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Career Advice

Why Teachers Quit

Lack of respect, abominable working conditions, and more.

 [Elizabeth Mulvahill](#) on June 14, 2019

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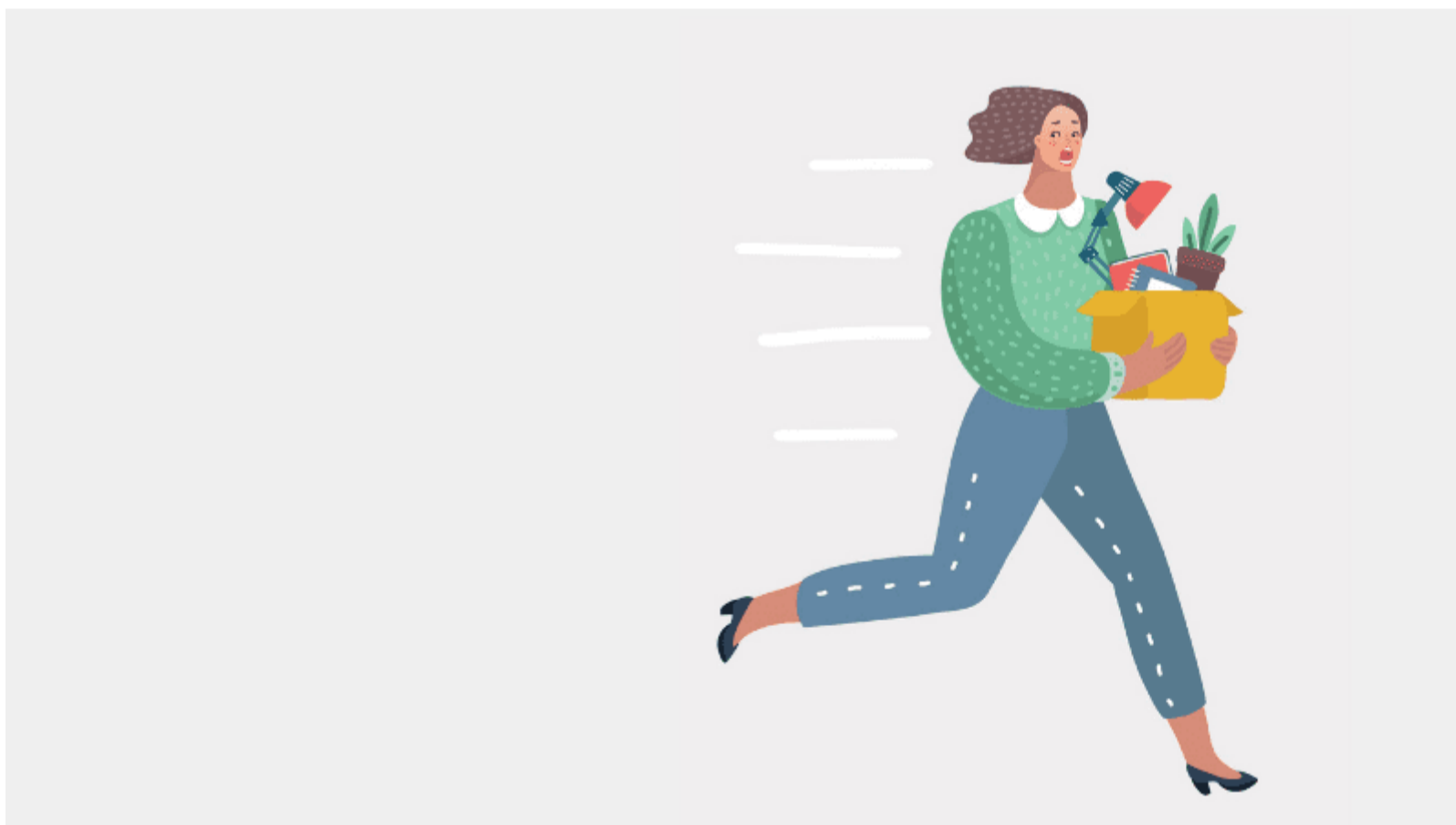
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The 2018–19 school year was a tumultuous one, to say the least. Hundreds of thousands of educators [participated in walkouts](#) and pay disputes across the country, and record numbers decided it was time to quit.

And that's not all. A recent Gallup poll shows that almost half of the teachers in the U.S. say they are actively looking for a different job now or watching for opportunities. That's not only heartbreaking for the professionals involved, it's bad news for the stability of the industry. High teacher turnover impacts student performance and costs U.S. schools [\\$7.3 billion in losses](#) every year.

So what are the issues that are driving so many educators away? We spoke with teachers who cited everything from challenging [physical conditions](#), [emotional stress](#) and unrealistic expectations to health and personal reasons.

Here are some of the top reasons why teachers quit the jobs they once loved:



Challenging Work Conditions

Building that are falling apart, a lack of basic classroom materials, [large class sizes](#) and overwhelming expectations. Teachers are challenged by the enormity of the job. Cassandra M. tells us, "We get bombarded with paperwork, ridiculous curriculum, and lack of time along with unrealistic expectations."

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Joan F. agrees, citing a laundry list of complaints. “Unmanageable class size, lack of materials, crappy building conditions, working 10–15 hour days and weekends, ineffective administrators, frivolous meetings and regulations, no support for discipline problems, etc.”

Lack of a Support System, Especially in the First Few Years

Being a *new* teacher can be especially overwhelming. Without the proper support, it’s tough to make a go of it. Charissa S. quit her first teaching job after just two months. She blames the “inadequate preparation by administration and school board for the school year, the challenging working conditions and unrealistic expectations for first-year teachers.”

In fact, current statistics show that new teachers leave at rates of somewhere between 19% and 30% over their first five years of teaching. A recent study by the [Learning Policy Institute](#) shows that if a teacher receives mentoring, collaboration, and extra resources, and is part of a strong teacher network, first-year turnover is cut by more than half. Unfortunately, just 3% of beginning teachers receive such comprehensive support.

Overwhelming Stress

The [emotional stress](#) teachers are dealing with seems to be at an all-time high. In fact, a [national survey](#) shows that 58 percent of classroom teachers describe their mental health as “not good.” And another [survey](#) confirms that nearly two-thirds feel their jobs are “always” or “often” stressful—roughly double the rates of stress experienced by the general workforce. Working under such conditions is untenable. Educators cannot do their best for students when they are struggling with the physical and mental effects of stress.

Lack of Respect

Many teachers feel the negative effects of what they perceive as a lack of respect. A [recent report](#) from Penn State University and the non-profit Robert Wood Johnson Foundation claims among professional occupations, teachers rate lowest in feeling that their opinions count at work.

“There seems to be little or no old-fashioned respect for teachers today,” Ann D. tells us. Whether the perceived lack of respect comes from students, parents, or administrators, it takes a toll. “Stress, lack of respect, and support,” says Erin T., “It’s tough, even after 16 years.” Georgianne H. suggests, “How about ‘nerves gone to bits’ as a reason why teachers are leaving?”

In addition, many teachers report feeling micro-managed by administrators and parents. “Admin just doesn’t respect teachers,” Rosanne O. claims. “We have little to NO say.” Carole R. is frustrated by “lawnmower parents, who expect their child to get an ‘A’ when they are only doing ‘C’ work.”

Discipline Issues

One teacher we spoke with uses the word ‘abominable’ to describe behavior in the classroom. “We have no recourse and the kids know it,” she says. “If you so much as cross your eyes at a child, they (the kids or their parents) call the police and the school board. Ten-year-olds hold my career in their hands. It’s ridiculous.”

Another agrees and blames parents. “We put up with a lot,” she says. “Attitude, lack of cooperation, physical attacks, yelling, and shootings that could happen at anytime. Parents only want to be their child’s friend and take on no parental responsibilities.”

Testing and Data Collection

The demands teachers are feeling [as a result of high-stakes standardized testing](#) and the emphasis on data collection is definitely a hot button issue among teachers who are leaving. According to an [NEA survey](#) of classroom teachers, 72 percent replied that they felt “moderate” or “extreme” pressure to increase test scores from both school and district administrators.

Bonnie L. vehemently sums up her frustration with just two words, “Data collection!” and Kevin P. tells us he hates being part of what he characterizes as a “punitive and abusive test-and-punish system.”

Amy L. quit after just three years because of what she calls the “teach to the test” mentality. “My first year, my principal called me into his office and told me to *only* teach to the standards, not teach *anything* outside them, and to not tell my students I was trying to prepare them for the real world or college. I started looking for a way out right then.”

Developmentally Inappropriate Expectations

After teaching 30 years, Bonnie D. made the heartbreaking choice to leave. She simply felt the system was no longer acting in the best interest of her students. “Everything became all about passing the ‘almighty test,’” she says. “My administrators decided to concentrate only on those students who could perform well. Call me old fashioned, but I always did my best to reach and teach *every* student in my room, not simply the ones who had the best chance of passing a test.”

In addition, many teachers worry about the [effect high-stakes testing has on kids](#). “Sometimes tests coincide with a bad day,” Michelle S. tells us, “or a day when a student is just not feeling it. That is an incredible amount of stress on kids—especially those classified as ‘bubble kids.’”

What do you say, educators? What do you think are the biggest reasons why teachers quit? Come and share in our [WeAreTeachers HELPLINE group on Facebook](#).

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