plan to enter the workforce are not prepared to do so.

06.

About one in three teachers

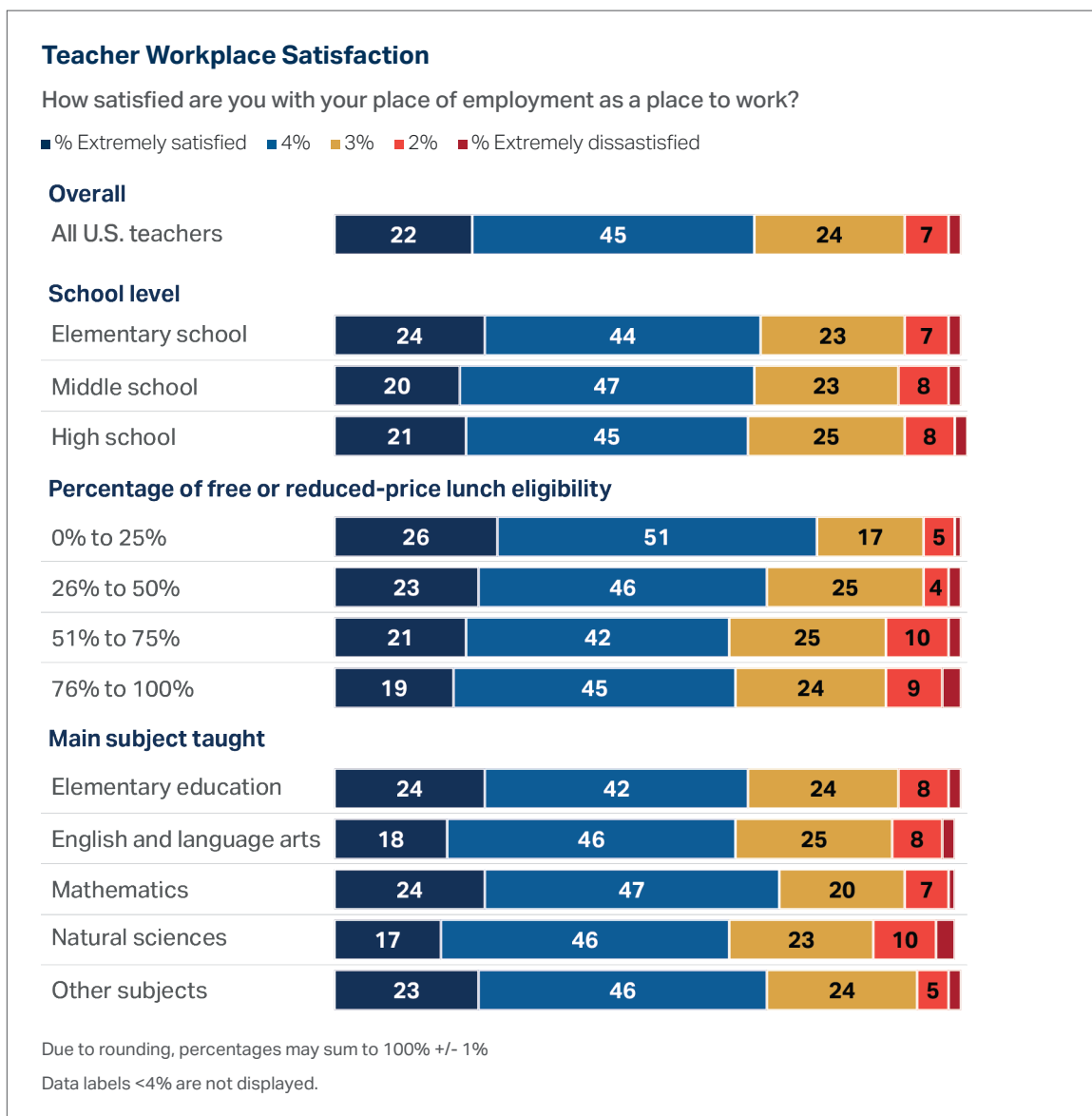
say their students are not excited about what they are learning in their classes (34%). While prior WFF-Gallup research indicates students' excitement is closely tied to that of their teachers, just under one in three teachers (31%) strongly agree they are excited about what they are teaching.

Detailed Findings

Two-thirds of teachers are satisfied with their workplace; one in five may not return to the classroom next year.

Two-thirds of teachers say they are “extremely” (22%) or somewhat satisfied (45%) with their schools as a place to work. While this level of satisfaction varies minimally across elementary (68%), middle (67%) and high school teachers (66%), there is a larger satisfaction gap based on students’ financial need. In schools where 25% or fewer students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL), 77% of teachers report being satisfied with their workplace. When more than half of students are FRPL-eligible, just under two-thirds of teachers are satisfied.

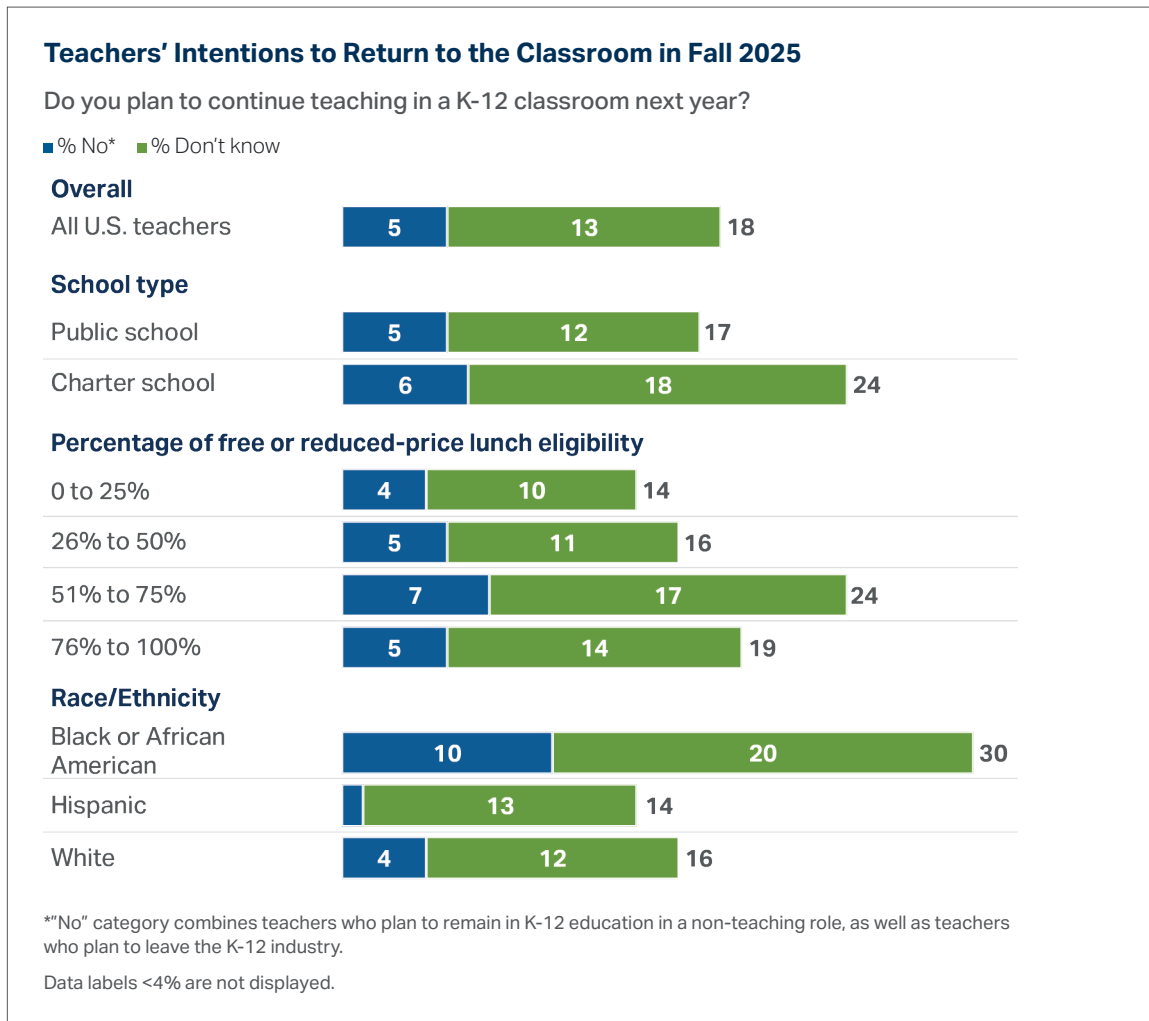
CHART 1



Compared to other industries, K-12 teachers express similar levels of satisfaction with their jobs. Gallup data suggest that on average, about 19% of U.S. workers were extremely satisfied with their jobs in 2024.

Whether due to unsatisfactory working conditions or something else, nearly one in five teachers say they do not plan to return to the classroom next year (5%) or are unsure whether they will (13%). Black teachers are nearly twice as likely as White or Hispanic teachers to say they are considering leaving the profession, as 10% say they do not plan to return for the fall 2025 semester, while 20% are not sure whether they will return.

CHART 2



This is particularly important for resource-strapped schools, as the cost of replacing a professional employee such as a teacher costs an estimated 80% of that worker's salary.⁷

7 Tatel, C., & Wigert, B. (2024, July 10). Employee turnover is preventable but often ignored. Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/646538/employee-turnover-preventable-often-ignored.aspx>

Several foundational workplace experiences improve teachers' job satisfaction.

Many K-12 teachers report deficits in foundational aspects of their jobs. On average, teachers say they are working 50 hours per week — well beyond the 40 hours per week most are contracted for — and less than half (45%) are satisfied with the amount they are paid. The data confirm that teacher pay and workload are both critical issues that impact teachers' engagement in the classroom and their intent to stay: More than three-quarters of teachers who are satisfied with their workload and pay are satisfied with their overall jobs. By comparison, fewer than six in 10 teachers who are not satisfied with their pay or workload are satisfied with their job overall.

CHART 3

Impact of Teachers' Pay, Workload and Opportunity to Do What They Do Best on Workplace Satisfaction

How satisfied are you with your place of employment as a place to work?

% Extremely satisfied + Somewhat satisfied

At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.



How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your job: Your workload



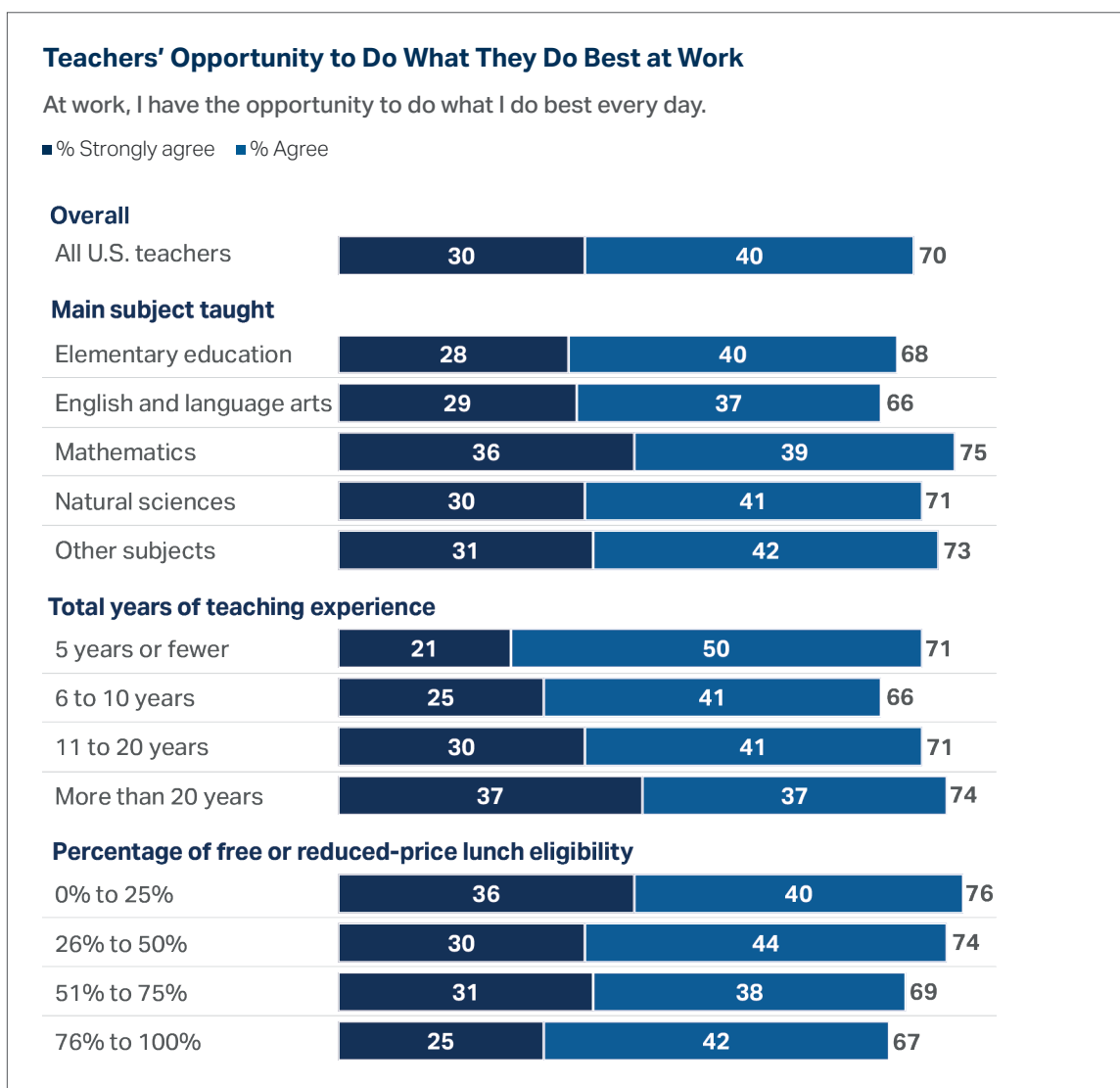
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your job: Level of pay



Although important to the employee experience, both workload and total pay have less of an impact on teachers' engagement than whether they feel their job gives them the opportunity to do what they do best every day. More than eight in 10 teachers who agree they have the opportunity to do what they do best every day (82%) are satisfied with their jobs. Those who do not agree they have that opportunity are more than 50 points less likely to be satisfied (31%).

Though most teachers agree (40%) or strongly agree (30%) their work gives them the opportunity to do what they do best, about one in three (29%) teachers say they do not have that opportunity. Teachers with more years of teaching experience are also more likely to strongly agree they get to do what they do best at work, as are teachers who work in schools where fewer students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

CHART 4



More years of teaching experience naturally help teachers maximize their talents, while some environments may hinder their ability to do their best work. However, school and district leaders can take several steps to create a workplace that supports and enhances effective teaching. This includes ensuring teachers have the materials and equipment they need, allowing teachers some flexibility to better meet the needs of their students and giving teachers a degree of autonomy to innovate and remove impediments to their work. Teachers who strongly agree their schools provide these experiences are three to four times more likely than their peers to also strongly agree that they get to do what they do best every day.

CHART 5

Influence of Materials, Flexibility and Autonomy on Teachers' Opportunities to Do What They Do Best

At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.

% Strongly agree, based on other workplace experience

I have the flexibility I need to ensure my students do their best.

Strongly agrees **73**

Does not strongly agree **22**

How satisfied are you with having the power to change things about your job that you're not satisfied with?

Extremely satisfied **84**

Less than extremely satisfied **27**

Leaders at my school give teachers autonomy to try new things.

Strongly agrees **64**

Does not strongly agree **21**

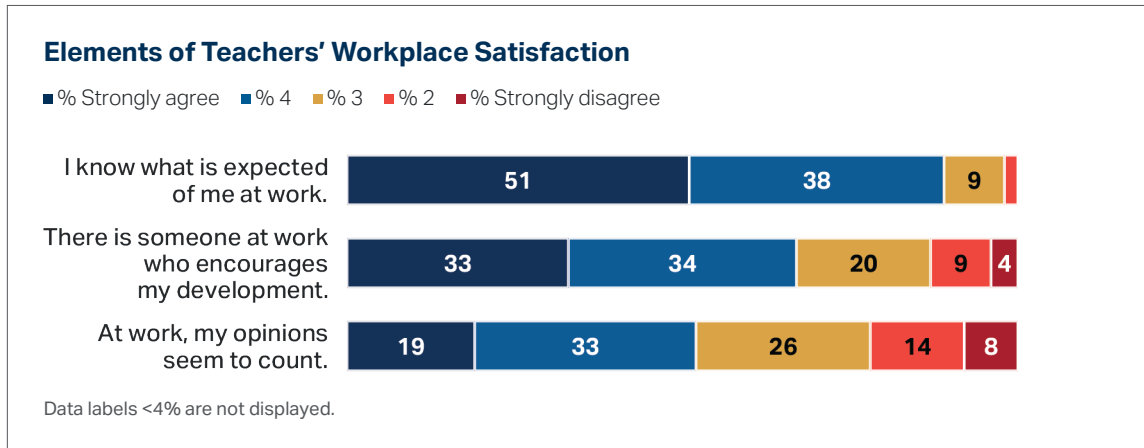
I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.

Strongly agrees **66**

Does not strongly agree **16**

In addition to having opportunities to leverage their strengths at school, teachers' job satisfaction is closely tied to several key factors. These include having clear expectations in their role, opportunities for professional growth and confidence that their opinions about the workplace are valued. However, about half of teachers (51%) strongly agree they know what is expected of them at work, and one in three (33%) strongly agree someone encourages their development. Just under one in five teachers (19%) strongly agree their opinions count at work.

CHART 6



Workplace satisfaction is also heavily influenced by teachers' satisfaction with building- and district-level leadership. More than eight in 10 teachers who are satisfied with their leadership also say they are satisfied with their workplace overall, but about one in three teachers (36%) are not satisfied with their school leadership, and more than half (57%) are not satisfied with their district leaders. Just 37% of teachers who are not satisfied with their building leadership, and 51% of those who are not satisfied with their district leadership say they are satisfied with their schools as a place to work.



One of the negative implications of low workplace engagement and satisfaction is the risk of increased employee turnover, as Gallup research finds that [the most engaged organizations have significantly lower turnover than those that are least engaged](#).⁸ This is also true of the teachers surveyed by Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation: Teachers who do not have clear expectations at work, lack development opportunities and do not feel they have a voice in the workplace are significantly less likely to say they plan to return to their classroom the following year.

Collaboration among teachers improves several key aspects of workplace engagement.

When examining gaps in teacher engagement, collaboration with peers stands out as a significant differentiator. Teachers who regularly collaborate with their peers to share resources, materials and best practices experience meaningful benefits. They are 12 to 32 percentage points more likely to agree they know what is expected of them at work, have the materials and equipment they need to do their job right, have someone at work who encourages their development and that their opinions count in the workplace.

CHART 7

Workplace Engagement Factors, Based on Teacher Collaboration*

% Strongly agree + Agree

■ Agrees teachers collaborate regularly ■ Does not agree teachers collaborate regularly

I know what is expected of me at work.



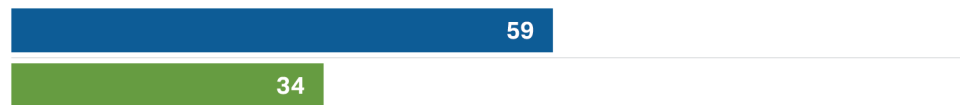
I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.



There is someone at work who encourages my development.



At work, my opinions seem to count.



*Based on agreement with "Teachers at my school collaborate to share resources, materials, and best practices with each other."

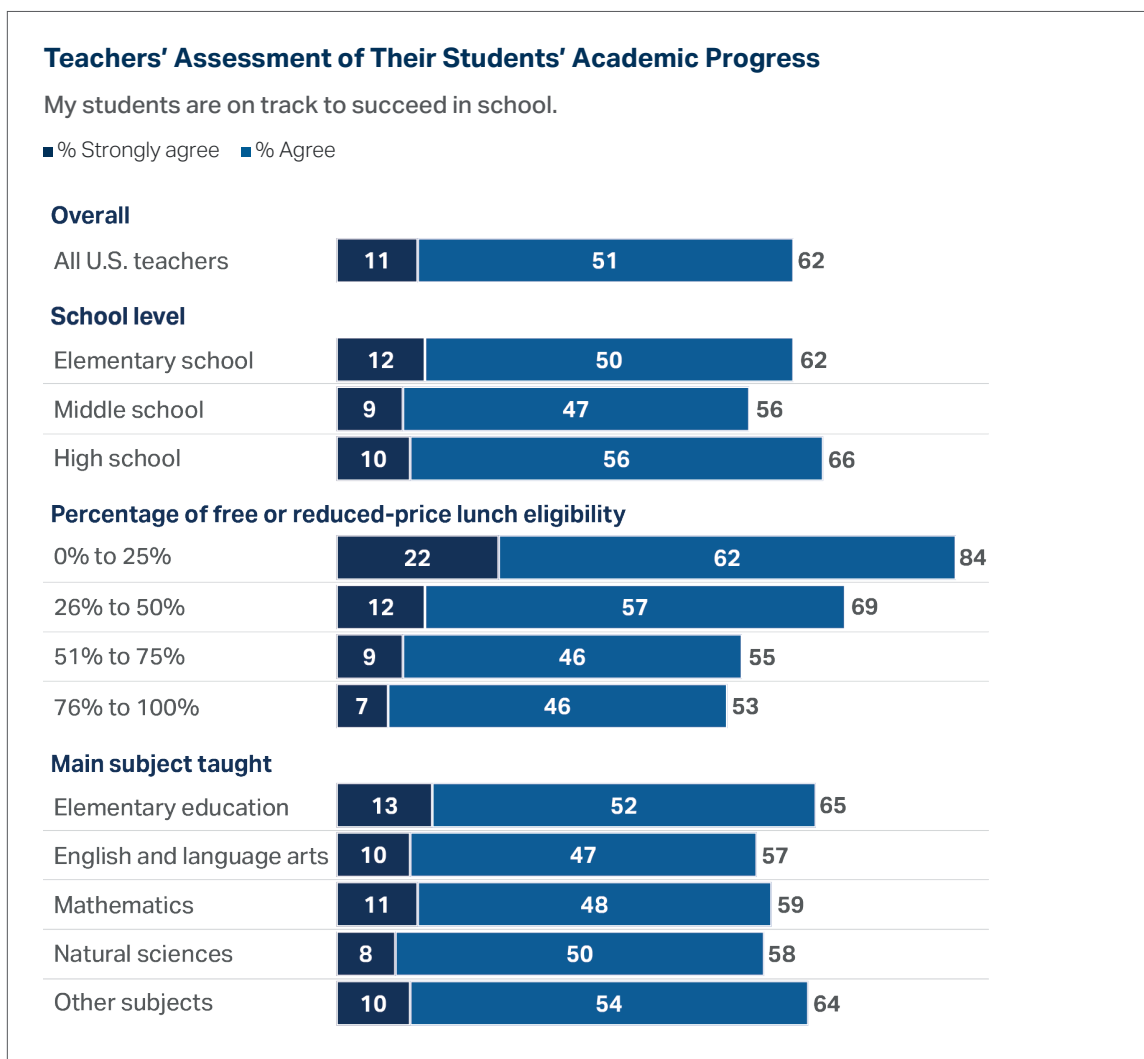
8 Gallup. (2013, June 20). The benefits of employee engagement (Updated January 7, 2023). Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236927/employee-engagement-drives-growth.aspx>

All four of these engagement elements are key factors in teachers' overall satisfaction in the workplace. Moreover, teachers who share materials, resources and other practices that have made their own teaching more effective gives their peers the ability to enjoy those benefits as well. However, over one in four teachers (28%) do not regularly collaborate with their peers, leaving these valuable opportunities to scale best practices throughout a department or building unrealized.

Teachers express concern about their students' academic success and postgraduation readiness, but engaged teachers are more confident.

Even before the National Assessment of Academic Progress confirmed that the median math and reading scores of U.S. students in 2024 remain worse than those measured in 2019, American teachers reported that many of their students were struggling academically. Nearly four in 10 K-12 teachers (38%) do not agree their students are on track to succeed in school, with middle school teachers expressing greater reservations about their students' academic performance.

CHART 8



Those teaching in core subjects, such as English, math and science, as well as those teaching in schools with more FRPL-eligible students, are also less satisfied than their peers with their students' academic achievement.

Predictably, this translates into concern about students' readiness to succeed in their post-high school endeavors. About as many high school teachers feel their college-bound students are "very" prepared to succeed in college (21%) as say their students are "not very" or "not at all" prepared (19%). Teachers' outlook for students who do not plan to attend college is even bleaker: Just 10% of high school teachers say that students who plan to enter the workforce immediately after high school are very prepared to do so; just over one in three teachers say these students are not very or not at all prepared (35%).

Students also seem to be aware that they may not be prepared for postgraduation life.

[Prior WFF-Gallup research](#)⁹ found that more than half of 12- to 18-year-olds (53%) do not feel prepared for their futures. Moreover, 26% of high school students specifically feel unprepared to succeed in college, and 31% feel unprepared to apply for a job.

One widely recognized solution to this lack of preparation, acknowledged by both teachers and students, is increasing student engagement in coursework. Teachers who agree their students are excited about what they are learning are more likely to believe those students are ready to succeed in the future. About three-quarters of teachers who agree their students are excited about what they are learning also agree their students are on track to succeed in school (76%). Among teachers who do not agree their students are excited in the classroom, about one in three agree their students are on track (36%).

CHART 9

Teachers' Assessment of Student Success, Based on Students' Excitement in Class*

My students are on track to succeed in school.

% Strongly agree + Agree

■ Agrees their students are excited in their classes ■ Does not agree their students are excited in their classes



* Based on agreement with "My students are excited about what they are learning in the classes I teach."

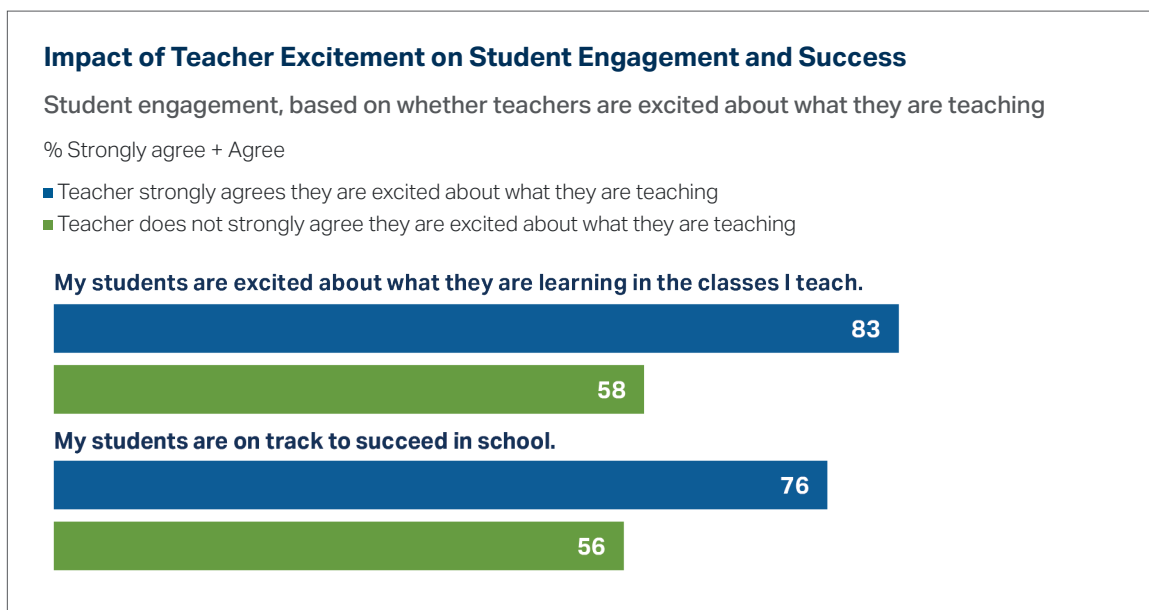
Meanwhile, Gallup's prior research with Generation Z finds the most engaged students (the top 25% of the distribution) are 10 times more likely than the least-engaged students (the bottom 25% of the distribution) to strongly agree they feel prepared for the future.

9 Walton Family Foundation & Gallup. (2024, August 12). Walton Family Foundation-Gallup Voices of Gen Z 2024 Report. Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/648638/gallup-walton-family-foundation-2024-voices-gen-report.aspx>

Teachers and their students agree on the impacts of an engaging classroom experience, as well as the role that teachers play in creating that environment. However, both groups are aware that students are not engaged as they could be. Roughly four in 10 middle and high school students say they have not learned anything interesting at school in the past week (41%), and that their teachers do not make them feel their schoolwork is important (40%). Teachers separately identify this lack of engagement: About one in three teachers do not agree their students are excited about what they are learning (34%) or that they are motivated to get good grades in their classes (36%).

Additionally, students and teachers agree that when young people are excited about or interested in what they are learning, it is because their teacher was engaged. Sixty-three percent of middle and high school students say they are most excited about learning when their teacher goes out of their way to make the topic exciting or interesting. Teachers who strongly agree that they are excited about what they teach are notably more likely to believe their students are engaged in class. They are also more likely to agree that their students are on track to succeed in school compared to teachers who do not share the same enthusiasm.

CHART 10



While teachers’ own excitement about their course material drives students’ interest in learning it, just under one in three teachers (31%) strongly agree they are excited about what they are teaching. Ensuring teachers have opportunities to fully engage with the topics they are teaching would not only increase the likelihood that their students are engaged in class, but also the likelihood that those students are prepared to succeed in their future courses.

Methodology

Results are based on a web survey conducted Oct. 29-Nov. 25, 2024, with a sample of 1,989 U.S. teachers working in public K-12 schools. Teachers were recruited from the RAND American Teacher Panel, a nationally representative, probability-based panel of U.S. public school teachers. More information about the RAND American Teacher Panel is available at <https://www.rand.org/education-and-labor/survey-panels/aep.html>.

The final sample was weighted to match the school- and teacher-level demographics of K-12 public school teachers in the U.S., including school level, student poverty, student race and Hispanic ethnicity, school size, school urbanicity, teacher gender, teacher race and Hispanic ethnicity and teachers' years of experience. Targets for these characteristics were retrieved from the National Center for Education Statistics. Teacher-level characteristics were based on the 2020-2021 National Teacher and Principal Survey, while school-level characteristics were based on the 2022-2023 Common Core of Data.

For the total sample of 1,989 U.S. teachers, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher. All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.



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