

Educator Retention Plans: *Trends from the 2022 Tennessee Educator Survey*

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Widespread school staffing challenges and teacher shortages have been a topic of national discussion going into the 2022-23 school year. In Tennessee, district reporting from the 2021-22 school year indicates that teacher shortage issues are localized with vacancies varying widely by region across the state. In fact, as of [February 2022](#), 50 districts reported having zero vacancies while several districts across the state are struggling to fill open positions.

Responses to the Tennessee Educator Survey (TES) can provide insight into these patterns of mobility and turnover within the state's teacher workforce. The annual survey asks teachers to report on their plans to remain at their schools and in education, as well as their satisfaction with elements of their job and workplace. The data we collect provide valuable insight into teachers' satisfaction and their potential future plans, which could be useful in predicting upcoming patterns of teacher turnover in the state.

Indeed, linking teachers' stated intentions from the 2021 survey with the current teacher labor pool in 2022 reveals that most teachers followed through with their stated plans. Of teachers who responded to the survey in 2021, 92% were still educators in Tennessee the following school year. Nearly all (96%) teachers who responded that they planned to continue teaching at their school the following year were still educators in the state, and 91% were still working in the same school. Conversely, most teachers who said they planned to transfer or leave teaching also followed through with those plans - 91% of teachers who said they planned to transfer within their district were still educators in the state the following year, and of those, 95% were in the same district, but only 33% were still in the same school, meaning that a within-district transfer did take place for most. Over half (56%) of teachers who said they planned to leave K-12 education in 2021 were no longer educators in the state in 2022.

This analysis of 2022 Tennessee Educator Survey responses explores whether educators reported that they plan to leave the classroom at different rates in 2022 than in previous years; which educator and school characteristics (i.e., race, gender, experience; school level, teaching a tested subject, level of school economic disadvantage) are associated with increased teacher mobility; and what differences (if any) exist between teachers who said they plan to continue in their schools, teachers who said they plan to transfer schools, and teachers who said they plan to leave the teaching profession. While any turnover can negatively impact the individual school where it occurs, increased rates of teachers exiting Tennessee public schools altogether could have larger implications for the state's teacher labor pool in future years, and educator responses to the survey may provide clues to predict future patterns of teacher turnover within the state.

Key Findings:

- 1 *Most teachers indicated they plan to continue teaching in their schools next year; however, the number of teachers considering leaving has increased from previous years.*
- 2 *Teachers of color and first year teachers were less likely to say they plan to continue teaching in their schools.*
- 3 *Teachers who reported they plan to transfer, leave teaching, or who were undecided were less satisfied with school culture, leadership, and evaluation.*

DATA AND METHODS

In this brief, we used data from the 2022 Tennessee Educator Survey (TES), an annual survey administered by the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA) in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE). The survey provides all teachers, administrators, and certified staff the opportunity to tell us what is working and what improvements need to be made about education in Tennessee. The 2022 TES included questions about educators' unique experiences in the 2021-22 school year, such as questions about major challenges and concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, we examined questions about school climate and teacher experiences that are asked annually on the TES.

This brief primarily focuses on survey responses from teachers, school leaders, and counselors. A little over half of all Tennessee teachers responded to the TES (N=37,036 teachers; 51% response rate) along with 51% of school leaders (N=1,948 school leaders).¹

KEY FINDINGS

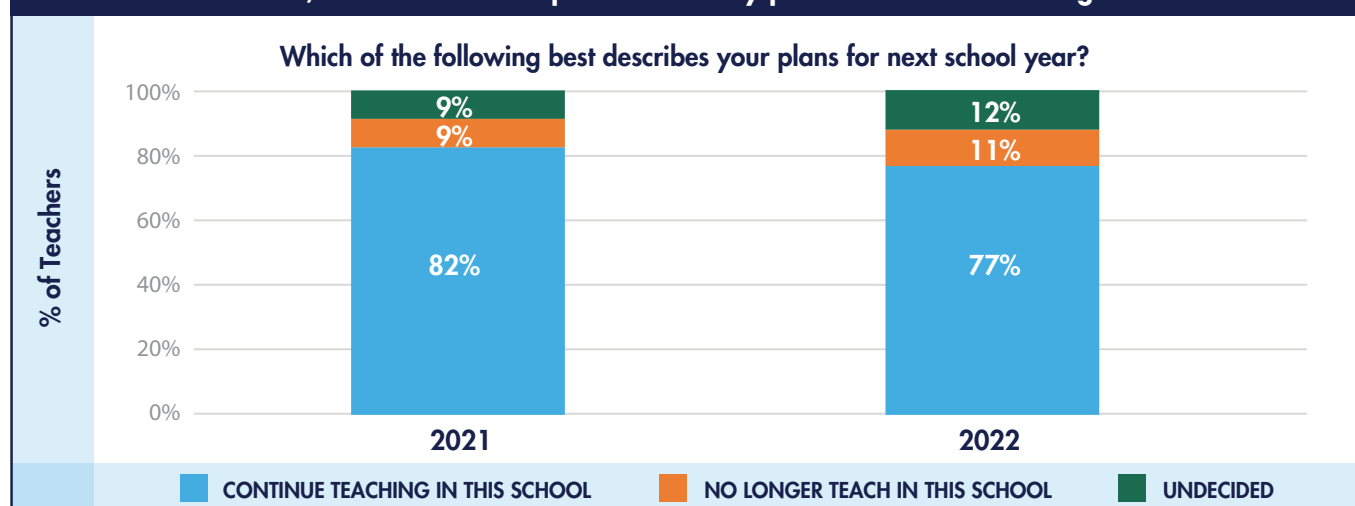
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KEY FINDING 1

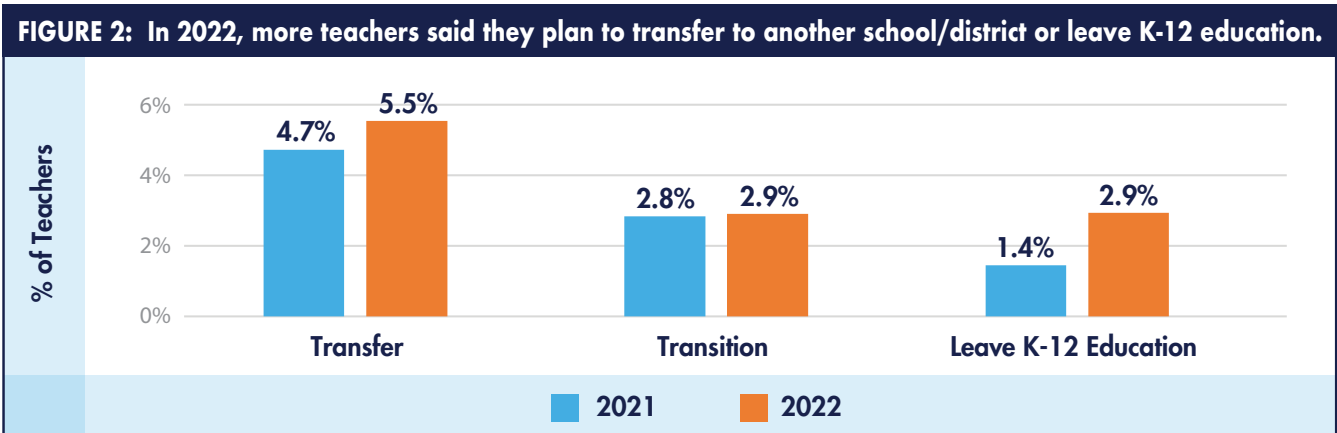
Most teachers indicated that they plan to continue teaching in their schools next year; however, the number of teachers considering leaving has increased from previous years.

In 2022, over three-quarters (77%) of teachers reported that they plan to continue teaching in their schools the following school year, a slight decrease from 82% of teachers in 2021. This is depicted in Figure 1 below. The percentage of teachers who said they plan to leave their schools increased from 9% to 11% from 2021 to 2022, and the percentage of teachers who were undecided about their plans for the following school year increased from 9% to 12%.

FIGURE 1: In 2022, fewer teachers reported that they plan to continue teaching in their schools.



As shown in Figure 2, more teachers reported that they plan to transfer from their current school (an increase from 4.7% to 5.5%) or leave K-12 education altogether (an increase from 1.4% to 2.9%²), which could be contributing to the rise in planned turnover. The percentage of teachers who said they plan to transition out of teaching (i.e., retire or move into an administrator position) stayed roughly the same as the year prior (going from 2.8% in 2021 to 2.9% in 2022).



2022 also saw an increase in the percentage of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed that they think about transferring to another school. This percentage had steadily decreased from 2018 to 2021 (down from 28% to 24%) but rose to 29% in 2022. There was also a decline in the percentage of teachers who reported that they plan to remain in education long-term, fluctuating between 70% and 73% from 2018 to 2021 and then dipping to 64% in 2022. Altogether, these responses could signal a need to bolster efforts to retain Tennessee teachers.



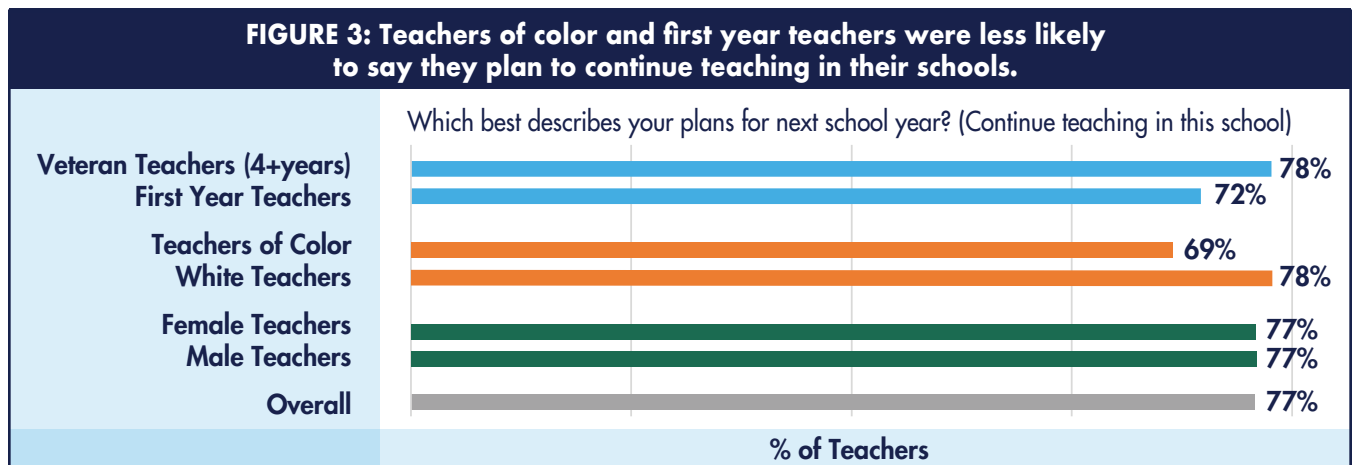
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KEY FINDING 2

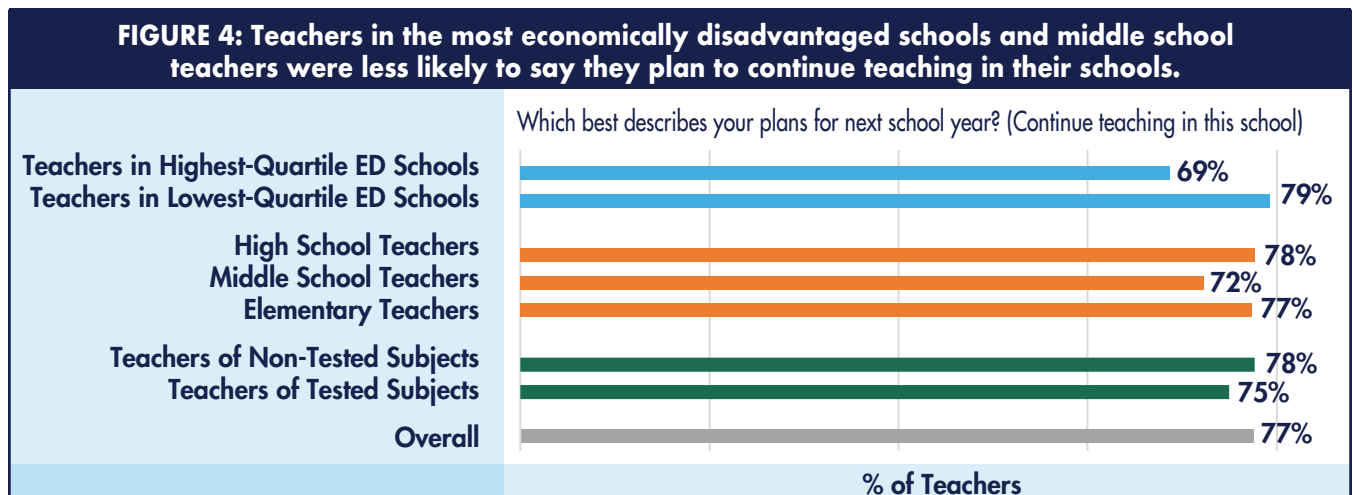
Teachers of color and first year teachers were less likely to say they continue teaching in their schools.

While 77% of teachers overall said they plan to continue teaching in their school next year, these rates varied when broken down by teacher characteristics (i.e., race, gender, teaching experience) and school/teaching assignment features (i.e., school tier, teaching a tested vs. non-tested subject, level of school economic disadvantage).

As shown in Figure 3, only 69% of teachers of color reported that they plan to continue teaching in their school next year, compared to 78% of White teachers. More experienced teachers were more likely to report that they plan to continue teaching in their schools next year (78% of teachers with four or more years of experience, but only 72% of first-year teachers). There was no distinguishable difference between male and female teachers; about 77% of both groups reported that they plan to continue teaching in their schools next year.



Further, as Figure 4 shows, middle school teachers were the least likely to respond that they plan to continue teaching in their schools next year (72% vs. 77% of middle school teachers and 78% of high school teachers), and teachers of tested subjects were also slightly less likely to report that they plan to continue (75% vs. 78% of teachers of non-tested subjects). Further, the disparity between teachers working in schools in the highest and lowest-quartile of economic disadvantage (measured by percent of students who qualify for free and reduced meals) was substantial: 79% of teachers in the lowest-quartile schools said they plan to continue, compared to just 69% of teachers in schools in the highest-quartile.

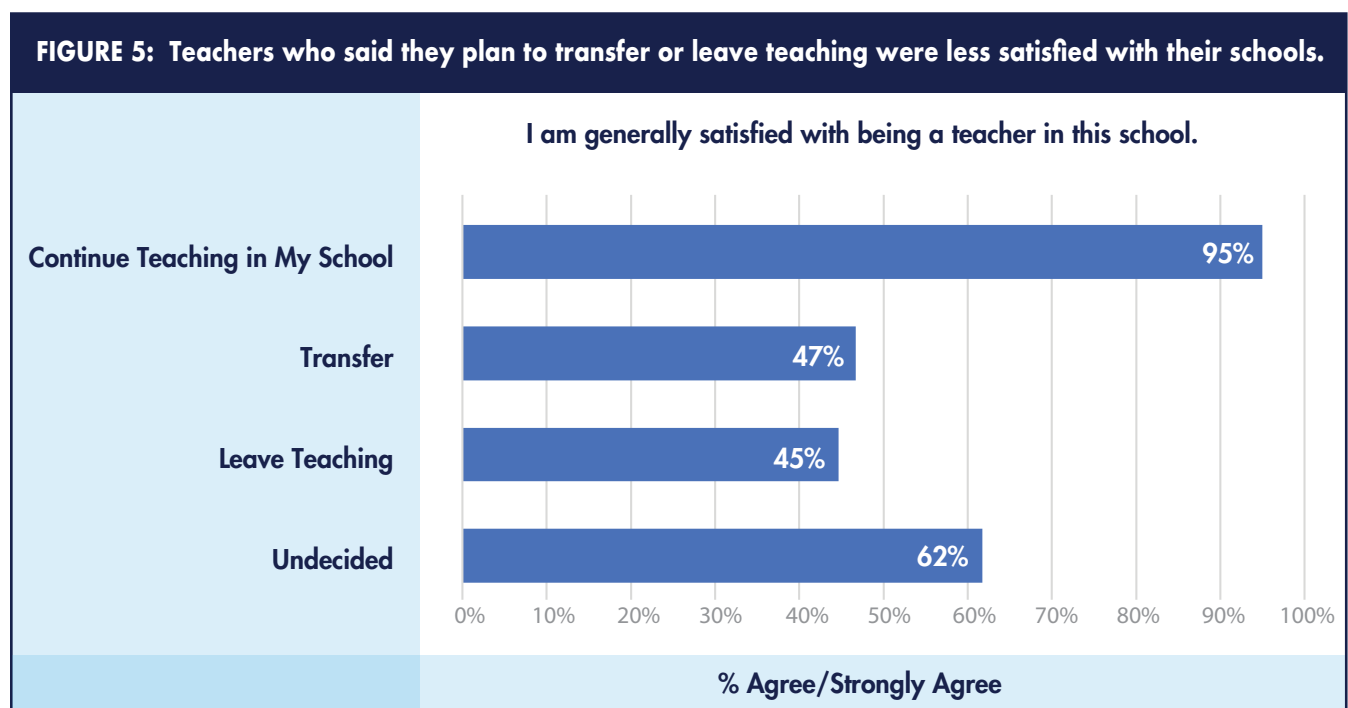


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KEY FINDING 3

Teachers who reported they plan to transfer, leave teaching, or who were undecided were less satisfied with school culture, leadership, and evaluation.

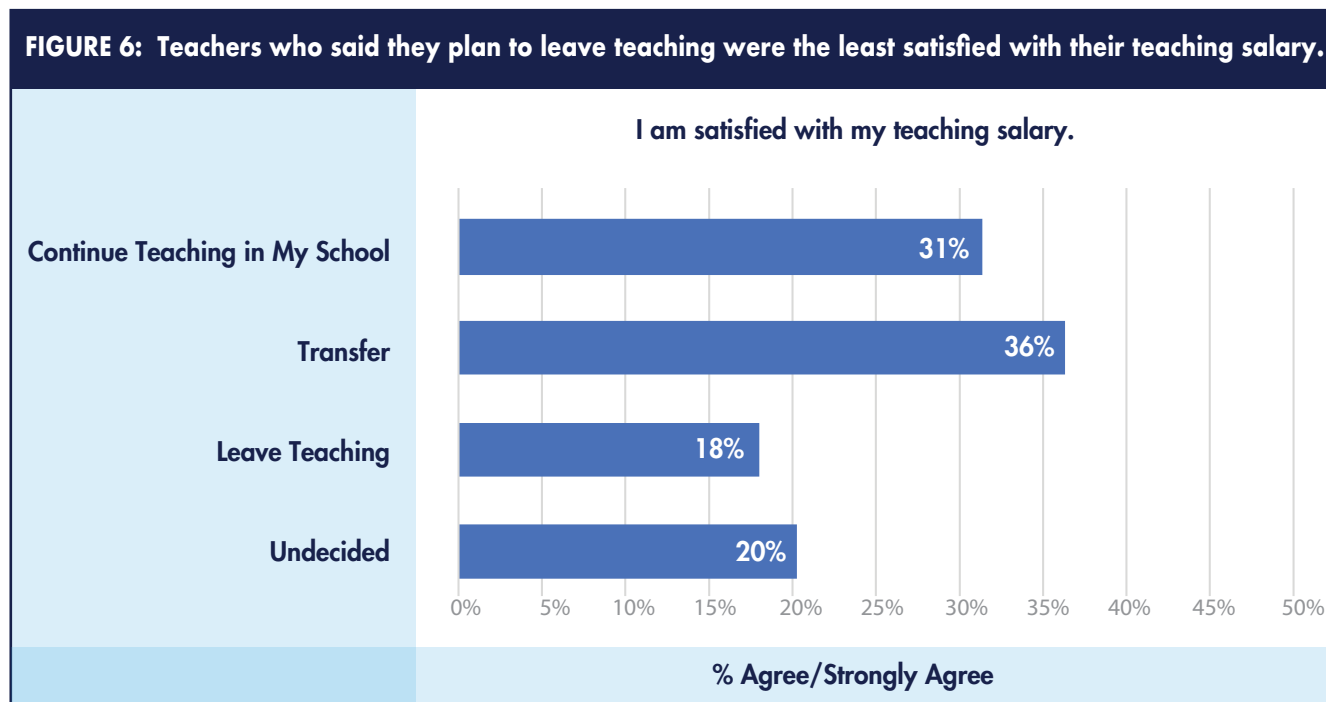
Consistent with previous [TERA survey findings](#) that link teacher satisfaction with retention, teachers who reported that they plan to continue teaching at their schools next year had much more positive perceptions of their school's culture than teachers who said they plan to transfer, exit the teaching profession, or who were undecided. For example, Figure 5 shows that 95% of teachers who reported that they plan to continue in their schools next year agreed or strongly agreed that they were generally satisfied with being a teacher in their school, compared to 47% of teachers who said they plan to transfer, 45% of teachers who said they plan to leave teaching, and 62% of teachers who said they were undecided.



Further, just over half of teachers who said they plan to transfer or leave teaching agreed that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within their school, compared to almost 90% of teachers who reported they plan to stay in their schools. Over a quarter of the teachers who said they plan to transfer or leave teaching also reported spending more than 25% of their instructional time managing student behavior, compared to just 9% of teachers who said they plan to continue teaching in their schools.

Perceptions of school leadership also differ greatly by teacher reported plans for next school year. About 38% of teachers who said they plan to transfer and 39% of teachers who reported that they plan to leave teaching agreed that they liked how things are run at their school, compared to 83% of teachers who said they plan to continue teaching in their schools. Teachers who said they plan to transfer or leave teaching were also less likely to perceive the feedback they receive from evaluations as helpful, or focused on improving their teaching, and more likely to perceive it as punitive, or focused on judging their performance.

Overall, teachers' satisfaction with their salary is low – only 31% of all teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their teaching salary. However, as illustrated in Figure 6, only 18% of teachers who said they plan to exit the profession and 20% of teachers who reported that they were undecided agreed that they were satisfied with their teaching salary.



Teachers planning to exit teaching also had the lowest levels of satisfaction with the amount of planning time they received. Only a third of teachers who said they plan to leave teaching agreed that their individual planning time was sufficient, compared to 45% of teachers who said they plan to transfer to another school or district and 64% of teachers who said they plan to continue teaching in their schools. Just as satisfaction with school culture and leadership seem to matter in retaining teachers at individual schools, issues of teacher pay and working conditions could play a role in teachers' decisions to remain in the profession.



ENDNOTES

1 To better account for differential response rates, we used analytic weighting in the analysis to produce results broadly representative of all public school teachers and school leaders in Tennessee.

2 The 2022 survey included the answer option “leave next school year to do something not in a K-12 district but in education (e.g., graduate work in education, work in an educational nonprofit)”, which was not included as an option in 2021. A small portion (0.7 percent) of respondents chose this option, and it is considered a planned exit from K-12 education in this analysis.

SOURCES

Tennessee has 1,000+ current teacher openings: How are local districts faring? (2022, August 4). WJHL-TV. Retrieved October 14, 2022, from <https://www.wjhl.com/news/local/back-to-school-news/tennessee-has-1000-current-teacher-openings-how-are-local-districts-faring/>.

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