Teacher Recruitment and Retention



AMS
American Montessori Society

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The American Montessori Society (AMS) is the leading voice for quality Montessori education and a hub for the global Montessori community. AMS serves a wide and diverse audience of more than 20,000 members including 1,300 Montessori schools in both public and private sectors, teacher education programs, individual educators, researchers, and advocates. AMS sets the professional standards that guide its affiliated teacher education programs and accredited schools, and serves as a trusted resource for members, the media, policy-makers, and the public. Learn more at www.amshq.org.

ABOUT HANOVER RESEARCH

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Introduction

The American Montessori Society (AMS) is committed to advancing the quality and sustainability of Montessori education across the United States and globally. In recent years, AMS and its member schools have encountered growing challenges in teacher recruitment and retention, mirroring broader trends across the education sector. Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has declined significantly, while teacher attrition rates have risen, raising concerns about the sustainability of the teaching workforce. Anecdotal evidence from Montessori school leaders highlights persistent difficulties in finding and retaining qualified educators, resulting in frequent vacancies and high staff turnover. These challenges underscore the need for actionable insights that can inform leadership strategies and better support school and district leaders in building and sustaining strong teaching teams.

To address these concerns, AMS partnered with Hanover Research on a comprehensive, multi-phase research initiative exploring factors driving teacher retention and attrition, the motivations and barriers faced by prospective educators, and the career interests of high school students as they relate to education. Through the results of the following studies, which gathered and analyzed data from current and former teachers, individuals enrolled in teacher preparation programs, and high school students, AMS aims to develop a nuanced understanding of the educator pipeline. The findings will empower AMS and its partners to implement targeted interventions, strengthen recruitment and retention efforts, and promote the long-term sustainability of Montessori education.

Methodology

This project used a multiphase mixed-methods design comprising three national surveys and one qualitative in-depth interview analysis:

- The National Teacher Exit and Retention Survey examined the experiences of current K–12 teachers and teachers who had left the profession within the previous five years.

- The National Prospective Teacher Survey explored the motivations, expectations, and concerns of adults enrolled in postsecondary programs, including participants in teacher-preparation pathways and recent program completers.
- The Future Education Career Interest Survey examined perceptions of teaching among U.S. 11th- and 12th-grade students aged 18 or older.
- The National Recruitment and Retention In-Depth Interviews explored current or recently exited K–12 teachers' perceptions of decisions to stay or leave, workplace culture and leadership, job satisfaction, and supports that could improve retention.

The surveys, developed to allow comparison of recurring issues across the educator pipeline, were administered through a Hanover-managed Qualtrics account and were designed to take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Respondents were recruited through a third-party panel provider and American Montessori Society contact lists, with the latter providing access to Montessori-affiliated participants. The protocol targeted recruitment pools of approximately 3,200 survey respondents: 2,000 current or former teachers, 500 prospective teachers, and 700 high school students. Sampling followed relevant characteristics—demographics, geographic region, school level and size, years of experience, teacher-preparation pathway, and Montessori affiliation—but the recruitment approach did not guarantee population representativeness. Eligibility, consent, reading comprehension, and background-screening questions confirmed that respondents met the criteria for each survey.

Response Size by Survey

SURVEY	RESPONSE SIZE
National Exit and Retention Survey	754
National Prospective Teacher Survey	221
National Career Interest Survey	466

Survey analysis began with data-quality checks examining completeness, response patterns, completion speed, and possible duplicate or redundant responses; responses judged insufficiently reliable were excluded. Hanover used descriptive statistics and predetermined segmentations and crosstabs to examine differences by demographic, school, district, employment, and Montessori-affiliation characteristics when subgroup sizes permitted. Hanover then identified and synthesized salient question-level patterns alongside visualization of the complete results and crosstabs and incorporated the results into an integrated Power BI dashboard.

The qualitative analysis targeted approximately 20 current or recently exited K–12 teachers, with an intended balance of Montessori and non-Montessori participants and variation in retention status, geographic region, and experience. Montessori participants were recruited through AMS contact lists, while non-Montessori participants were recruited through User Interviews, Inc. Ten participants identified as Montessori, while ten came from the traditional classroom setting: 85% of participants were current teachers, while 15% were recently exited teachers. Trained researchers conducted semi-structured telephone or Zoom interviews lasting approximately 20–30 minutes. The interview guide addressed decisions to stay or leave, workplace culture and leadership, job satisfaction, and supports that could improve retention, while allowing interviewers to use probes and follow participants' experiences. With participant permission, interviews were recorded, transcribed, de-identified, and thematically coded. Researchers reviewed emerging themes after successive groups of approximately three interviews to assess coverage of the research questions and refine subsequent inquiry.

Across educational settings, stayers—educators who remain at the same school from one academic year to the next—are more likely to report leadership practices that foster trust through professional autonomy, meaningful teacher voice, responsive communication, respect for professional judgment, and equitable treatment. Conversely, gaps in these conditions may contribute to decisions among leavers—educators who exit the teaching profession. Montessori educators report particular challenges related to shared decision-making, communication, professional recognition, and opportunities for career advancement, highlighting leadership conditions that may influence teacher retention and attrition.

Key Findings

Montessori educators demonstrate a strong commitment to their work, highlighting the importance of compensation and sustainable workloads in supporting long-term retention.

Among educators who identify compensation as a decision factor, 66% of Montessori educators say pay does not align with living costs, compared with 52% of public-school and 42% of other non-public-school educators. At the same time, Montessori educators often manage responsibilities that extend beyond instructional time, including material preparation, observation, and mixed-age classroom management. Only 37% of Montessori staff report being able to complete their duties during regular hours, compared with 64% of public-school and 75% of other non-public-school staff, reflecting the distinctive demands and dedication associated with Montessori practice.

Strong leadership relationships are a powerful retention asset, and educators are most engaged when trust is paired with meaningful opportunities for input.

Educators who remain in the profession consistently report stronger leadership experiences than those who leave: 82% of stayers feel trusted to carry out their responsibilities without excessive oversight compared with 56% of leavers, while 81% describe their supervisor relationship as positive and supportive, compared with 59% of leavers. However, autonomy alone is insufficient; educators also value meaningful input into decisions, reliable communication, leaders who understand classroom realities, and evidence that feedback leads to action. Montessori educators report strong levels of professional trust, with 85% saying they feel trusted; however, fewer (60%) report being involved in job-related decisions, suggesting an opportunity to build on an already strong foundation of autonomy through greater shared decision-making.

A human-centered workplace strengthens commitment by addressing educators' day-to-day experience, not just their formal employment conditions.

Educators who stay in their roles report notably stronger experiences related to teamwork, mutual respect, organizational pride, feelings of being valued, enjoyment, and fulfillment than those who leave. Montessori educators report many of the same priorities and identify additional opportunities to strengthen communication, with 61% reporting clear and timely supervisor communication, compared with 73% of public-school staff. Interviews connect these outcomes to tangible practices such as protecting teachers' time, supplying needed resources, offering flexibility, communicating changes in advance, and treating employees consistently and fairly.



Professional learning supports retention when it addresses classroom realities and connects to meaningful career growth.

Prospective educators enter the profession with a strong orientation toward learning—every surveyed pre-service respondent rates lifelong learning opportunities as highly influential—but educators distinguish between simply having access to training and receiving development they can actually use. Reported gaps include classroom management, behavior support, special education, neurodivergence, and support for English language learners. Montessori and non-Montessori educators identify different development needs: while Montessori educators seek to complement philosophical preparation with practical support for behavioral, linguistic, and learning needs, traditional educators emphasize practical, job-embedded preparation.

Montessori educators share many of the motivations and priorities seen across the profession while navigating distinctive strengths, responsibilities, and opportunities for support.

The findings suggest that Montessori educators are driven by many of the same factors that influence teacher retention more broadly, including supportive leadership, meaningful professional learning, sustainable workloads, and competitive compensation. At the same time, they bring unique responsibilities related to material preparation, observation, mixed-age classrooms, and maintaining fidelity to Montessori principles. These distinct characteristics create opportunities for tailored leadership practices, professional learning, and workplace supports that reflect and strengthen the Montessori model.

Teacher Retention and Recruitment

Analysis of the survey and interview data revealed the following themes:

- Compensation and Workload
- Trust, Autonomy, and Leadership
- Relevance of Professional Learning
- Human-Centered Work Environments
- High School Student's Career Interest

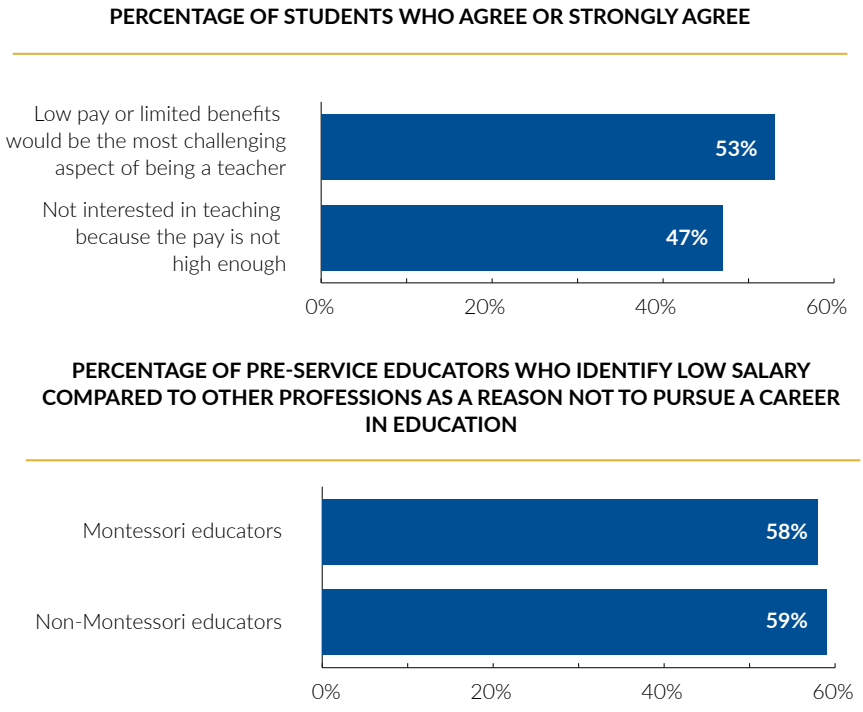
Compensation and Workload Shape Retention Decisions

Across the educator pipeline, survey respondents report that inadequate compensation, excessive workload, stress, and challenging working conditions—especially in Montessori settings—undermine entry and retention, while better pay, greater respect, and more sustainable workplaces offer the clearest opportunities to strengthen recruitment and reduce turnover.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY SHAPES ENTRY AND RETENTION

Compensation shapes interest in teaching long before educators enter the classroom and continues to influence whether they remain in the profession. Among high school students who do not plan to become teachers, 47% say teachers do not earn enough, while 53% identify low pay or limited benefits as a potential challenge. Pre-service teachers—or individuals enrolled in formal teacher preparation programs who have not yet completed their initial preparation—express the same concern more strongly: 58% of Montessori respondents and 59% of non-Montessori respondents identify low salaries compared with other professions as a leading reason not to pursue teaching. These findings show that prospective educators evaluate the financial viability of teaching against other career options from the beginning of the recruitment pipeline.

Figure 1: Perceptions of teacher compensation among high school students and pre-service educators



Source: National Career Interest Survey and National Prospective Teacher Survey

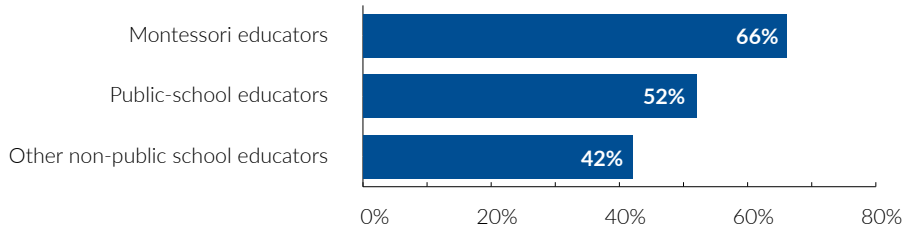
"Salary is definitely a factor. It's the reason I couldn't pursue teaching earlier in life, even though I wanted to. Compared to other careers, compensation can make it hard to sustain a certain lifestyle."
-Montessori respondent

"Salary is number one. Everything keeps getting more expensive, but salaries don't keep up. Especially for paraprofessionals—they are incredibly underpaid."
-Non-Montessori respondent

The costs of becoming a teacher compound concern about future earnings. Unpaid or underpaid student teaching concerns 67% of Montessori respondents and 73% of non-Montessori respondents. Respondents also cite tuition costs and limited access to financial aid as significant barriers. These expenses require prospective teachers to absorb financial strain before they begin earning a full-time salary. When candidates anticipate relatively low wages after paying for preparation, the financial return on entering the profession may appear insufficient. Once educators enter the workforce, they assess whether their pay supports a reasonable standard of living. Fifty-seven percent of current educators and 47% of former educators report that their pay does not keep pace with local living costs. Montessori educators report an especially pronounced mismatch: among those who identify compensation as a decision factor, 66% say their pay does not align with living costs, compared with 52% of public-school educators and 42% of educators in other non-public schools. These differences suggest that local costs and employment setting shape how educators experience compensation.

"People know education pay won't be amazing, but if salaries don't allow someone to support their family, that becomes a major factor. So it's often workplace dissatisfaction or lifestyle/financial realities."
-Montessori respondent

Figure 2: Percentage of educators who identify compensation as a decision factor to stay or leave who say their pay does not align with living costs



Source: National Exit and Retention Survey

Educators also judge compensation in relation to the amount of work their positions require. **Only 40% of current educators agree that their compensation matches their workload.** The interviews provide context for this judgment. Participants describe planning, administrative work, assessments, documentation, material preparation, and student observation spilling into evenings and weekends. Montessori staff also describe the time required to prepare materials, observe students, and manage mixed-age classrooms. When schools rely on educators' personal time to complete essential duties, educators effectively perform work beyond their scheduled and compensated hours.

Compensation concerns extend beyond current salary to long-term financial and professional growth. Pre-service teachers also value clear information about compensation and benefits when evaluating employment commitments. Together, these findings indicate that educators consider whether schools communicate compensation clearly, provide predictable salary growth, and offer viable pathways for advancement. Interview participants who express interest in moving into mentoring, coaching, or leadership roles further illustrate the importance of career pathways that allow experienced educators to remain in education. Former educators identify limited opportunities for raises or advancement more often than current educators (68% versus 48%, respectively).

Across the surveys, respondents consistently identify stronger compensation as a central recruitment and retention strategy. Higher pay or better benefits would increase interest in teaching for 51% of high school students. Competitive compensation ranks as very or extremely important to long-term retention for 86% of Montessori respondents and 91% of non-Montessori respondents. Among current educators, 75% identify an increased base salary as a reason to remain, and 57% support automatic cost-of-living adjustments. These findings point to a multidimensional compensation strategy that combines competitive base pay, benefits, preparation support, cost-of-living adjustments, transparent salary information, and opportunities for advancement. Because workload affects how educators evaluate the fairness of their pay, schools must also protect planning time and limit uncompensated work if they want compensation improvements to produce lasting retention gains.

WORKLOAD AND TIME PRESSURES IMPACT TEACHING SUSTAINABILITY

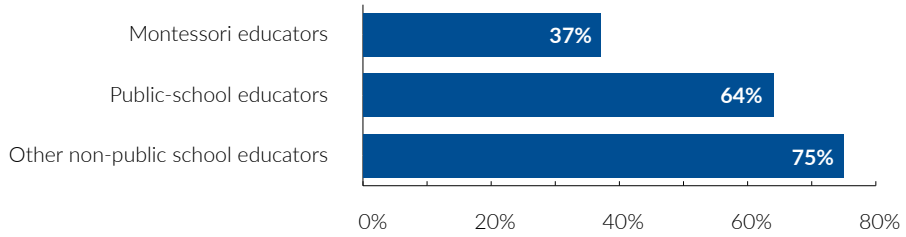
Workload and stress influence both entry into teaching and decisions to remain in the profession. Among current educators, 39% identify stress or workload as an exit factor, as do 42% of former educators. High school students anticipate these pressures before entering the field: 43% of those who do not plan to become teachers say they have heard that teaching is very stressful, and 50% of surveyed students identify high stress or burnout as a potential challenge. These findings suggest that demanding working conditions affect not only current teachers' retention decisions but also prospective teachers' perceptions of the profession.

> *"Time—more than anything else. Time is the scarcest resource. Higher pay doesn't help if it comes with unsustainable workloads. What really helps is carving out time during work hours for planning and parent communication—tasks that otherwise happen after hours. Dedicated, protected time for non-classroom responsibilities makes a huge difference."*
> *-Montessori respondent*

Time scarcity provides one important link between workload and burnout. Interview participants describe insufficient time to plan, reflect, and recover during the workday. They report that planning and administrative responsibilities often spill into evenings and weekends, reducing their ability to separate work from their personal lives. Some participants also describe workload pressures as cumulative, with demands intensifying over time when schools fail to intervene. This pattern shows how recurring time pressure can gradually make teaching feel unsustainable.

Protected planning time can help schools interrupt this cycle. Interview participants associate protected time during the workday with lower stress, stronger morale, and greater job satisfaction. Survey findings reinforce the need for this protection: only 37% of Montessori staff report that they can complete their duties during regular working hours, compared with 64% of public-school staff and 75% of staff in other non-public schools. When schools reserve adequate time for essential responsibilities, educators can complete more work within the workday and preserve more time for recovery.

Figure 3: I can usually complete my work duties during regular working hours



Source: National Exit and Retention Survey
Note: This chart combines the percentage of respondents who answered "somewhat agree" and "completely agree".

> *"Give teachers adequate preparation time, especially new teachers. Limit unnecessary demands and respect teachers' need for breaks. Providing flexibility and trusting teachers to make decisions in their classrooms goes a long way."*
> *-Non-Montessori respondent*

The sources also show that workload takes different forms across educational settings. Montessori staff describe the time required to prepare materials, observe students, and manage mixed-age classrooms. They report that time pressure can undermine both the quality and sustainability of Montessori practice and make it harder to maintain fidelity to Montessori principles. Traditional classroom staff describe different but related pressures, including fast-paced curricula, frequent assessments, and extensive documentation. These findings indicate that schools need to identify the specific activities driving workload in each setting rather than treat workload as a uniform problem.

Teaching can also impose a significant physical burden. Interview participants who work with young children describe constant bending, floor work, lifting, and long-term physical strain. Several participants say they love teaching but question whether their bodies will allow them to continue indefinitely in early-childhood classrooms. Their experiences expand the concept of burnout beyond emotional exhaustion and show that physically demanding working conditions can also shorten an educator's time in a classroom role.

Classroom conditions add another layer of anticipated stress. Among high school students, 49% express concern about managing student behavior, and the same percentage anticipate a lack of respect from students or families. Students also identify large class sizes or insufficient support, testing or curriculum pressures, and limited career growth as potential challenges. The interviews echo some of these concerns through educators' descriptions of fast-paced curricula and demanding instructional and documentation requirements. These findings suggest that educators need manageable classroom conditions, adequate support, and realistic instructional expectations to sustain their work.

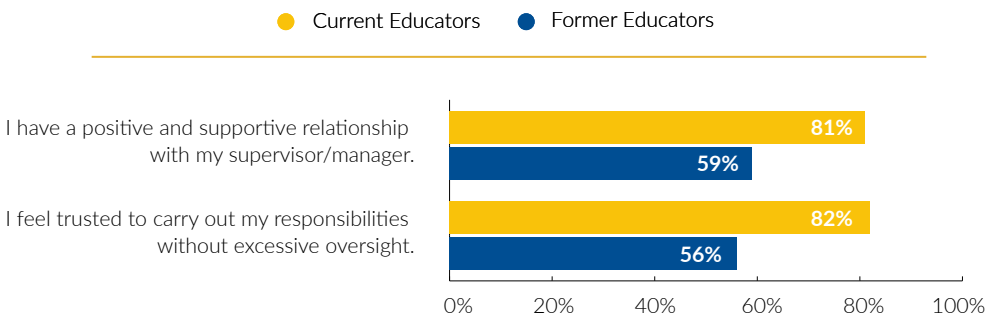
Trust, Autonomy, and Leadership Matter

Across settings, educators are more likely to stay when leaders build trust through autonomy, meaningful teacher voice, responsive communication, respect for professional judgment, and equitable treatment, though Montessori educators report particular gaps in shared decision-making, communication, recognition, and advancement opportunities.

PROFESSIONAL TRUST, AUTONOMY, AND TEACHER VOICE

Educators experience trust through both professional autonomy and supportive supervision. Current and former educator survey findings show that stayers more often report freedom to carry out their responsibilities, make work-related decisions, and work without excessive oversight. Pre-service teachers also place strong importance on supportive school leadership. Interview participants reinforce these findings by linking flexibility, approachable supervisors, and respect for professional judgment with stronger engagement and a greater willingness to remain in their positions.

Figure 4: Leadership perceptions

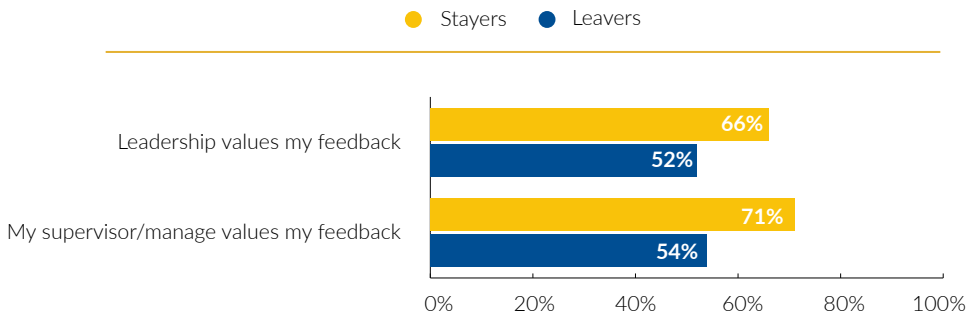


Source: National Exit and Retention Survey
Note: This chart combines the percentage of respondents who answered "somewhat agree" and "completely agree".

> *"Flexibility has been huge for me. Being trusted to design my curriculum and adapt it as needed has helped me stay engaged, especially through difficult periods like the pandemic. The structure-within-limits approach that Montessori uses works well for adults too. Leadership here hires people they trust and generally allows them to do their work, which helps teachers thrive.[…] Over time, there's been a shift toward prioritizing teacher well-being, and that has made a real difference."*
> *-Montessori respondent*

Teacher voice represents a separate but closely related dimension of trust. Stayers more often believe that supervisors and organizational leaders value their feedback, while Montessori educators report high levels of autonomy but less involvement in decisions that affect their work. Interview participants want leaders to seek teacher input, listen carefully, and act on what they hear. Although 85% of Montessori educators feel trusted, only 60% say supervisors involve them in job-related decisions, compared with 72% of educators in other non-public schools. These findings show that granting classroom autonomy does not replace shared decision-making. Leaders strengthen trust when they give educators meaningful influence over policies, responsibilities, and practices that shape their daily work.

Figure 5: Perceptions on feedback



Source: National Exit and Retention Survey
Note: This chart combines the percentage of respondents who answered "somewhat agree" and "completely agree".

> *"Providing flexibility and trusting teachers to make decisions in their classrooms goes a long way."*
> *-Non-Montessori respondent*

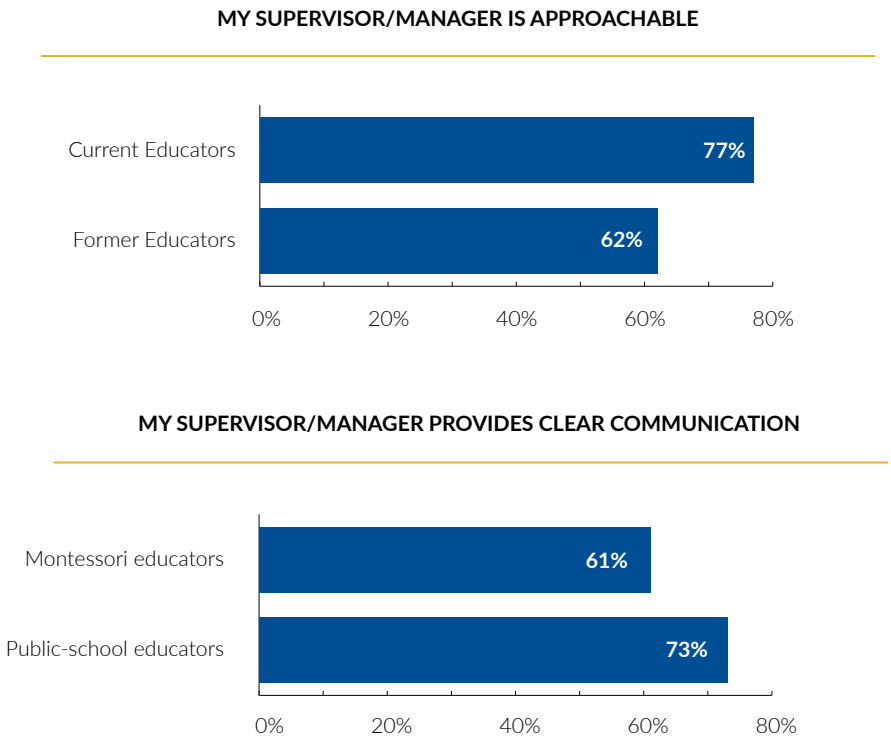
CREDIBLE, RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP

Leadership presence, responsiveness, and communication also shape educators' confidence in their organizations. Traditional classroom educators value regular check-ins, classroom observations, actionable feedback, consistent approaches to discipline, and attention to staff morale. Montessori educators report comparatively weaker experiences with clear and timely supervisor communication. Interview participants describe advance notice, reliable calendars, realistic timelines, and stable expectations as important leadership practices. They also explain that last-minute changes, disconnected leaders, and unfulfilled commitments create stress and weaken trust.

> *"Feeling heard and seeing action taken builds trust. Listening is also key. Leadership that considers teachers as whole people—not just employees—creates a healthier culture. That shift has made a noticeable difference in morale."*
> *-AMS respondent*

Educators also expect leaders to understand the instructional settings they oversee. Montessori participants want leaders who understand Montessori pedagogy and avoid imposing traditional models that conflict with its principles. Traditional classroom educators similarly value feedback and administrative decisions grounded in actual classroom conditions. Across settings, participants also emphasize mentorship, collaboration, and access to a dependable person who can answer questions, especially early in an educator's career. Leaders build credibility when they understand educators' work and create practical structures that help them succeed.

Figure 6: Leadership perceptions



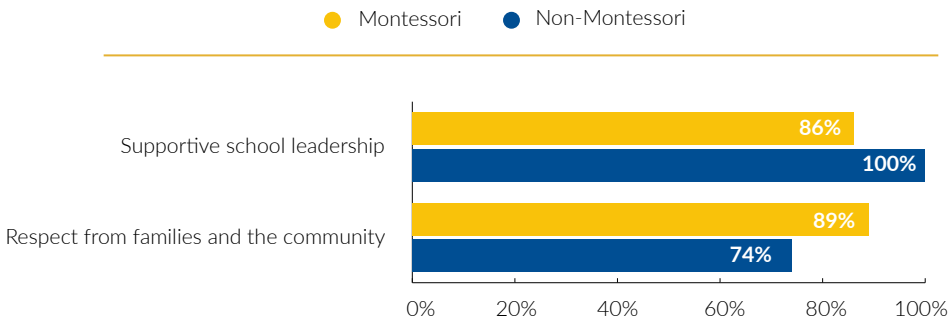
Source: National Exit and Retention Survey
Note: This chart combines the percentage of respondents who answered "somewhat agree" and "completely agree".

RESPECT, RECOGNITION, AND EQUITABLE TREATMENT

> *"Not being heard as a professional—leaders acting like they know better without being in classrooms day to day."*
> *-Montessori respondent*

Finally, educators connect trust with respect, recognition, and equitable treatment. Prospective teachers place substantial importance on supportive school leadership, with 86% of Montessori respondents and 100% of non-Montessori respondents rating it as very or extremely important. Respect from families and the community is also highly valued, particularly among Montessori respondents, 89%, compared with 74% of non-Montessori respondents. Interview participants describe sincere appreciation, flexibility during personal difficulties, and recognition of teachers as individuals as reasons to stay. Conversely, favoritism, impersonal treatment, and declining respect for professional judgment contribute to dissatisfaction. Across surveys and interviews, educators consistently associate trustworthy leadership with clear communication, responsiveness, equitable treatment, and respect for their professional expertise.

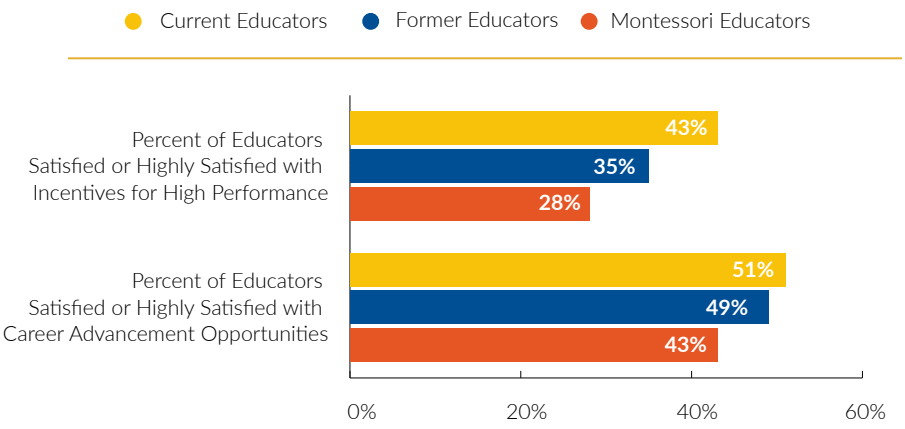
Figure 7: How important are the following school environment factors to your ability to thrive and remain in the teaching profession?



Source: National Prospective Teacher Survey
Note: This chart combines the percentage of respondents who answered "extremely important" and "very important".

Formal recognition remains a notable weakness, even within otherwise positive workplace cultures. Only 35% of current educators express satisfaction with incentives for high performance, compared with 43% of former educators. Montessori educators report particularly low satisfaction: only 28% feel satisfied with performance incentives, and 43% feel satisfied with career advancement opportunities.

Figure 8: Recognition perceptions



Source: National Exit and Retention Survey

Professional Learning Must Be Relevant to Classroom Needs and Connected to Growth

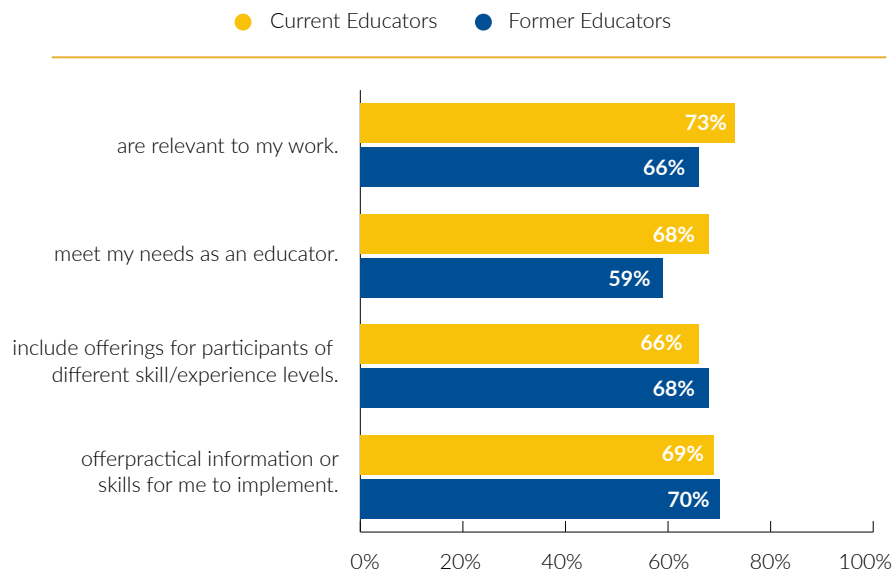
Professional learning can strengthen recruitment and retention when it is practical, differentiated, supported by mentorship and resources, and connected to career goals; Montessori educators particularly seek preparation for evolving classroom needs and more time to apply and reflect on learning.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Professional learning represents a powerful source of interest in teaching and a potential driver of retention. Every pre-service respondent in both Montessori and non-Montessori groups rates opportunities for lifelong learning as very or extremely influential in the decision to become a teacher. Gaining knowledge and developing new skills also ranks as the most common reason respondents pursue their current field of study, selected by 83% of Montessori respondents and 66% of non-Montessori respondents. These findings show that prospective teachers enter the profession with a strong desire to learn, but schools must sustain that motivation by connecting professional learning to educators' work and long-term goals.

However, access to training alone does not ensure that professional learning meets educators' needs. Seventy-two percent of both stayers and leavers agree that they can access the training necessary for their roles. However, satisfaction with training or professional development falls from 70% among stayers to 63% among leavers, and only 59% of leavers agree that school-based professional development meets their needs, compared with 68% of stayers. At the same time, similar shares of stayers and leavers find district-level sessions relevant. This pattern suggests that schools must look beyond whether training exists or covers a relevant topic and consider whether educators can apply it successfully in their classrooms.

Figure 9: In general, the professional development opportunities offered by my school . . .



Source: National Exit and Retention Survey
Note: This chart combines the percentage of respondents who answered "somewhat agree" and "completely agree".

Preparation for classroom realities emerges as a particular concern for pre-service respondents. One-third of Montessori respondents and 9% of non-Montessori respondents worry that their preparation programs do not adequately prepare them for classroom practice. Interview participants identify specific gaps in classroom management, behavior support, special education, neurodivergence, and support for English language learners. Traditional classroom educators similarly describe entering the profession with substantial theory but too little practical experience. These gaps can increase stress and leave new educators feeling inadequate during the years when they may need the most support.

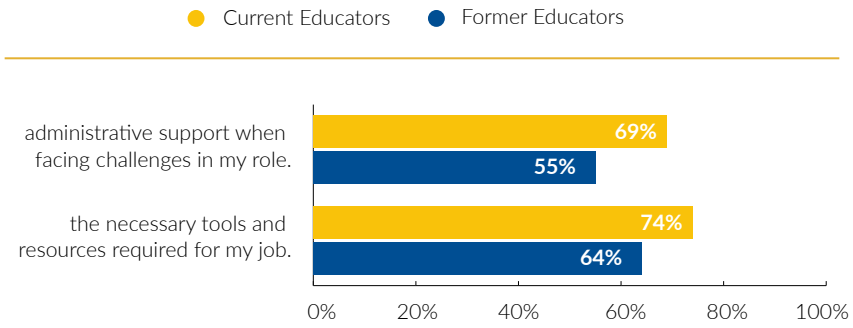
Educators also want professional learning that reflects their differing roles, interests, and career objectives. Leavers express substantially more interest than stayers in developing leadership or supervisory skills and learning about technology integration. Montessori educators seek training that preserves strong philosophical preparation while addressing current behavioral, linguistic, and learning needs. Traditional classroom educators call for practical, job-embedded learning rather than disconnected or one-time sessions. A uniform professional development program cannot address the full range of educators' classroom responsibilities and professional ambitions.

> *"I had strong training in Montessori philosophy, but I wasn't prepared for the behavioral and learning needs I see now."*
> *-Montessori respondent*

> *"Professional development needs to be differentiated and aligned with teachers' interests. If a teacher wants to grow in a particular area, leaders should support that rather than blocking opportunities due to logistics. Crisis and behavioral intervention training should be meaningful and ongoing, not a one-time slideshow.... Sometimes observation feedback isn't relevant or practical, which suggests a disconnect from classroom realities."*
> *-Non-Montessori respondent*

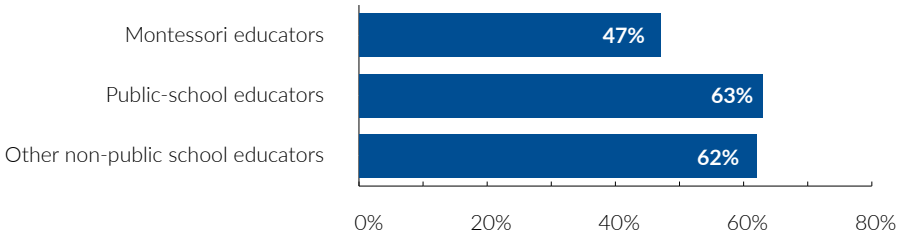
Schools must also provide the time, resources, and leadership support that allow educators to apply new learning. As shown on the following page, only 55% of leavers say leaders support them when challenges arise, compared with 69% of stayers, while 64% of leavers report receiving the tools and resources needed to apply new skills, compared with 74% of stayers. **Montessori educators report particularly limited time for reflection after training:** only 47% say they have enough time, compared with 62% of educators in other non-public schools and 63% of public-school educators. Without time to reflect, practice, and receive feedback, even relevant professional development may fail to improve classroom practice or strengthen retention.

Figure 10: In my role, I have . . .



Source: National Exit and Retention Survey
Note: This chart combines the percentage of respondents who answered "somewhat agree" and "completely agree".

Figure 11: In my role, I have adequate time for cognitive processing and reflective meta-cognition after the training.



Source: National Exit and Retention Survey
Note: This chart combines the percentage of respondents who answered "somewhat agree" and "completely agree".

MENTORSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY SUPPORT MATTER

Mentorship and sustained early-career support can connect preparation, classroom application, and professional growth. Interview participants across Montessori and traditional settings value a dependable mentor who can answer questions, share materials, and reduce isolation. Montessori educators more often describe philosophy-specific mentoring and school investment in training, coaching, and conferences, while traditional educators describe practical support from teammates and grade-level peers.

> *"Mentor support is most important—having a go-to person for any question."*
> *-Non-Montessori respondent*

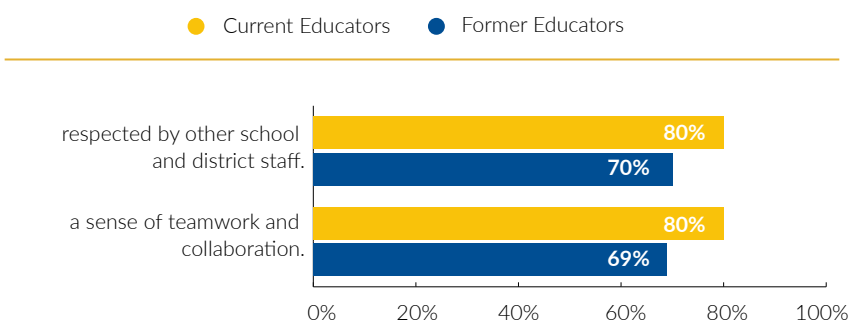
Clear career pathways matter as well: 83% of Montessori respondents hope to remain classroom teachers, while non-Montessori respondents express more varied ambitions, including becoming teacher educators or school administrators. **Schools can make professional learning a stronger retention tool by combining relevant content, ongoing mentorship, opportunities to apply new skills, and pathways that connect learning to educators' evolving career goals.**

Human-Centered Work Environments Foster Commitment

> *"Compensation matters, but so does how teachers are treated day to day. Making sure teachers have the supplies they need, protecting their time, and recognizing that teachers are people who need rest and balance are all essential."*
> *-Montessori respondent*

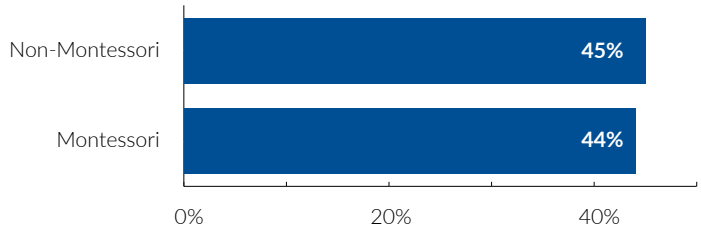
Human-centered work environments foster commitment by creating daily experiences of collaboration, respect, belonging, and support. Among educators planning to stay, 80% say their workplace fosters strong teamwork and collaboration, compared with 69% of educators who have left. The same pattern appears for mutual respect, which 80% of stayers report compared with 70% of leavers. Prospective teachers also look for these conditions when selecting a workplace: 44% of Montessori respondents and 45% of non-Montessori respondents rank a welcoming and inclusive culture among their three most important reasons for choosing a specific school. High school students express similar preferences: 33% say working in a school aligned with their values would increase their interest in teaching, while 32% would respond positively to hearing young or diverse teachers discuss their experiences.

Figure 12: When at work, I feel . . .



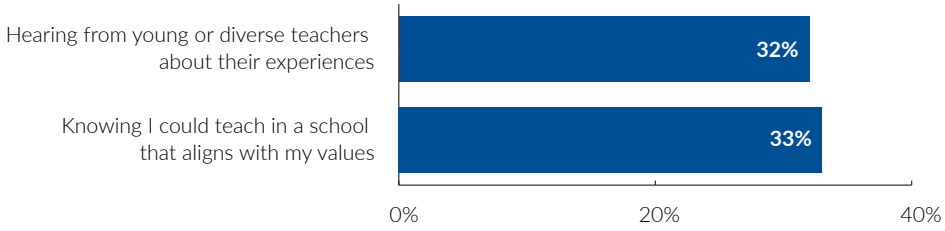
Source: National Exit and Retention Survey
Note: This chart combines the percentage of respondents who answered "somewhat agree" and "completely agree".

Figure 13: Percentage of prospective teachers who rank a welcoming and inclusive culture among their three most important reasons for choosing a specific school



Source: National Prospective Teacher Survey

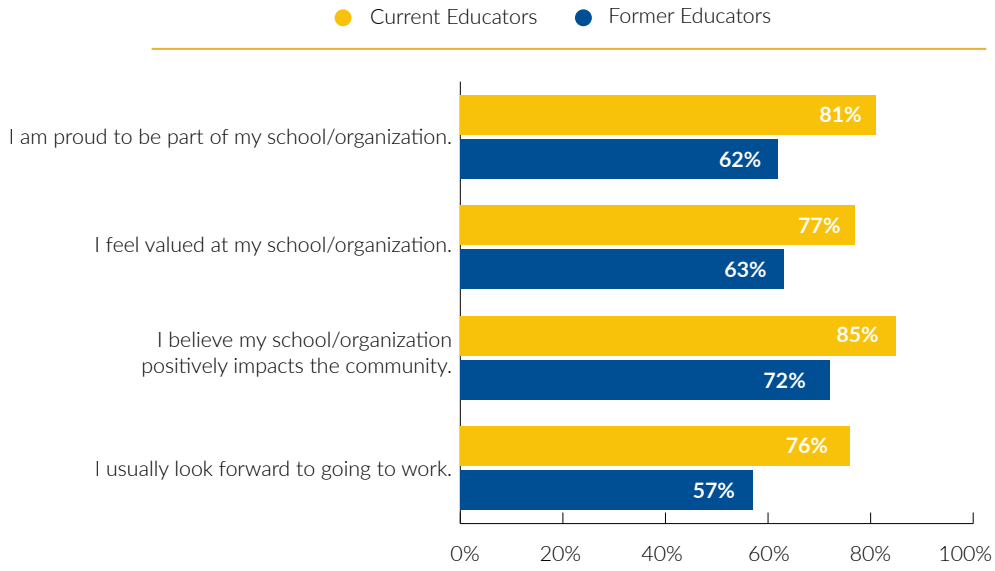
Figure 14: Which of the following would make you more interested in teaching and education?



Source: National Career Interest Survey

Stayers also report a stronger emotional connection to their organizations: Eighty-one percent express pride in their organization, 77% feel valued, and 76% usually look forward to work. Among leavers, those shares fall to 62%, 63%, and 57%, respectively.

Figure 15: Perceptions of commitment and morale



Source: National Exit and Retention Survey
Note: This chart combines the percentage of respondents who answered "somewhat agree" and "completely agree".

The nature of the work itself also supports commitment. Eighty-nine percent of stayers describe their roles as enjoyable, compared with 69% of leavers, while 86% of stayers find their work personally fulfilling, compared with 73% of leavers. Stayers also report stronger perceptions of physical safety, at 87% compared with 74% of leavers. High school students' expectations show that workplace well-being affects recruitment before individuals enter the profession: 43% of students who do not plan to teach have heard that teaching is very stressful, and 50% anticipate high stress or burnout as a challenge. Students again expressed concern about managing student behavior, large classes or insufficient support, and testing or curriculum pressures. These findings indicate that educators remain more committed—and prospective teachers may view the profession more favorably—when schools allow them to experience meaning and enjoyment while protecting their safety and well-being.

Interview participants identify practical ways schools can create these conditions. They want leaders to provide adequate supplies, protect teachers' time, recognize the need for rest and balance, ask staff what they need, and offer meaningful options. They also value clear communication and advance notice rather than last-minute changes. Fair treatment matters as well. One participant describes how administrative favoritism left some teachers feeling undervalued despite their contributions. These experiences show that human-centered practices require consistent, equitable treatment, not occasional expressions of appreciation.

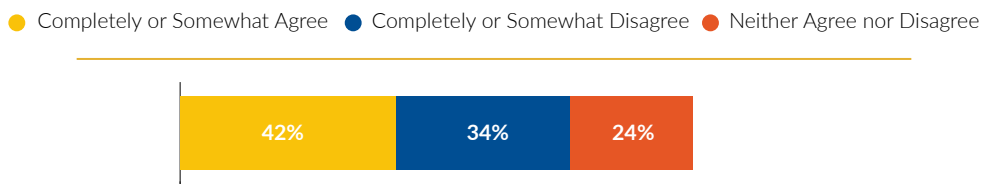
> *"I've seen situations where teachers were supported through family emergencies, even when it was difficult for the school. That sends a strong message that teachers' well-being matters. Feeling cared for as a whole person, not just as an employee, makes a big difference and encourages people to stay."*
> *-Montessori respondent*

> *"I'm already planning an exit strategy from the classroom. I love education, but the current dynamic makes teaching increasingly unsustainable. There used to be more respect for teachers' professional judgment."*
> *-Non-Montessori respondent*

High School Students: From Cautious Interest to Career Commitment

High school student respondents show limited but potentially expandable interest in teaching and education careers. Only 42% agree that they would consider working in teaching or education, while 34% disagree and 24% remain undecided. No grade level attracts strong interest from more than 26% of respondents, although high school and elementary teaching generate somewhat more interest than early-childhood or middle-school teaching. The classroom teacher role draws the largest share of consideration at 41%. Low pay, high stress, and difficult classroom conditions contribute to students' hesitation, but the sizeable, undecided group gives educator recruitment efforts an opportunity to turn moderate curiosity into stronger commitment.

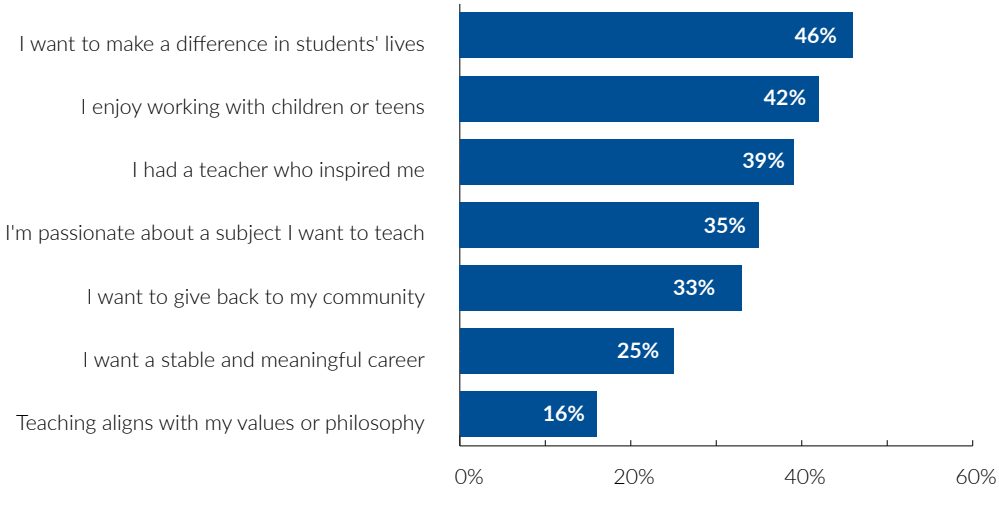
Figure 16: "I am open to considering work in teaching or education"



Source: National Career Interest Survey

Students who consider teaching respond most strongly to its purpose and relational rewards. Forty-six percent want to make a difference in students' lives, 42% enjoy working with children or teenagers, and 39% draw inspiration from a teacher they have had. Other students cite passion for a subject they hope to teach or a desire to give back to their community. Students also identify making a difference, building relationships with students and families, and exercising creativity as important benefits of teaching. These findings suggest that students view teaching primarily as meaningful, interpersonal work rather than simply a stable occupation.

Figure 17: Reasons for high school student interest in teaching

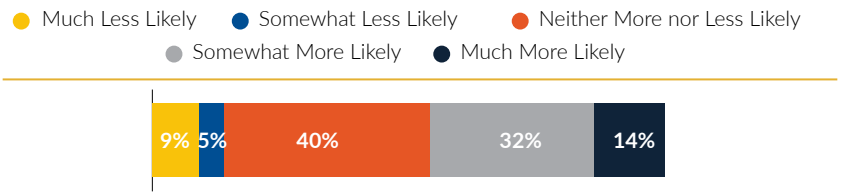


Source: National Career Interest Survey

Students form their perceptions of teaching mainly through their own school experiences, but relatively few gain direct insight into teachers' daily work. Sixty-four percent say their experiences as students influence their views, compared with 38% who point to conversations with current or former educators. Only 23% have participated in a teaching or tutoring program, and 22% have visited or volunteered in a classroom. Students express interest in more substantive exposure: 29% say better insight into what teaching is really like would increase their interest, and 27% identify internships or similar programs as a potential motivator. Structured classroom experiences could help students test their interest and develop a more informed understanding of the profession.

Familiarity with Montessori education creates a somewhat favorable disposition but does not consistently translate into career commitment. All respondents have attended a Montessori high school, yet only 46% say their experiences make them more likely to consider teaching in a Montessori school, and just 14% feel much more likely to do so. Another 40% remain neutral. These findings show that exposure to Montessori education alone does not lead students to view Montessori teaching as a concrete career option. Recruitment efforts may need to connect students' positive school experiences to explicit career pathways, direct invitations to explore teaching, and opportunities to experience the educator role firsthand.

Figure 18: Because of your experience, are you more or less likely to want to pursue a career teaching in a Montessori school?



Source: National Career Interest Survey

Insights

Advance policies that improve the financial viability of entering and remaining in the teaching profession.

Financial barriers emerge across the educator pipeline, from the costs of preparation and unpaid or underpaid student teaching to salaries that may not keep pace with local living costs or workload. Policy responses can address these pressures through investments in paid preparation experiences, scholarships or financial aid, competitive salary structures, cost-of-living adjustments, stronger benefits, and clearer pathways for compensation growth over time. Such policies may be especially important in settings where educators face distinctive workload demands that widen the gap between compensation and the role's actual requirements.

Cultivate school cultures where educators feel heard, valued, and trusted.

The findings indicate that leadership plays a central role in educators' decisions to remain in the profession. While teachers value professional autonomy, they are most likely to stay when trust is paired with meaningful opportunities for input, clear communication, responsiveness to concerns, and visible respect for their expertise. Schools can strengthen retention by creating structures that elevate educator voice, provide regular opportunities for feedback and dialogue, and ensure that teachers see how their input informs decisions. Leaders who understand classroom realities and follow through on commitments can foster stronger levels of trust, commitment, and organizational connection.

Create sustainable working conditions that allow educators to focus on high-quality teaching and learning.

Educators consistently describe their work as meaningful and rewarding, but many report challenges related to workload, time, and competing responsibilities. Schools can strengthen recruitment and retention by protecting planning and preparation time, reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, ensuring adequate classroom resources, and providing consistent support for emerging student and classroom needs. Workload pressures manifest differently across educational settings; therefore, leaders should examine the specific demands placed on educators and identify opportunities to streamline responsibilities while preserving instructional quality and mission-aligned practice.

Design professional learning and mentorship systems that support both immediate classroom needs and long-term career growth.

Professional learning is a key factor drawing individuals into education and helping them remain in the profession. Findings suggest educators benefit most from development opportunities that are practical, relevant, differentiated, and directly connected to classroom application. Schools can strengthen retention by pairing professional learning with mentorship, coaching, opportunities for reflection and implementation, and pathways for continued growth and leadership. Professional development is likely to have the greatest impact when it builds on educators' existing strengths while helping them address evolving instructional, behavioral, linguistic, and learning needs.

Strengthen policies that build an earlier and more accessible pipeline into teaching.

Many high school students remain open to education careers and are attracted to teaching because of its mission, relationships, and potential to make a difference, yet relatively few have opportunities to experience the profession firsthand. Policies that expand grow-your-own programs, educator career pathways, internships, tutoring experiences, dual-enrollment opportunities, and other structured exposure to teaching could help students translate general interest into a clearer career commitment. These efforts may be particularly valuable for students who already have positive school experiences but have not yet considered teaching as a concrete professional pathway.

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