The Nebraska Teacher Retention Survey

The Nebraska Department of Education, in a partnership between the **Office of Policy and Strategic Initiatives and Data, Research, and Evaluation**, is conducting a statewide Nebraska Teacher Retention Survey to assess the experiences and needs of PK-12 educators. This effort aims to gather valuable insights to better support teachers and improve their working environment.

The Urgency of the Teacher Shortage in the US

In 2024, US schools had 39,700 vacant teaching positions and over 288,000 positions filled by underqualified teachers (Nguyen, Lam, & Bruno, 2024).

The issue is particularly pronounced in:

- STEM education
- Special education
- Early childhood education
- Rural schools

❖ **Rural** schools and **high-poverty** districts are the most impacted, with higher turnover rates and greater difficulty recruiting certified teachers (Engle, Xia, & Butler, 2024; Hanushek, 2024).
❖ **High-poverty schools** account for 25% of all public schools but over 50% of teacher attrition (Hanushek, 2024)

Nebraska's Teacher Shortage: Open Positions and Retention Challenges

In Nebraska specifically, the 2024-25 Nebraska Teacher Vacancy Report identified **669 unfilled positions, with 150 in special education, and 0 applicants in 63% of unfilled positions**.

In recent national surveys, a significant number of educators have indicated they are considering leaving the profession within the next few years.

Findings include:

- Horace Mann Survey (2024): 30% of teachers are considering leaving within the next three years (K-12 Dive, 2024)
- National Education Association (NEA) Survey: 55% of teachers report they are likely to leave education sooner than planned (GBA Memo, 2024)
- This survey – 25% of teachers are considering leaving the field of education; 15% are dissatisfied with their current job

Teacher shortages lead to a variety of impacts on students

- **Lower Student Achievement & Increased Dropout Rates**: Students in high-shortage schools, particularly in math, science, and special education, face greater academic struggles due to frequent turnover and uncertified instructors (Nguyen et al., 2024; Hanushek, 2024).
- **Reduced Course Offerings & Larger Class Sizes**: Many districts have eliminated advanced STEM courses, while others have increased teacher workloads, worsening burnout (Matulka, 2024; Hanushek, 2024)
- **Disproportionate impact on rural and high-poverty schools**: Teacher shortages widen educational inequities, as disadvantaged students are more likely to be taught by inexperienced or uncertified teachers (Nguyen et al., 2024; Aldeman, 2024).

Purpose of this Study

This survey seeks to inform policies that strengthen Nebraska's teacher workforce by identifying key factors that encourage educators to stay and addressing challenges that contribute to turnover. The findings will help guide strategic efforts to improve job satisfaction, enhance retention, and ensure long-term support for teachers across the state.

Survey Overview

Demographic questions (8 items)

- Total years teaching, years teaching at current school, SES status of student body, grade level(s) currently teaching, subject(s) currently teaching, along with basic demographics

Substantive questions (71 items)

- Retention & motivation drivers (25)
- School leadership (12)
- Student engagement (12)
- Coworker dynamics in the work environment (6)
- Parental involvement and community support (7)
- Career satisfaction (7)
- Open-ended feedback questions (2)

Pilot Study

PHASE	TIMELINE
Pilot Data Collection	January 13th – March 3rd 2025
Initial Data Analysis	March – April, 2025
Preliminary Results Shared	April 9th, 2025
Survey & Project Refinement	May – August 2025
Statewide Launch	Fall 2025

The first stage in this process is a pilot study, an essential step refining the survey before its statewide administration. It will help ensure validation and guide development of the final survey, to be administered later in 2025.

Purpose of the Pilot

- Refine the survey instrument (question wording, response scales, probing, and asking additional questions)
- Ensure validity before statewide administration
- Inform adjustments to the sampling plan and strategy

Sampling Frame for Pilot

The sample was drawn from Nebraska's Education Directory Search and classified by **grade level** (PreK-only, elementary, middle, high school, secondary) and **location** (rural, town, urban). The sample was divided into 15 strata to **ensure statewide representation**.

Oversampling Adjustments:

- Certain groups (e.g., PreK-only in rural areas) were fully included due to small populations
- Adjustments were made for adequate representation in town-based PreK and secondary school teachers

Why these strata?

- Educational Environment Differences
  - Urban, town, and rural schools face distinct challenges in teacher attrition, resources, and demographics
  - Job demands vary by grade level, influencing career decisions.
- Ensuring Representation
  - Teacher distribution is uneven across locales and grades
  - Stratification prevents smaller subgroups (e.g., rural Pre-K teachers) from being overlooked
- Research-Based Rationale
  - Studies show attrition trends differ by location and grade level
  - Rural schools face retention issues; secondary teachers may have different mobility patterns

Pilot Results

The primary purpose of initial analyses is to inform the statewide data collection in the Fall. Pilot results examined:

- Survey Factor Structure
  - Evaluating the interrelatedness of survey questions
  - Identifying latent constructs
  - Verifying the survey captures the intended dimensions of teacher experiences and motivations
- Survey Methodology
  - Question wording (clarity and precision)
  - Response scale appropriateness
  - Overall survey clarity and user experience
- Qualitative Insights
  - Probing emergent themes
  - Identifying areas requiring additional exploratory research

Initial Pilot Analyses

Leadership and Job Satisfaction

- **Leadership Effectiveness:** Teachers who agreed leadership was effective were significantly less likely to consider leaving the profession
- **Job Satisfaction:** Teachers who strongly agree that school leaders are effective are significantly more likely to be strongly satisfied with their jobs
- **Sense of Fulfillment:** Teachers who strongly agree they have a sense of fulfillment at their school are significantly less likely to consider leaving education

Compensation and Retention

- **Salary Perception:** Teachers who agree they live comfortably or feel fairly paid are significantly less likely to consider leaving the field
- Differences in salary satisfaction between public and non-public teachers are not significant
- **Fair Pay:** Teachers who did not think they are fairly paid were 41% more likely to consider leaving than those who felt fairly paid (Exp(B) = 0.59, $p < .001$)
- **Salary satisfaction:** Teachers satisfied with salary and benefits are 19.5% less likely to consider leaving (Exp(B) = 0.805, $p < .0010$

Early Career Challenges

- Teachers with **3 to 5 years of experience** were 2.24 times more likely to consider leaving than those with over 20 years of experience (Exp(B) = 2.23, p= 0.005)
- Teachers with **6 to 10 years of experience** were 1.71 times more likely to consider leaving than those with over 20 years of experience (Exp(B) = 1.71, p = .02)

Additional Insights

- **Degree Levels:** No significant differences were found across degree levels in terms of teacher retention
- **School location** (urban, town, or rural) did not significantly impact attrition risk
- **Workload Impact:** Teachers responsible for multiple grade levels showed an increased likelihood of attrition (Exp(B) = 2.97, p = .002)

Full Statewide Data Collection

In the spring of 2026, we hope to release the survey for full statewide data collection of all teachers. data, we hope to complete additional analyses, including, but not limited to:

- Demographic Breakdowns (Public vs. Private, teacher experience levels, grade level differences)
- T-tests/ANOVA to compare groups
- Multiple Regression/Logistic Regression to examine predictors of teacher retention and job satisfaction
- Cluster analysis to identify patterns of respondents

Optimizing Survey Timing: Email Distribution Experiment

A secondary goal of this research was to *understand the impact of survey distribution timing (days & times) on* the sample of teachers. To achieve this, teachers were randomly assigned to groups. Each group received identical surveys and instructions but was sent the email at varying days and times. All other variables, including all survey questions, email content, subject, and format, were held constant.

Key Findings:

- **Highest Response Rate:** Monday afternoon had the highest response rate, with nearly 40% of surveys submitted
- **Survey Completion:** Surveys sent out on Mondays were more likely to be completed in one sitting.
- **Declining Response Rates:** Engagement decreased after Monday, suggesting diminishing returns later in the week.

GROUP	TOTAL SAMPLE	SURVEY RESPONSES	RESPONSE RATE
A (Monday 9:30 am)	622	221	35.5%
B (Monday 2:30 pm)	610	243	39.8%
C (Tuesday 9:30 am)	622	197	31.7%
D (Tuesday 2:30 pm)	582	203	34.9%
E (Wednesday 9:30 am)	612	173	28.3%
F (Wednesday 2:30 pm)	589	182	30.9%
Total Sample	3637	1219	33.5%