

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF TEACHING:

Advancing Satisfaction in Marion County Schools

Younger teachers have lower
rates of job satisfaction
compared with all teachers.



"Teachers are passionate about our profession. We are relying on lawmakers and community to support structural changes that will support retention and recruitment. The future of our classrooms is dependent on the action that's taken next."

— TEACHER, INNOVATION NETWORK CHARTER SCHOOL,
CENTER TOWNSHIP

A NOTE FROM

Jasmin Shaheed-Young

FOUNDER & CEO OF RISE INDY



High-quality education changes lives, reshapes communities, and strengthens society. This belief drove me to launch **RISE INDY** in 2019, and it continues to inspire our organization's work to ensure all students have access to an education that prepares them for an ever-changing world.

Teachers are the most important ingredient in providing students with a high-quality education. I have seen the impact of amazing educators firsthand as the sister of a national award-winning teacher, principal, and school founder. I also have experienced it personally as a mother of three school-aged children.

My middle school math teacher, Ms. Filomeno, was the mirror that helped me believe I was an exceptional math student. She recognized my gifts and held a bar of excellence that I knew I could achieve. Her encouragement gave me mathematical confidence leading to a career filled with math as a political fundraiser, leader on a development team, and now, fundraiser in a different capacity at my own organization, **RISE INDY**. Every student should have this experience — educators that nurture the best of their abilities so they reach their highest potential in life. Great teachers are the bridge for impactful leaders.

I want every student in our community to reap the immense benefits that come from having an excellent educator. That requires elevating the voices of teachers and learning from their insights and experiences.

RISE INDY believes community voices should fuel the work of improving our education system, and teachers' voices are incredibly important. That's why we, in partnership with **MelanatED Leaders** and **Teach Indy**, commissioned a survey of 575 teachers in Marion County to understand teachers' overall satisfaction with their jobs and the opportunities and challenges they face in the profession.

Based on these findings, we sought to develop policy recommendations to help improve teacher morale and boost recruitment and retention, which are keys to ensuring that every student can benefit from the life-changing work of a great teacher.

We have immense gratitude for the educators who took the time to participate in this survey, the educators in our mighty teachers coalition, and to every teacher that shows up for the children in our community. Together, we can improve the experiences of teachers and thereby elevate outcomes for all Indianapolis students.



We envision a day when...

Every Indianapolis resident is engaged in building a public education system that prepares every student for graduation and beyond.

Students and parents experiencing injustice in our system have a voice in the direction of our schools and can ally with the teachers and leaders fighting to improve outcomes for children. Every elected leader — whether they are a school board member, a City-County councilor or a state legislator — is working toward a coherent and ambitious vision for improvement in our public schools.

Community leaders across Indianapolis are organized to bring new perspectives to persistent challenges and to amplify the voices of those who might otherwise be unheard.

Mission We serve our community and Indianapolis students by convening a diverse group of local residents to improve public schools.

Vision We believe all children deserve an excellent education that prepares them for graduation and beyond.

Values

Our work and education policy agenda are based on three core values:

- 1 Students should be at the center of all education discussions.
 - 2 Families should be empowered to choose and advocate for what's best for their children.
 - 3 Educators should have autonomy and flexibility to meet the needs of students.
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ABOUT OUR PARTNERS

MelantED Leaders builds a powerful community of education leaders of color across Indianapolis to inspire, educate and edify each other for students of color.

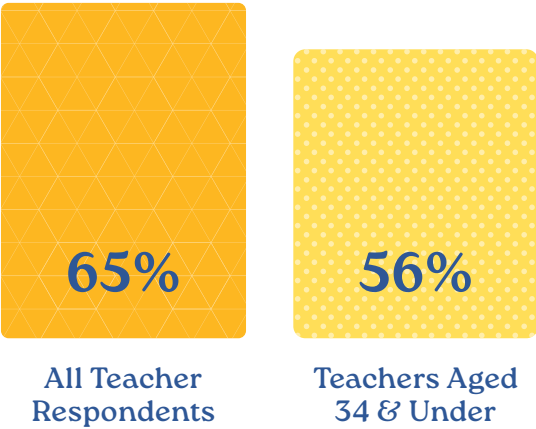
Teach Indy believes that teachers are essential leaders in their communities. As an Indianapolis-based nonprofit, we help elevate the teaching profession so that students can achieve their fullest potential. We do this in three ways: by creating a diverse, teacher-centered community; by empowering teachers to be problem-solvers; and by elevating teachers' expertise.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teachers are the most important in-school drivers of students’ success. Studies show that having a quality teacher makes two to three times the impact on math and reading scores compared with factors such as facilities, services and school leadership.¹ We must have a strong, thriving and well-supported teacher force to give all students in Indianapolis access to a high-quality education and narrow persistent gaps in academic outcomes based on race and income.

Teachers also play an instrumental role in addressing the lagging literacy rates in Marion County, where nearly three-fourths (71.3%) of students in grades three through eight read below grade level.²

PERCENT OF TEACHERS WHO SAY THEY ARE SATISFIED WITH THEIR WORKPLACE



With this belief at the forefront, **RISE INDY**, in partnership with **MelantED Leaders** and **Teach Indy**, issued a countywide teacher survey to better understand how Marion County educators feel about their profession, areas of opportunity to better support them and potential changes to policy and practice to maximize their impact. Because labor market data about teachers is difficult to track, the reality of how teachers feel about their work is more nuanced. Which is why we wanted to hear from educators directly. The responses from 575 teachers differ in some respects from recent national teacher reports and show reason for hope — while also underlining areas for improvement.

While two-thirds of teachers are satisfied with their workplace, younger educators have lower rates of job satisfaction.

Nearly two-thirds of teacher respondents (65%) agree they are satisfied with their schools as a workplace. Among teachers 34 and under, the workplace satisfaction rate is nine percentage points lower, at 56%. We must work to **ensure that younger teachers are engaged and have the right mentorship and support** – and elevate the experiences of the 35% of teachers across age groups who say they are neutral or dissatisfied. This would help improve upon the 68.5% retention rate for Marion County public school teachers in 2023.³

Open-text responses show that teachers are **highly motivated by their ability to positively impact students and families**, including seeing students’ learning growth, and their ability to form relationships with colleagues. By building on these strengths, we can create enriching experiences that help keep talent in the classroom.

The three Ps – perception, pay and policy – emerge as educators’ top concerns.

Nearly three-fourths (73%) of teachers feel that society does not value or respect their profession, and the majority of teachers surveyed (57%) believe they are underpaid for their work. Only 13% of teachers surveyed agree that recent policy changes have made them feel more secure about their job; 56% disagree and 31% neither agree nor disagree. These concerns are especially acute among educators 34 and under – a larger percentage of whom disagree that perception, pay and policy are positive.



Such findings provide constructive areas for change to help maximize the impact of teachers and retain top talent in the profession. They also give us optimism that teachers find their workplaces, colleagues, and the mission of their jobs compelling. Read on for insights into teacher survey results, and state, local, and district policy changes that can drastically improve teacher retention and recruitment.

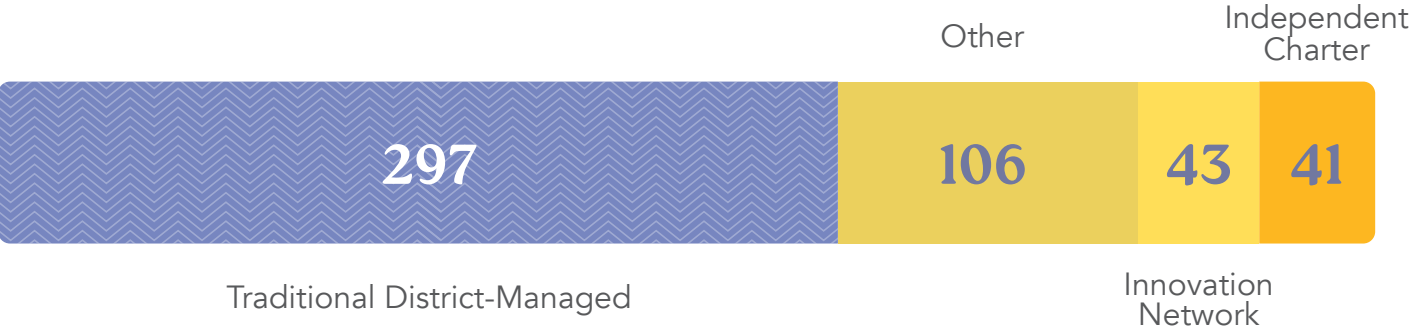
¹RAND Corporation. (n.d.). [Teachers matter: Understanding teachers’ impact on student achievement](#). RAND Education and Labor. Retrieved June 28, 2024.

²Indiana Department of Education. (2024). [ILEARN English Language Arts scores, grades 3-8](#). Indiana Department of Education.

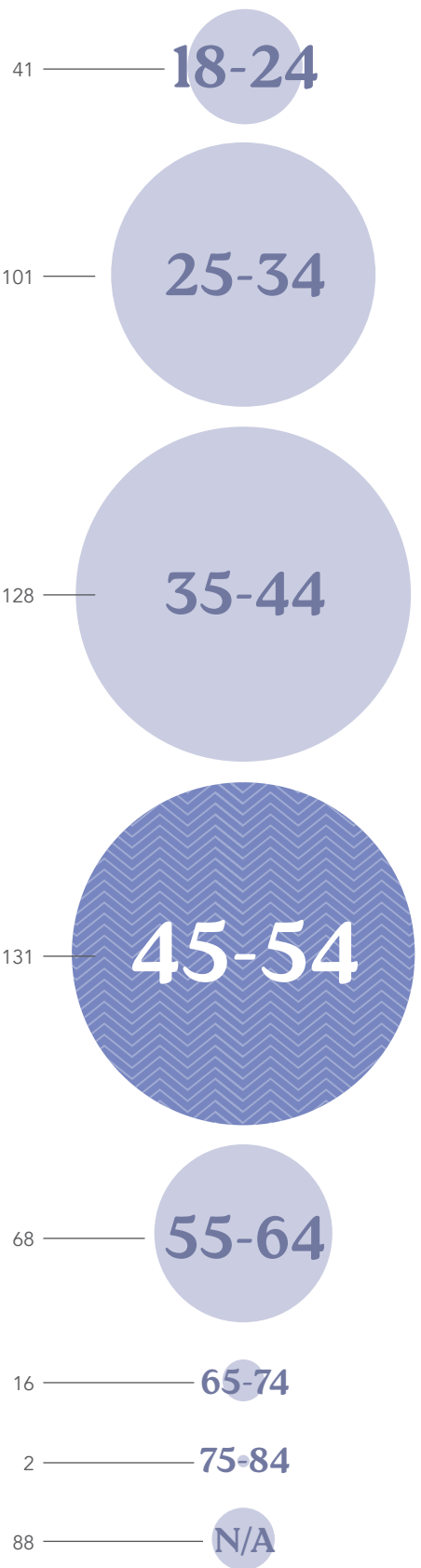
³ [Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation. \(n.d.\). Indianapolis education data snapshot](#). Retrieved June 28, 2024. Note that data are calculated based on the number of teachers who remain in their buildings from one year to the next, and these do not adjust for growth in schools that add teachers, which can be misleading.

About Our Survey Respondents

SCHOOL TYPE



AGE RANGE OF TEACHERS



An additional 106 teachers indicated they **do not know** their school type, highlighting that labels such as public charter, district-run and Innovation Network Schools matter more to policymakers than those in the classroom.

“The students motivate me the most to keep teaching. Sometimes the adults get caught up so much in the rules that we forget our why.”

- TEACHER, INDIANAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS, CENTER TOWNSHIP

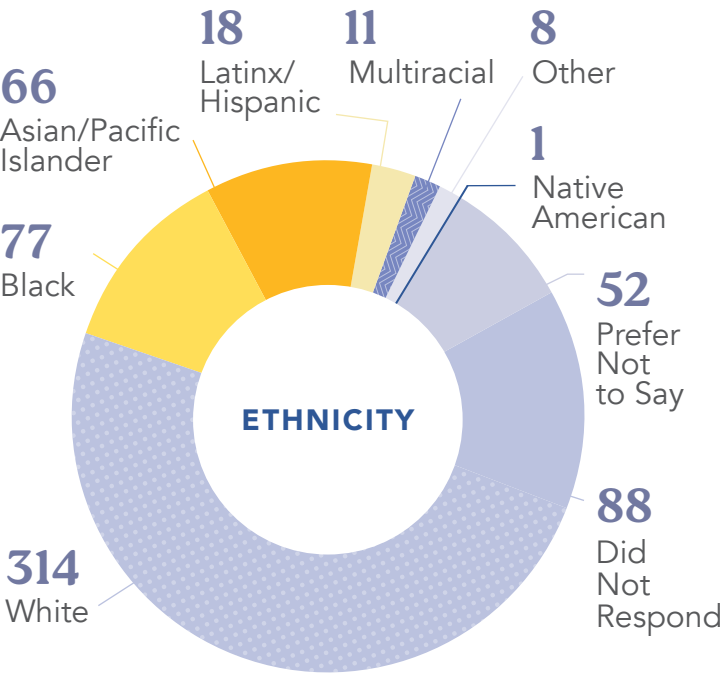
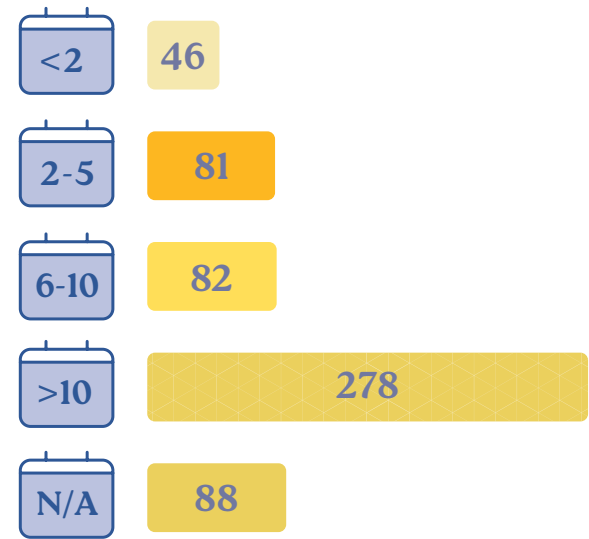
As of July 2024, there were **1,593 jobs posted** across Indiana public schools.¹

575 respondents

KEY FINDINGS

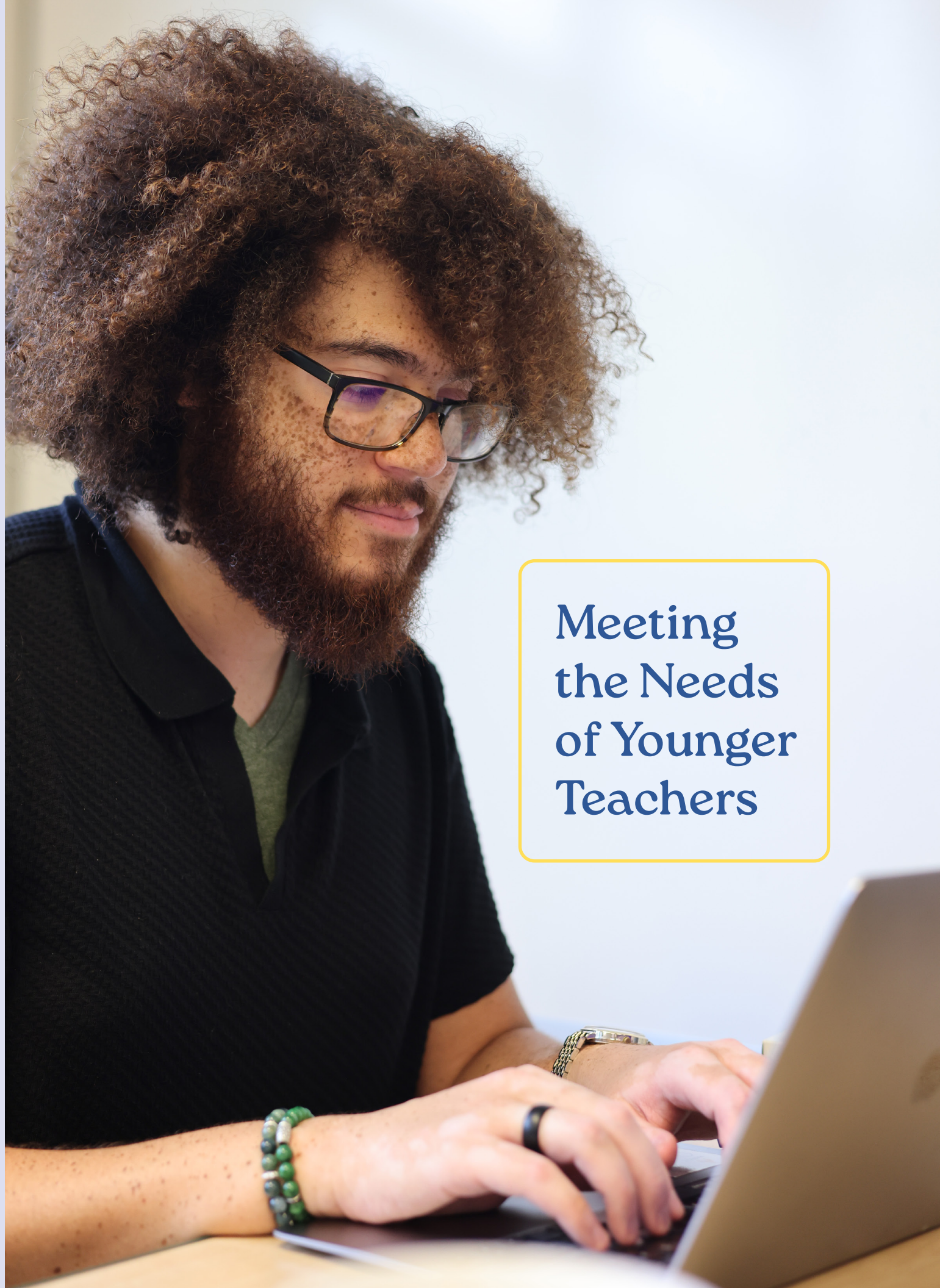
Our survey included responses from 575 Marion County educators representing a mix of public school types, including public charter, district, magnet and Innovation Network Schools.

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE



*Among these respondents, 88 did not provide any demographic information, such as gender, race/ethnicity or school type.

¹ Indiana Department of Education (n.d.). Indiana Educator Job Board. Retrieved July 23, 2024.



Meeting the Needs of Younger Teachers

Younger teachers are *less satisfied* with their workplace than older teachers.



The majority of respondents say they **feel encouraged and supported in their professional growth**, with 69% agreeing (36% strongly agree, 33% somewhat agree) that there is someone at their school who invests in their development. Also encouraging is that 61% of teachers surveyed believe they have the ability to do what they do best every day at their school, a key factor in workplace satisfaction.



Satisfaction rates are **lower among younger teachers**, 40% of whom somewhat agree and 16% of whom strongly agree that they are satisfied with their school as a place to work. Supporting teachers' professional development is critical across their careers, and there's a need to especially focus on the satisfaction and support of early-in-career educators.

“The other day I was having a crappy day and one of my fellow teachers had students write thank you notes. A couple of them got dropped off to me and I thought, ‘This is why I keep going. This is why I keep doing this.’”

- TEACHER, INNOVATION NETWORK CHARTER SCHOOL, CENTER TOWNSHIP

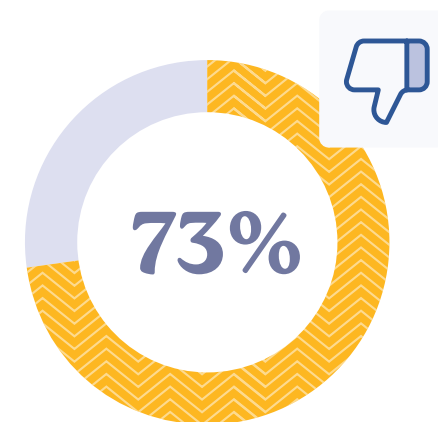


The Three P's To Address:

- ✓ Perception
- ✓ Pay
- ✓ Policy

PERCEPTION

Teachers feel that society views their profession negatively.



A striking 73% of respondents reported that society does not respect or value their profession.

(46% strongly disagree and 27% somewhat disagree)

This finding was universal among teachers at different types of schools. Nearly three-fourths (74%) of teachers at district-managed schools disagree that society respects and values their profession, compared with 71% of public charter school teachers and 66% of Innovation Network School teachers. Among teachers 34 and under, 79% disagree that society respects and values their profession (50% strongly disagree, 29% somewhat disagree).

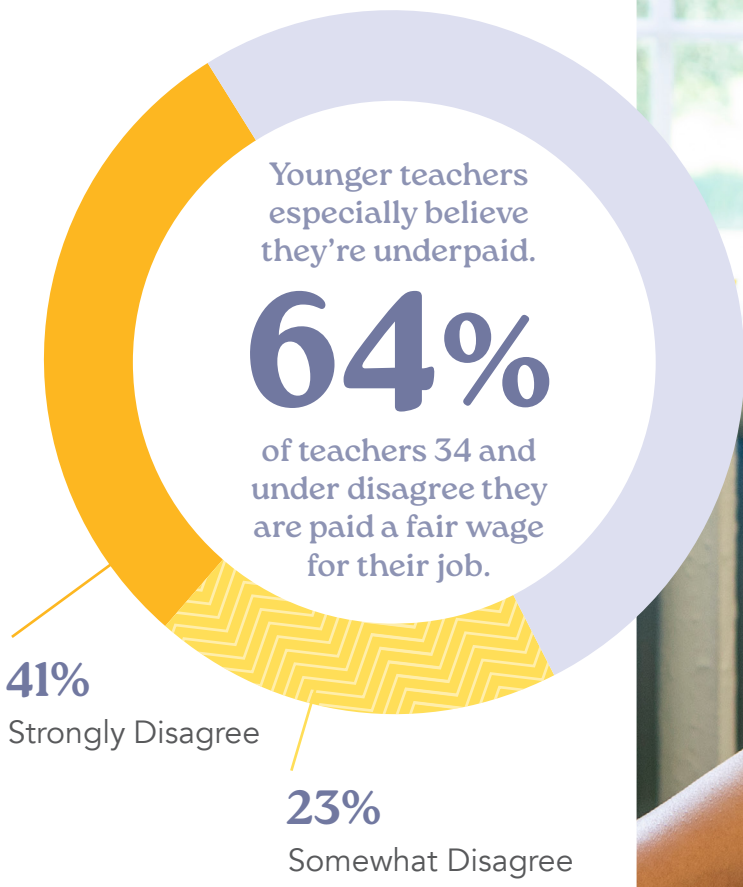
PAY

The majority of teachers surveyed believe they are underpaid.



Teachers at district-managed schools have more negative perceptions of pay than those at Innovation Network or public charter schools. Sixty-one percent of district teachers disagree they are paid a fair wage, compared with 33% of Innovation Network School teachers and 47% of public charter school teachers.

The sentiment signals the need for a re-evaluation of teacher pay policies. While open-text responses showed connections with students and relationships with fellow teachers motivate educators most, pay also matters to teachers.



Financial and professional incentives, including better pay, benefits, respect and autonomy were identified, based on responses to the question, “What are the 1-3 primary factors that would keep you in the teaching profession?”



“Even when there are financial initiatives to retain teachers, some people wait to get the money and leave. You are either in it or you (are) not. Salary would be impactful. If teachers made more money, they would be less likely to be looking for other employment and more content where they are.”

– TEACHER, METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP

POLICY

Recent policy changes *have not* made teachers feel more secure about their jobs.

56%

of teachers do not agree that recent policy changes have made them feel more secure

Only 13% of teachers surveyed agree that recent policy changes have made them feel more secure in their teaching careers (4% strongly agree and 8% somewhat agree). Fifty-six percent of teachers do not believe that policy changes have made them feel more secure, and 31% neither agree nor disagree.

While these trends are mostly consistent across race/ethnicity, a larger percentage of teachers from district-managed schools (63%) disagree that policy changes have made them feel more secure compared with those at public charter (41%) or Innovation Network Schools (47%). Only 9% of teachers ages 34 and under agree that policy changes have made them feel more secure.

47%

of teachers from Innovation Network Schools disagree

41%

of public charter school teachers disagree

63%

of teachers from district-managed schools disagree

Have recent policy changes made teachers feel more secure about their jobs?



Lack of parental engagement is also identified as a challenge.

Forty-five percent of teachers feel their students' families do not make their job easier (26% somewhat disagree, 19% strongly disagree). These concerns are most acute among teachers at district-managed schools. More than half (51%) of teachers at district-managed schools disagree that their students' families make their lives easier, compared with 24% of public charter school teachers and 35% of Innovation Network School teachers.



In open-text responses, teachers said they would like to see more engagement and support from parents, and some who responded to separate questionnaires identified **students' cell phone use as a challenge they need parents' help addressing.**

Parents could support teachers by volunteering with a program like Freedom Readers to be in partnership with educators.

Recommendations

STATEHOUSE



Grow and promote efforts to increase support for teachers through tutoring and staffing support.

Examples include:

Indiana “Grow Your Own” initiative, which offers residents pathways to become teacher’s aides.

Funding high-dosage tutoring efforts through schools, private providers and nonprofits to help offset learning disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Increase teachers’ take-home pay.

While school districts have been increasing teacher pay in recent years, the majority of those increases come in the form of health benefits and pension. Districts should prioritize increases in take-home pay for hard-working teachers to provide immediate benefit. The Indiana General Assembly has the opportunity to legislate to ensure that school districts allocate state funds accordingly.

INDIANAPOLIS/ MARION COUNTY



Strengthen policies that enhance work-life balance and supervisor support, such as travel sabbatical programs designed with the dual purpose of rejuvenation and professional development.



Invest in programs to help bolster teacher recruitment efforts in Marion County through financial incentives like relocation/ sign-on bonuses and financial support for childcare.

These bonuses could alleviate the financial burden associated with moving to a new area and serve as an attractive incentive for prospective teachers.

Additional community perks could include memberships to museums (The Children’s Museum = \$265 annual membership, The Indiana State Museum = \$179 annual membership, Newfields = \$100 annual membership).

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS



School districts should establish a teacher’s cabinet that engages high-performing educators to help shape state-level policy.

Teachers deserve a space to work with districts on state policies to ensure their voices are represented in each district’s legislative agenda.



Create and implement professional development and mentoring programs that cater to teachers at different career stages, focusing especially on addressing the unique challenges faced by younger educators.

Newer teachers may especially benefit from mentoring, coaching and support from experienced educators.



Launch public awareness campaigns to highlight the value and complexities of teaching, aiming to improve societal respect for the profession.

Media coverage of ‘a day in the life’ and educator-derived programs for students can be especially beneficial to shape community appreciation of the profession.



Implement community outreach initiatives aimed at enhancing parental engagement and fostering collaborative relationships among teachers, students and families.

This might include setting up regular town hall meetings, establishing parent-teacher committees and using digital platforms for continuous dialogue.

Schools or nonprofits also could provide resources and training for teachers on how to engage families effectively in the educational process.



Everyone who interacts with teachers can make a difference by showing teachers appreciation for their hard work.

Conclusion

Our survey findings contribute to a growing body of research that highlights there is work to do to elevate the experiences of teachers so they continue to stay engaged in the profession. Importantly, while nearly two-thirds of Marion County teachers surveyed are satisfied with their workplace, there's more to be done to ensure that younger teachers, in particular, experience higher rates of job satisfaction. Our findings align with those of similar studies – including a 2024 report by RAND⁴ – showing the need to increase teacher pay so that hard-working educators feel appropriately compensated for the critical work they do.

Pay can be addressed with policy and funding changes. Creative thinking is also needed to help address costs such as out-of-pocket expenses for classroom supplies, and to provide financial rewards and bonuses for hardworking educators. In this regard, **nonprofits and philanthropy must come alongside the government** to implement and drive change.

Showing teachers that Hoosiers have a positive perception of their work is critical. Everyone who interacts with teachers can make a difference in this regard by showing teachers appreciation for their hard work. **RISE INDY's** Teacher Coalition provides a central place for educators' voices to be heard.

This has effectuated change through **RISE INDY's** work connecting teachers to elected officials at the Statehouse, bringing elected officials to schools to speak with teachers and students, and connecting educators with prospective candidates to establish policies that will improve student outcomes.

Large-scale, coordinated efforts – such as **Teach Indy's** Reimagining the Teacher Role Cohort to engage educators in rethinking aspects of their daily jobs – help to show teachers their input is respected and should be elevated. Teach Indy also elevates teachers' voices through its annual conference and blog series featuring teachers. **MelanatED Leaders** provides educators of color with opportunities for peer connection, mentorship, and professional coaching to help them maximize their impact.

Lawmakers should consider ways to engage educators directly as they consider and shape legislation that impacts their daily practice.

This report acknowledges what we've long known to be true: teachers are instrumental members of society and the number-one in-school drivers of student success. Let's leverage these findings to help amplify their impact and ensure their profession remains celebrated and desirable for the sake of generations to come.

⁴RAND Corporation. (2022). *Measuring the long-term effects of recent U.S. Army recruiting changes (Report No. RRA1108-12)*. RAND Corporation.

METHODOLOGY

The data collection process for the survey included a mixed-method approach to gather both quantitative and qualitative insights. Methods included:

SURVEYS

The primary quantitative data collection tool was a survey administered across a representative sample of Marion County teachers. The survey had 575 respondents, a confidence level of 95% and a margin error of plus or minus four. The survey included structured questions, and responses were captured on a Likert scale (e.g., “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree”), allowing for the quantification of teachers’ attitudes and perceptions about various aspects of their work environment. It also included open-text responses to capture more nuanced feedback.

INTERVIEWS

In addition to the structured survey, RISE INDY provided questionnaires to four Marion County teachers representing public charter, district-run, and Innovation Network Schools. Their qualitative insights complement and enrich the quantitative data, giving voice to individual experiences and perspectives.

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS

Considering the textual data collected from open-ended survey questions, sentiment analysis was applied to gauge the emotional tone and overall sentiment behind teachers’ written responses (positive, negative or neutral). This helped provide a better understanding of the teachers’ perspectives and the emotional undertones associated with their experiences.

The preparation of responses for analysis in the teacher report involved a data cleaning process, keyword extraction, thematic analysis, and correlation analysis. These steps were taken to ensure the text data was accurate, consistent, and ready for further processing.

