

AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR WORK IN 2022

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This and previous studies can be found at www.monash.edu/perceptions-of-teaching

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This report details findings of the 2022 Monash University Teachers' Perceptions of their Work Survey, a study of Australian teachers' perceptions of their career experiences.

Debate and discourse in the media highlight an absence of teacher voices in conversations about the working contexts and conditions that impact them daily. This report contains teacher-elicited insights about their experiences and reflections on what could occur to improve current practices and educational policies impacting their work.

METHOD

A total of 5,497 participants responded to an anonymous online survey between May 9 and May 30 2022. The survey elicited both qualitative and quantitative insights about a range of topics, including, but not limited to:

- Respect and appreciation
- Satisfaction and belonging
- Retention and attraction
- Working conditions

FINDINGS

Most teachers reported that they felt the public does not respect teachers and that teaching is unappreciated.

Fewer than half of survey respondents reported feeling personally appreciated. A large majority of teachers indicated that they were planning to, or would like to, leave the profession. Most were dissatisfied with their roles. However, a large majority reported a sense of belonging to the profession.

A considerable majority of teachers reported that their workloads were unmanageable, and a quarter of teachers reported feeling unsafe in their workplace. Only one in three teachers would recommend teaching as a career.

Teachers reported a variety of challenges in respect to their workload and their perceived respect. Additional pressures included:

- Complexity of the learning, behaviour and social needs of children and young people
- An increasing burden of administration and data collection tasks
- Limited support from school and system leadership
- An overloaded curriculum

The teachers surveyed offered a number of solutions, including:

- Reducing administrative workload
- Reducing class sizes
- Employing more staff (including staff with expertise to support complex student needs)
- Higher expectations of students and parents
- More value placed on teachers and the profession, articulated through public platforms and symbolised by increased salaries

IMPLICATIONS

The majority of teachers indicated negative sentiments in their responses to most of the constructs examined in this study – with the exception of belonging. Understanding teachers' sense of belonging to the profession and how this might be further supported and leveraged could hold potential.

This study shows that there are many issues facing Australian teachers, and these concerns are complex. Findings demonstrate that the challenges faced by the teaching workforce require systemic support guided by appropriate education policy.

Teacher voice in policymaking is critical for addressing the challenges and concerns, and the voices of teachers shared in this report illustrate this potential.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is an important profession. Teachers are central to communities, playing a key role in cultural, social and economic growth.

In Australia, there are approximately 450,000 teachers working in almost 10,000 primary and secondary schools and in numerous early childhood settings (ACARA, 2020; Australian Childcare Alliance, 2022). In 2022, teachers in Australia are facing a range of exacerbated challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research deepens understandings of teachers' current conditions and experiences.

This study contributes to a research program that was initiated in 2019 (Heffernan et al., 2019) with a commission to better understand issues of recruitment and retention of teachers amid reports of "alarming" rates of teacher attrition and looming teacher shortages (Allen, Rowan & Singh, 2019, p.99).

In 2022, the Australian teaching workforce is under significant pressure – and concerns about teacher shortages are impacting students and communities across the country. The urgency and intensity of this situation has drawn the attention of the Australian and State and Territory governments, with teacher workforce supply being identified as an "immediate national priority" (Australian Government, 2022, p.4).

This report presents the findings of the 2022 Australian Teachers' Perceptions of their Work survey, which builds on the 2019 survey. In both surveys, an aim has been to amplify the voices of teachers by inviting them to contribute to much needed understandings of their career experiences and workplace conditions. In 2022, amid government "crisis talks" and considerable media attention, focusing on those who are most committed to the important work that they do (and most familiar with the current conditions and their consequences) is even more critical.

In the following sections, we share the findings from the survey of Australian teachers. We have organised the report into the following sections:

- Methodology
- Participant information
- Respect and appreciation
- Satisfaction and belonging
- Retention and attraction
- Working conditions
- Conclusions: Key challenges, recommended solutions and implications

METHODOLOGY

The survey was developed and administered using 'Qualtrics', an anonymous online survey software. The survey instrument combined single-choice Likert-like questions and open-ended questions. The survey was open from May 9 to May 30 2022. Invitations to participate were sent through:

- The project team's professional networks
- Monash University's alumni networks
- Monash University's social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram)
- The project team's social media networks (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn)

Promotion efforts and snowball sampling meant that these posts were shared widely, resulting in 5,497 participants responding to the survey. Their responses form the dataset for this report.

Detailed demographic information is provided below in the Participant Information section.

ANALYSIS

Questions containing Likert-like statements were analysed using frequency counts. The analysis also includes comparisons across subgroups (by gender, teaching level, years of teaching experience and school sector and location). These comparisons are based on chi-squared tests. All the comparisons that are reported below are statistically significant with at least a 95% confidence level.

Qualitative data collected from open-ended survey items have been analysed through a thematic analysis wherein the researchers generated key recurring themes within the data.

SHARING TEACHERS' VOICES

With an aim of our research being to share the voices of the profession, we have included as many direct quotes from comments provided in the survey as possible throughout this report.

Almost 5,500 dedicated, busy educators took the time to provide us with over 38,000 comments throughout this survey. We feel it is very important to share these insights using their powerful words to represent their perceptions of teaching in 2022.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

TEACHING ROLE

The majority of survey participants were primary (41.8 percent) and secondary (31.5 percent) school teachers, but the sample also includes early childhood teachers (5.9 percent) and school leaders (15.6 percent). The “other” category (5.2 percent) included special needs educators, teachers who work across multiple levels (e.g., early childhood to secondary) and tertiary educators.

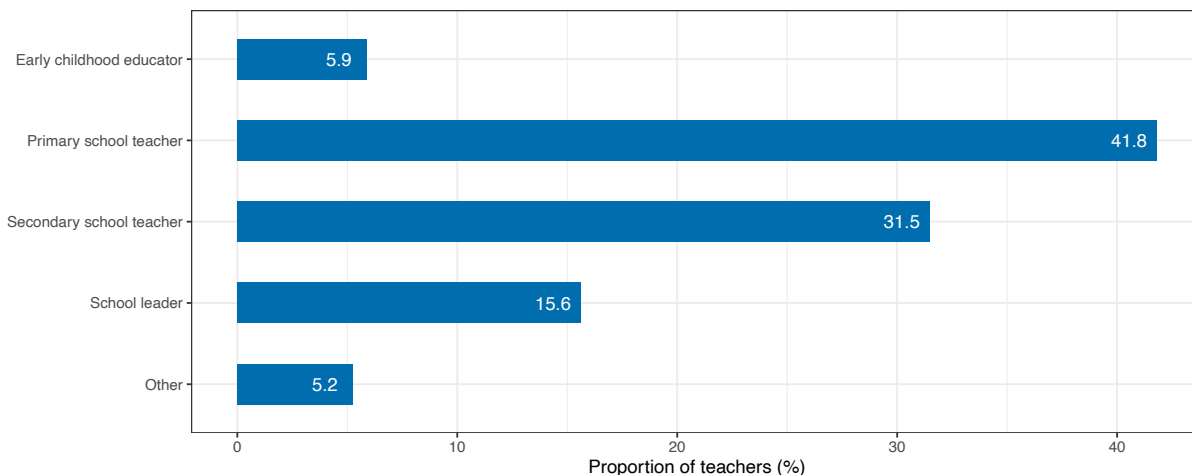


FIGURE 1: Proportion (%) of teachers by teaching role.

SCHOOL TYPE

The largest group of respondents were from the public or state school sector (65.7 percent). Educators from private and independent schools (14.8 percent) and faith-based schools (12.8 percent) were the next largest groups of respondents. The sample included smaller proportions of educators working across multiple school sectors (4.9 percent) or working in other educational settings (1.7 percent, including community-based and not-for-profit early childhood centres).

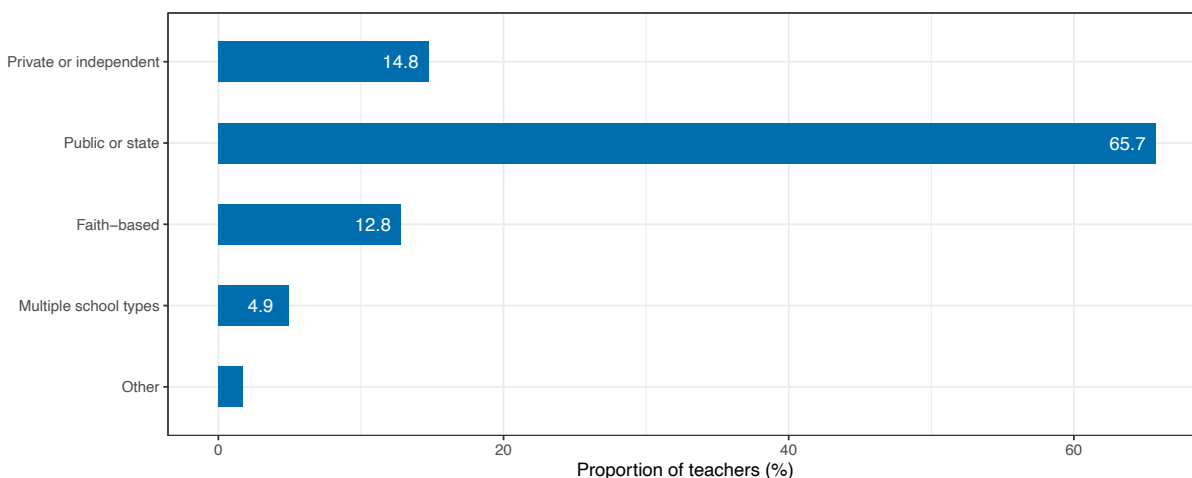


FIGURE 2: Proportion (%) of teachers by school type.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

The participants were also diverse in terms of their teaching experience. The range includes those who just started teaching this year (2.7 percent) to those with over 30 years' experience (9.1 percent), with the largest group reporting 10 to 19 years' experience (32 percent).

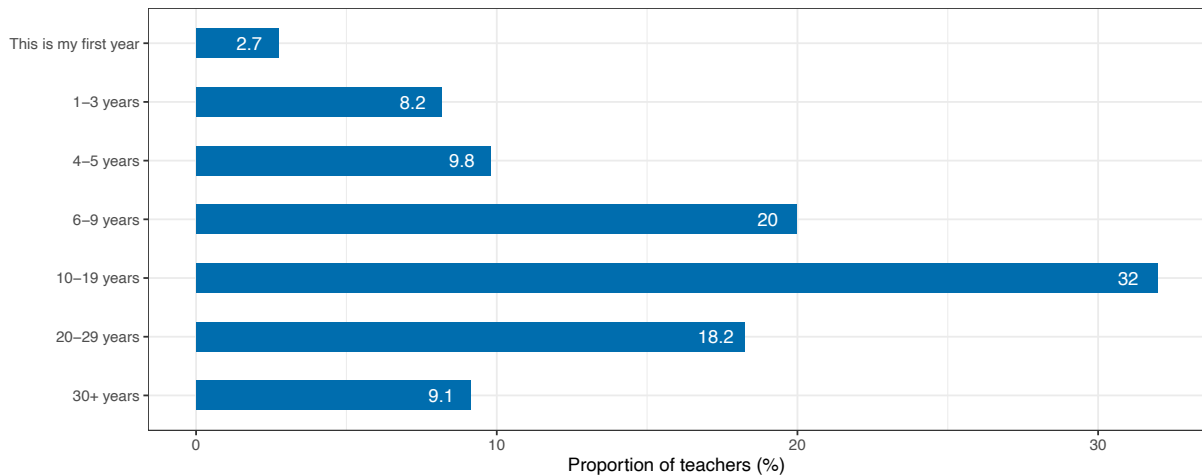


FIGURE 3: Proportion (%) of teachers by teaching experience.

WORK LOCATION

The sample is diverse in terms of location (urban/regional/rural), with 64.7 percent of participants teaching in capital cities and 35.3 percent working in regional, rural or remote locations.

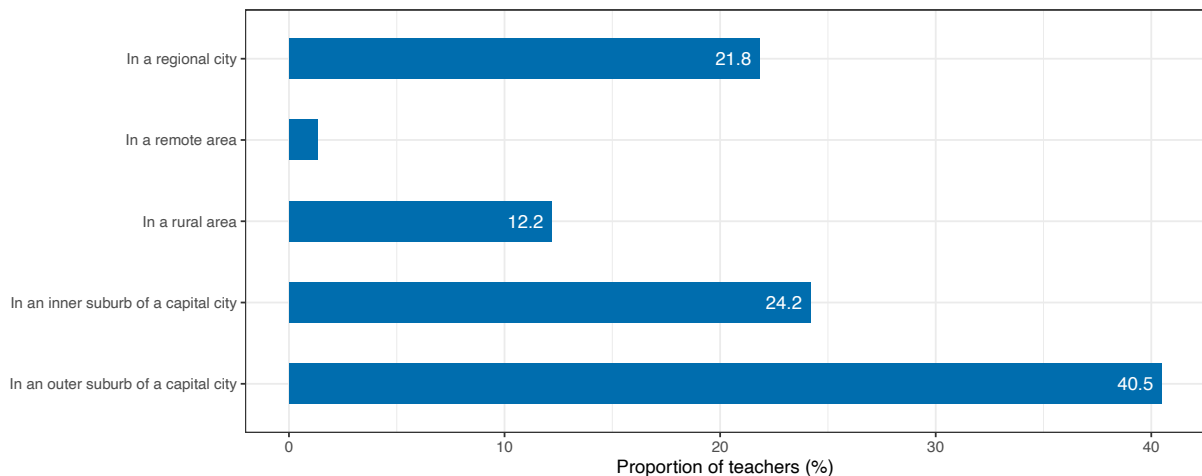


FIGURE 4: Proportion (%) of teachers by school location.

GENDER

Most of the respondents were women (89.5 percent), which implies a slight over-representation of women in the sample, in comparison to the 78 percent estimated by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, 2021). Additionally, 0.5 percent of teachers in the sample identify as non-binary, agender, gender diverse or as having multiple genders. Another 0.5 percent preferred not to disclose their gender.

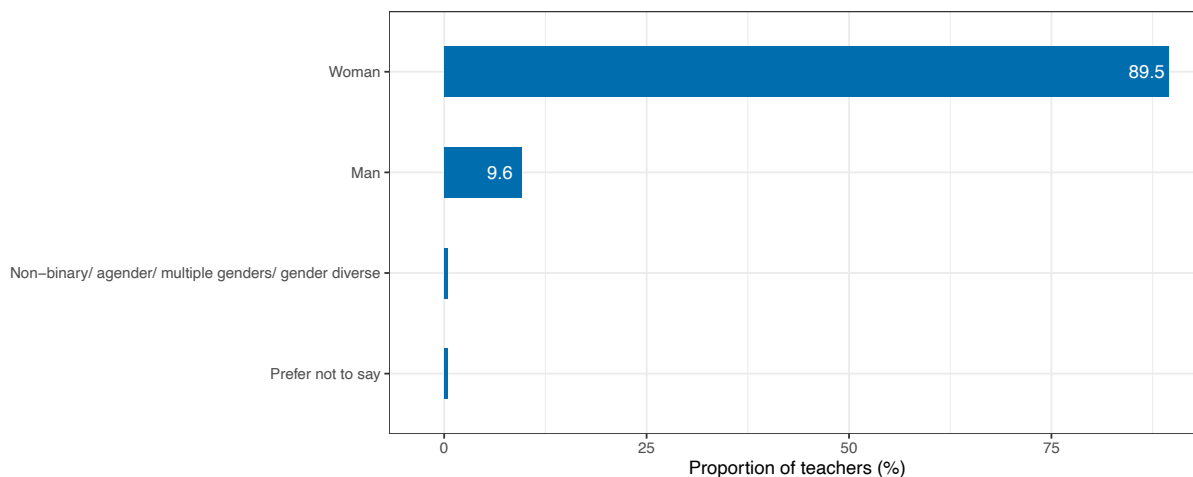


FIGURE 5: Proportion (%) of teachers by gender.

AGE

Teachers under 40 years old are also over-represented in the sample (47.4 percent of respondents) in comparison to the 33 percent estimated by AITSL (2021). Nonetheless, the sample includes participants from all age groups.

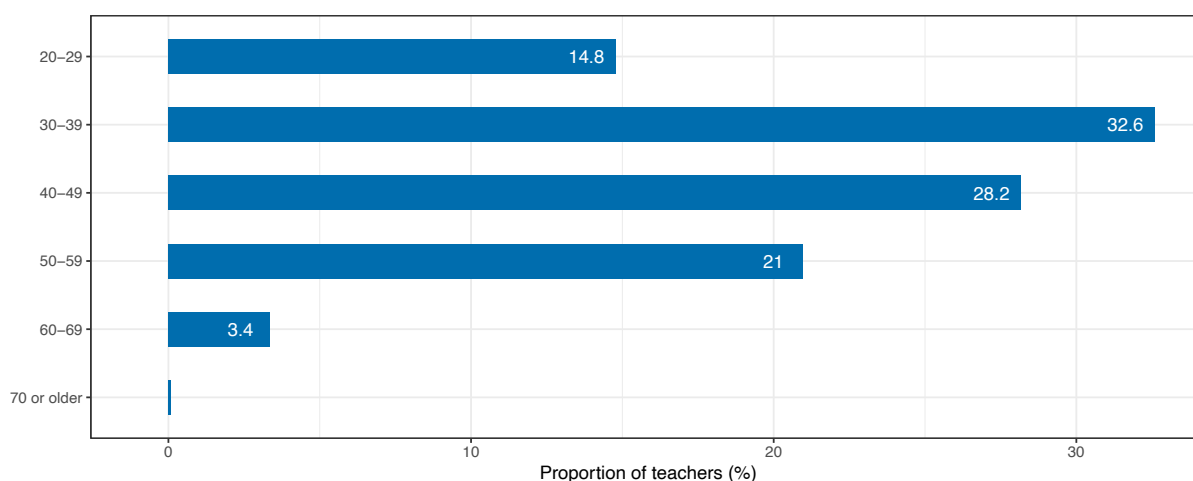


FIGURE 6: Proportion (%) of teachers by age.

RESPECT AND APPRECIATION

Insights into teachers' perceptions of the ways that they feel respected and appreciated for their work was a focus of the study. The survey included six items related to how teachers feel that they are respected and appreciated – both as a profession and as individual teachers.

Building on the 2019 survey, new items were included for 2022. These sought to further understand feelings of respect and appreciation. They included questions about perceptions of how teachers are respected by different groups in their communities.

The results from the survey that relate to respect and appreciation of Australian teachers are described below.

PUBLIC RESPECT FOR TEACHERS

As illustrated in Figure 7, the majority of teachers who responded to the survey (70.8 percent) feel that the public does not respect teachers.

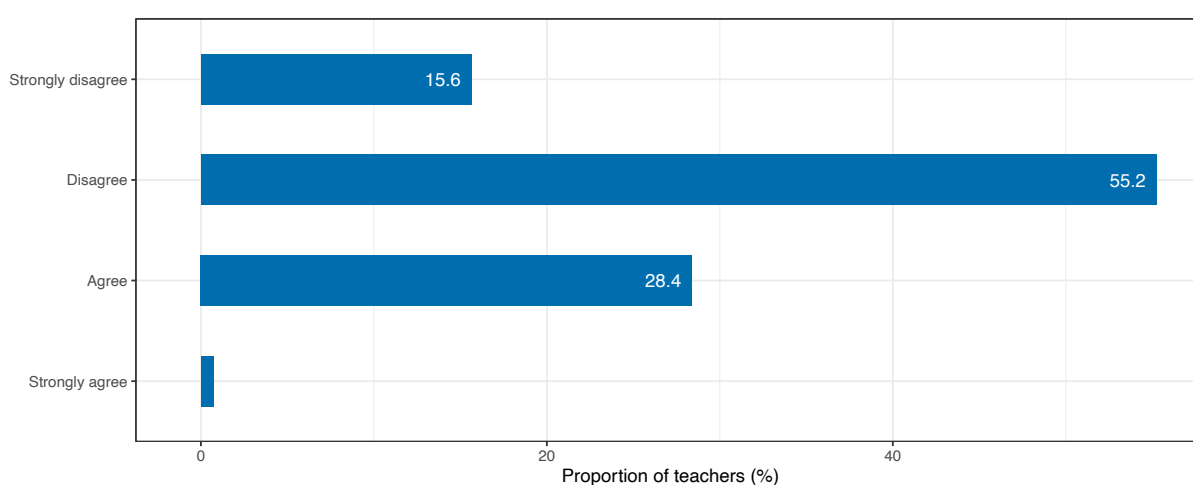


FIGURE 7: Proportion (%) of teachers by feelings of respect from the Australian public.

These feelings appear to also be shaped by the sector in which teachers are working, their gender and their years of experience.

The perception of being disrespected is stronger for teachers in public or state schools (72 percent) than teachers in faith-based schools (69.8 percent) and private or independent schools (66.7 percent).

Additionally, the feeling that the Australian public does not respect teachers is higher among non-binary, agender or gender-non-conforming teachers (73.1 percent) and female teachers (71.5 percent) than male teachers (64.9 percent).

Less-experienced teachers tend to have more positive perceptions of the Australian public's respect towards teachers. For example, 51.3 percent of those in their first year of teaching agree or strongly agree that the Australian public respects teachers. Comparatively, 26 percent of respondents with six to nine years of teaching experience expressed similar sentiments.

RESPECT FOR TEACHERS FROM DIFFERENT GROUPS

In the current survey, teachers were asked to rate how much they agreed that different groups within the community respected teachers.

Figure 8 demonstrates that a slight majority of respondents agreed that students respected teachers (50.9 percent). Only 33.3 percent of teachers agreed that parents respected their work, 17.2 percent suggest that the media are respectful of teachers and a mere 9.1 percent feel that politicians respect teachers.

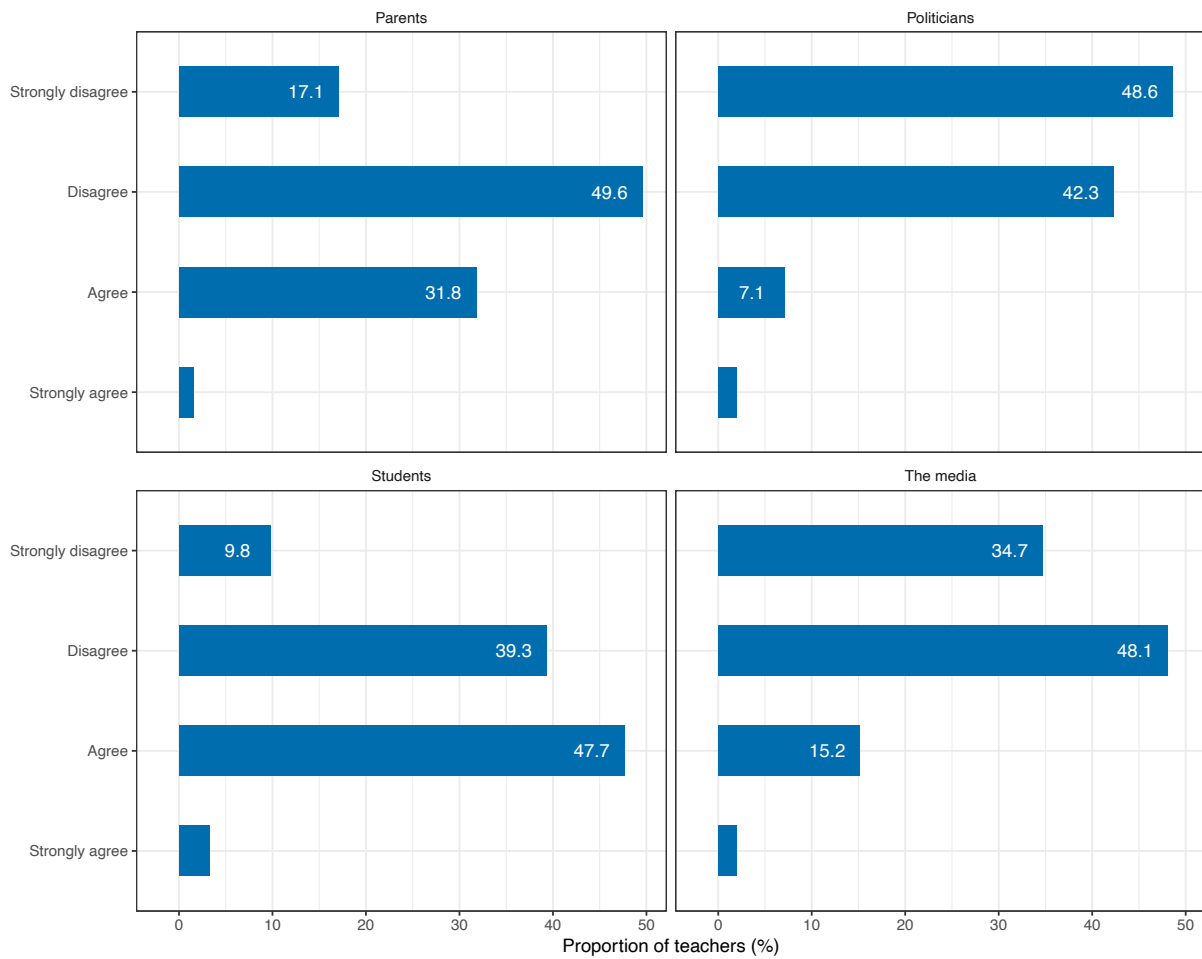


FIGURE 8: Proportion (%) of teachers by how respected they feel by different groups.

PUBLIC APPRECIATION OF TEACHERS

Data from the current survey illustrated in Figure 9 shows 69.2 percent of respondents feel that the Australian public does not appreciate teachers.

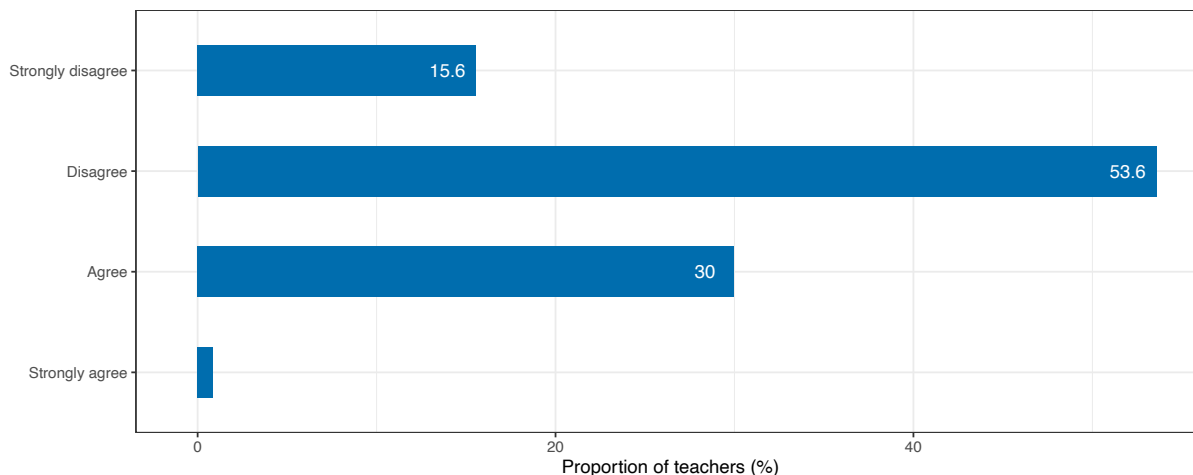


FIGURE 9: Proportion (%) of teachers by feelings of appreciation from the Australian public.

As with teacher perceptions related to public respect, feelings associated with public appreciation are mediated by sectoral association, gender and experience.

Feelings of a lack of public appreciation were stronger for respondents in public or state schools (70.6 percent) than respondents in private or independent schools (64.6 percent) or faith-based schools (67.9 percent).

Additionally, the feeling that the Australian public does not appreciate teachers is higher among non-binary, agender or gender-non-conforming teachers (76.9 percent) and female teachers (69.8 percent) than male teachers (63 percent).

53.3 percent of participants in their first year of teaching feel that the Australian public does not appreciate teachers. 71 percent of participants who had been teachers for six to nine years felt the same way.

CHANGE IN PUBLIC APPRECIATION SINCE 2019

It was possible to compare the data regarding teachers' feelings of appreciation by the Australian public to the 2019 survey (Heffernan et al., 2019) as the same item was included in both surveys.

There has been a slight increase to 30.8 percent in 2022 from 29 percent in 2019 of teachers believing the public appreciates teachers. Our analysis found that this is not a statistically significant difference.

This is interesting given that a survey of the Australian public in 2020 suggested that COVID-19 circumstances (such as remote learning arrangements) had resulted in greater positivity in public perceptions of teachers' work (Heffernan, et al., 2021). This increase in public positivity is not reflected in a significant increase in teachers' perceptions of the feelings of appreciation for them in 2022.

TEACHERS FEELING PERSONALLY APPRECIATED

For this 2022 survey, we added an item which sought to separate teachers' perceptions of general appreciation for teachers in Australia from their perceptions of personal, daily experiences of appreciation. Teacher responses to this item reveal that 41.9 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that they feel personally appreciated as a teacher, as illustrated in Figure 10.

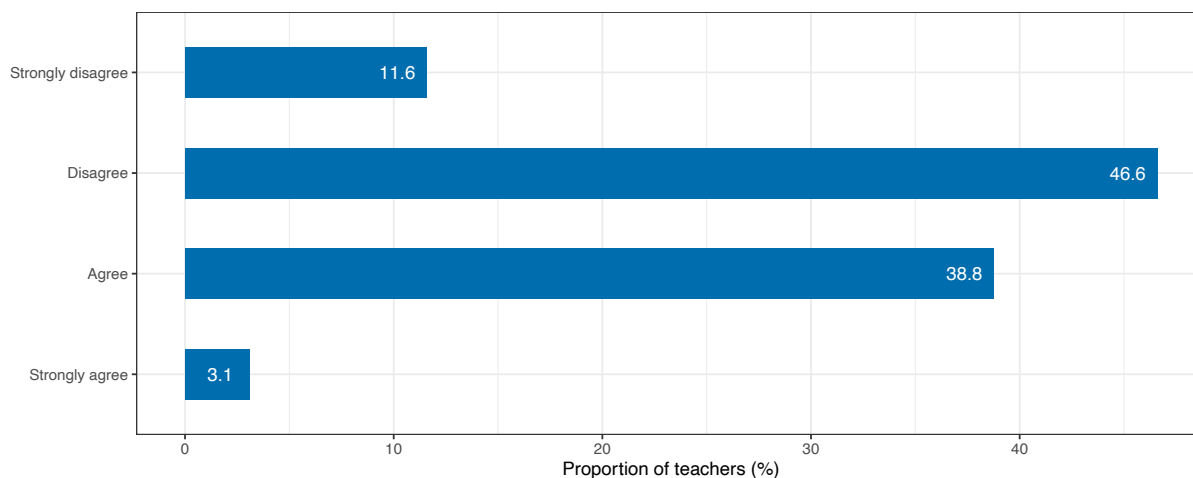


FIGURE 10: Proportion (%) of teachers by feelings of personal appreciation.

School leaders are more likely to feel like this (49.1 percent) than any other group, especially when compared with secondary school teachers (39.3 percent). Respondents in private or independent schools were also more likely to feel personally appreciated (48.1 percent) than respondents in faith-based schools (45.9 percent) or public or state schools (39 percent).

Teachers in their first year were also more likely to report feeling personally appreciated (52.9 percent) than participants with six to nine years of experience (39.8 percent).

The proportion of respondents who felt personally appreciated (41.9 percent) was higher than those who felt a sense of general appreciation for Australian teachers (30.8 percent, Figure 9). This difference may be partly explained by the findings of respondents' perceptions of the level of respect from different groups (Figure 8); those groups who are more closely associated with teachers' daily work (students and parents) are seen as more respectful of teachers' work than those who are less closely associated.

Most respondents felt disrespected by those who contribute to broader opinions and discourses about Australian teachers (the media and politicians). It is possible that this sense of negativity contributes to reduced feelings of appreciation for Australian teachers broadly.

TEACHERS' INSIGHTS INTO APPRECIATION

To further consider how and why teachers are, or are not, feeling appreciated, we asked respondents to explain what contributed to their feeling appreciated or unappreciated (depending on their agreement with the statement I personally feel appreciated as a teacher).

Contributing to a sense of appreciation

Two themes were prominent in the comments from teachers about what it was that made them feel appreciated.

Support from colleagues

Descriptions of the importance of supportive colleagues included a focus on aspects related to school leadership and organisation. For example, the following were all suggested as improving feelings of being personally appreciated:

- "Words of affirmation from our school leadership."
- "When my school leaders support me in taking care of myself."
- "We are constantly supported with outstanding professional learning to help us improve."
- "The resourcing is adequate in our school, so this makes the job easier."
- "The way my Principal works to build a supportive and respectful work culture."

Support from other colleagues (including positive relationships with other teachers) was also identified as valuable, as these comments illustrate:

- “Positive interactions with other teachers/staff.”
- “The feedback I get, mainly from other teachers.”
- “Meaningful collaborative conversations where your voice is heard with teachers.”

Positive feedback from students and families

Most participants mentioned the importance of positive feedback from students and parents (particularly parents). This was in the form of clear affirmations, including:

- “Words and emails from parents.”
- “When parents thank us for our work and are supporting of what we do.”
- “When the parents of the students I teach write a thank you card at the end of the school year and purchase a gift to show their appreciation.”

Although it is important to acknowledge that a thank you is not enough to counter the challenges of the teaching profession, our respondents were clear on how valuable hearing “thank you” from parents is, as this comment illustrates:

- “When parents acknowledge all that has been done for their child. Sometimes it’s only a look on the face or eye contact but saying ‘Thank you’ goes a long way.”

Feedback from students was also noted as an important contributor to feelings of appreciation. This also often included hearing words of appreciation from students:

- “When the kids say thank you for your help.”
- “Students who say thank you at the end of a lesson.”

The sense of appreciation related to students also includes teachers seeing student engagement and success in learning. Teachers responded with comments such as:

- “When my students enjoy a class or improve their skills.”
- “When my students experience success.”
- “Students wanting to come to school and enjoying and being engaged with their learning.”
- “When I get to see students eager to learn. The satisfaction and joy as a teacher in helping to build students skills on all areas of their development, including their social and emotional health, is one of the greatest rewards.”

Barriers to appreciation

A broader range of responses were offered as teachers explained what contributed to their feeling unappreciated. Themes of excessive workload, insufficient salary, and disrespect from students and parents were evident and often mentioned in combination, as this comment illustrates: “Workload, abusive parents and low pay.”

Parents were mentioned in almost half the comments provided. Teachers described “unsupportive”, “unrealistic”, “disrespectful” and “demanding” parents as contributing to feeling unappreciated.

A further challenge identified was broader misunderstandings regarding the complexity of teachers’ work. One teacher explained:

I think the public doesn’t understand how large the workload is. I feel they don’t understand the research and preparation that goes into teaching. I think particularly in primary years where classes can look like a bunch of games and fun activities, there is no understanding that these are actually carefully structured exercises, not a bit of fun. I feel the admin load is large and squashed into our free time.

Many teachers also highlighted the potential role of the media and politicians in contributing to these misunderstandings. One teacher summed this up by stating:

I feel appreciated by my colleagues and administration and the parents of most of the students in my classes because, like most teachers, I work at building those relationships. However, the constant teacher-bashing in the news and from politicians undermining the work that we do in schools is unacceptable.

This idea was echoed by another teacher who indicated that “most parents and colleagues are understanding of and value my profession. The media and the wider public who don’t understand the profession are driving the devaluing of this job.”

These reflections – on the feeling that broader discourses in the media and politics contribute more to feeling unappreciated than the relationships with parents and students – reflect the findings of respect that were discussed above. It is worth noting that the question about feeling respected by different groups (see Figure 8) was a later item on the survey.

DISCUSSION OF RESPECTING AND APPRECIATING TEACHERS

Teaching is a complex profession that contributes to students’ academic achievement, their socio-emotional development and self-regulated learning (Bardach et al., 2021). An important motivating factor for teachers undertaking this crucial work is their perception of the public opinions of their profession.

Heffernan et al., (2019) highlighted discrepancies between the ways in which teachers perceived public opinion of their work and actual public opinions. They found that public appreciation and respect for teachers was higher than teachers perceived.

Various studies suggest that media portrayals of teachers often contribute to negative representations of educators (Shine, 2020; Thapliyal & Fischetti, 2017; Willis et al., 2021). Reports about schools and teachers often perpetuate a perception of low teacher quality as responsible for any failings of education (Mockler, 2022).

Unsurprisingly, such reports can have detrimental impacts on teachers. For example, Shine (2021) explored teachers’ perceptions of the image of educators typically portrayed in media. She discovered that 8 out of 10 teachers found it negative and a reason for intention to leave their profession.

These negative discourses about teachers and teaching – often perpetuated for political reasons (Scholes et al., 2017) and portrayed in mainstream and social media – can negatively impact teachers’ perceptions of the respect and admiration with which they are held. This can lead to a desire to leave the profession.

In contrast, Cruickshank and MacDonald (2017) explored the implications of gratitude. They highlighted that respect and appreciation support the growth and development of teachers as they navigate the challenges of the profession and contribute to a sustainable career.

As many of the comments provided about what contributes to feeling appreciated illustrated, demonstrations of gratitude and respect from those with whom teachers interact daily (students, parents and colleagues) are important to feelings of appreciation. Expressions of gratitude strengthen relationships, improve connectedness, and can even support mental and physical health (Allen et al., 2020).

However, it is important to note that although gratitude contributes to feelings of appreciation, teachers in this survey have identified that unmanageable work conditions, disrespectful environments and insufficient reward (symbolised by salary) will not be negated by thanks alone.

KEY POINTS

- There has been a slight increase in the number of teachers who believe the public appreciates teachers since 2019. However, this is not a statistically significant difference.
- Most teachers don't feel respected, and these feelings impact more teachers as their careers progress.
- Teachers feel that most students respect them, whereas less than 10 percent feel that politicians respect teachers.
- Teachers cited issues such as workload, insufficient salary and disrespect from parents as contributing to feelings of underappreciation.
- Many teachers highlighted the role of the media and politicians in contributing to misunderstandings regarding the complexity of teachers' work.

SATISFACTION AND BELONGING

Teachers' perceptions of their workplace and its climate impact their efficacy and job satisfaction (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Collie et al., 2012).

School as the work environment requires teachers from diverse backgrounds to work with each other and form collaborative relationships. The relationships that teachers have with colleagues can form the backbone of their sense of belonging to their workplace. A sense of belonging is considered to be an important psychological need, determined by the extent to which a person feels accepted, respected and connected (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hagerty et al., 1992).

In a school setting, teacher belonging refers to how much teachers feel respected and accepted by their colleagues and leaders (Pesonen et al., 2021). Both teacher satisfaction and teacher belonging have been shown to be critical for their wellbeing, self-efficacy and confidence (Bjorklund Jr et al., 2020; 2021).

Their absence can cause feelings of uncertainty and anxiety (Stillman & Baumeister, 2009).

SATISFACTION

When thinking about overall satisfaction, 45.8 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that, overall, they are satisfied with their role as a teacher, as shown in Figure 11.

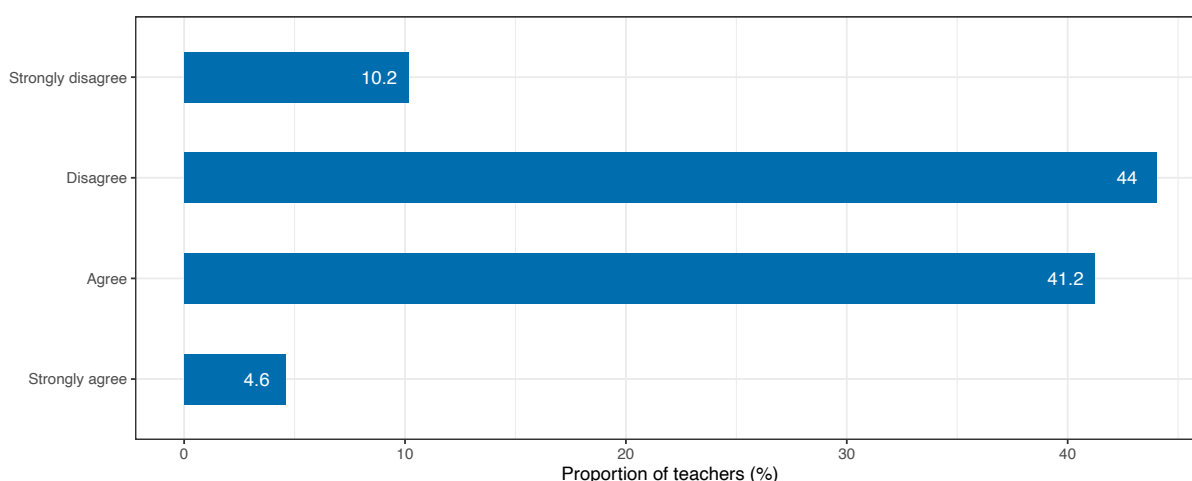


FIGURE 11: Proportion (%) of teachers by overall satisfaction.

School leaders are more likely to feel like this (52.4 percent) than any other group, especially in comparison to primary school teachers (41.9 percent).

Teachers working at private or independent schools were also more likely to report being satisfied with their roles (52 percent) than teachers working at faith-based schools (47 percent) and public or state schools (44 percent).

These feelings of satisfaction seem to decline over time. 64.7 percent of teachers in their first year report feeling satisfied with their role, while 42.6 percent of teachers who have had this role for 20 to 29 years and 47.2 percent of those who have been teaching for 30 or more years feel the same way.

We did not find statistically significant differences by gender or school location.

CHANGE IN TEACHER SATISFACTION SINCE 2019

It was possible to compare data regarding teachers' feelings of satisfaction in their role to the 2019 survey (Heffernan et al., 2019) since the same item was included in both surveys.

Figure 12 shows that there has been a decrease in the percentage of teachers who feel satisfied with their role in 2022, with only 45.8 percent in agreement that they are satisfied compared to 65.9 percent of respondents in 2019.

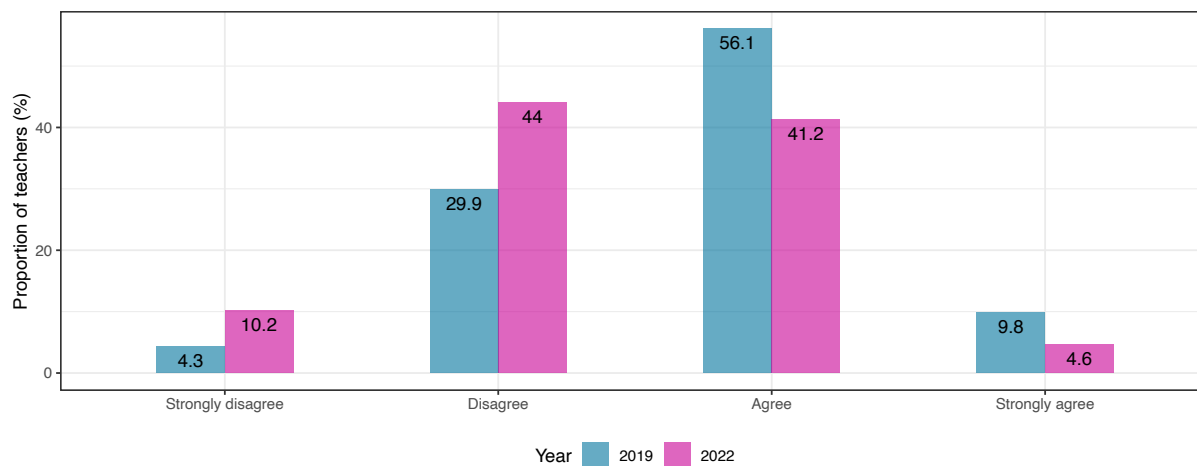


FIGURE 12: Satisfaction with role 2019 and 2022.

TEACHERS' INSIGHTS INTO SATISFACTION

To further consider how and why teachers are, or are not, feeling satisfied with their roles, we asked respondents to explain what contributed to their feeling satisfied or dissatisfied (depending on their agreement with the statement Overall I am satisfied in my role as a teacher).

Contributing to a sense of satisfaction

Over two thirds of the comments provided centred on teachers' satisfaction linked to the opportunity to work with children and young people. Teachers described finding satisfaction in seeing students learn and grow, and in developing positive relationships with those that they teach, as these comments illustrate:

- "When I can see I am making a difference."
- "When I have good connections with my students, and I can see they are growing."
- "The work I do with young people in the classroom and the opportunities I have to support them in their aspirations."
- "The kids. It's the best feeling when you see them finally get something they've been struggling with."
- "Being able to help people. Feeling like I am making a difference in children's access to learning and long-term outcomes."

Other response themes included positive work environments where colleagues and leadership were important, as these comments show:

- “Working with good colleagues.”
- “Progressing the development of teaching practices amongst colleagues.”
- “When I feel valued by colleagues and leaders.”

Many noted more general aspects that contributed to satisfaction, such as:

- “Making a difference.”
- “Meaningful work.”
- “I love learning, and passing on a passion for learning is the best thing I can do for humanity.”

Barriers to satisfaction

There were similarities in teachers’ comments on feeling unappreciated and their comments describing what contributed to feeling dissatisfied.

Teacher workload was the most mentioned reason for dissatisfaction. Teachers reported that they felt overwhelmed by their job due to working long hours. They mentioned:

- “Unreasonable expectations from administration, departments, parents and the general public.”
- “Workload. Every year the expectations for high outcomes increase, as do our responsibilities. I feel burnt out.”
- “Workload pressure and expectation to work many extra hours to complete bare minimum tasks, compounding stress.”

One teacher explained the “imbalance between the enjoyable aspects of teaching (e.g., classroom and student interactions, designing learning experiences) and the draining aspects of teaching (e.g., accountability paperwork, parent complaints, Nationally Consistent Collection of Data [NCCD] requirements, paperwork, record keeping et cetera)”. According to them, the draining aspects outweigh the enjoyable aspects.

They went on to say, “the time taken in keeping records of everything has increased exponentially.”

Many of the teachers noted concerns about abusive and demanding parents and students; lack of trust, respect and appreciation; low salary; unsupportive or ineffective leadership; and a crowded curriculum as other agents of their dissatisfaction. Again, many of these themes mirror those shared in comments about appreciation suggesting some pervasive negative concerns for the Australian teaching profession.

A further analysis of these comments – describing what contributes to feelings of dissatisfaction – revealed coping and mental health concerns. These included:

- Stress and anxiety
- Overwhelm
- Pressure
- Fatigue

As one teacher explained, “I am burnt out. I cannot do my job well with all the demands placed upon me.”

BELONGING

Items to examine the construct of a sense of belonging to the profession were added to this 2022 version of the survey. The findings suggest that most teachers have a clear sense of belonging to the teaching profession, with almost 80 percent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing, as is shown in Figure 13.

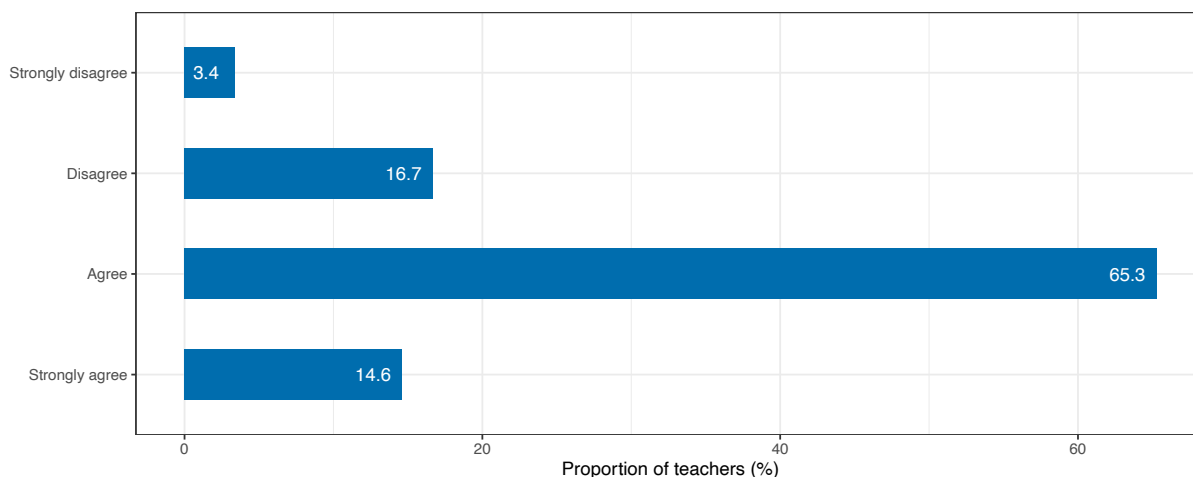


FIGURE 13: Proportion (%) of teachers by sense of belonging to the teaching profession.

Early childhood educators were the least likely to agree (66.5 percent) that they felt a sense of belonging to the profession compared with any other group, especially when compared with school leaders (84.4 percent). No statistically significant differences in a sense of belonging across school settings, gender, teaching experience or the location of the school were found.

TEACHERS' INSIGHTS INTO BELONGING TO THE TEACHING PROFESSION

To further consider teachers' feelings of belonging to the profession, we asked respondents to provide a comment explaining what contributed to their feeling a sense of belonging or not belonging.

Contributions to a sense of belonging

The survey revealed that a teacher's sense of belonging was influenced mainly by their relationships and connections with others in their school environment.

Relationships with colleagues

The majority of teachers mentioned their connections with colleagues as the most significant factor that contributed to their sense of belonging. One of the participants elaborated, saying belonging grew from "positive relationship with my fellow teachers". Another said belonging came from "like-minded teachers – those who are passionate about teaching and learning and who actually like children."

From many, there was a sense of shared purpose that connected teachers and contributed to feelings of belonging to the profession, as this comment described: "Teachers are usually incredibly warm, passionate, positive people who want the best for their workmates and our shared students."

Collaboration and respect between colleagues were also described as important for a teacher's sense of belonging. For example, one participant said belonging came when "teachers collaborate and share knowledge without putting each other's ideas down." Another said, "I love discussing new practices and discovering professional learning with other engaged teachers."

Relationships with students

Teachers' relationships with students were also found to be important for a sense of belonging to the teaching profession. One participant described this by saying "building positive relationships with young people and seeing them learn new things". Another described that "you get emotionally invested in ensuring the students develop".

This comment combined the importance of both supporting learning and being there for students' broader needs: "When the students have that AHA moment and tell you about their day and what they love about coming to school, as well as trusting you with personal matters."

Supportive schools and systems

Other responses related more to school-wide or systemic factors. One teacher said, "being heard. Self-efficacy and the ability to deliver a differentiated curriculum ... centred around the kids". Others pointed to the value of working in a "great school".

The importance of secure employment was mentioned by respondents as being an important contribution to their feelings of belonging to the profession. One comment shared that "being permanent enabled me to feel a sense of belonging, but as a contract teacher I don't have the same sense of security and feeling like a real part of the education department."

Another teacher described the difference in their sense of belonging once they secured a permanent position:

Having an ongoing job helps develop a sense of belonging too. Earlier, every year, as soon as term 3 started, I would be thinking of applying again and started feeling I don't belong here anymore. My current position is ongoing and it definitely is a big boost.

Barriers to belonging

In terms of negative factors affecting teachers' sense of belonging to their profession, common reported barriers included lack of respect, workload, unrealistic expectations, and a lack of support.

A lack of respect was a common factor in many of the comments provided. These included reflections on general respect for teaching from the community as these comments explained:

- "Within the community, teaching is not valued or respected."
- "The fact that the teaching profession is not respected as a career."
- "Not being thought of as being a professional or treated as the professional that I am."

Some teachers felt that issues of respect arose from misconceptions and wrong assumptions about what the job entails, as this comment illustrates:

Non-teachers assume they know what it is like to be a teacher because they have been a student in a school. I do not think I know what it is like to be a dentist because I have been and had my teeth cleaned.

Other comments reflected specifically on the ways that policies and systemic arrangements impact teachers' work, such as:

- "Lack of respect for my professional autonomy, doing more, more, more without anything ever being taken away."
- "Government treating teachers as babysitters, not respecting teachers as professionals."
- "Too much emphasis on data collection, and too little respect for teacher ability."

A further observation from the data is how expectations stemming from systemic requirements can undermine the development of relationships between teachers, as this comment noted:

It is uber competitive. Teachers are pitted against each other to gain ongoing contracts. There is sometimes fear to speak up as you may be labelled a trouble maker. You may be supported in private but not publicly by peers.

Others reflected on their sense of general Government support as a barrier to belonging, as these two comments show:

- "It feels like the government is out to 'get' us. It's like we aren't good enough."
- "Government treatment of teachers. Makes me want to throw in the towel."

Once again workload was a commonly raised issue. This was seen as a barrier to belonging to the profession due to the lack of time and pressure that resulted from workload expectations. One teacher stated a "lack of social connection with the people you work with – no one has the time or energy to interact outside of school hours." Another explained, "workload meaning there's less time to talk on any personal level."

Other factors affecting teachers' sense of belonging to their profession included a lack of support from leadership and a toxic work environment as indicated in these comments:

- "Workplace bullying and harassment by senior leadership."
- "When parents emotionally abuse me through emails and leadership do not support me but support the parent more than me."

Similar to the barriers to teacher satisfaction that were identified, a teacher's sense of belonging to the profession was threatened by negative media about the teaching profession. This was captured in these comments:

- "Constant derision of the profession in media."
- "The government/media always saying they want to attract better students to choose a career in teaching."
- "When I read/see media reports or politicians' statements blaming teachers for falling standards."

DISCUSSION OF TEACHERS' FEELINGS OF SATISFACTION AND BELONGING

The present survey found that more than half of the teachers surveyed felt dissatisfied in their roles. This proportion appears to have grown considerably over time when compared with past reports (i.e., Heffernan et al., 2019; OECD, 2020).

While a sense of career fulfillment or gratification may change for a teacher over time, teacher job dissatisfaction has a negative relationship with their retention (Torres, 2019). However, even teachers who do feel satisfied may still be at risk of leaving the profession. For example, Heffernan et al., (2019) found that a third of teachers wanted to leave their profession despite being satisfied with their job.

Contrary to findings related to teacher satisfaction, nearly 80 percent of teachers surveyed felt a sense of belonging to the profession. Teacher belonging is an under-researched area but may hold great promise in terms of how government-level and school-level solutions are considered. It seems from the survey that a teacher's sense of belonging to the profession is one of the greatest assets to the current climate. Nurturing teacher belonging going forward may be a key consideration for future educational policy.

It is important to note that a sense of belonging is considered a highly dynamic and temporal construct. That is, it can change over time and even through the course of the day (Allen et al., 2021). Kachchhap and Horo (2021) suggest that a teacher's sense of belonging changes with organisational support and climate. Feelings of belonging are susceptible to changes over time, context, and various organisational conditions (Dewhurst et al., 2020).

While the survey only offers a snapshot in time regarding teacher belonging, further research is needed. It is also important to point out that 20 percent of teachers did not report a sense of belonging to the profession and this significant portion of the population should also be considered.

Both job satisfaction and teacher belonging are multifaceted constructs. This means that both satisfaction and belonging are impacted by multiple factors and therefore multiple factors should be considered in how we maintain and increase teacher belonging and satisfaction.

KEY POINTS

- The number of teachers who were dissatisfied has grown considerably since previous reports (Heffernan et al., 2019).
- The survey found that workload, negative media, disrespect from parents and students and a lack of recognition negatively impacted teacher satisfaction with the profession.
- The survey also found that students' achievements, growth and a positive work environment influenced teacher satisfaction.
- The vast majority of teachers felt a sense of belonging to the profession and that this belonging arose from relationships with other teachers, school staff and students.
- Factors like negative public perceptions towards the teaching profession, workload, negative media, a lack of support, unrealistic expectations and time pressures threatened a sense of belonging.

RETENTION AND ATTRACTION

Attracting and retaining committed teachers is important to the success of education provision across all settings and systems.

Understanding teachers' motivations to enter the profession and what supports them to remain in the career has been of increasing interest as workforce management challenges have intensified. Shortages of educators have long been evident in Australia for specific locations and disciplines such as in rural and remote settings (Downs & Roberts, 2018), and across specialisations including mathematics and sciences (Mason & Matas, 2015).

Recent evidence suggests that providing enough teachers across all settings is challenging, with the implications of COVID-19 amplifying the issue. In Australia, significant policy attention has been directed to the issue of teacher workforce shortages that are evident now and predicted into the future (Australian Government, 2022).

INTENTIONS TO REMAIN IN TEACHING

Our survey asked participants to indicate how long they intended to remain in the profession. Only 27.6 percent of respondents reported planning to stay in teaching until retirement, while 19.9 percent report planning to leave in five years – as shown in Figure 14.

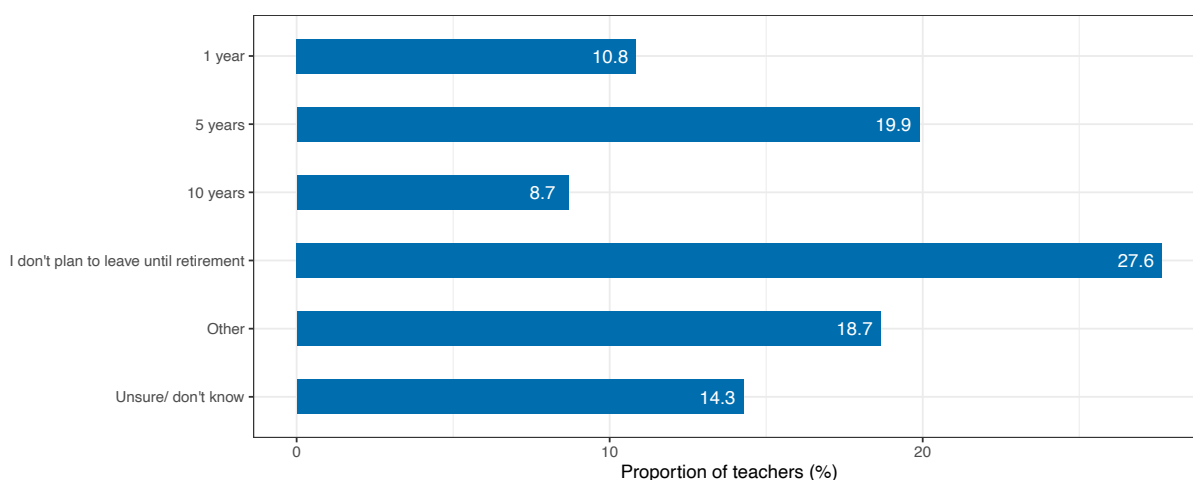


FIGURE 14: Proportion (%) of teachers by time intended to remain in the profession.

Respondents in their first year of teaching were more likely to report not planning to leave (37.2 percent) than any other group, especially in contrast with teachers with six to nine years of experience (25.1 percent). This finding is interesting as it contradicts a common focus on the attrition rates of early career teachers (typically those in their first five years of teaching).

Participants who selected “other” from the response options made up 33 percent of all respondents to this question. They were asked to provide an open response. Of these, 14.3 percent have been coded to unsure/don't know as shown in Figure 14.

Comments from these 14.3 percent who were unsure or did not know illustrated tensions that make their teaching career plans uncertain. These included:

- Tensions between their enjoyment of teaching but frustration with increasing demands and difficult conditions:
 - o “At this stage I’m not sure, I love teaching but the demands and conditions are not sustainable to good mental health.”
 - o “I am unsure at this stage. I love teaching and I love working with the children. But the admin burden is beginning to outweigh the teaching.”

- o “I really don’t know - I would like to stay but genuinely don’t know if I will be able to keep up this kind of workload.”
- o “I’m not sure. Part of me loves it and would never leave, but the other part of me is so worn out I wonder how long I can stay.”
- Tensions caused by health and wellbeing impacts:
 - o “Currently unsure. I enjoy my job but it is becoming more stressful each year.”
 - o “I don’t know. I love teaching and would like to stay, but I don’t know how long I can endure it for.”
 - o “Undecided, as the career I love is being threatened by my worsening mental and physical health due to overload.”

Further, these comments demonstrated that many were unsure if they would stay because they did not know what other options they had:

- “I don’t know. Thinking of leaving but don’t know what to go to.”
- “Unknown. I’d leave tomorrow if an opportunity arose.”

Alternatively, some were unsure because of their personal circumstances, including family reasons:

Genuinely don’t know. Before this year I would have said I’d be a teacher forever. Now that I am planning on starting a family in the next year, I’m beginning to research potential back-up plans for if things don’t improve and I can’t cope.

The responses from the remaining 18.7 percent of participants who selected “other” were analysed and coded to the categories presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Categories of “Other” responses to “How long do you intend to remain in the profession?”

Category	% of ‘other’ response	Illustrative comments
Had already left full-time classroom teaching or wanted to leave at the earliest opportunity	45%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Already left, got PTSD. - I am in the process of resigning right now. - I have quit my contract with a public school and I am now doing casual relief and some tutoring. - As soon as I can get out. - I plan to take a break at the end of 2022 and reassess if it is the career for me.
Staying conditionally and/or re-assessing	43%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If we are provided with more time I’ll stay as I love the job. If not, I don’t know how long I will last but it is not sustainable. - When I first started teaching, I thought I’d be a teacher forever. Now I’m considering changing professions. - Until my mental health can’t take it anymore. - Until I burn out.
Intending to leave, or reduce work, but with a time-frame different to what was offered in the question categories	12%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Three years, I am working on an escape plan. - I would have said until retirement but now I don’t think I have more than two years left in me. - I plan to move to part-time within the next five years.

As shown in Table 1, most teachers who elaborated on their “other” response indicated that they were not committed to a full career in the profession. They described an intention or desire to leave as soon as practical. Highlighted here was the importance of work and life balance and the impacts of exhaustion and burnout.

This comment illustrates the impact of these circumstances:

I have always wanted to stay teaching forever, however in the last six months, I have seriously started to think about leaving as I am just completely exhausted by the job and the outside expectations on teachers.

Overall, this survey question illustrates that a large percentage of teachers plan to, or would like to, leave the profession before retirement age and that they feel that the conditions do not support them to stay for a lengthy career. With only 27.6 percent of teachers suggesting that they would stay for their full career, this survey supports evidence that retention in the profession is a problem.

CHANGE IN TEACHERS’ INTENTIONS TO LEAVE SINCE 2019

To compare and provide insights into retention issues – and based on our analysis of those participants who selected “other” in answer to the question “How long do you intend to stay in the profession?” – we presented the data here in two broad categories. These are:

- Those who answered, “do not plan to leave”
- Those who responded in another category

We have grouped the latter together to represent those participants who had firm intentions to leave or were considering leaving.

Figure 15 shows that, in 2019, 41.7 percent of participants reported not planning to leave the teaching profession. In 2022, this has decreased to 27.6 percent.

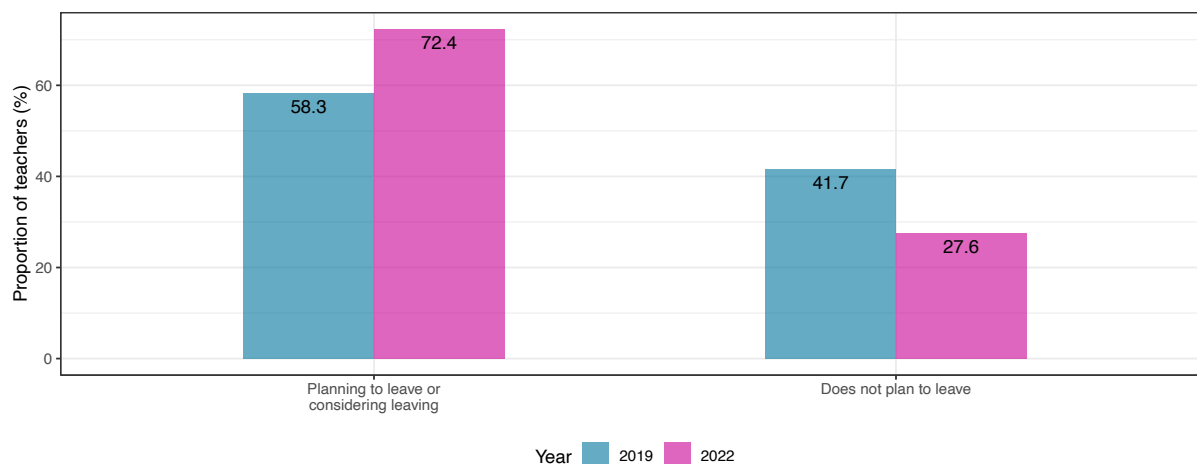


FIGURE 15: Proportion (%) of teachers by intention to leave in 2019 and 2022.

The decrease evident from 2019 to 2022 in the proportion of teachers who are confident that they intend to stay in the profession demonstrates a considerable increase in potential attrition from the teacher workforce in Australia.

REASONS FOR WANTING TO LEAVE

All 72.4 percent of the participants who did not select that they planned to stay until retirement were directed to a further item asking why they planned to leave.

Our analysis of the responses revealed that workload and the implications on work-life balance was a prominent theme. This was followed by health and wellbeing concerns, and concerns about the changing nature of the profession – including declining appreciation, respect and trust.

As is common in the open-ended comments provided to other questions on our survey, a number of these themes were often included in one comment. This illustrates how the issues intersect in contributing to teachers wanting to leave the profession.

Workload

Workload and associated concepts such as burnout, work-life balance and exhaustion were the most common reasons for teachers' intention to leave their careers.

Teachers regularly indicated that they are “undervalued, overworked and underpaid”. As we have seen in responses to prior questions, there were a range of negative words used to describe the magnitude of workload, such as:

- “Unattainable”
- “Overwhelming”
- “Increasing”
- “Demanding”
- “Unmanageable”
- “Huge”
- “Excessive”
- “Enormous”
- “Massive”
- “Unrealistic”
- “Unreasonable”
- “Unsustainable”
- “Insurmountable”
- “Immense”

Teachers described their inability to manage workload expectations in healthy, positive and productive ways as reasons they were considering leaving the profession, as these comments indicate:

- “Workload is not sustainable; pressures lead to significantly worse mental health outcomes.”
- “It's not sustainable in the long term. I'm exhausted by the workload.”
- “I'd like to get a better work-life balance. I've hit burnout twice already. I don't expect I can keep up the level of energy or give so much of my time for much longer.”

Health and wellbeing concerns

Respondents described the impact that their work was having on their health and wellbeing as reasons for wanting to leave. These were commonly associated with workload, but also with the emotional intensity of the work, such as that which results from abusive and disrespectful students and teachers.

Their voices, as shown in these illustrative comments, were powerful in describing how these conditions are negatively impacting on their lives.

- “My mental health is failing under the stress of the workload with the constant abuse from students and parents. I shouldn’t have to work this hard just to be disrespected every day.”
- “I care too much to do a crappy job. I’d rather have less emotional pressure and workload and less pay in a different job. I still really want to teach.”
- “Teaching is too stressful, the expectations are so high, you are not paid for the hours you work, you are overworked which isn’t healthy. I regret choosing teaching now that I have seen what it is actually like... It’s not a good work-life balance or good life quality.”

Lastly:

My mental and physical health have taken a battering this year. New administration arrived in our school and placed unrealistic expectations and demands on us and seem to care more about NAPLAN scores than children who are suffering and have real issues they need help with. I’m feeling like I can’t make enough of a positive difference without completely losing myself. My workload is affecting my relationships with my partner, friends and children because I’m feeling so down and negative about how much work I have and having to bring it everywhere with me. I can’t just go to my own kid’s tennis game and enjoy watching it. I have to bring the week’s planning along to do, or a survey for a child’s doctor. I always feel under stress about how much is on my to-do list and wondering how I will ever get it done. I’m contemplating a job where I get to go home at night and just do home things, be with my kids and cook and feel relaxed and content.

The changing nature of the profession

Teachers highlighted the change in the nature of their careers as another reason for considering leaving the profession.

These comments capture the perceptions that the focus of teaching work has undergone a change:

- “Teaching has become about data collection rather than the student as a person.”
- “I don’t ever want to be complacent, and I don’t want to work in a job that is so overloaded with administration protocols that it takes away from what I am there to do.”
- “It’s not the profession I want to remain in. I became a teacher to educate and inspire students, not to push agendas and collect data.”

Other comments reflected on the changing nature of students and parents and, as has been highlighted in other sections of this report, the pervasive disrespect and abuse that is part of the everyday work of many teachers.

For example:

- “It is becoming more difficult to teach, and I feel there is more abuse from students directed at teachers. I do not want to be in a workplace where you are abused regularly long term.”
- “The level of disrespect from parents and students, despite experience, leaves you feeling ‘why bother’. Lack of appreciation and students’ addiction to technology means that you feel like you are banging your head against a brick wall.”
- “Increased trauma and unsafe workplace through student and parents’ behaviour.”
- “Families have become extremely entitled and disrespectful over the years, and children’s behaviours and anxieties have increased tenfold.”

RECOMMENDING TEACHING AS A CAREER

Another item on our survey asked participants if they would recommend teaching as a career. Their responses are presented in Figure 16 below. Most participants did not feel that they could recommend teaching as a career with 64.5 percent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

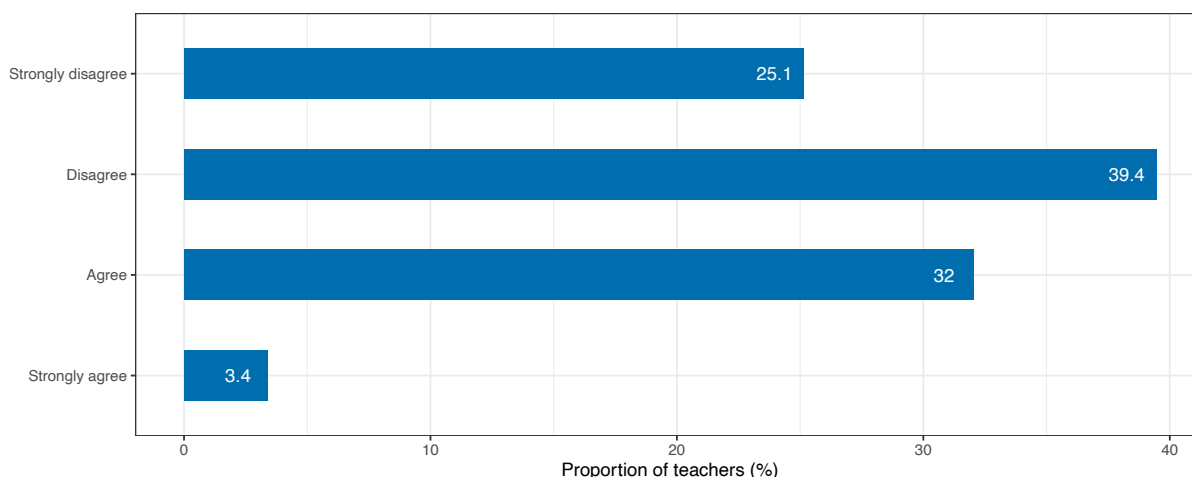


FIGURE 16: Proportion (%) of teachers by recommending teaching as a career.

CHANGE IN RECOMMENDING TEACHING AS A CAREER SINCE 2019

Teachers in the 2022 sample are less likely to recommend teaching as a career. Only 35.4 percent of respondents in the 2022 sample agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend teaching as a career, in comparison to 47.7 percent of respondents in the 2019 sample.

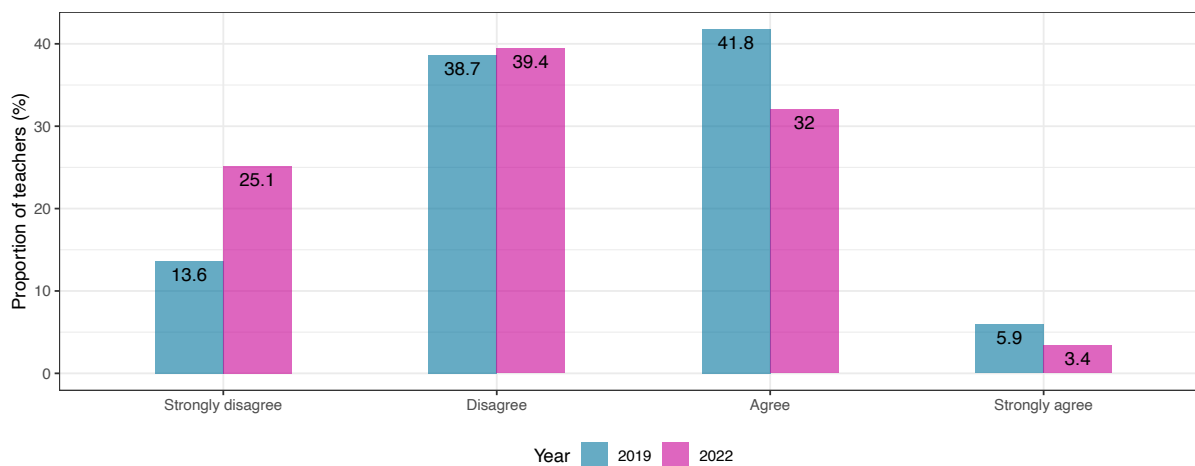


FIGURE 17: Proportion (%) of teachers by recommending teaching as a career in 2019 and 2022.

Of note in this comparison is that the strength of disagreement has increased considerably, with almost twice the proportion of participants strongly disagreeing that they would recommend teaching as a career in 2022.

ADVICE FOR THOSE CONSIDERING TEACHING AS A CAREER

Participants were asked to elaborate on whether they would recommend teaching as a career with an open response question. The question asked what advice they would give to someone considering teaching as a career.

The majority reflected on their own situations, and their advice included warnings about entering the profession. Respondents described regretting their own career choices and they highlighted the physical and emotional demands of the work. Many responses reflected the tension between being passionate about teaching and young people and how this balanced against the demands of the work as illustrated by these comments:

- “Think carefully about it – you need to really love the work to tolerate the work conditions.”
- “Think long and hard. There are aspects that are deeply rewarding and making connections and supporting young people is a privilege. However, much of the work you do is dictated by those with little real understanding of what facilitates good learning experiences.”

Teachers also provided advice that focused on the challenge of balancing work and life such as illustrated by these comments:

- “Find a balance between work and life, seek out a mentor for support, and take on opportunities when you’re ready for the next challenge.”
- “Ensure you are fully aware of the commitment you will be making. Unfortunately, it creeps into your personal life. It is extremely challenging to leave work at work and still meet your obligations.”
- “Learn to walk away during the holidays... Take the time to step back and recharge. Have boundaries with how much you’ll talk about work and stew on things.”

DISCUSSION OF RETAINING AND ATTRACTING TEACHERS

Attracting potential teachers to the profession is crucial to the appropriate supply of teachers to meet the needs of Australian communities.

There are many factors that influence potential attraction to the profession; teaching is a relatively public profession where the work that occurs in education settings is visible to communities. In Australia, the visibility of teaching work was increased due to remote learning arrangements that were necessary during COVID-19-induced community lockdowns.

The findings from this survey indicate that teaching is challenging and that many participants are finding it hard to know if they are going to be able to stay for a full career. Attrition from teaching is a significant concern, with demand for teachers expected to significantly exceed supply in coming years (Australian Government, 2022).

As well as the need to attract new teachers to the profession, keeping the teachers that are currently working in our schools is important. Teacher attrition has negative consequences for student achievement (Kelchtermans, 2017), relationships with colleagues (Anrup & Bowles, 2016) and community connections (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Teacher attrition also has financial impacts (Ryan et al., 2017) for schools and governments.

Reasons given for leaving the profession include:

- Lack of respect and appreciation
- Exhaustion, stress, burnout and associated health concerns
- Heavy workload reflect issues that have been identified in previous research (see Heffernan et al., 2022)

Our findings here suggest that, broadly, the two compounding factors are workload and diminished respect, trust and appreciation. These lead to detrimental impacts on teachers' lives and wellbeing.

The intensification and extension of the work expectations of teachers has been identified as increasing over recent years, particularly regarding data collection and administration (Eacott, et al., 2022; Stacey et al., 2020). It has been suggested that this infers a decreased trust in teachers' professional judgement (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018).

Along with the disrespect that many teachers are experiencing from students and parents and noticing in the media and from politicians, the workload impacts on health and wellbeing explain why many teachers find it hard to stay in the profession or recommend it to others.

KEY POINTS

- Only 27.6 percent of teachers indicated that they intended to stay in the teaching profession until retirement.
- Reasons given for wanting to leave the teaching profession included workload, health and wellbeing concerns, and the changing nature of the profession.
- Only 35.4 percent of teachers would recommend teaching as a career.

WORKING CONDITIONS

The working conditions of teachers are the learning conditions of students.

These conditions not only have a bearing on the quality of the daily experiences and engagement of teachers, but flow through to impacts on students and communities (Watt & Richardson, 2013). Challenging working conditions are linked to higher rates of attrition from the profession and result in significant economic and social costs to communities and nations (Kelchtermans, 2017; Ryan et al., 2017).

This survey asked participants specifically about their perceptions of their workloads and their feelings of safety at work. As has been shown in previous sections, workload issues are pervasive. The findings in this section further verify the magnitude of the issues of workload in Australian teachers' perceptions of their work in 2022.

WORKLOAD

Only 13.9 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that they find their workload manageable, as is illustrated in Figure 18.

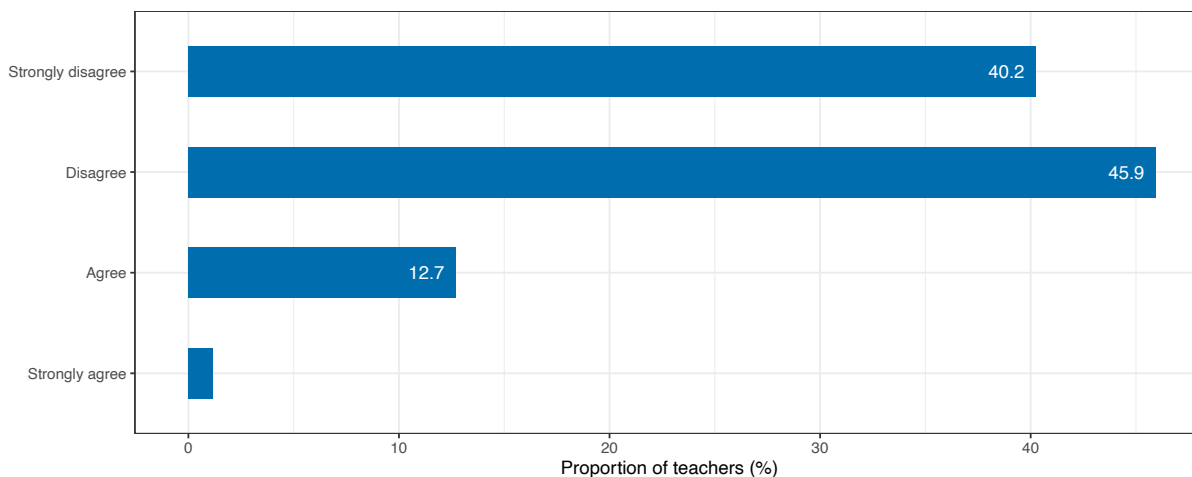


FIGURE 18: Proportion (%) of teachers by finding their workload manageable.

Further analysis of these data showed some variations in the ways that different cohorts of respondents were experiencing their workload.

Early childhood educators were somewhat more positive with 22.7 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that their workload is manageable. Primary teachers were least likely to agree that their workloads were manageable (11.5 percent).

More participants working at private or independent schools (16.9 percent) reported finding their workload manageable than teachers in public or state schools (13 percent) or faith-based schools (12 percent). Teachers in their first year of teaching are more likely (25.9 percent) to find their workload manageable than any other participant group. Teachers with 10 to 19 years of experience were least likely to feel that their workloads are manageable (12 percent).

Finally, gender-diverse participants (8.3 percent) and women (13.1 percent) are less likely to report finding their workload manageable than men (20.7 percent). We did not find statistically significant differences in perceptions about workload by school location.

CHANGE IN TEACHERS FEELING THAT THEIR WORKLOADS ARE MANAGEABLE SINCE 2019

Teachers in the 2022 sample were less likely to find their workload manageable than teachers in the 2019 sample. As Figure 19 shows, only 13.8 percent of respondents in the 2022 sample agreed or strongly agreed that their workload is manageable, in comparison to 24.4 percent of respondents in the 2019 sample.

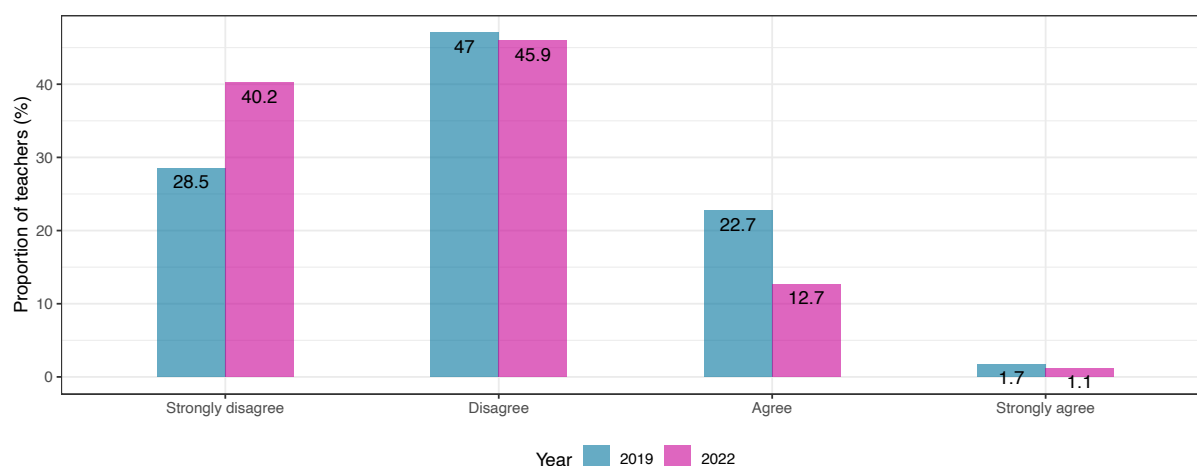


FIGURE 19: Proportion (%) of teachers by finding their workloads manageable in 2019 and 2022.

An interesting further observation from this comparison is the change in strength of disagreement, with a considerable increase in the 2022 percentage of teachers who strongly disagree that their workloads are manageable.

TEACHERS' SUGGESTIONS ABOUT HOW TO MAKE WORKLOAD MORE MANAGEABLE

Respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed that their workloads were manageable were asked to suggest what might make their workloads more so. The analysis of these responses found two broad themes.

The first was to change arrangements in schools so that teacher/student ratios were more manageable. These ideas were expressed as suggestions such as smaller class sizes, less teaching time and more teachers in schools.

These quotes illustrate this theme:

- “Fewer students in the class and more preparation time.”
- “Hiring of additional qualified specialist staff to assist teachers by diagnosing students, helping create support plans, helping design manageable adjustments, etc.”
- “If we had more staff. I am currently teaching above load and I can't get everything done.”
- “Fewer classes and more preparation time. Or smaller class sizes. I have to use my sick leave to mark!”

The second broad theme related to reducing administrative work and providing more time for preparation and planning. These comments included an indication that administrative tasks – including meeting various compliance and accountability policies – make up an unwieldy proportion of workload. “Admin” was mentioned often in the responses.

These comments illustrate frustration with the administrative and compliance burden:

- “Useless administration. Learning planners on all class webpages. Uploading resources to 4 to 6 different places. Emailing the same learning planners and resources to every parent and student who then email me asking about these things.”
- “Trust teachers. Lessen the accountability and meaningless data collection. Strip the administration to what is meaningful for teaching and learning.”
- “Too much admin. I want to prepare quality lessons catered to the needs of my students and provide quality feedback on their work. I would love to do deep thinking on curriculum design. But when? I have so many online modules to do, and things which were once manageable (like organising an incursion or excursion) are now hugely daunting.”

Respondents also mentioned that a reduction in the number of meetings and greater trust in teachers to do their work would support them with their workloads:

We are constantly having to prove that we are doing our job properly. The amount of data and meetings to discuss data to inform planning is ridiculous. There is no trust placed in us that we know how to do our job properly. We have to prove it, all day every day, and I can think of no other industry where this is the norm. It also adds no value to our teaching.

Overall, the comments collected when asking for suggestions about how to make workload more manageable reflected the issues that have been identified as contributing to workload challenges.

SAFETY

Our survey asked participants to indicate their sense of feeling safe at work. Figure 20 shows that over 75 percent of respondents indicated that they do feel safe in their workplace.

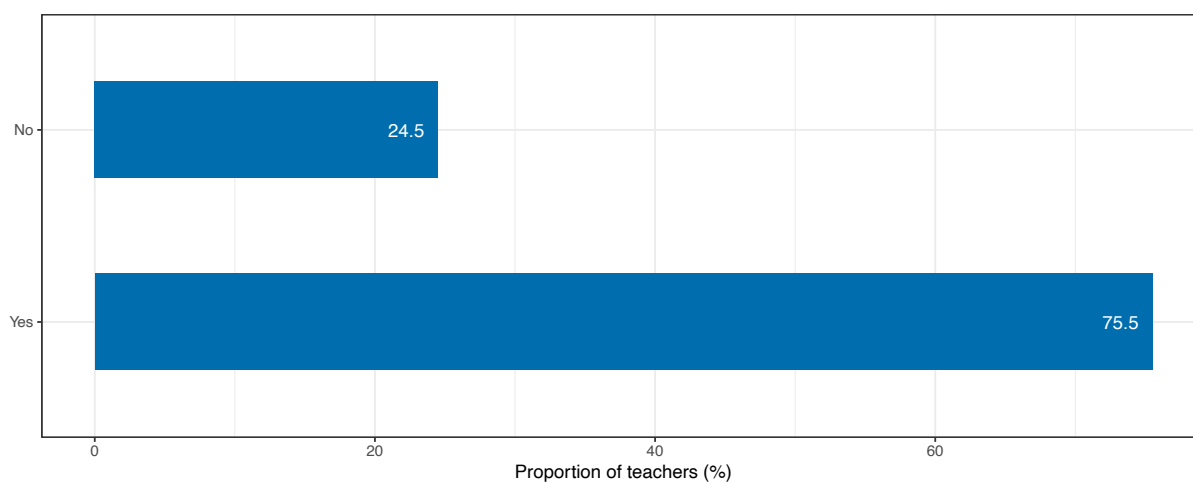


FIGURE 20: Proportion (%) of teachers by feeling safe in their workplace.

CHANGE IN TEACHERS' FEELINGS OF SAFETY AT WORK SINCE 2019

When comparing the results from the 2019 survey, there are more teachers who are feeling unsafe at work, with 24.5 percent in 2022 being an increase of 5.6 percent from 2019, as shown in Figure 21.

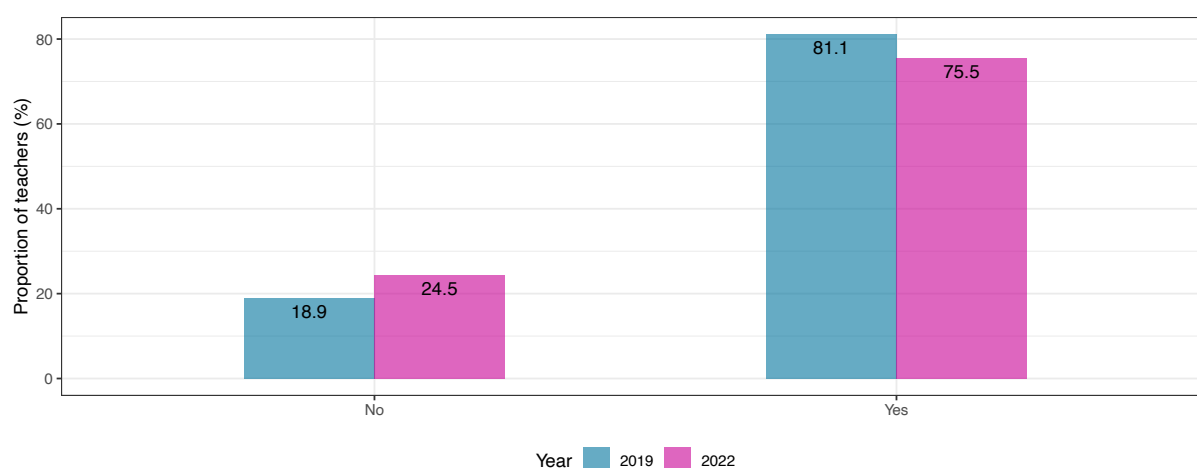


FIGURE 21: Proportion (%) of teachers by feeling safe in their workplace in 2019 and 2022.

REASONS FOR FEELING UNSAFE AT WORK

We asked those 24.5 percent of participants who indicated that they did not feel safe at work to share why they felt this way in an open comment. There were a range of topics identified, including:

- Student behaviour and violence
- Parent abuse
- Negative relationships with staff, including leaders

Mental health and wellbeing concerns were also an important topic raised.

Of the responses provided, almost two thirds of the comments related to students. These comments suggested that some students were “abusive”, “aggressive”, “violent” and “threatening”, and that feeling safe in certain situations was not possible, as these comments illustrate:

- “Student behaviour is wild and unpredictable at times.”
- “Children’s behaviour in class and playground. Hitting, punching, shouting, screaming, tantrums.”
- “I have been assaulted by a student which involved both physical, sexual and emotional attacks for an extended period of time. Often, I have to make a decision on if I should protect students from other students and put myself at physical risk. All advice is to never do this which means the psychological guilt of not protecting an innocent child comes into play.”

Issues that related to parents and families were noted in approximately a quarter of the comments, with these teachers mentioning issues including “verbal abuse”, “hostility”, “threatening behaviour” and “aggression”.

Some comments also described dysfunctional relationships where teachers were harassed and bullied by parents. They noted that there was little support for them in these situations. These comments illustrate this issue:

- “Angry parents able to access teachers to yell and threaten with no consequences.”
- “Some parents at our school also go straight to the department to complain when they are not happy about something (e.g., a grade on a report or a social/bullying issue). This does not make one feel all that secure in their employment.”
- “Parents and students are allowed to abuse staff verbally and physically. We have to grin and bear it because they might be going through a tough time. No other profession puts up with this. Even supermarkets have a sign saying abusing staff will not be tolerated!”

Safety issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic were mentioned by some teachers. In these comments teachers noted their concerns for their own health – in terms of protections provided so that they do not catch COVID – and their concerns about changes in students and their communities resulting from the pandemic.

Concerns over the lack of support from leaders of schools and systems were mentioned by approximately one fifth of respondents. Some of these respondents felt bullied and harassed by their leaders.

Many comments were connected to a desire to be protected from abuse or assault from parents and students, as these examples illustrate:

- “Violence and bad behaviour from students has increased dramatically and leadership don’t offer any support.”
- “Teachers are not supported from leadership when a problem arises with a student or parent. It is always teachers who take the blame and there are not enough consequences.”

Responses to this question highlighted the overarching issue of the wellbeing and mental health of teachers. These comments, regardless of whether they specifically mention mental health or emotional trauma, are all indications of emotionally demanding and depleting work.

Many teachers did specifically comment on impacts on their wellbeing, as these examples illustrate:

- “I constantly feel worried/anxious about getting things done, meeting deadlines, and arising conflict with parents/peers.”
- “Toxic leadership at school has led to poor mental health.”
- “I feel psychologically unsafe; being overworked and undervalued is bad. I’ve already had a breakdown due to burnout.”
- “I feel emotionally drained and exhausted constantly. I do not feel emotionally safe when students who misbehave are returned to the classroom, with no support for them or myself.”

DISCUSSION OF TEACHERS’ WORKING CONDITIONS

In this section of the survey, findings have verified and expanded on the themes of workload challenges and the lack of respect and appreciation experienced by teachers.

With 86.1 percent of the Australian teachers who participated in the study not finding their workloads manageable in 2022, this report strengthens the calls to review workload expectations of teachers (Australian Government, 2022).

Strategies that aim to respond to the challenges of workload for Australian teachers need to attend to the complexity and intensity of teaching work as well as the amount. The mental and emotional demands of teaching have continually increased and have been further exacerbated by the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic (Fray et al., 2022).

As has been found in other Australian research, suggestions from our participants focus on reducing administration load (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018; Hunter et al., 2022). Also important in consideration of possible responses is to acknowledge the value of time to develop and maintain relationships with students, parents and colleagues. Time and adequate support for teachers to engage authentically and productively with all students – including those with complex learning, social and behavioural needs – may alleviate disruptive and disrespectful student behaviours in schools, which contribute to teachers feeling unsafe.

Feeling safe in the workplace should be a minimum expectation for all Australian workers. Of the 25 percent of participants who indicated that they do not feel safe in their workplace, many indicated that abuse and harassment from students and parents was a concern.

The issue of teacher-targeted bullying and harassment has been identified as a significant contribution to teachers' reduced health and wellbeing – and the likelihood that they would want to leave the profession (Fogelgarn et al., 2019). The demise in respect and appreciation for teachers and teaching, as was discussed above, is a factor in the prevalence of circumstances where teachers are feeling unsafe in their interactions with students and parents. The diminishment of broader respect, trust and appreciation for teachers has consequences for the ways that students and parents interact with teachers (Baroutsis, 2019).

KEY POINTS

- A significant majority of teachers (86.1 percent) do not find their workloads manageable in 2022.
- Suggestions for making workloads more manageable included improving staff-to-student ratios to provide more time for teachers and more targeted expertise to support complex student needs.
- Another theme in the suggestions to make workloads more manageable was to remove onerous administrative and accountability requirements.
- Most teachers feel safe in their workplaces, but a concerning proportion of 25 percent of respondents do not feel safe.
- Reasons for feeling unsafe at work included abuse and harassment from students and parents.

CONCLUSION: KEY CHALLENGES, RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Consistent messages concerning the challenges facing teachers have emerged throughout this report.

Our survey concluded by asking the respondents to describe the key challenges facing Australian teachers and then asked them to suggest their ideas for possible solutions.

To conclude this report, we share the findings from these two questions as acknowledgement that teachers are at the forefront of understanding the issues and possibilities that face Australian education in 2022.

CHALLENGES FACING AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS

Most of the responses provided by participants identified multiple areas that presented challenges in education. Our analysis found the following themes:

- Workload
- Student/parent issues
- Respect
- Pay

In answering this question approximately 60 percent of respondents reported that workload is a key challenge. Workloads were described as “unmanageable”, “unrealistic” and “unsustainable”.

One teacher explained, “Workload. Burnout. Exhaustion. So many hours spent on things that aren’t teaching children.”

Although a large number of the responses nominated workload as a challenge without further elaboration, many provided further insight into the challenging aspects of their workload. These included:

- “Class sizes and the compounding issue of the increasing complexity of the learning, behaviour and social needs of children and young people.”
- “Administration, assessment, and data collection requirements.”
- “An overloaded curriculum.”
- “Staff shortages.”

Participants also noted issues related to students and parents as challenging for Australian teachers. Comments highlighted behaviour issues, mental health issues, reduced resilience and social skills after COVID-19 induced lockdowns, and complex learning needs.

These are some comments that indicate these types of challenges:

- “We’re expected to bend over backwards to accommodate students and families to support challenges of COVID-19 but also carry on as if we’re not impacted too.”
- “Behaviour management from lack of parent discipline at home.”
- “The rise of new and difficult student behaviours that we don’t yet know how to deal with, and the expectation to fulfil duties that once would have been the responsibility of parents.”
- “Misalignment between expectations and resources, including people hours. The support that we’re expected to offer students and families outside of our skill set or resources is significant.”

Many responses indicated that a lack of respect, appreciation and/or trust was a challenge for Australian

teachers. Comments noted how these discourses impacted on their work, as illustrated by these participants:

- “A lack of trust from the general public stemming from negative media portrayals.”
- “A continued lack of respect for the important job we do and a lack of understanding for what is involved.”
- “A lack of recognition of our individual talents – huge pressure to be accountable through forms and paperwork without trusting us to do our jobs.”

Pay was mentioned by approximately 15 percent of participants as a challenge. These comments noted that “unpaid hours”, “lower pay when compared to other professions” and “poor wages” were a concern.

Many of these comments were provided alongside the identification of workload as a challenge.

SOLUTIONS TO RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGES

After participants were asked to identify the challenges facing Australian teachers, they were asked to suggest possible solutions. There were a variety of responses, many which directly reflected the challenges that were identified. Our analysis found the following themes:

- Workload reduction
- Provide more time
- Extra staff/smaller class sizes
- Higher expectations of children and parents
- Reduced administration
- Value teachers

The reduction of workload is related to the theme of more time – and both are broader themes that encompass extra staff and smaller class sizes and reduced administrative burdens.

Many respondents provided simple statements such as “workload pressures need to be reduced” or “more time”. Comments that provided more detail were generally related to extra resources, particularly staffing, and a reduction in the volume of tasks teachers are expected to perform – particularly administrative work.

Given this, the focus for further discussion below is firstly on those two themes.

Extra staff

The suggestion of extra staff is related to reducing class sizes. Many participants noted that reducing the numbers of students in classes (and therefore that each teacher is responsible for) would help reduce workload.

This comment spells this out: “Smaller class sizes, for improved relationships and lower workload.”

The other reason behind the call for extra staff is that the complex needs of students require a broader range of specialisation and targeted support from a greater number of staff.

These two comments expand on this suggestion:

- “Increased funding for teaching aids, social workers, school counsellors, other qualified professionals to be working in schools supporting children’s social and emotional development.”
- “Support increased with extra staff to cover administrative tasks as well as the staff who are trained to work with students with high needs. Teachers, particularly those in low socioeconomic and remote schools deserve to have a trained psychologist to help them with vicarious trauma. These teachers are carrying a severe emotional and mental burden that is causing severe PTSD.”

Higher expectations of students and parents

In response to challenges concerning student and parent behaviour, there were suggested solutions that place greater expectations on students and parents as they interact in education settings.

These comments illustrate this theme:

- “Stricter guidelines for parents and students dealing with teachers. More serious consequences for students and parents that break guidelines on how to treat and work with teachers.”
- “Hold parents to greater account for their child and not expect teachers to parent as well as teach.”
- “Schools stamping out abuse from parents/taking a harder line.”
- “Hold parents accountable for their child’s behaviour.”

Reduce administration

A reduction in administrative demands was a clear focus. Many suggestions were generalised statements such as “reduce admin” and have “admin done by others”.

Some indicated the impact that this burden has on the quality of their teaching: “More admin means I have less time to plan quality learning activities for my students.”

Other comments provided more nuanced ideas about specific changes that could assist. These examples share some of these:

- “Employ admin people to do admin tasks such as policy creation, OHS checks.”
- “Transition roles for students coming out of university where they take on a smaller load of classes while acting as an admin assistant to a mentor teacher.”
- “Add jobs for administration staff to ease burden on teachers.”
- “Fewer meetings and administration tasks.”

A final area for attention is the conflation of assessment and reporting work with administration work that is related to documenting and accounting for student performance.

Teachers who commented on this issue suggested that there was a connection to a lack of trust in teachers: “The ongoing scrutiny and professional distrust that is solved by increasing administrative accountability in teaching is just busy work. Just trust teachers to teach.”

Value teachers

Another important theme that emerged was a call from teachers for solutions that improve the ways that teachers are respected, appreciated and valued. There were some differing aspects in these comments, including calls for the media to contribute to a more positive portrayal of teachers:

- “The press writing more inspiring articles on teachers and respecting our role in the community. Less trash talk on teachers from the press.”
- “The media needs to celebrate the work teachers do.”
- “Media coverage that supports teachers and changes the narrative with parents.”

Trusting teachers as experts was also a message from the comments. This related to the perceived need to document and account for broad aspects of their work:

- “Trust that as professionals, we will develop our skills and knowledge and that the administrivia should be managed by clerical assistance.”
- “A lot of what we do is ‘tick boxes’ so things look good on paper. We are professionals – trust us to do our jobs.”

Comments reflecting issues of trust and respect also mentioned support from parents for teachers, such as “parents allowing teachers to do their job” and “get parents back on board to support schools rather than blame them for their child’s shortcomings”.

A final component of this theme was pay. Teachers suggested that wages do not reflect the workload expectations:

- “Pay to recognise the hours teachers actually work and the fact that we even have to buy our own whiteboard markers, etc.”
- “Teachers deserve to be paid for all the work we do outside of school hours: after school, on our weekends and during school holidays.”

There were also comments that connected salary to the need for increased esteem for the teaching profession:

- “Pay to reflect the important job of teachers.”
- “Better pay would also help make the job more attractive.”
- “Pay teachers more to demonstrate that teaching is a worthy profession.”

IMPLICATIONS

This study has shown that there are many issues of concern to Australian teachers, and that these issues impact their capacity to work in sustainable and productive ways.

Further, the Australian teaching workforce is being challenged by the situations that teachers are facing in their workplaces due to the resulting attrition of current teachers. It is important to again highlight that the working conditions of teachers are the learning conditions of students.

In the current circumstances, this is most starkly illustrated by the difficulties many schools are facing in simply finding teachers to take classes (Australian Government, 2022). These shortages are predicted to continue. The detrimental impacts on students and communities now and into the future are concerning.

The issues that have been identified by teachers in this research are not the result of sudden or unexpected changes in Australia. They are the outcome of what has been described as “intergenerational policy failure” where the policy architectures of choice, autonomy and accountability have contributed to the intensification of work in Australian educational settings (Eacott et al., 2022, p.5).

The inclusion of teachers’ voices in policy making can result in changes to the framing of teachers and schools in the public discourse and can contribute to a better alignment of policy and context (Eacott et al., 2022; Good, 2019). Attention to teachers’ voices on the issues they are most intimately familiar with will not only contribute to better policy, but symbolise that they are valued and appreciated.

The majority of teachers surveyed in this study reported a strong sense of belonging to their profession. Greater attention to their voices in educational policies and practice, could lever this sense of belonging and open opportunities for empowerment and hope as they consider their future in the profession and how it can be improved going forward.

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