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Research Brief

Wellbeing and Working Conditions in the Arkansas Teacher Workforce

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DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY
& SECONDARY EDUCATION



The Arkansas Teacher Survey is a joint project of the Arkansas Department of Education Division of Elementary and Secondary Education and the University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform Office for Education Policy.

SUMMARY

- To better support a healthy teacher workforce, it is crucial to understand their job satisfaction, stress, and intentions to leave the profession.
- While most Arkansas teachers (86%) report being satisfied being an educator, we identify several potential areas for improvement.
- Teachers report that managing student behavior is their primary source of stress.
- Thirteen percent (13%) of teachers reported they plan to leave their current school.
- When asked why they were considering leaving their current school, teachers reported feeling unsupported, lacking influence over school policies, and insufficient planning time.
- Regular assessments of teacher well-being and job satisfaction can help us identify teachers' needs and implement effective support measures, ultimately promoting a healthier work environment and enhancing teacher retention.

MOTIVATION

Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers is a critical policy issue, particularly due to the declining prestige of the teaching profession and decreased enrollment in traditional teacher preparation programs (Kraft and Lyon, 2024). To effectively support a healthy workforce, it's essential to understand teachers' job satisfaction, work-related stress, and intentions to leave the profession.

Teachers appear to be especially at risk of experiencing higher levels of job-related stress and lower levels of well-being compared with other working adults (Steiner et al., 2022). Low levels of teacher well-being and job satisfaction can not only hurt teachers but also students' outcomes by leading to higher teacher turnover (Sorenson & Ladd, 2020) and diminished job performance (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Regularly monitoring teachers' well-being and job satisfaction will enable us to intervene effectively, providing the necessary support to help retain teachers and limit any possible negative effects on students' academic progress.

In the spring of the 2023-2024 school year, we developed the Arkansas Teacher Survey in collaboration with the Arkansas Department of Education. The survey was deployed in May of 2024 to a representative sample of Arkansas teachers. A total of 2,721 teachers responded to our survey. The survey included multiple measures of job satisfaction, feelings of success as a teacher, job-related stress, degree of coping with stress, and intentions to leave the profession. Additionally, teachers reported on different supports they received, the level of collaboration with colleagues, the number of hours they worked outside their contract, and their perceived working environment. This research brief discusses the survey's main results.

RESULTS

Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Figure 1 presents our results concerning measures of teachers' job satisfaction. Most teachers in Arkansas feel satisfied and successful, 86% and 85% respectively. Additionally, 83% of Arkansas teachers would recommend their school to parents seeking a place for their child. However, 14%, 15%, and 17%, respectively, disagree with these statements. Thirty percent (30%) of teachers disagree with how things are run in their schools and the same proportion are considering transferring to another school.

Teachers' Well-being

Figure 2 shows measures of teachers' well-being. While 86% of teachers report being glad they chose teaching as a career and 79% said they look forward to teaching in the future, about half of teachers say they have less enthusiasm than when they started teaching. Only 53% would recommend teaching to a young person. Similarly, only about half of the teachers (49%) we surveyed felt the stress and disappointments of teaching were worth it.

Teachers' Job-Related Stress

Figure 3 shows teachers' responses to how often they experience job-related stress and how they perceive they are coping with it. While 55% of teachers report frequent job stress (42% often and 13% always), teachers report they are generally coping well with this job-related stress. Only 6% say that they are not able to cope with it at all.

Figure 4 presents teachers' reported top three most important sources of job-related stress. Managing student behavior appears, by far, as the top reported source of teachers' stress, with 56% of teachers in Arkansas choosing it as their top 3. This result is consistent with the [2023 and 2024 Arkansas Education Preparation Program Completer Survey](#) (McGee et al., 2024a), which documented that managing student behavior was the area where new teachers felt least prepared by their education preparation programs.

Despite the recent [teacher salary increases under the LEARNS Act](#) described in Zamorro et al., 2024, low salaries and preparing students for standardized tests appear as the second and third main sources of teacher stress, with 25% of teachers choosing these in their top 3. Supporting students' mental health and well-being, supporting student's academic learning and a lack of support from school administrators appear next with between 20% and 22% of teachers choosing these sources of stress as their top 3.

Working long hours, administrative work outside teaching, and the intrusion of political views and opinions in their job also appear as frequently chosen reasons, with between 18% and 19% of teachers in Arkansas selecting these. On the other hand, feeling physically unsafe and a lack of adequate coaching or mentoring are the least chosen sources of job-related stress.

FIGURE 1. TEACHERS' JOB SATISFACTION

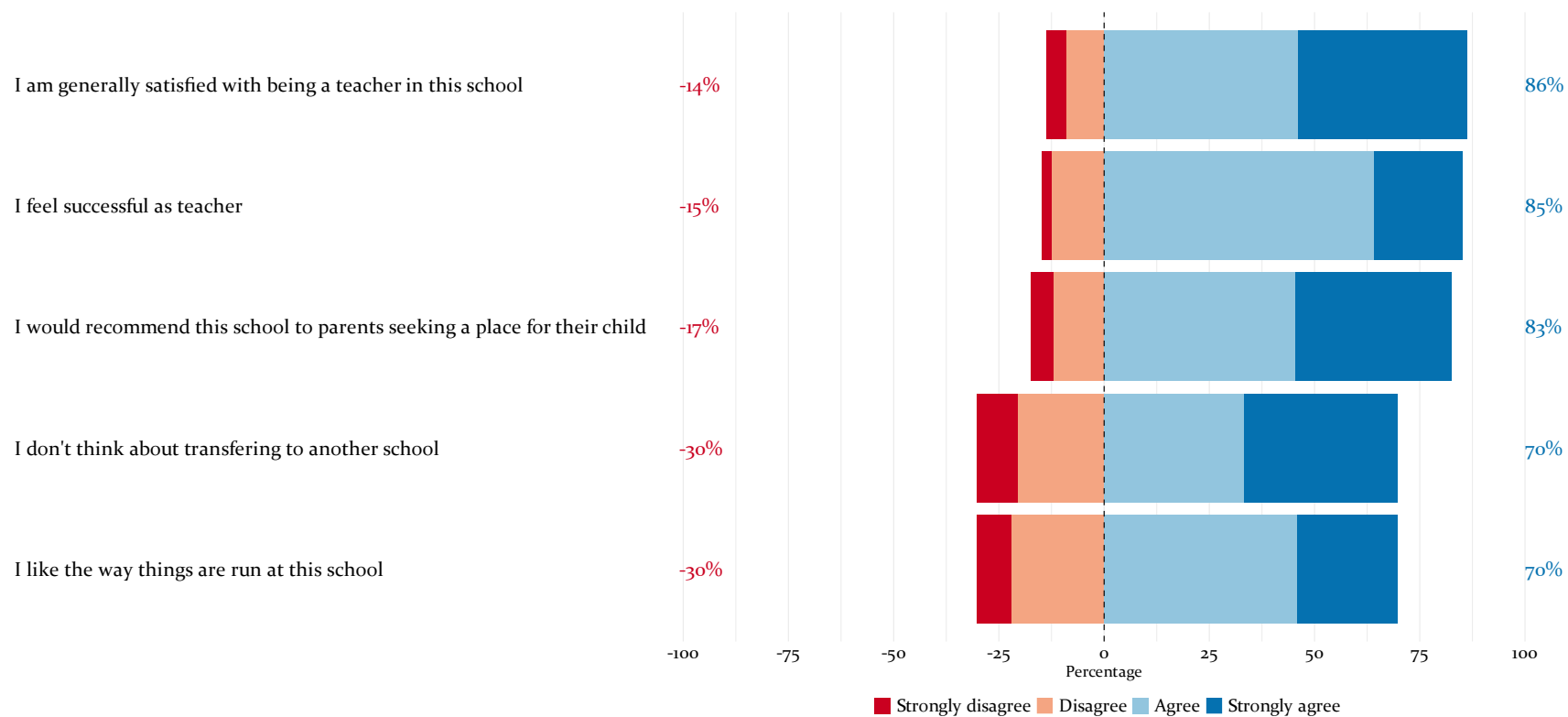


Figure 2. Teachers' Well-Being

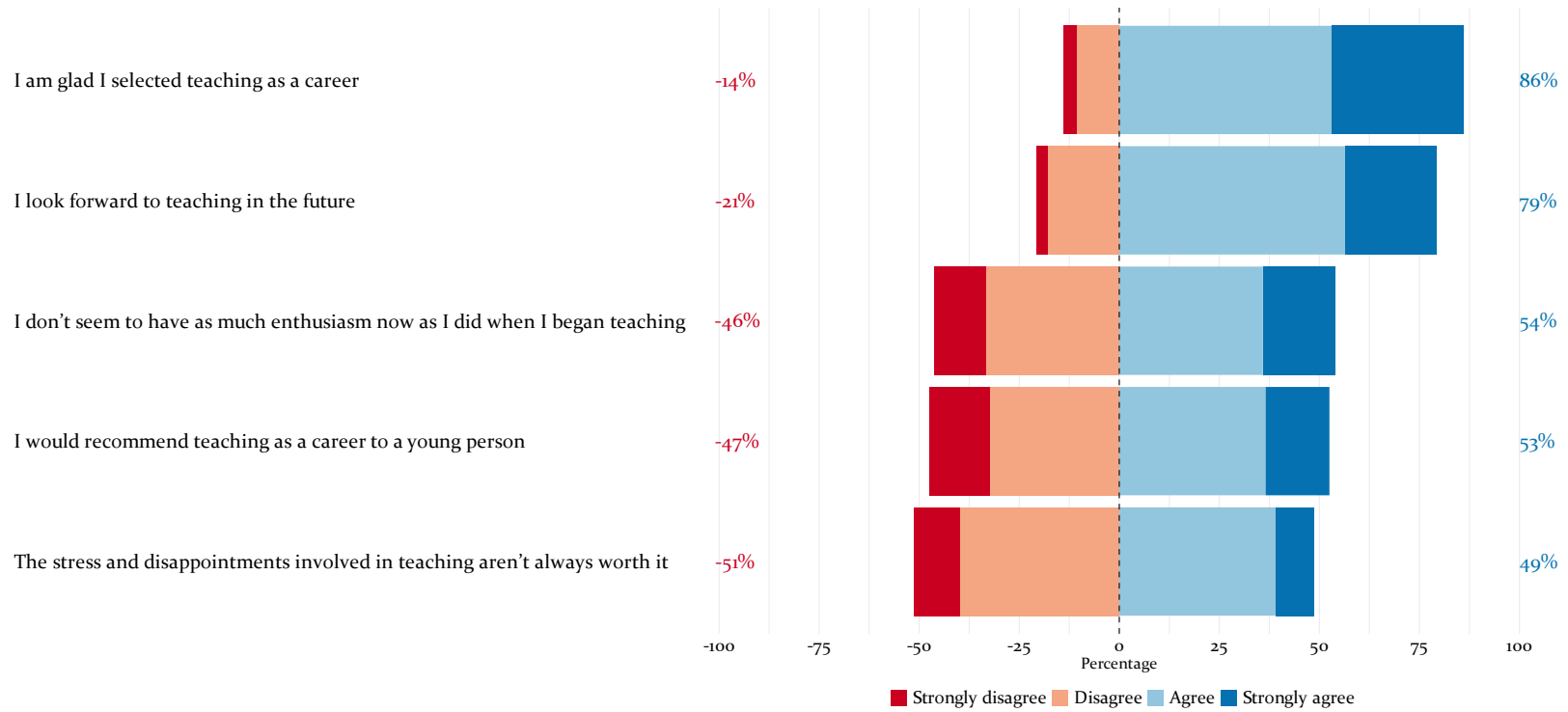
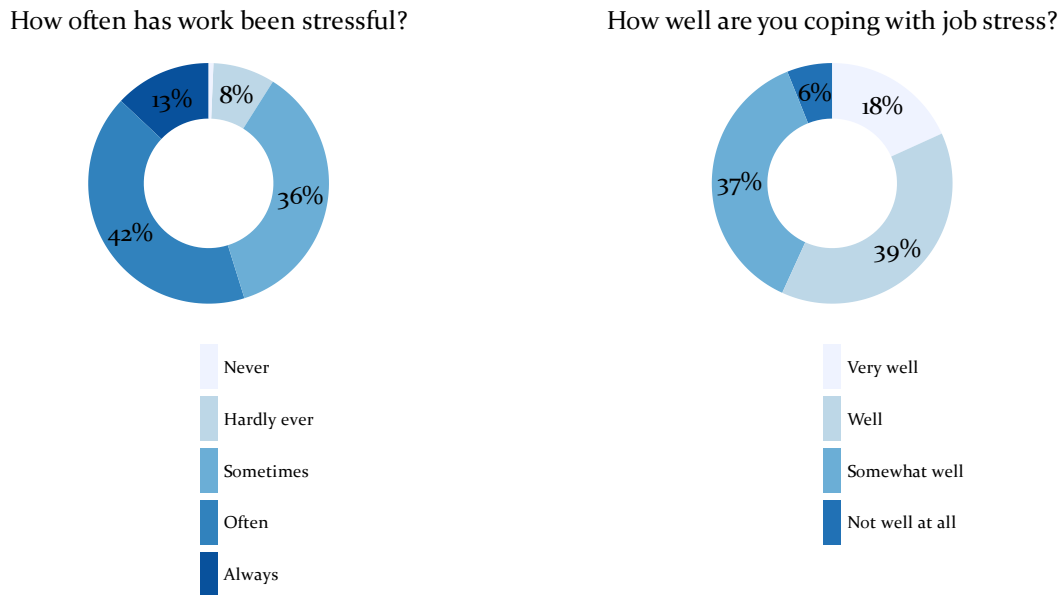


Figure 3. Teachers' Job-Related Stress



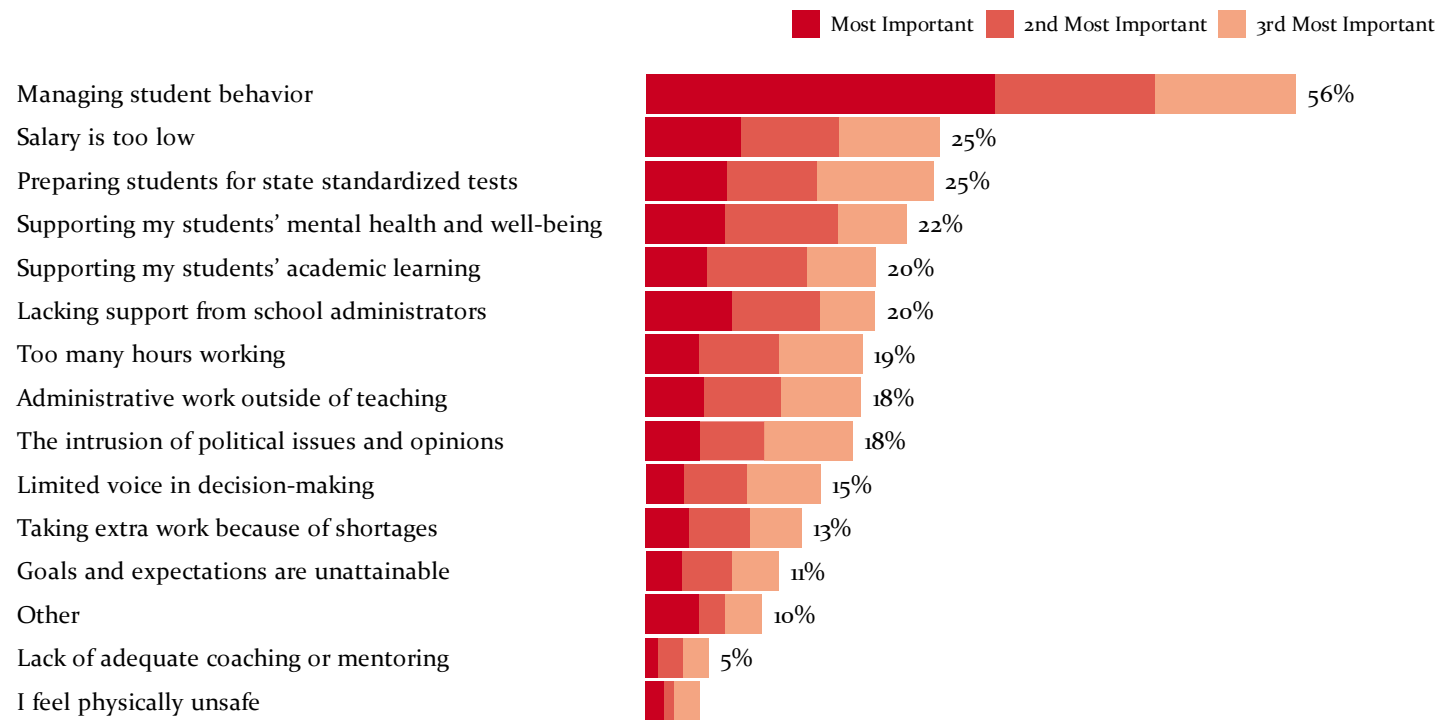
The Appendix presents teachers' reported job satisfaction, well-being, and sources of stress across the following experience categories: Novice teachers (less than 3 years of experience), early-career teachers (between 3 and 10 years of experience), mid-career teachers (between 11 and 20 years of experience), and late-career teachers (more than 20 years of experience).

Responses are relatively consistent across experience levels, but some notable differences emerge. Late-career teachers are the most satisfied with their profession, likely because more satisfied teachers tend to stay longer. Interestingly, we found novice teachers expressed the highest enthusiasm for teaching across several measures, but enthusiasm dropped among early- and mid-career teachers.

For example, 92% of novice teachers were glad they chose the profession, versus 81% of early-career teachers. Similarly, 71% of novice teachers would recommend teaching to a young person, compared to only 50% of early- and late-career teachers, and 43% of mid-career teachers. Novice teachers also report the highest satisfaction with school operations (74%), compared to early-career (67%) and mid/late-career teachers (69%).

Stress sources are similar across experience levels, but novice teachers struggle most with student behavior, while early- and mid-career teachers are more concerned about low salaries.

Figure 4. Sources of Teachers' Job-Related Stress



Teachers' Future Employment Plans

Figure 5 presents teachers' employment plans for the next school year. Recent research has found that teachers' intentions to leave can predict turnover (Harbatkin et al. 2023). Therefore, measuring intentions to leave can tell us about the potential for future turnover.

While most teachers (87%) plan to continue working in their current school, 17% say it is likely or very likely that they will leave the profession and 10% say they plan to retire. Interestingly, both the proportion reporting they plan to stay and the proportion saying they plan to leave the profession are larger than teachers' actual behavior over the past few school years (Camp et al., 2024). Using Arkansas administrative data, Camp et al. (2023) document that between 75 and 76% of teachers stayed in their current schools each year, while about 10% left the profession.

Moreover, 17% of teachers declare it is likely or very likely that they switch to a non-teaching role. Twenty-four percent (24%) say they plan to move to a different school – 14% outside the district and 10% within the same district. Finally, 5% of teachers say it is likely or very likely that they will teach in a private school or move out of the state.

We asked those who said it was unlikely or very unlikely that they stay in their current school about the top 3 reasons why they were considering leaving their school. The results in Figure 6 show that lack of support is the top reason, chosen by 54% of teachers. Figure 9, discussed below, shows data around the different supports teachers received/didn't receive and their perceived importance, adding useful additional context to this response.

Lack of influence over policies and practice is the second highest reason, chosen by 43% of teachers. These top 2 reasons are followed by insufficient salaries, wanting to spend time with family, too much work, and a lack of opportunities for promotion/advancement.

FIGURE 5. TEACHERS' EMPLOYMENT PLANS FOR NEXT SCHOOL YEAR

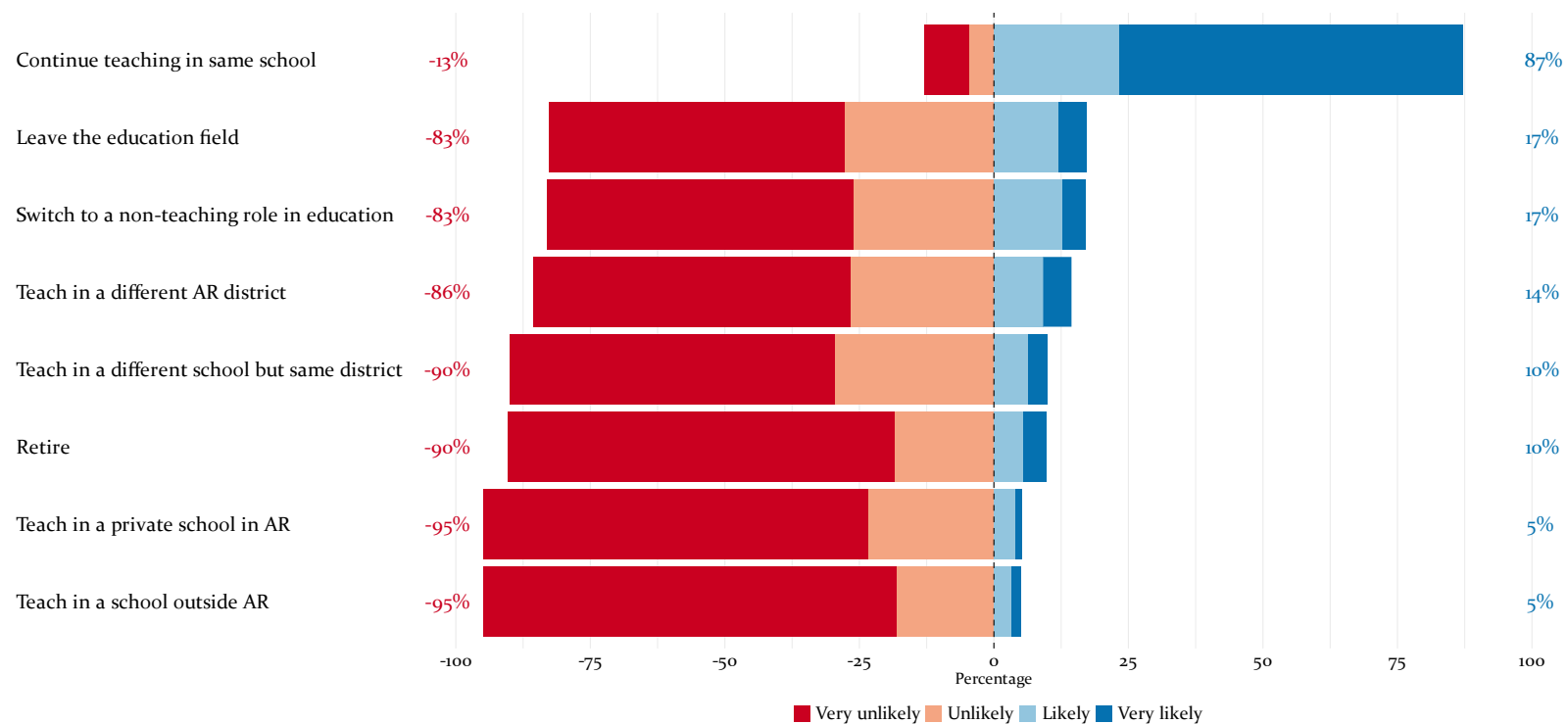
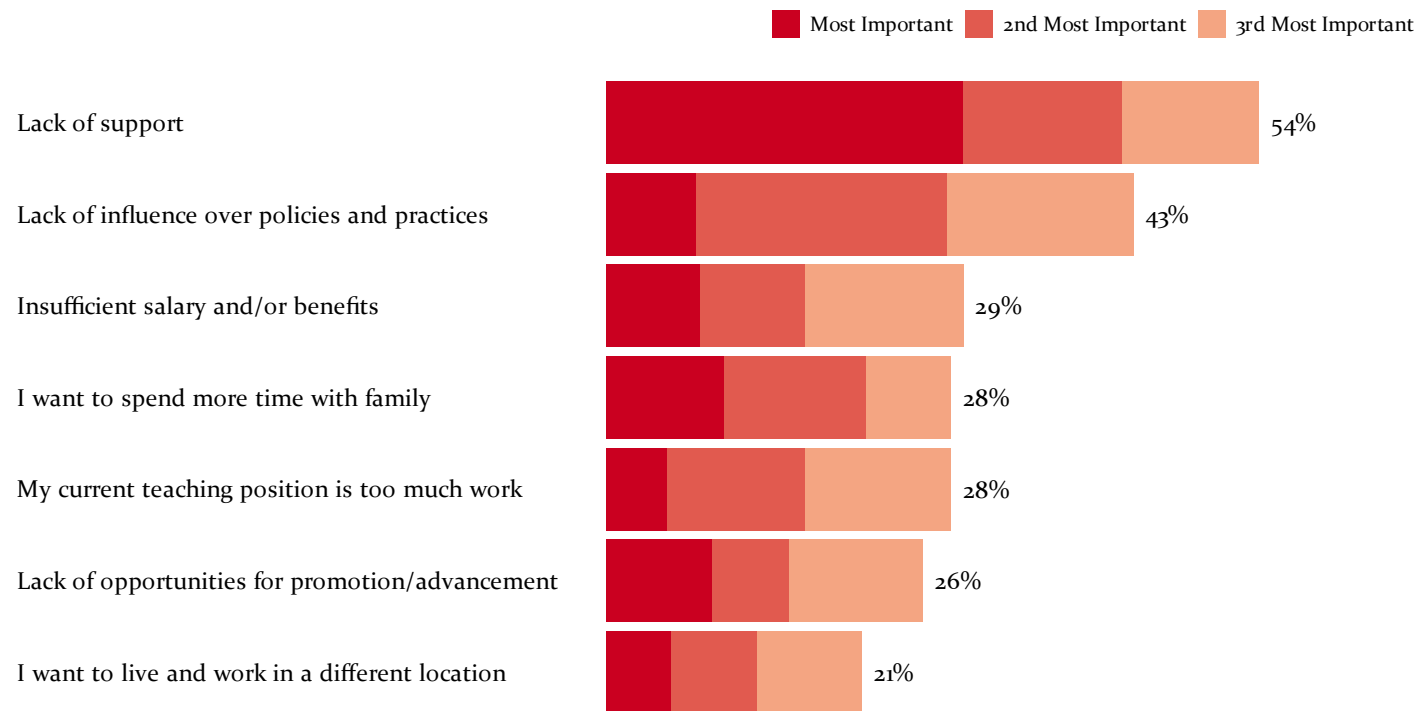


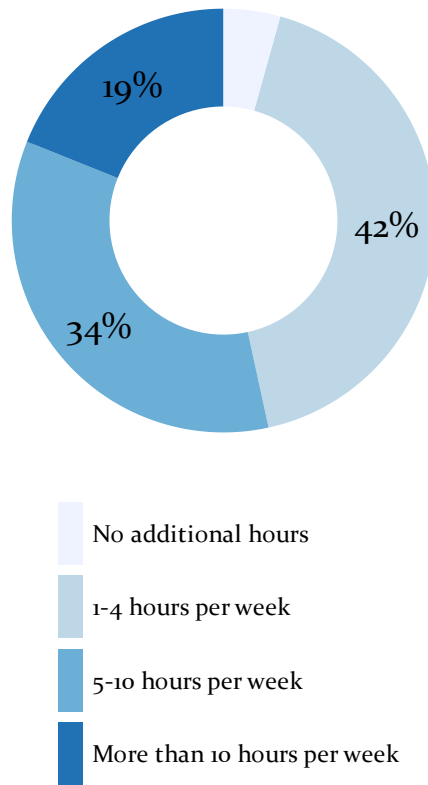
Figure 6. Reported Reasons to Leave their Current School



Teachers' Working Conditions

Long working hours can have a negative impact on teachers' wellbeing (Hashino, 2024). Figure 7 presents teachers' reported working hours outside of their contract. Most teachers in Arkansas report working some hours outside their contract. Only 4% of teachers report not working extra hours. Forty-two percent (42%) report working 1 to 4 hours extra per week, 34% 5 to 10 hours, and 19% more than 10 hours per week.

FIGURE 7. TEACHERS' REPORTED WORKING HOURS OUT OF CONTRACT



A supportive work environment can help promote teachers' sense of success even in moments of crisis (Kraft et al. 2021). Figure 8 presents teachers' responses to questions about their work environment. Most teachers (80%) agree or strongly agree that their school staff is a learning community where ideas and suggestions for improvement are encouraged. However, 31% and 32% of teachers disagree that teachers can focus on teaching and that their school is an atmosphere of trust and respect, respectively. Thirty-six (36%) to 37% of teachers also disagree that they have sufficient planning time.

Finally, 40 to 43% of teachers do not agree that students treat adults with respect or that their school handles discipline effectively. This latter result is consistent with the result reported above showing that managing student behavior is the top source of job-related stress for teachers.

Figure 9 shows whether teachers reported receiving various supports and, when they did, how important these supports are to them. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of teachers report they do not receive any reduction in schedule or preparation periods to help them with their classroom planning. At the same time, 85% of teachers who receive this support find it important. Similarly, 32% of teachers report they do not have any extra assistance in their classrooms, while 72% of those who receive it perceive it as important.

Finally, Figure 10 shows teachers' reported frequency of collaboration around instruction, curriculum, student progress, and assessment. Between 59% and 52% of teachers report collaborating at least once per week in all areas. Only about 4 to 5% of teachers report never collaborating in these areas.

Teachers' open-ended responses provide additional context.

Our survey also included a final open-ended question for teachers to share additional thoughts about their experience teaching. Six hundred and forty-one (641) teachers left a comment. Overall, the comments corroborated the results of our survey questions. Most prominently, teachers' comments focused on student behavior, politics, a lack of administrative support, and their love for teaching.

The most frequent topic of comments left by teachers (19%) was student behavior. Teachers emphasized student disrespect, apathy, and the distractions brought by technology. Often these comments were accompanied by feelings of lack of support from parents. For example, a teacher said:

"Students grow more disrespectful, parental support decreases every year. Students spend way too much time in front of a small screen outside of school which leads to a lack of academic stamina, problem solving, and social skills."

State and local politics was the second most frequent topic of teachers' comments (14%). Multiple comments discussed insufficient salaries, and more experienced teachers, in particular, discussed the flattened salary schedules because of the minimum salary increases under LEARNS (See Zamarro et al., 2023 for a discussion of teacher salaries under LEARNS). Veteran teachers' pay was also a concern among principals and superintendents when we surveyed them this past spring as we documented in Zamarro et al. (2024b).

FIGURE 8. TEACHERS' PERCEIVED WORK ENVIRONMENT

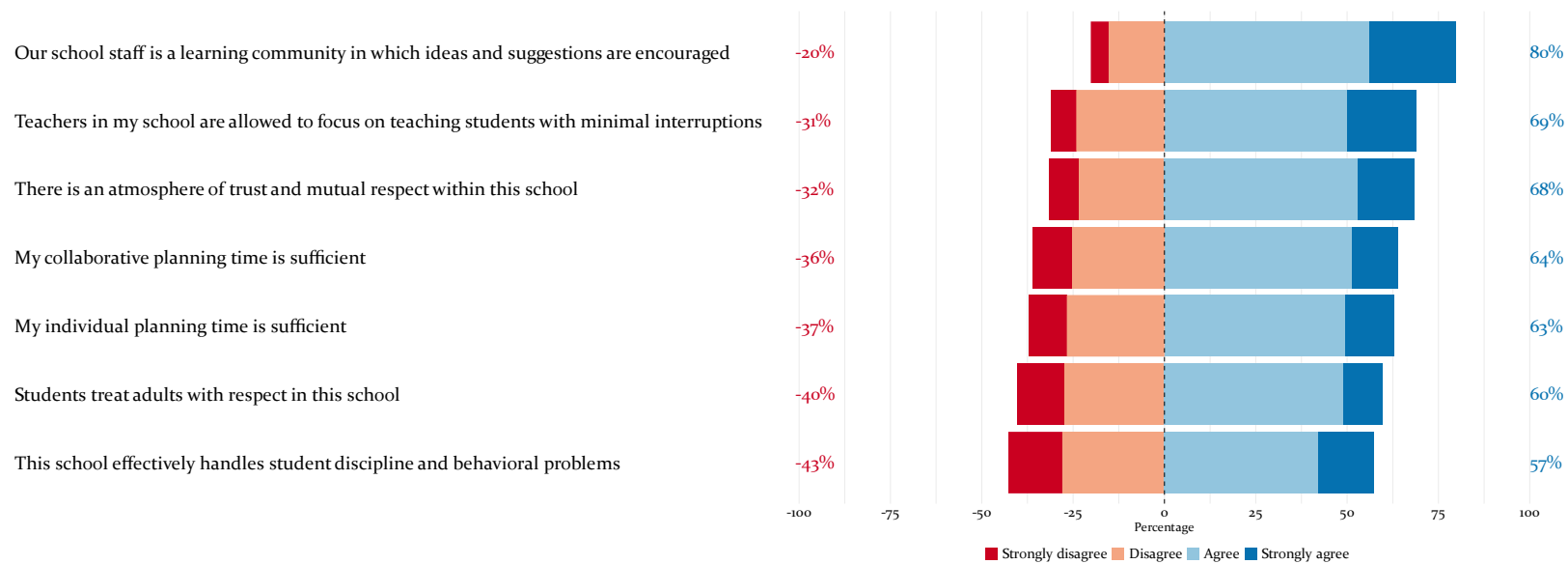


FIGURE 9. TEACHERS' REPORTED SUPPORTS

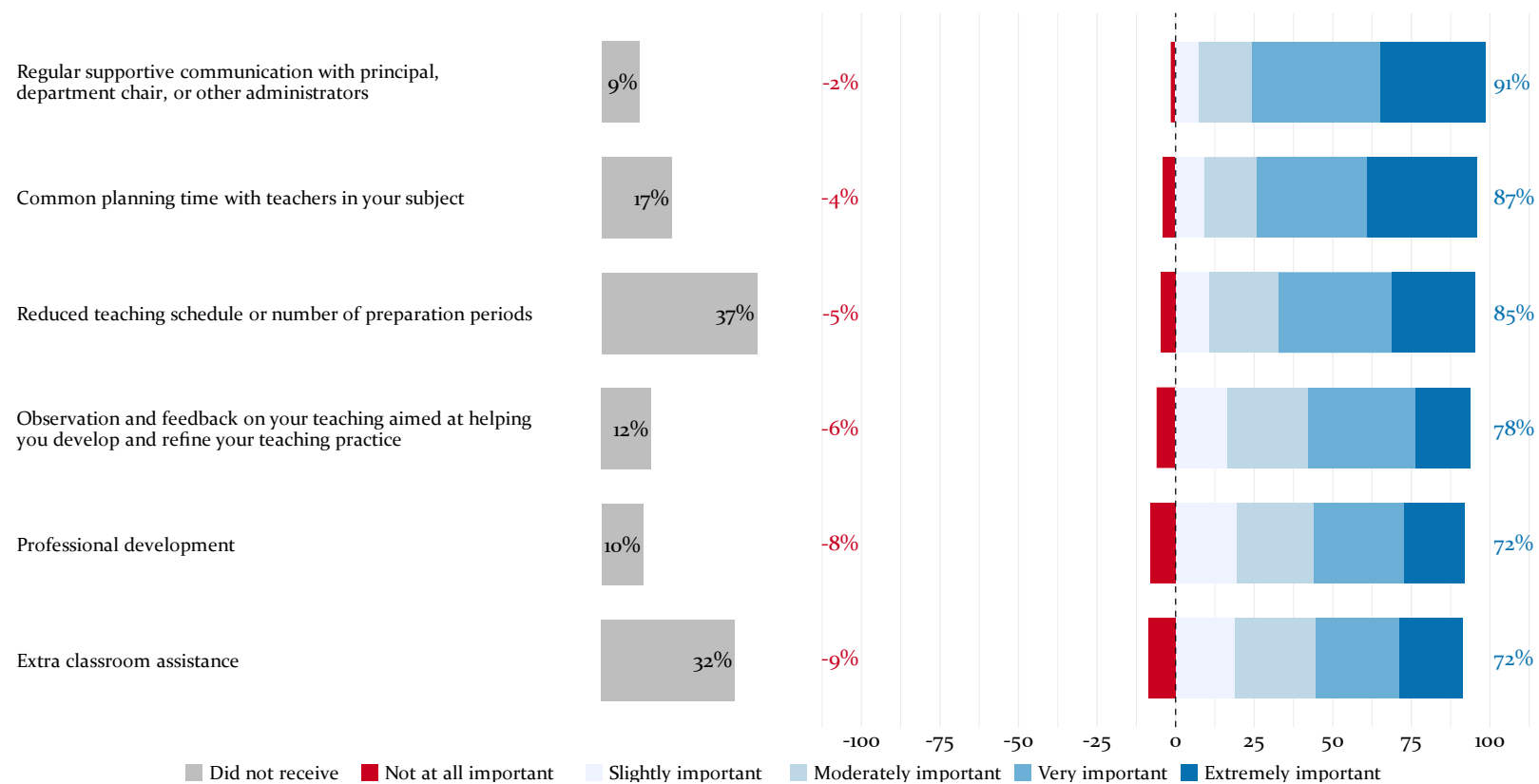
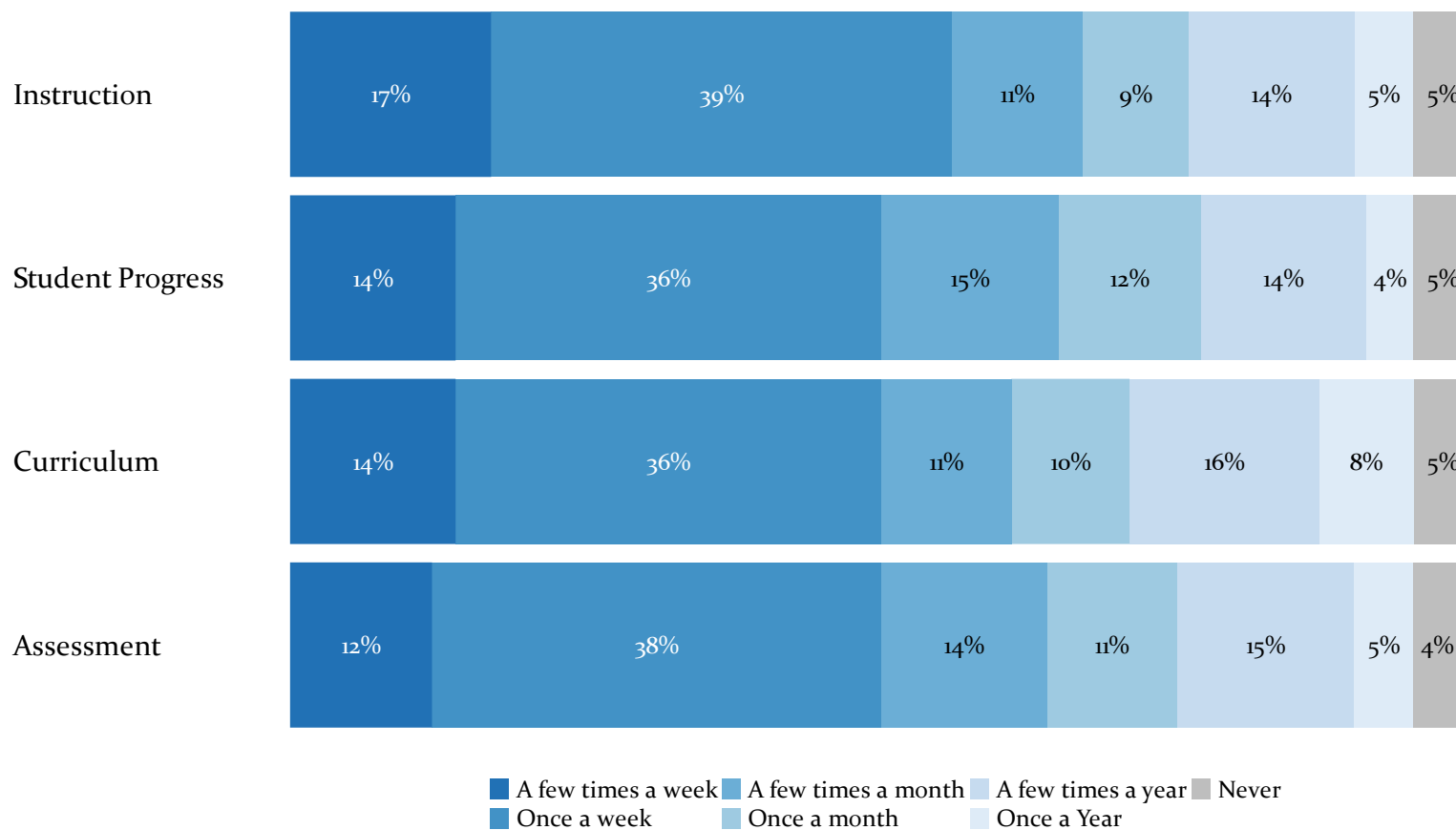


FIGURE 10. TEACHERS' REPORTED SCHOOL COLLABORATION



For example, a teacher wrote:

"I enjoy teaching and love my students. I believe this career suits me well. However, it is challenging to live comfortably on a teacher's salary alone."

While a veteran teacher wrote:

"This is my 25th year teaching and I am only making about \$5,000 more than first-year teachers. This makes me feel like I am not valued. I have more experience and knowledge than first-year teachers, but I am not paid for it."

Teachers (13%) also discussed disappointment in their school/district administration. Many highlighted how a lack of administrative support made their jobs more difficult. For example, this is what a teacher said about the lack of administrative support at her school:

"It has been a difficult year at my current school. The administration seems unable or unwilling to address behavior or academic problems, resulting in a lack of support and communication. The weak leadership has impacted every aspect of the district..."

Finally, despite the difficulties they faced, teachers often (12%) emphasized their love for teaching. For example, a teacher said:

"Working in education is not for the faint-hearted. Education has changed drastically in the last twenty years, and society has changed as well. It is sometimes hard to keep up with the changes; however, we keep pushing through. I love students. I love teaching. I don't always love the rest of it..."

DISCUSSION

Monitoring teacher well-being and job satisfaction can help us better understand their needs and identify supports to promote a healthier work environment. Improving teacher job satisfaction can help increase retention and classroom effectiveness. With this aim, we partnered with the Arkansas Department of Education to develop and deploy the Arkansas Teacher Survey in the spring of the 2023-2024 school year.

A total of 2,721 teachers responded to our survey, reporting on different measures of job satisfaction, job-related stress levels, intentions to leave the profession, working conditions, and supports. Most teachers in our survey (86%) report being satisfied with being a teacher. However, we identified several potential areas for improvement.

The teaching profession remains stressful and managing students' behavior appears as the top source of stress reported by 56% of teachers. Likewise, 40% of teachers disagreed that

students treat adults with respect in their schools and 43% disagreed that their school handles discipline effectively. This result is consistent with results in the [2023 and 2024 Arkansas Education Preparation Program Completer Survey](#) (McGee et al., 2024a), which documented that new teachers feel that their teacher prep programs do not adequately prepare them to manage student behavior. Finding ways to better prepare teachers for managing student behavior and to better support positive student behaviors at school would promote a healthier work environment for teachers.

Teachers reported a lack of support and a lack of influence over policies and practices as the top reasons they consider not staying in their current schools. Similar results regarding the lack of support were also reported by novice teachers on the [2023 and 2024 Novice Teacher Survey Report](#) (McGee et al., 2024b). Finding ways to better support teachers and their professional autonomy would be important to help promote teacher retention.

Providing more planning time could also help support teachers. Between 36 and 37% of teachers report their collaborative or individual planning time not being enough. At the same time, most teachers (76%) work between 1 and 10 hours out of contract each week. Reduced teaching load or extra classroom assistance are supports that are not available for about 37 and 32% of teachers, respectively, despite those receiving these supports finding them important.

Overall, our results for Arkansas are consistent with those reported on the nationally representative RAND teacher panel, which included the same questions related to teachers' job-related stress (Doan et al., 2024). Both in Arkansas and the national RAND survey, teachers list student behavior, salary, and student achievement as their top sources of job-related stress. Interestingly, however, the RAND survey records that 37% of teachers nationally report salary as a top source of stress while only 24% of Arkansas teachers identify this as a top concern. This could be a result of the recent salary changes induced by the LEARNS Act, a possibility we plan to explore in the future.

Moving forward, we think it is important to continue monitoring teacher wellbeing to assess the temperature of our teaching profession and help support healthy school environments for our teachers and students.

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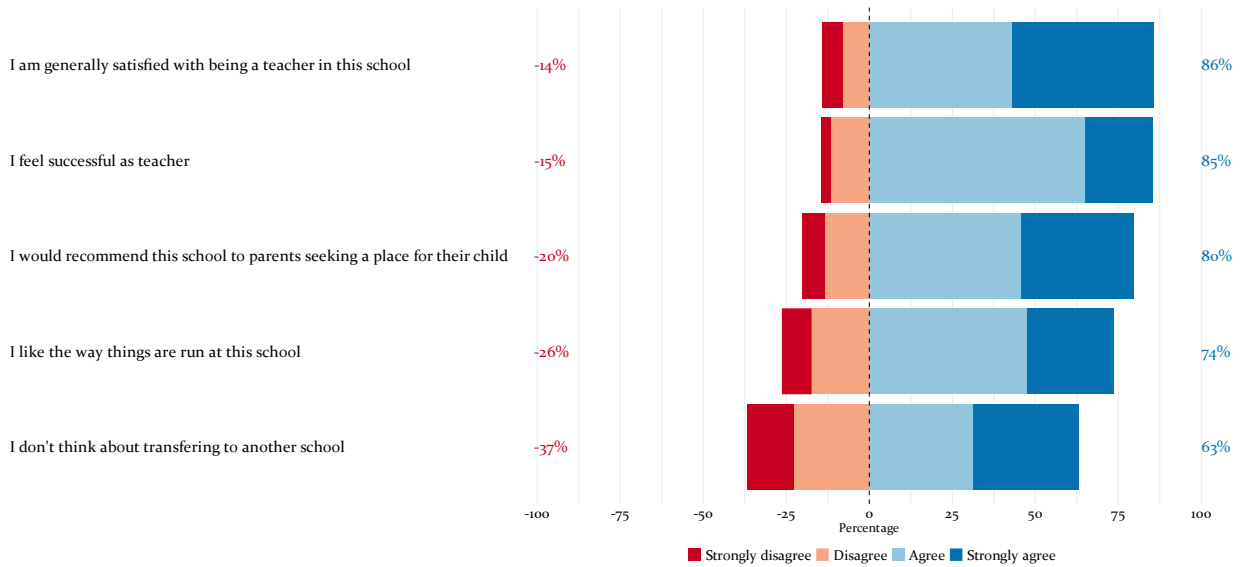
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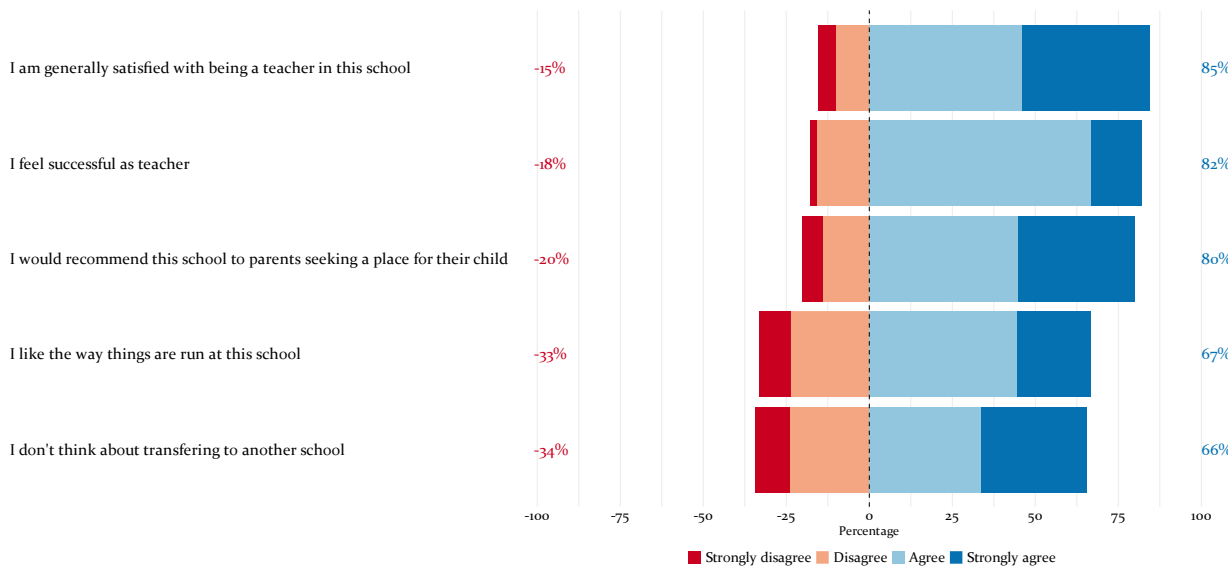
APPENDIX

Teachers' Job Satisfaction by Experience Levels

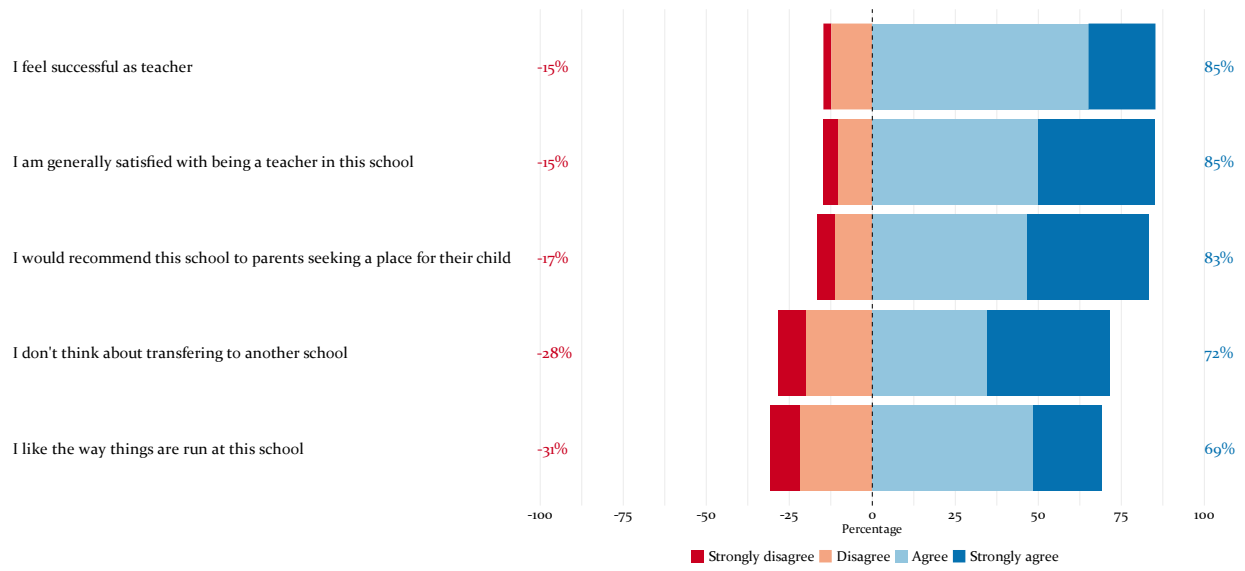
Novice Teacher (Less than 3 years of experience)



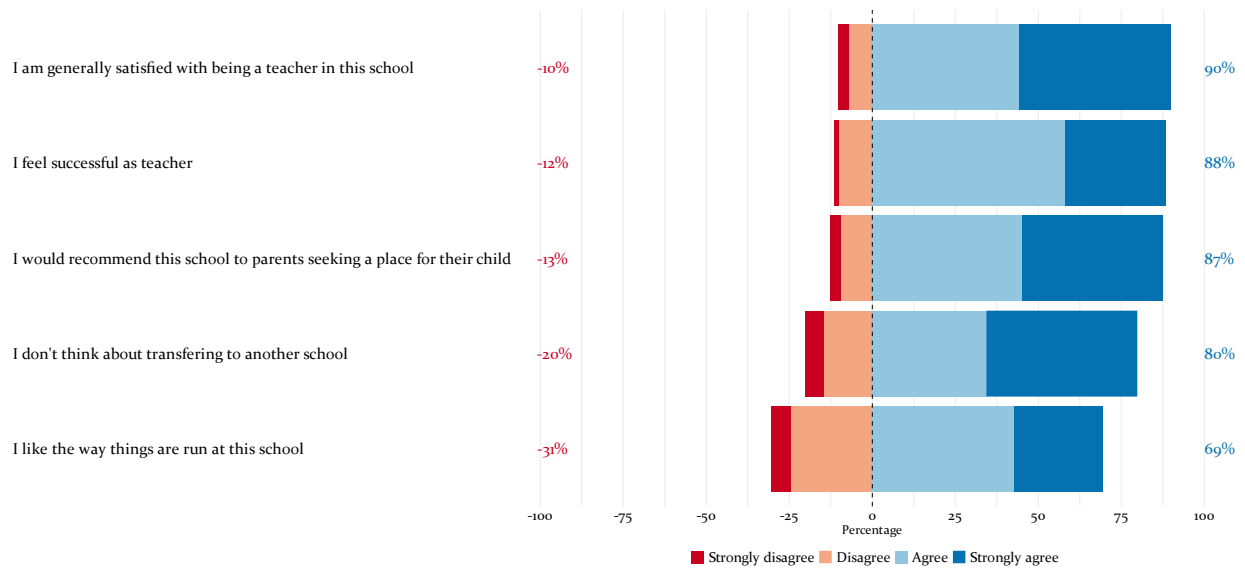
Early Career Teacher (3 to 10 years of experience)



Mid-Career Teacher (11 to 15 years of experience)

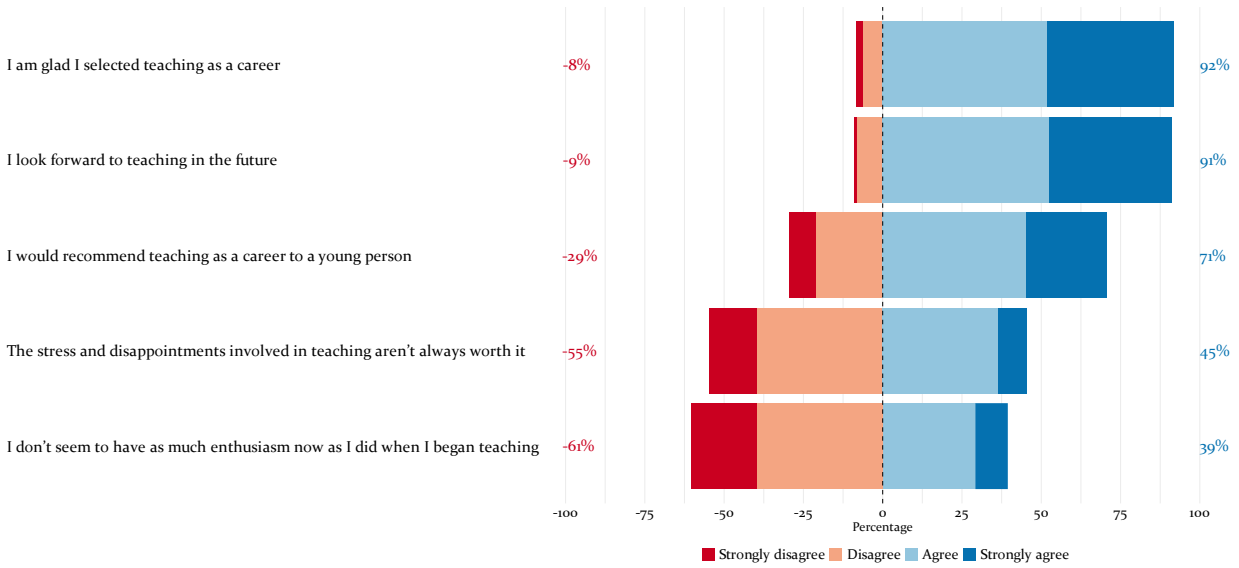


Late-Career Teacher (More than 15 years of experience)

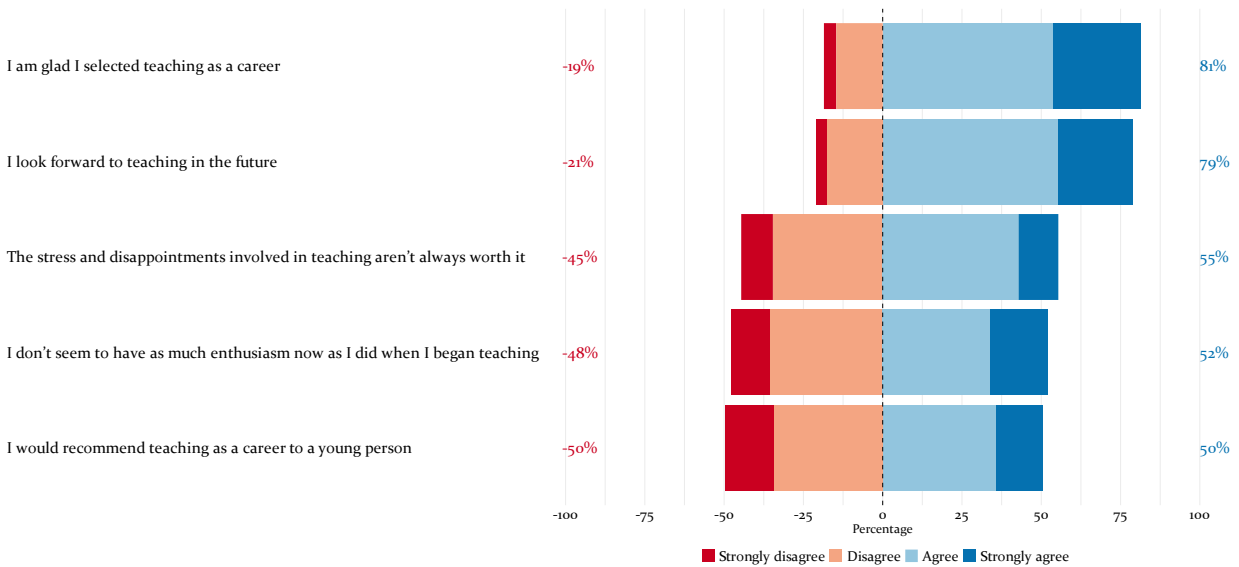


Teachers' Wellbeing by Experience Levels

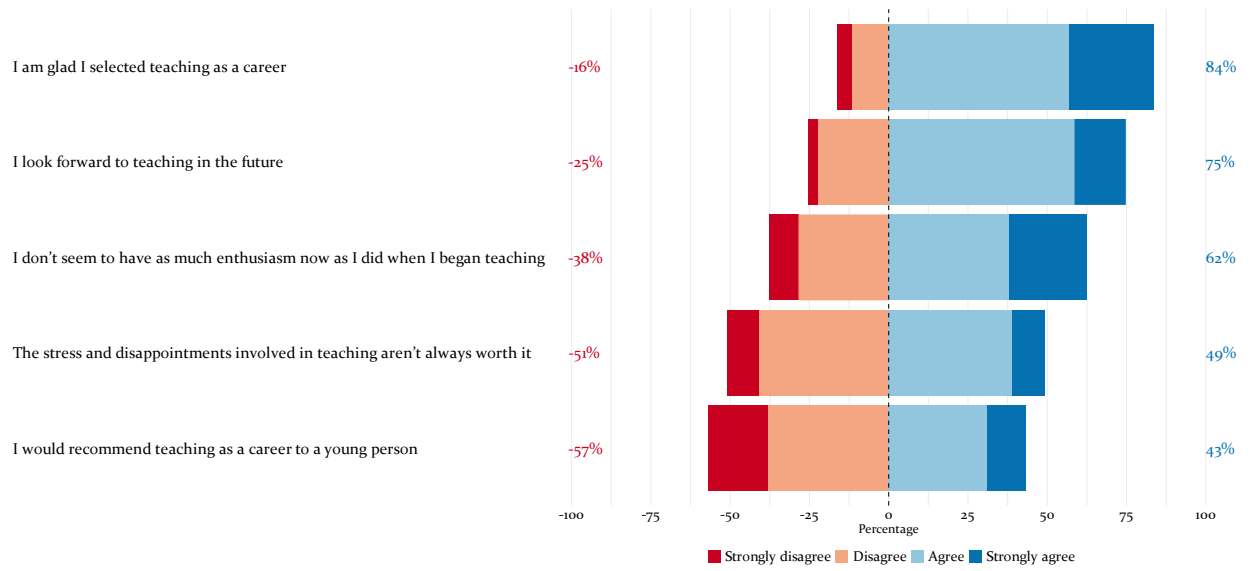
Novice Teacher (Less than 3 years of experience)



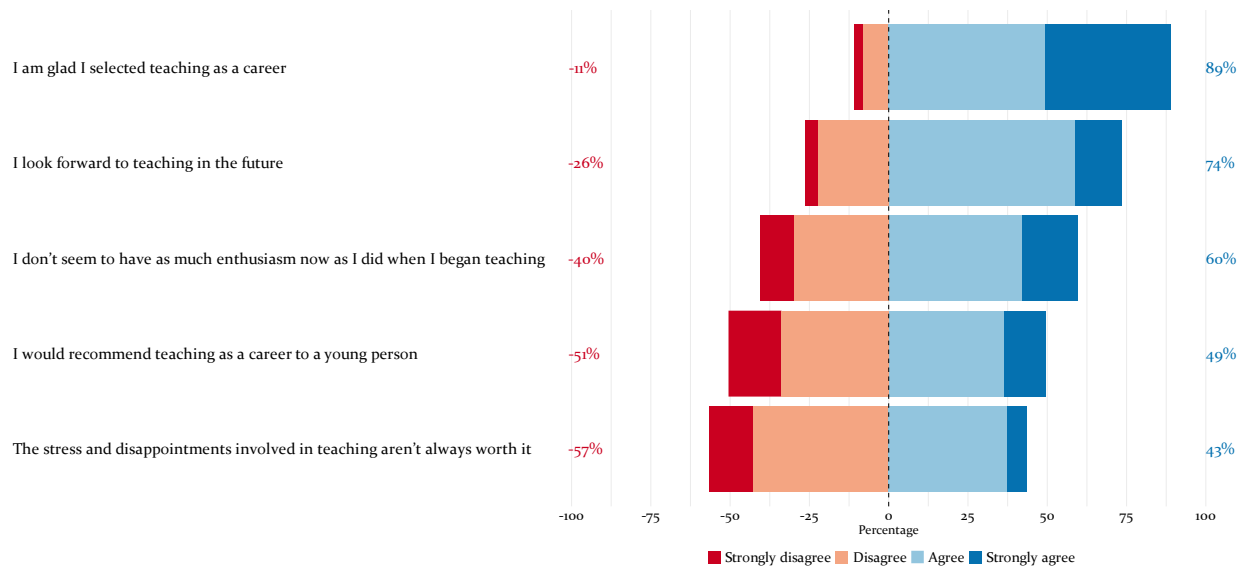
Early Career Teacher (3 to 10 years of experience)



Mid-Career Teacher (11 to 20 years of experience)

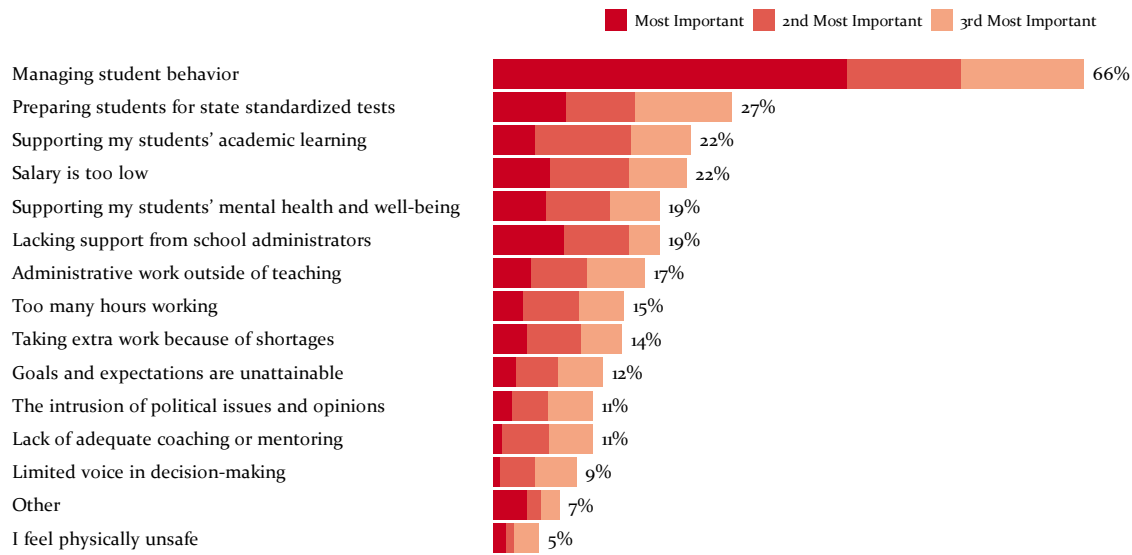


Late-Career Teacher (More than 20 years of experience)

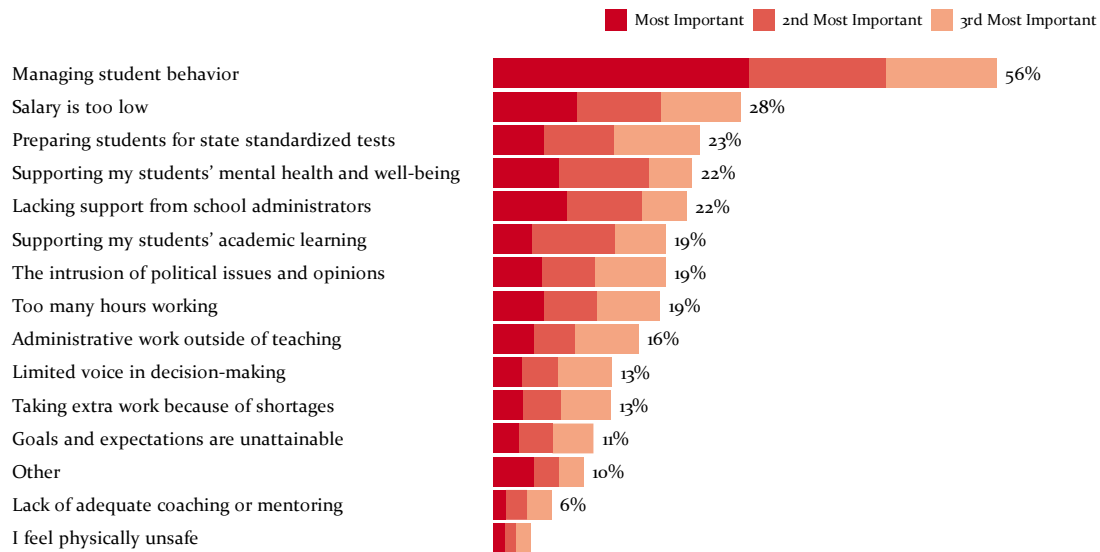


Sources of Teachers' Job-Related Stress by Experience Levels

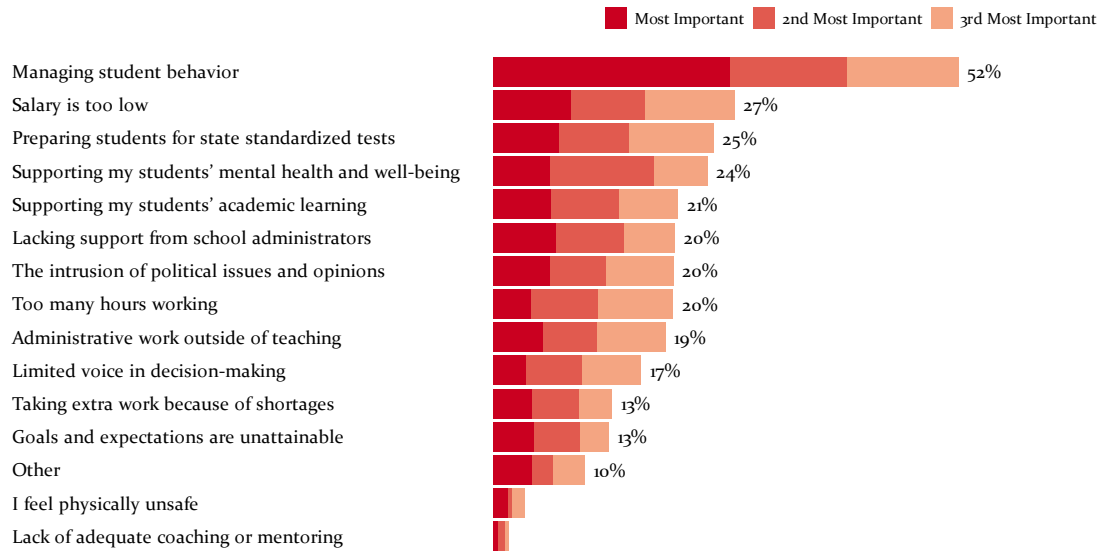
Novice Teacher (Less than 3 years of experience)



Early Career Teacher (3 to 10 years of experience)



Mid-Career Teacher (11 to 20 years of experience)



Late-Career Teacher (More than 20 years of experience)

