"Having to fight for everything"
Voices of Illinois Educators on Why They Leave or Stay in the Profession

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KEY FINDINGS

1,898

current and former educators responded to the survey's open-ended prompts, yielding 2,665 comments.

65%

of educators who either left the profession or moved schools/districts commented on work environment set by their administration.

58%

of current educators also commented on work environment set by their administration.

Districts and schools must cultivate leaders who forge positive relationships with teachers and administrators.

Top Themes for Educators Commenting on Their Former Positions Compared to Those Commenting on Their Current Positions

Comments from both subgroups of educators fell into the same top four categories, in the same rank order.

Administration — 65% / 58%
Personal — 25% / 42%
School Resources — 10% / 22%
Parents and Students — 9% / 18%
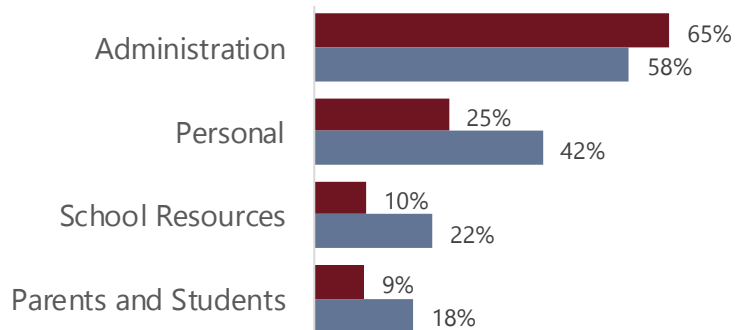
"Chaos. Constant turnover of administration at the district level. Inconsistency. Having to fight for everything."
-Middle school English as a Second Language teacher

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teacher retention varies widely across and within states. In Illinois, district-level teacher retention rates for the 2021-22 school year ranged from 30% to 100%, with the statewide average at approximately 88%.[5] Coupled with persistent teacher shortages across the country, research underscores the importance of retaining qualified teachers to adequately staff classrooms.

To understand the factors that contribute to educator retention and turnover, the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS) emailed the Educator Working Conditions Survey in Spring 2022 to over 26,000 current and former educators across the state. The goal of the survey was to assess the personal and school-related reasons for educators' decisions to stay in or leave their positions. Nearly 3,500 educators from approximately 60% of districts statewide responded to the survey. A previous analysis of the survey's close-ended, Likert items showed that current educators felt higher levels of job satisfaction than former educators, particularly around working conditions.[6] In this report, we analyze the qualitative comments from a subset of 1,898 educators who responded to the survey's open-ended prompts, which asked educators about their experiences in their current and/or former positions, their working conditions, and the areas surrounding their schools.

> **"I left because teaching consumed my whole life. I was working past contract hours and on Sundays to barely keep up with the workload. Unrealistic expectations were in place that could never be met, and I was tired of feeling guilt for not meeting them."**
>
> **-Early-career high school science teacher**

Our thematic analysis of educators' comments revealed consistent responses from educators who left their positions and from current educators. Commenting on their former positions, a majority of educators (65%) who either left the profession (i.e., leavers) or moved to another school (i.e., movers) focused on **administration**. Within these comments, **most educators indicated dissatisfaction with the working conditions under the purview of administration**, which included management, school climate, policy, and professional learning opportunities. The second most frequently cited factor behind educators' decisions to leave their former positions was **personal** reasons, which included familial responsibilities, medical concerns, professional advancement, and graduate education, among others. Comparatively, only 25% of leavers' and movers' comments about their former positions contained personal reasons.

> **"Not only was the pay terrible, but my school's administrator micromanaged every educator in every classroom including their plan time. No matter how much hard work was put in, there was never any praise or acknowledgment. Many educators felt unappreciated."**
>
> **-Mid-career elementary teacher**

Similar trends were found in our analysis of educators' comments about their current positions, which included educators who have stayed in the same position for more than 1 year (i.e., stayers) and movers. Administration (58%) and personal reasons (42%) also emerged as the

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most frequent themes in these comments. However, whereas educators' comments about their former positions mostly indicated dissatisfaction, pointing to the negative aspects of their professional experiences that prompted them to leave, educators' comments about their current positions were mixed. Thus, we examine both the good and bad aspects of educators' current professional experiences. Such a comprehensive approach is key to devising solutions that successfully retain those educators who presently staff our classrooms and schools.

Educators also shared experiences of how their views on issues like politics, cultural diversity and inclusion, and pedagogical approaches conflicted with the views of the schools, districts, and communities they served, which led not only to decreased job satisfaction, but in some cases, mobility and attrition. Results suggest that the **environments in which educators thrive are ones that encourage diversity in all forms** (i.e., marginalized identities such as race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) **and provide spaces of respect, support, opportunity, and fairness for all involved**.

> **"Constant turnover in administration was a major cause of my departure. The environment and culture were lost with so much turnover. ...The entire environment had become toxic."**
>
> **-Elementary special education teacher**

Overall, many educators called for more support, including clear and respectful communication among administration, teachers, and parents; viable and relevant professional learning opportunities; involvement and choice in decision-making; tenable workloads with sufficient time to plan and collaborate; and scaffolded and tailored induction and mentorship supports for early-career educators and educators of color.

As states invest in policies to address educator turnover as well as shortages, **results emphasize that recruiting and training good school leaders is critical**. Districts and schools must cultivate leaders who forge positive relationships with teachers and administrators. They must also **align policies to the values of all educators—in particular those in their early career and those from diverse backgrounds—so that all voices involved are supported and included**.

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"HAVING TO FIGHT FOR EVERYTHING":
VOICES OF ILLINOIS EDUCATORS ON WHY THEY LEAVE OR STAY IN THE PROFESSION

Shereen Oca Beilstein[1], Judith Kom Nguiffo[2], Tom Withee[3], and Meg Bates[4]

ABSTRACT

In Spring 2022, we surveyed 3,478 current and former Illinois public school educators from nearly 60% of districts statewide to examine the individual-, school-, and community-level factors that contribute to educator retention, mobility, and attrition. A preceding report, which analyzed the survey's close-ended, Likert items, demonstrated that current educators felt higher levels of job satisfaction than former educators, especially in terms of working conditions.[6] In this report, we analyze the qualitative comments from a subset of 1,898 current and former educators who responded to the survey's open-ended prompts. These comments also revealed important differences between current and former educators' employment decisions that were based on factors ranging from personal reasons to school resources and to educators' relationships with the communities around their schools. Additionally, a majority of comments detailed educators' views on and experiences with the working conditions and school climates cultivated by administration, mirroring results from the preceding report. Here, we highlight the personal stories—both positive and negative—behind educators' decisions to stay in or leave their positions with the goal of informing the development and implementation of targeted strategies and policies that aim to improve educator recruitment and retention.

BACKGROUND

Factors that Increase Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover—when teachers move schools or leave the profession—can affect a school's financial resources, instructional quality, and staff climate.[7, 8] Turnover also has been shown to negatively impact student learning, especially for low-performing and Black students.[9] Although some amount of turnover can be expected from routine events such as retirements, the implications of high turnover can be detrimental for districts and schools.[10]

Working conditions play an influential role in turnover and retention, as the school environment has been shown to shape teachers' self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and employment decisions.[11, 12] When compared to student demographics (e.g., race/ethnicity and household income), working conditions were more predictive of teachers' job satisfaction and career intentions and schools' teacher turnover rates.[13, 14, 15] Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, working conditions were associated with teachers' *sense of success*.[16] It is important to note that positive working conditions do not just benefit teachers—they also impact students. Positive working conditions have been linked to improved student outcomes such as achievement and graduation rates.[17]

Because working conditions are largely shaped by administrators, training and retaining high-quality leadership is a key strategy to limit excessive turnover and boost retention.[13, 14] However, during the pandemic, research documented increased job stress and decreased satisfaction among administrators, which has generated predictions of escalating attrition and turnover for school leadership.[18, 19, 20]

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Teacher Turnover in Illinois

According to the 2021-22 Illinois Report Card, the statewide principal turnover rate averaged two principals per school over a 6-year period.[5] However, district-level principal turnover rates varied widely, ranging from one principal to five principals per school over a 6-year period. Regarding teacher turnover, the statewide teacher retention rate has remained stable over the past several years, averaging 87.6% for the 2021-22 school year. On the other hand, district-level teacher retention rates also varied widely, ranging from 29.6% to 100%. Concurrently, district-level teacher shortages show wide variation.[21] In past reports, we found that teacher shortages disproportionately exist in specific content areas and geographic regions.[22] Furthermore, shortages exist in the racial and ethnic diversity of the teacher workforce, as a predominant amount (81.3%) of teachers in Illinois identify as White.[5] Thus, to alleviate staffing problems in areas with deep and persistent shortages, targeted efforts are needed to decrease turnover and retain highly qualified teachers and administrators.[10, 23, 24]

Motivated by the district-level variation in the turnover and retention of administrators and teachers—referred to collectively throughout this report as *educators*—in Illinois, we conducted a survey to understand current and former educators' attitudes toward their own work, their working conditions, and the local communities they serve. In Spring 2022, 3,478 educators from nearly 60% of districts statewide responded. A preceding report analyzed the survey's close-ended, Likert items and found that current educators felt higher levels of job satisfaction than former educators, especially in terms of working conditions.[6] In fact, the largest differences found between current and former educators were related to their perceptions of the quality of relationships they felt with administration. Smaller differences were found between current and former educators' responses about the local communities around their schools, which included their assessment of community support and acceptance.

The Current Study: Deepening Our Understanding

In the current study, we examine qualitative comments from a subset of 1,898 current and former educators who responded to the survey's open-ended prompts. Whereas the preceding report pinpointed the significant factors that contribute to educator retention, mobility, and attrition, this study aims to build on and deepen those findings by examining the motivations, rationales, and stories behind educators' employment decisions. We believe that a qualitative analysis of the survey's open-ended comments is a necessary supplement to the preceding report's quantitative analysis of close-ended comments, which ultimately, can lead to more informed and detailed decision-making by education leaders and policymakers. The following research questions guided our analysis:

1. What were the individual-, school-, and community-based experiences of educators who left their positions?
2. By comparison, what were the individual-, school-, and community-based experiences of current educators?
3. What can we learn from the positive experiences of current educators about the successful features of their workplace that can inform effective retention strategies?

METHODS

Sample

In Spring 2022, 3,478 educators representing 57.9% of districts (500 of 863 districts) responded to the online survey, at a 13.1% response rate. Our sampling frame consisted of 26,462 educators who were employed in six Regional Offices of Education (ROEs), which included ROEs 1, 6, 21, 26, 28, and 50, over 4 school years from 2018-19 to 2021-22.[a] Of the 3,478 survey respondents, 1,898 educators (54.6%) responded to at least one of the open-ended prompts under investigation, providing commentary we could analyze. For this subset of commenters, their demographic characteristics were as follows: By position, 1,680 (88.5%) were teachers, 204 were administrators (10.8%), 13 (0.7%) were on leave of absence, and 1 (0.1%) educator did not specify. By experience, 250 (13.2%) educators were in their early career (i.e., 1-5 years of experience), 654 (34.5%) in their mid-career (i.e., 6-15 years of experience), 926 (48.8%) in their late career (i.e., 16 or more years of experience), and 68 (3.6%) did not specify. By race/ethnicity (see Appendix A), the composition of commenters largely resembled that of the Illinois teacher workforce with most educators identifying as White (e.g., 1,475, or 77.7% of, commenters).[5]

Categorizing Commenters by Employment

Commenters were categorized into three mutually exclusive groups based on the following employment question:

- What is the respondent's current employment status?
  - Employed in the same public school within the past 5 years as a teacher or administrator (**stayer**) or
  - Moved schools in the past 5 years, but still employed as a public school or private school teacher or administrator (**mover**)
  - No longer employed as a teacher or administrator (**leaver**)

The subset of commenters in this report's sample included 899 (47.4%) *stayers*, 653 (34.4%) *movers*, and 346 (18.2%) *leavers*, which roughly mirrors the survey sample's distribution of 1,935 (55.6%) stayers, 1,049 (31.2%) movers, and 494 (14.2%) leavers. Although the proportions of movers and leavers who provided comments were slightly higher relative to those same proportions from the survey sample.

Data Sources and Analyses

Survey Instrument

The main goal of the Educator Working Conditions Survey was to understand educators' perceptions of their individual self-efficacy and meaningful work; school working conditions; and sense of belonging in and support from the local community atmosphere (e.g., parents/guardians, civic leaders, residents).[13, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31] To assess these dimensions of

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[a]For more on the sociodemographic variables, geographic distribution, and other background information for all 3,478 survey respondents, please see pps. 30-33 of the full report.[6]

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educators' work experiences, the study team developed a survey that contained both close-ended, Likert-type items and open-ended questions. As previously mentioned, results for the close-ended survey items have been published in a preceding report (see the executive summary here[32] and the full report here[6])[b].

For the current study, we turn our focus to examine participants' responses to the survey's open-ended questions. Table 1 provides details about the open-ended questions we analyzed and the count of respondents by employment category (i.e., stayer, mover, or leaver) who provided comments. We note that participants received different questions depending on their current employment status. For example, leavers were asked about their former positions, stayers were asked about their current position, and movers were asked about both their former and current positions.

Table 1: Open-ended survey questions by commenter category (i.e., stayer, mover, or leaver).

Open-Ended Survey Question	Commenters' Employment Category	Count of Commenters
What comments would you like to share about why you left your most recent position as an educator?	Leavers	278
	Movers	485
What additional comments do you have about the working conditions at your previous position as an educator?	Leavers	235
What additional comments do you have about the atmosphere of the local community at your previous position as an educator?	Leavers	148
What additional comments do you have about the geographic location of your previous position as an educator?	Leavers	157
What comments would you like to share about your current educator position?	Stayers	897
	Movers	444

Analysis

A thematic, detailed codebook for the qualitative comments was developed inductively and deductively using the process outlined by MacQueen et al. (1998).[33] The unit of analysis was a respondent's entire comment, which was stripped of identifiers before being coded. Because the

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[b]In the Results, pertaining specifically to the section on Educator Attrition and Mobility, we include select responses from two survey questions that differed in format from the open-ended questions described in the Methods. We did not include these two survey questions in our main descriptive analyses because their format did not allow for numerical comparisons. More information about these two survey questions can be found in Appendix B.

individual codes were not mutually exclusive, a respondent's comment could contain multiple codes. Appendix C details findings for all codes.

During the analysis, two coders met continually to discuss points of disagreement, revise the codebook, and recode the data. The five questions under investigation yielded 2,665 comments produced by 1,898 educators, and at least 20% of responses for each open-ended question was double coded to establish interrater reliability. Moderate to strong interrater reliability was achieved, ranging from a Cohen's kappa of 78.1% for the question about educators' current positions to 85.4% for the question about leavers' geographic locations.[34, 35]

RESULTS

The results are organized into two main sections. In the first section, we focus on educator attrition and mobility by examining the experiences of leavers and movers at their *former* positions. Within this section, we discuss the individual- and school-based accounts of educators on why they left their former positions and detail their experiences with the communities and geographies surrounding their schools. In the second section, we consider the experiences of stayers and movers at their *current* positions. We explore similarities and differences between educators' perspectives on their *former* and *current* positions to understand which factors may be most important for encouraging retention and reducing turnover.

In each section, we present findings for the most frequent themes that emerged from respondents' answers to the open-ended survey questions. For complete findings, please refer to Appendix C. It is important to note that the descriptive results we report represent comments from both teachers and administrators combined, as the general trends for each subgroup of respondents were similar. We then explore the stories behind educators' career decisions, job satisfaction, and workplace experiences through select quotations from the open-ended survey questions that draw from the same set of codes and center around a common topic.

Educator Attrition and Mobility

Individual- and School-Based Experiences

Twelve codes captured the themes present in respondents' comments for two open-ended questions about their previous positions ("What comments would you like to share about why you left your most recent position as an educator?") and working conditions ("What additional comments do you have about the working conditions at your previous position as an educator?"). We combined findings for these two questions because they both address educators' individual- and school-based experiences. Table 2 displays the codes, definitions, and frequencies for the most prevalent codes.

Respondents' comments on their individual- and school-based experiences were most frequently about *administration* (65.0%), *personal* (24.6%), *school resources* (9.5%), and *parents and students* (9.2%). Within these broad categories, the individual experiences movers and leavers shared were rich and detailed, and in the next several sections, we draw from select quotations to illustrate the complexity and variation found in their stories.

Table 2: Rank of the most prevalent codes that captured movers' and leavers' individual- and school-based experiences at their former positions. Across both questions, commenters included 485 movers and 307 leavers for a total of 998 comments.

Code	Definition	Frequency	Percent (%)
Administration*	Working conditions under purview of administration, including management, school climate, policy, and professional learning opportunities	649	65.0

Personal	Personal factors, including familial responsibilities, medical concerns, professional advancement, graduate education	246	24.6
School Resources	School resources including curricular materials, technology, compensation, and funding	95	9.5
Parents and Students	Parents' and/or students' attitudes and behaviors	92	9.2

Note: Teachers and administrators alike commented on issues with administration

Administrative Support

Extending Beyond Management to Cultivate a Workplace of Support and Professional Growth

District and school leadership set the foundation from which successful professional communities develop. At the most basic level, leaders are responsible for managing the daily operations of districts and schools. Under good management, educators who left or moved positions for personal reasons reported feelings of "constant support" from open "line(s) of communication" and of respect, that their "...opinions as a teacher matter."

More often, however, educators left their positions primarily due to issues with administration. Many shared experiences of leaders with poor management skills, ranging from being overcontrolling and unappreciative to lacking guidance and support. One mid-career elementary teacher decided to move to another school because leaders "micromanaged every educator ... including their plan time," and despite the hard work of staff, "there was never any praise or acknowledgement," which led "many educators to feel unappreciated." Another elementary teacher, with more than 20 years of experience, decided to move districts because of "lack of principal support ... and direction for [the] position," incomplete evaluations, and insufficient professional learning opportunities.

> **"[There was a] lack of autonomy, lots of red tape to get any new ideas launched, [and] lack of openness to support professional development."**
>
> **-Elementary teacher**

Beyond managing staff and day-to-day operations, district and school leaders are responsible for setting the agenda, practices, and policies that establish the professional culture and working conditions wherein educators either thrive or, as was the case for many educators who left their positions, languish. Many educators who left the profession or moved positions commented on how the job responsibilities set by administration brought about untenable workloads. "I left because teaching consumed my whole life," wrote an early-career high school science teacher. "I was working past contract hours and on Sundays to barely keep up with the workload. Unrealistic expectations were in place that could never be met, and I was tired of feeling guilt for not meeting them." Similarly, a special education elementary teacher with nearly two decades of experience moved districts because of "unmanageable caseloads and little to no help from administration." She also mentioned that "concerns are not taken seriously, and the workload just keeps increasing year to year."

Educators also expressed the need for mentorship, particularly in their first few years of teaching. An elementary teacher who resigned commented,

> *The external agenda was often overwhelming. The workload was too much in the way of collecting data, paperwork and other responsibilities that it was difficult to focus on the kids... There needs to be more support for first-year teachers and less responsibilities as they are gaining their footing and there is much to learn... especially from a mentor teacher at their current grade level. Having a mentor teacher in another grade is not as beneficial.*

Former educators also shared stories of leaders who suppressed teacher autonomy, voice, growth, and creativity through interpersonal interactions or opaque or cumbersome organizational processes. As an example, one elementary teacher left the profession after more than a decade of teaching due to "lack of autonomy ... and openness to support professional development" and "lots of red tape to get any new ideas launched." Another elementary teacher resigned after more than 10 years in education in part because "teachers were often left out of the overarching conversations and left to vote on options that leadership had chosen." And, as a final example, a former middle school English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher shared that "the administration fostered a culture of compliance" and when she "voiced [her] opinion, it was not acceptable," despite intentions to provide equitable opportunities for learning "that nurture authenticity, creativity, awareness, community," and "intellectual, physical, and emotional wholeness."

On a more interpersonal level, results emphasized that the way leaders lead matters greatly: The individual relationships leadership builds with staff are imbued by the attitudes and habits that guide their everyday interactions. "We were ruled by humiliation and fear," wrote a district administrator who left her position after more than 20 years to work at a private school. The administrator then revealed that staff were "openly lied to," "bullied," "belittled and screamed at," asserting that this toxicity diffused throughout the district and "ultimately, it [was] the children and families who suffered."

Administrative Turnover

The effects of turnover among leadership at the district and school levels can be far-reaching. Educators commented specifically on the difficulties associated with changes to policies and working conditions. "Constant turnover in administration was a major cause of my departure," wrote an elementary special education teacher. "The environment and culture were lost with so much turnover." A middle school ESL teacher moved districts mid-career also because of high district-level turnover, which led to "chaos," "inconsistency," and "having to fight for everything."

"Following administrative changes, there was significant disruption to the work environment and it became increasingly toxic and unhealthy to remain at the district. There was a lot of infighting and politicking, and little direction for the actual work."

-District administrator

Administrative turnover can also prove to be problematic for other administrators as well. A late-career district-level administrator resigned after nearly two decades in education because

administrative changes resulted in a "mercurial," "authoritarian" supervisor and "infighting and politicking," which bred a "increasingly toxic" environment with "little direction for the actual work." Despite such hostility and negativity, this former administrator felt "camaraderie amongst her peers." Nevertheless, "without any support or feedback," the environment "was very discouraging and stymied [her] professional growth."

Personal

From Medical Concerns and Familial Obligations to Job Dissatisfaction and Professional Advancement

The personal reasons behind educators' decisions to leave their positions ranged widely. Some reasons were circumstantial, including familial obligations (e.g., becoming a stay-at-home parent, a desire to live closer to family) or medical issues (e.g., a chronic medical condition). "My salary was almost negligible when considering what I would need to pay for childcare," expressed a high school mathematics teacher, who resigned within 5 years of teaching. "There was no reason for me to work if what I was making would go directly to childcare, so it was more beneficial to care for my own child at home rather than work with other people's children."

"I felt dissatisfied with the inability to change parts of the system that I felt could really help students, but essentially the issues were the same just with a different flavor in all the school districts I worked in (which was more than 5). Not enough funding or help to affect change."

-Early-career elementary ESL teacher

Other educators left their positions due to job dissatisfaction. An early-career middle school teacher said she resigned because the realities of the profession did not align with her expectations, disclosing that the profession is "about everything but actually teaching the children." Another early-career elementary ESL teacher cited growing frustration with the systemic issues that kept her students from receiving adequate funding for the supports they needed to succeed. "I felt dissatisfied with the inability to change parts of the system that I felt could really help students," she wrote. "Essentially, the issues were the same just with a different flavor in all the school districts I worked in (which was more than five)." Reflecting on her former career as a teacher, she shared,

> I had always questioned whether teaching was for me. There were a lot of expectations and not enough help (for everyone as I could see it). I didn't feel like I was really able to affect change for my students. Every day felt defeated.

Now, she works as a user interface designer and researcher for an education-technology company and commented that she is "in a much better place in terms of being able to balance work and life and have much lower stress." Other educators also cited professional advancement (e.g., pursuing graduate education, changing careers) as a reason for leaving their positions.

Yet some personal reasons were tied up with administration and the unfit professional climate and working conditions leaders had cultivated. "The environment created by the administration in the building was toxic and unprofessional," wrote an elementary ESL teacher who resigned with more than 10 years of experience. Such a negative environment made it "untenable" for her

"...to teach and work as an effective educator while trying to maintain one's own mental health." Comments like these reveal the impact administration can have on the personal and professional experiences of educators.

Working During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic added an unprecedented amount of stress and uncertainty to the personal lives and working conditions of educators. A preceding report found that stayers had a more agreeable perspective than leavers on feelings of safety and pandemic-related policy.[6] Our examination of the qualitative comments shed light onto the concerns educators had based on the specific contexts in which they found themselves during the pandemic. For example, a bilingual education elementary teacher and new mother with more than 10 years of experience resigned after the 2019-20 school year because the district anticipated moving to a hybrid learning format, and the lack of data around vaccines made her "feel very uneasy and unsafe for [her] family." As another example, a recently resigned elementary teacher with nearly two decades of experience wrote of her working conditions,

> COVID caused a lot of relational problems between myself and even trusted colleagues whom I would have considered best friends. The school board was very rebellious and put our teachers at risk with COVID policies (which were later reversed). ...Before COVID, I would have said that I never wanted to work anywhere else. I am so disillusioned. At least before, the stress of the workload was offset by the camaraderie of the people I worked with. Not so much later.

School Resources

Accessing Necessary Facilities and Materials for Teaching

Results also indicated that the physical conditions of and resources available at some educators' workplaces—the school buildings, curricular materials, and instructional technologies—needed substantial upgrades. For several educators, the quality of school and classroom facilities elicited health and safety concerns. A middle school teacher commented that the "building is old and (the) maintenance negligible," remarking on "insect infestations" and the "HVAC [heating, ventilation, and air conditioning] system constantly breaking down." Another high school teacher's science lab was in such disrepair, it was "deplorable" with "several broken windows" and "asbestos." "I was told to clean if I wanted to," they wrote, "but maintenance wouldn't because it was a hazard." Meanwhile, this teacher observed the amount of money administration spent on "non-functional aesthetics," such as "repainting the school, putting decals on the stair rises and doors," despite failing to address the classrooms that are "falling in on themselves" and to provide teachers with "the supplies and equipment they actually need."

> **"This district is one of the lowest paying ... and additional work was always necessary because the curriculum was not always appropriate for my students and several adjustments needed to be made. We also were required to provide additional assistance outside of class, time in which we were not compensated."**
>
> **-High school mathematics teacher**

Accessing essential school supplies was another issue that educators often commented on. An elementary school teacher shared her experiences with lack of school supplies for staff, noting that "at times, there was a shortage of printer paper and/or copy ink." This teacher, like many others, was also "responsible for school supplies if students did not bring their own."

Manageable class sizes and fair compensation were also themes that emerged from educators' comments about school resources. "We need a cap size for classes," wrote a high school bilingual education teacher. "I had 43 kids in Spanish I at one point in my career." Regarding compensation, a high school mathematics teacher assessed that her workload was not "proportional," writing,

> *This district is one of the lowest paying … and additional work was always necessary because the curriculum was not always appropriate for my students and several adjustments needed to be made. We also were required to provide additional assistance outside of class, time in which we were not compensated.*

Parents and Students

Navigating Difficult Behaviors

At the heart of a classroom are the relationships that educators build with their students. Indeed, supporting students' cognitive and socioemotional development and bonding with students on a personal level are some of the reasons that often drive educators to pursue the profession. However, several educators noted that these relationships can become difficult to manage, especially when student behaviors are violent or aggressive and educators do not have adequate support from their colleagues and administration. "The behaviors of the students were not being addressed and were escalating," commented one elementary teacher. "The administration was not supportive even when behaviors escalated to physical violence."

Even with adequate training and support within the classroom, some educators called for consistent, school-wide messaging about acceptable behavior. "I had numerous students on my caseload who were physically aggressive," wrote an early-career special education teacher. "And while there was a litany of support within the classroom, there was a staff culture of normalizing that experience and not providing any resources or supports for staff after those intense moments." She went on to share that she "developed intense anxiety from those interactions because of the frequency and intensity of student behaviors that often led to injuries" for herself. In addition, for some educators, navigating relationships with parents—not the students—was trying due to a range of behaviors including parents being disrespectful, unsupportive, combative, and entitled.

> **"I had numerous students on my caseload who were physically aggressive… And while there was a litany of support within the classroom, there was a staff culture of normalizing that experience and not providing any resources or supports for staff after those intense moments."**
>
> **-Early-career special education teacher**

Experiences of Leavers

Seventeen codes captured the themes present in leavers' answers to questions about the local communities ("What additional comments do you have about the atmosphere of the local community at your previous position as an educator?") and geographic locations ("What additional comments do you have about the geographic location of your previous position as an educator?") of their former schools. In this section, we unpack findings for each question separately by presenting descriptive results and discussing select quotes for the most frequent themes.

Local Communities

Finding Alignment around Culture, Politics, and Other Issues

Most comments about the local communities surrounding leavers' previous positions contained the following four themes: *alignment with culture/politics* (35.8%), *community and town* (33.8%), *parents and students* (27.0%), and *administration* (20.9%; see Table 3).

Table 3: Rank of the most prevalent codes that captured leavers' experiences with the local communities surrounding their former schools; 148 leavers provided comments.

Local Community Code	Definition	Frequency	Percent (%)
Alignment with Culture/Politics	Reported (mis)match between their own views and that of the broader community	53	35.8
Community and Town	Mention of the local community, its livability, or location	50	33.8
Parents and Students	Parents' and/or students' attitudes and behaviors	40	27.0
Administration	Working conditions under purview of administration, including management, school climate, policy, and professional learning opportunities	31	20.9

Individual comments in response to the local community question often contained several of these top codes, many linked to *alignment with culture/politics*. This finding suggests that when the beliefs of educators do not converge with the beliefs of the schools and communities they serve, such misalignment can act as a moderator that impacts the experiences of all involved.

For example, several educators discussed the challenges they faced trying to uphold their roles as teachers and mentors while working within communities where people's views on a variety of issues, at times, contradicted their own. As one middle school teacher revealed, "The local community held a very conservative approach … and did not always align with my personal beliefs. That being said, the district and community fully supported me as one of their own." Being cognizant of dissonance between one's own views and that of the community can also affect educators' decisions about curriculum. "I admittedly played it safe/traditional with my

curriculum with the assumption that I would get less push back from the community because that certainly was a concern for me," wrote an early-career high school English Language Arts teacher. "Although I felt respected as an educator within the community, I know I also did not rock any boats so I wouldn't have to fight for that position."

Other educators commented on the problems that can arise from a lack of transparency and communication between school leaders and the communities they serve. "[It] sometimes felt like the district made sneaky decisions without consulting or informing vulnerable families," wrote an elementary teacher. "[The] local community deferred to teachers/school in making important decisions for their children. Would have been great to have more families involved in these decisions." Another teacher spoke of the need for schools to create bridges with community organizations. "There needs to be more partnerships between schools and local cultural and educational institutions," observed a high school teacher. "I spoke a second language, Spanish, and I studied in Spanish-speaking countries, so I think that helped me connect with students and faculty from other cultures. I appreciated the diversity of perspectives and experiences that you don't find in other settings, and that needs to be valued more."

> **"I admittedly played it safe/traditional with my curriculum with the assumption that I would get less push back from the community because that certainly was a concern for me. Although I felt respected as an educator within the community, I know I also did not rock any boats so I wouldn't have to fight for that position."**
>
> **-High school English Language Arts teacher**

Similarly, representation and inclusion of racial and ethnic diversity within schools and within the community were topics that surfaced in multiple educators' comments. "Race/ethnicity is still a big dividing factor," wrote a high school technology teacher. "The few teachers and students who were not homogeneously white were not accepted by other teachers or students. Small-minded individuals created the most problems." And for some educators, racialized tensions led to feelings of exclusion. "Being an African American educator, I did not feel welcomed by the community," shared an early-career elementary teacher who resigned to pursue higher education. "There was Black vs. Brown tension at the school, and it was shown through student behavior, and it made teaching very difficult."

Geographic Location

Commute, Access to Services, and Safety Matter

The most frequent themes that arose from leavers' comments about the geographic locations of their former positions were *commute* (39.5%), *neighborhood characteristics* (12.7%), *resources and services* (9.6%), and *safety* (9.6%; see Table 4).

Table 4: Rank of the most prevalent codes that captured leavers' experiences with geographic locations of their former schools; 157 leavers provided comments.

Geographic Location Code	Definition	Frequency	Percent (%)
Commute	Reference to aspects of commute to work (e.g., time, distance, traffic, and parking)	62	39.5
Neighborhood Characteristics	Characteristics of the school families or neighborhood residents (e.g., income level, race/ethnicity)	20	12.7
Resources and Services	Access to neighborhood resources (e.g., shopping, transportation, infrastructure)	15	9.6
Safety	Reference to safety levels of community/neighborhood	15	9.6

Commute was frequently mentioned in leavers' responses to this question, as 39.5% of respondents mentioned their travels to and from work. For some leavers, their commute was one of several factors that contributed to their decision to leave. As one late-career high school teacher remarked, "The workload and commute became too difficult to sustain." For other teachers, the cost of their commute was prohibitive.

"The cost of gas was [a] financial burden on my teacher salary," wrote another high school teacher. For *neighborhood characteristics*, educators commented on the socioeconomic status of the neighborhoods in which they worked (e.g., "high poverty area") or the racial and ethnic diversity found in local communities (e.g., "the area was … lacking in diversity"), among other characteristics. Regarding *resources and services*, educators commented on the lack of access to essential services such as public transportation, shopping, and affordable childcare. And finally, feelings of safety when traveling to and from school buildings was another priority for educators. "There was always a concern for safety," shared an elementary teacher. "There were times we would be asked to [not] leave the building because a shooting may have occurred nearby. …Our school didn't provide parking, so we had to park on the street in the Englewood area. So, you were always on alert when leaving work."

> **"The workload and commute became too difficult to sustain."**
>
> **-Late-career high school teacher**

Experiences of Current Educators

The survey design also gave current educators, which included stayers and movers, the opportunity to provide comments about the positions they presently held ("What comments would you like to share about your current educator position?"). We found that the topics of importance to leavers and movers regarding their *former* positions were also significant to stayers and movers regarding their *current* positions. The following codes occurred most frequently in stayers' and movers' comments about their current positions: *administration* (57.7%); *personal* (41.8%); *school resources* (21.6%); *parents and students* (18.2%); and *alignment with culture/politics* (10.2%; see Table 5).

Table 5: Rank of the most prevalent codes that captured stayers' and movers' experiences at their current position; 897 Stayers and 444 Movers and provided comments.

Code	Definition	Frequency	Percent (%)
Administration	Working conditions under purview of administration, including management, school climate, policy, and professional learning opportunities	774	57.7
Personal	Personal factors, including familial responsibilities, medical concerns, professional advancement, graduate education	561	41.8
School Resources	School resources including curricular materials, technology, compensation, and funding	289	21.6
Parents and Students	Parents' and/or students' attitudes and behaviors	244	18.2
Alignment with Culture/Politics	Reported (mis)match between their own views and that of the broader community	137	10.2

Educator Satisfaction

A Spotlight on What Works for Retention

We now consider the *current* experiences of stayers and movers that differed from the *former* experiences of leavers and movers to learn about the successful workplace features that have the potential to inform effective retention strategies. In fact, several movers compared their current and former positions in their comments, providing insight into the features of and programs implemented by administration that they hold in high regard—the very factors that motivate them to stay. "It is a NIGHT and DAY difference," wrote one mid-career elementary teacher who moved to a nearby district. "Professionalism and collaboration are the best part of it... We have professional development, and the school support is amazing. The collaboration is something that I am not used to since last year I was completely on my own." Another mid-career middle school teacher who also moved districts said that despite a longer commute, the support she receives from her colleagues and administration is the main reason why she intends to stay in her current position. "Student and teacher needs are promptly addressed from curriculum to building issues," she wrote. "Teachers are not assigned tasks that take away from lesson

> **"Student and teacher needs are promptly addressed from curriculum to building issues... Teachers are not assigned tasks that take away from lesson planning time such as having to schedule their own conferences... This allows for more creativity and thoughtful lessons that engage students in effective learning."**
>
> **-Mid-career middle school teacher**

planning time such as having to schedule their own conferences... This allows for more creativity and thoughtful lessons that engage students in effective learning."

Many current educators also commented on the benefits they received from professional development and support programs such as mentorship and coaching. Our previous findings demonstrated that educators of color and early-career educators highly valued these supports, which is important given that these are two teacher populations for whom recruitment and retention efforts in Illinois and nationwide have become a top priority.[6, 36, 37] Here, we highlight the experiences of two educators who represent these groups. "The partnership [my school] has with AUSL (Academy for Urban School Leadership) is the best part of my experience," wrote a mid-career Black/African American elementary teacher. "[My coach] and I usually meet weekly or every other week and go over various areas of my practice." These programs not only give educators the opportunity to refine their craft, but they also encourage them to stay. "The focus on professional growth and mentorship is making me a better teacher in this district," commented one early-career high school teacher. Both educators indicated that they plan on staying in their positions for the next school year.

> **"My new school is very diverse, inclusive, and sensitive to the needs of others. My school has made impressive strides towards promoting equity and social emotional learning. I feel that even though the students have had struggles, teachers are well equipped to make a positive impact on their lives."**
>
> **-Early-career special education teacher**

Feeling accepted, respected, and valued by colleagues and administration are themes that consistently appear in both former and current educators' comments. "I have never been as supported and accepted as I am in my current school district," wrote one elementary teacher who intends on staying in her current position. "My opinion is valued, the community is supportive, leadership is encouraging, and the whole community is very collaborative... This is a stark contrast to [previous district]." An early-career special education teacher said she moved positions in part because the "emotional stress of dealing with extreme behaviors without enough support were too much to bear," which "took a deep toll on my physical, mental, and emotional health." Her new school is a much better fit, and she plans on staying for a variety of reasons. "My new school is very diverse, inclusive, and sensitive to the needs of others," she wrote. "My school has made impressive strides towards promoting equity and social emotional learning. I feel that even though the students have had struggles, teachers are well equipped to make a positive impact on their lives."

> **"My school has inclusion for all, not just the students but the teachers as well. I am severely hearing impaired and the staff goes above and beyond to make sure I am included and my accommodations are met."**
>
> **-Mid-career elementary teacher**

For educators representing diverse and marginalized communities, these themes of respect from administration and colleagues and inclusion in school communities become especially salient. "They treat me with respect," wrote a Black/African American middle school teacher of the new school he moved to. "They respect my

race and heritage." A mid-career elementary teacher who also moved districts commented that her current school "has inclusion for all, not just the students but teachers as well." Intending on staying in this new position, she wrote, "I am severely hearing impaired and the staff goes above and beyond to make sure I am included and my accommodations are met."

Sources of Dissatisfaction

Not all stayers' and movers' current experiences were positive, however. Many comments revealed not only current educators' job dissatisfaction, but also serious deliberation on whether they should leave their roles. In many ways, these comments about educators' current positions mirrored those from educators about their former positions. In this section, we explore the concerns and issues raised by stayers and movers about their current positions that were not just similar to, but expand on the themes discussed earlier. By examining the aspects of educators' professional experiences that do not work, we can then begin to devise solutions that successfully retain those educators who presently staff our classrooms and schools.

Many stayers and movers commenting on their dissatisfaction with their current positions cited *administration*. They expressed their desire for increased support from school leadership, which included greater involvement in decision-making, enhanced professional development opportunities, and reduced workloads. "I am seeking a better work environment," shared a

middle school teacher with more than 20 years of experience who was intending to leave her position the next school year. She wrote about an administration that rolls out "a multitude of programs at once," many of which are "redundant or contradictory," without "guidance or explanation." And despite offering staff the opportunity for feedback, school leadership "doesn't actually want any questioning or contradictory opinions or facts," which results in a culture wherein "staff are afraid to say what they really think or need because they are afraid, they will get fired or … force[d] … to resign."

> **"The current administration … like[s] to 'implement' a multitude of programs at once…, throw information at staff 'fire hose style' and require staff to do training … on their own, unpaid time without guidance or explanation. Staff are asked to weigh in … but admin doesn't actually want any questioning or contradictory opinions or facts. Staff are afraid to say what they really think or need because they are afraid they will get fired or … force[d] to resign."**
>
> **-Late-career middle school teacher**

 Regarding *personal* reasons like burnout, many stayers and movers ultimately called for more *school resources* such as better access to mental health and wellness services and higher salaries. "Teaching is hard and there is no work-life balance," commented one high school teacher. "I spend every weekend either planning or grading but I can't do both. Faculty often take a 'mental health' day of sick leave just to catch up. I don't because it just creates more work for myself."

Working within schools, districts, and communities that lack diversity of or inclusive perspectives on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and other backgrounds (i.e., *alignment with culture/politics*) is a challenge that stayers and movers in their current positions also face. A Black/African American middle school teacher expressed her desire to "see more representation

of those with my same race/ethnicity as staff and administration," which is "a factor in my comfort level at a workplace." Another Black/African American educator with more than a decade of experience intends to resign from the profession, in part due to the discrimination he experienced. "The vast majority of my struggles in education throughout my career have stemmed from my experiences as a black male elementary teacher and former military dependent … commuting from a city to a rural, predominately white community," he wrote. "From implicit biases, miscommunications, and microaggressions (without any willingness to learn and/or adapt by leadership or the majority of colleagues) to the embarrassingly low pay, workload, and disrespect, the children have always been the only reason I have remained as long as I have." And yet another mid-career high school teacher wrote about the difficulties she experiences on account of her sexual orientation, despite maintaining positive relationships with parents. "My wife and I are not completely accepted in our community," she shared. "Although we have good relationships and friendships, we are different and have to deal with unnecessary comments from neighbors, or even strangers. I am not certain every parent or educator, or the community would be accepting of my lessons founded on accepting cultural diversity."

> **"The vast majority of my struggles in education throughout my career have stemmed from my experiences as a black male elementary teacher … commuting from a city to a rural, predominately white community. From implicit biases, miscommunications, and microaggressions (without any willingness to learn and/or adapt by leadership or the majority of colleagues) to the embarrassingly low pay, workload, and disrespect, the children have always been the only reason I have remained as long as I have."**
>
> **-Mid-career elementary teacher**

Though not all educators equally embraced reform efforts around diversity. Some educators disclosed their discomfort with adopting inclusive teaching practices and pedagogies. "The recent push of the philosophies of Critical Race Theory, Gender Ideology, and other forms of identity categories have created a terrifying and threatening work environment," wrote a late-career high school department chair. "The pressure that I have to identify by gender with pronouns and the thought policing of my philosophy has been highly tense. I find it very difficult to practice my Catholic Faith when the philosophy of what it means to be male, female, gender, race, etc., is antithetical to my worldview."

CONCLUSION

In Illinois, wide variation exists in the amount of educator turnover and retention experienced by districts.[5] In light of such variation, we surveyed nearly 3,500 current and former educators to understand the factors that influenced their job satisfaction and employment decisions (i.e., whether to *stay* in their current position, *move* to a similar position at another school, or *leave* their position). In a preceding report that analyzed the survey's close-ended, Likert items, **the quality of relationships and connectedness educators felt with administration emerged as the largest factor that separated current and former educators' responses.**[6] In addition, smaller differences were found on survey items related to current and former educators' feelings about the local communities of their schools.

The current analysis of qualitative comments from a subset of 1,898 survey respondents **reinforces those findings and builds on them**, illustrating the complexity of current and former educators' experiences with district and school leadership. Furthermore, our analysis explores current and former educators' experiences with the communities surrounding their schools as well as additional personal factors that contribute to their job satisfaction and career decisions.

Most of the personal reasons behind educators' decisions to leave their positions were circumstantial, including major life changes like retirement, growing their families, and pursuing further education. Some personal decisions, like retirement, are routine and generally do not result in increased turnover in districts and schools. However, other decisions, like having children, may result in increased turnover for districts and schools that provide less parental support or lower salaries. It also is possible that **the teaching profession's lower salary and relative inflexibility of daily work schedules, compared to other occupations, may result in increased attrition** among current educators and fewer prospective educators entering teaching.

> **"My salary was almost negligible when considering what I would need to pay for childcare. There was no reason for me to work if what I was making would go directly to childcare, so it was more beneficial to care for my own child at home rather than work with other people's children."**
>
> **-High school mathematics teacher**

Educators also shared experiences of how their views on issues like politics, cultural diversity and inclusion, and pedagogical approaches conflicted with the views of the schools, districts, and communities they served, which not only led to decreased job satisfaction, but in some cases, mobility and attrition. We acknowledge that individuals' beliefs and worldviews on issues like these generally tend to be stable, and as a result, resistant to change.[38] Accordingly, we do not advocate for the establishment of community and workplace environments that seek homogeneity in the views and values of its members. Instead, results suggest that **the environments in which educators thrive are ones that encourage diversity in all forms** (i.e., marginalized identities such as race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) **and provide spaces of respect, support, opportunity, and fairness for all involved**.

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Revising and rebuilding school cultures that encourage future educators to pursue teaching and current educators to stay in the profession, however, will require structural changes to the national, state, district, and school policies, cultures, and practices that have, in the past, excluded educators based on marginalized identities.[39] Though critical to educational reform, such systemic policy solutions to address inequities due to critical issues such as lack of sufficient compensation, flexible work schedules for parents, and cultural diversity will take time. Here, we point out more proximal, actionable measures that education leaders can simultaneously enact to encourage recruitment and retention, as these results demonstrate the large influence administration has on educators' job satisfaction and career decisions.

> **"The external agenda was often overwhelming. The workload was too much in the way of collecting data, paperwork and other responsibilities that it was difficult to focus on the kids… There needs to be more support for first-year teachers and less responsibilities as they are gaining their footing and there is much to learn."**
>
> **-Elementary teacher**

Put simply, **recruiting and training good school leaders is critical**.[40, 41] Many educators who left the profession or moved positions called for more support, which can come in a variety of forms that include clear and respectful communication among administration, teachers, and parents; viable and relevant professional learning opportunities; involvement and choice in decision-making; tenable workloads with sufficient time to plan and collaborate; and scaffolded and tailored induction and mentorship supports for early-career educators and educators of color.

As states invest in policies to address educator turnover as well as shortages, these findings emphasize the importance of school leadership. **Districts and schools must cultivate leaders who forge positive relationships with teachers and administrators**. They must also align policies to the values of all educators—in particular those in their early career and those from diverse backgrounds—so that all voices involved are supported and included.

> **"I have never been as supported and accepted as I am in my current school district. My opinion is valued, the community is supportive, leadership is encouraging, and the whole community is very collaborative."**
>
> **-Late-career elementary teacher**

APPENDIX A

Race/Ethnicity of survey respondents who provided comments compared to race/ethnicity of Illinois teacher workforce.

Table 6: Breakdown of Responders' Race/Ethnicity.

Race/ethnicity	Count of survey commenters	Percentage of survey commenters	Percentage of Illinois *teacher* workforce (ISBE, 2022)
Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander	1	0.1%	0.1%
American Indian or Native American	7	0.4%	0.2%
Asian	31	1.6%	1.8%
Black or African American	129	6.8%	6%
Hispanic/Latinx/Spanish	122	6.4%	8%
Middle Eastern or North African	5	0.3%	
Multiracial	37	2.0%	0.8%
White	1,475	77.7%	81.3%
Unknown	91	4.8%	0%
Total	1,898		134,888

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APPENDIX B

In the Results, under Educator Attrition and Mobility, we included select quotes from participant responses to two additional survey questions that were not part of the report's main descriptive analyses. These two survey questions differed in format from the open-ended questions, making a descriptive analysis that combined both question formats difficult. Compared to an open-ended prompt (e.g., "What comments would you like to share about your current educator position?"), these two questions gave respondents a list of categorical items to choose from, including a fill-in option, Other. In the Results, we highlighted several select quotes from responses left under Other, and here we provide descriptive findings based on our coding of the Other category using the same codebook that was applied to the open-ended survey questions.

Please note: Definitions for these codes are located in Appendix C.

Primary Reason Left

The first additional survey question asked respondents what the primary reason was that they left their position. Categorical answer options were Retirement, Early Retirement, Resignation, Left for Medical Reasons, Termination, and Other. Respondents could select only one category (or skip). All 494 leavers received this question.

Table 7: Primary Reason Left – Selected Category.

Primary Reason Left	Frequency	Percent (%)
Resignation	191	38.7
Retirement	67	13.6
Early Retirement	37	7.5
Termination	23	4.7
Left for Medical Reasons	21	4.3
No response	1	0.2
Other	154	31.2
Total	494	100

Approximately one-third (31.2%) of leavers selected Other. Our coding of this subset of responses showed similar trends to the descriptive analyses reported previously. Within Other, the themes ranked in order of prevalence were as follows. Please note that single responses could contain multiple codes.

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Table 8: Primary Reason Left – Other. Write In Coded.

Primary Reason Left – Other	Frequency	Percent (%)
Personal	80	51.9
Administration	37	24
End of Contract	17	11
Relocation	16	10.4
Medical Leave	13	8.4
Parents and Students	5	3.2
Retirement	3	1.9
Termination	2	1.4
Still Employed	2	1.3
School Resources	2	1.3

Factors Contributed

The second additional question asked respondents which of the following categorical options listed in the table below contributed to their decision to leave their positions. All movers (n = 1,094) and leavers (n = 494) received this question. Respondents could select multiple options (or skip).

The previous report included aggregated frequencies of respondents' answers (see p. 12, Figure 8), and 566 educators (39.5%) selected Other. Again, our coding of this subset of responses showed similar trends to the descriptive analyses related to educator attrition and mobility. Within Other, the themes ranked in order of prevalence were as follows. Single responses could contain multiple codes.

Table 9: Primary Reason Left by Leavers and Movers.

Factors for Leaving or Moving		Leaver	Mover	Total
Administration	N	101	136	237
	%	44.5	40.1	41.9
Parents and Students	N	4	4	8
	%	1.8	1.2	1.4
Relocation	N	10	41	51

	%	4.4	12.1	9.0
Termination	N	10	18	28
	%	4.4	5.3	5.0
Resignation	N	91	78	169
	%	40.1	23.0	29.9
Retirement	N	3	11	14
	%	1.3	3.2	2.5
End of Contract	N	15	33	48
	%	6.6	9.7	8.5
Medical Leave	N	10	0	10
	%	4.4	0.0	1.8
School Resources	N	12	6	18
	%	5.3	1.8	3.2
Still Employed	N	1	15	16
	%	0.4	4.4	2.8
Not Applicable	N	0	10	10
	%	0.0	3.0	1.8
No Factors	N	2	0	2
	%	0.9	0.0	0.4

APPENDIX C

The tables below list all codes applied to commenters' responses, broken out by the different open-ended questions under investigation. Whereas the tables in the Results detailed the most frequent codes, here we list the frequencies for all codes that emerged during our thematic analysis.

Educator Attrition and Mobility

Individual- and School-Based Experiences

In this table, we combined results for two related open-ended survey questions on educators' previous positions (What comments would you like to share about why you left your most recent position as an educator?) and their working conditions (What additional comments do you have about the working conditions at your previous position as an educator). Across both questions, commenters included 485 movers and 307 leavers.

Table 10: Rank of all codes that captured movers' and leavers' individual- and school-based experiences at their former positions.

Code	Definition	Frequency	Percent (%)
Administration	Working conditions under purview of administration, including management, school climate, policy, and professional learning opportunities	649	65.0
Personal	Personal factors, including familial responsibilities, medical concerns, professional advancement, graduate education	246	24.6
School Resources	School resources including curricular materials, technology, compensation, and funding	95	9.5
Parents and Students	Parents' and/or students' attitudes and behaviors	92	9.2
Relocation	Moved away from position	62	6.2
Still Employed	Respondent is still employed by school/district	39	3.9
Retirement	Retirement for reasons ranging from administration to burnout to reaching the end of career	35	3.5
Termination	Termination for reasons ranging from conflict to evaluation	32	3.2
End of Contract	Contract expiration, cancellation, or non-renewal	28	2.8

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Not Applicable	Comments were unrelated or too vague to interpret	13	1.3
Medical Leave	Leave due to medical reasons	9	0.9
No Factors	No reasons behind decision to leave	3	0.3

Local Communities

Frequency and rank of codes that emerged from leavers' responses to the question that asked about additional comments they have regarding the atmosphere of the local community at their previous positions. Only leavers received this question, and 148 leavers provided comments.

Table 11: Rank of all codes that captured leavers' experiences with the local communities surrounding their former schools.

Local Community Codes	Definition	Frequency	Percent (%)
Alignment with Culture/Politics	Reported (mis)match between their own views and that of the broader community	53	35.8
Community and Town	Mention of the local community, its livability, or location	50	33.8
Parents and Students	Parents' and/or students' attitudes and behaviors	40	27.0
Administration	Working conditions under purview of administration, including management, school climate, policy, and professional learning opportunities	31	20.9
Neighborhood Characteristics	Characteristics of the school families or neighborhood residents (e.g., income level, race/ethnicity)	18	12.2
No Impact	Community had no impact on decision to leave position	7	4.7
Not Applicable	Comments were unrelated or too vague to interpret	5	3.4
Termination	Termination for reasons ranging from conflict to evaluation	3	2.0
Family and Friends	Reference to family, friends, and/or the school or town where respondent grew up	1	0.7

Safety	Reference to safety levels of community/neighborhood	1	0.7

Geographic Location

Frequency and rank of codes that emerged from leavers' responses to the question that asked about additional comments they have regarding the geographic location of their former positions. Only leavers received this question, and 157 leavers provided comments.

Table 12: Rank of all codes that captured leavers' experiences with geographic locations of their former schools.

Geographic Location Codes	Definition	Frequency	Percent (%)
Commute	Reference to aspects of commute to work (e.g., time, distance, traffic, and parking)	62	39.5
Neighborhood Characteristics	Characteristics of the school families or neighborhood residents (e.g., income level, race/ethnicity)	20	12.7
Resources and Services	Access to neighborhood resources (e.g., shopping, transportation, infrastructure)	15	9.6
Safety	Reference to safety levels of community/neighborhood	15	9.6
Community and Town	Mention of the local community, its livability, or location	14	8.9
Family and Friends	Reference to family, friends, and/or the school or town where respondent grew up	12	7.6
Not Applicable	Comments were unrelated or too vague to interpret	11	7.0
No Impact	Geography had no impact on decision to leave position	11	7.0
Alignment with Culture/Politics	Reported (mis)match between their own views and that of the broader community	10	6.4
Rural/Remote	Reference to rural nature of the area or job	8	5.1
Relocation	Moved away from position	7	4.5
Weather	Mention of weather and weather-related conditions	5	3.2
Cost of Living	Reference to costs of living (e.g., groceries, housing)	3	1.9

Urban	Reference to urban nature of the area or job	2	1.3
Suburban	Reference to suburban nature of the area or job	2	1.3

Experiences of Current Educators

Frequency and rank of codes that emerged from movers' and stayers' responses to the question that asked about their current positions; 897 Stayers and 444 Movers and provided comments.

Table 13: Rank of the most prevalent codes that captured stayers' and movers' experiences at their current position.

Code	Definition	Frequency	Percent (%)
Administration	Working conditions under purview of administration, including management, school climate, policy, and professional learning opportunities	774	57.7
Personal	Personal factors, including familial responsibilities, medical concerns, professional advancement, graduate education	561	41.8
School Resources	School resources including curricular materials, technology, compensation, and funding	289	21.6
Parents and Students	Parents' and/or students' attitudes and behaviors	244	18.2
Alignment with Culture/Politics	Reported (mis)match between their own views and that of the broader community	137	10.2
Retirement	Retirement for reasons ranging from administration to burnout to reaching the end of career	64	4.8
Still Employed	Respondent is still employed by school/district	53	4.0
Not Applicable	Comments were unrelated or too vague to interpret	49	3.7
Community and Town	Mention of the local community, its livability, or location	48	3.6
Commute	Reference to aspects of commute to work (e.g., time, distance, traffic, and parking)	20	1.5

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Neighborhood Characteristics	Characteristics of the school families or neighborhood residents (e.g., income level, race/ethnicity)	15	1.1
Safety	Reference to safety levels of community/neighborhood	15	1.1

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