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Understanding the Future Teacher Workforce: In Their Own Words

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Understanding the Future Teacher Workforce: In Their Own Words

By.Patty Williams,Samantha Michelson,Dongmei Yuan

**Project Funded By University of Maine System Rural Health and
Wellbeing Grant: Strengthening the Teacher Workforce in Rural, Low
Income Communities**



Introduction: Maine is facing a shortage of highly prepared teachers

Multifaceted Causes of Shortage:

Compensation, COVID-19 After effects, Aging Workforce, Working Conditions, Challenges Associated with Teaching in the U.S. (Safety, Politicization of Curriculum, Standards Movement & Loss of Freedom in Instructional Choices, etc.)

Maine Data:

- Almost 30% of new teachers leave the profession within 3 years (Johnson et al., 2020).
- 13 different areas and certifications have been identified as teacher shortage areas in 2022-2023, including early childhood, special education, elementary education, and subject-level teachers in math and science (ME DOE, 2022)

Challenges for Teachers:

- National data shows 91% of practicing teachers report frequent job related stress, reporting the need for more supervisor check-ins, time, and support around student challenges in order to decrease their stress (Will, 2021).
- Gunn and McRae (2021) found in a Canadian sample that personal and professional factors were equally important in teacher retention for early career teachers. Working in an atmosphere where there is mutual trust and respect, for employers who consider their time and workload and who understand they have a personal life, and with colleagues they can turn to for advice and assistance helps retain them.

Our work seeks to extend this work and understand what future and new teachers in Maine need and are looking for. Data will also help school districts and superintendents consider how better to attract and retain teachers.



Research Questions: Examined Using Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collected

01 What are future teachers looking for in their jobs and the profession?*

02 What are their worries and concerns about teaching in Maine?*



03 What kinds of supports do they feel are necessary to attract and retain teachers?*



How can employers better promote their positions and what their district offers future teachers so there is a better teacher-school district match?

***Focus here will be on examining these questions using qualitative data.**

Methods

- Disseminated a survey statewide. Based on Gunn & McRae (2021) survey of new teachers in Canada.
- Disseminated in February-March 2023 via email.
 - Sent to directors of all teacher education programs and community colleges in Maine; they forwarded to their students. UMF students sent directly to students here.
 - Sent to superintendents of all school districts; they forwarded to their staff.
- Coding Procedures:
 - Open Coding separately
 - Finalized coding terms as a group
 - Coded each case using final coding scheme together until agreement achieved



Description of Sample (n=244)



61% Preservice/39% New Teachers (1st 3 years)

Majority of **Preservice Teachers** Juniors and Above (63.7%), Enrolled Full-time (77.6%), and in a Traditional Teacher Preparation Program (80.9%)

Majority of New Teachers Working Full-time (93.1%)



Certification: 35.5% Early Childhood, 42.7% Elementary, 40.2% Middle/Secondary, 17.9% Special Education (some have multiple certifications so #s don't add up to 100%)

83.7% Female

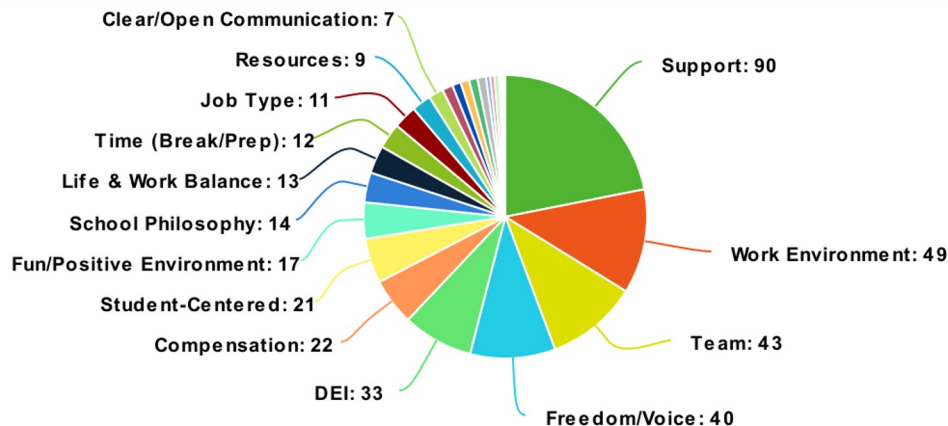
97.6% White/Caucasian

43% First Generation College Student



Findings: Ideal Job

Ideal Teaching Results



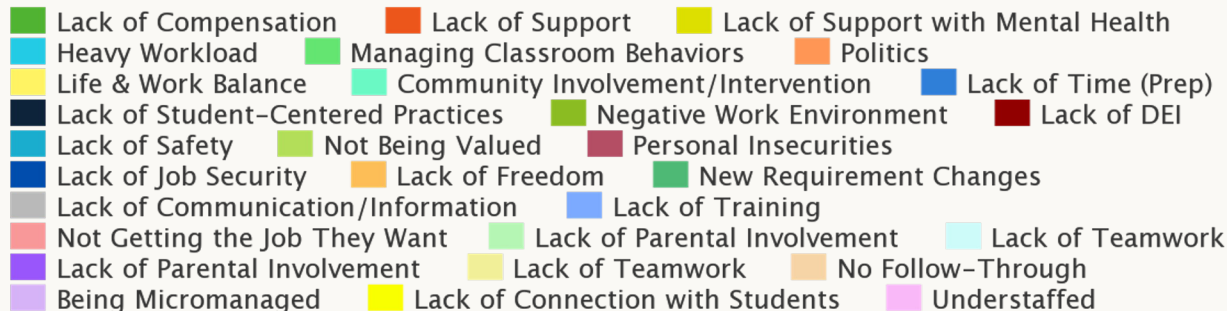
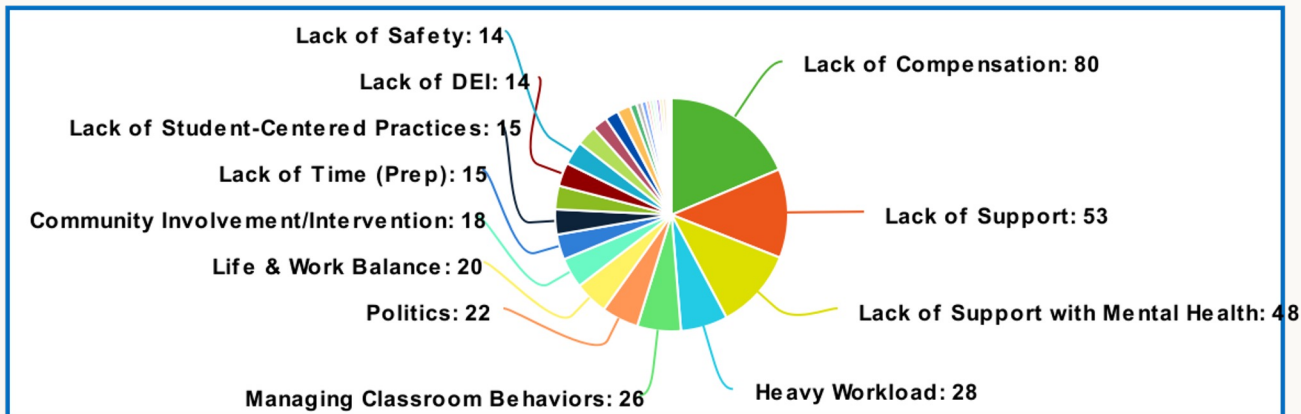
meta-chart.com

“A supportive community of teachers and administrators. Open communication across the district as well as between surrounding districts/state legislators. Freedom to teach without excessive paperwork taking away planning time.”

“Diverse/Inclusive environment and curriculum, compensated and paid fairly for the work and hours put into the job (inside and outside of contract hours), support from admin, positive work environment, self-care priority especially in this society and job”

Findings: Worries About Being a Teacher in Maine

Worries



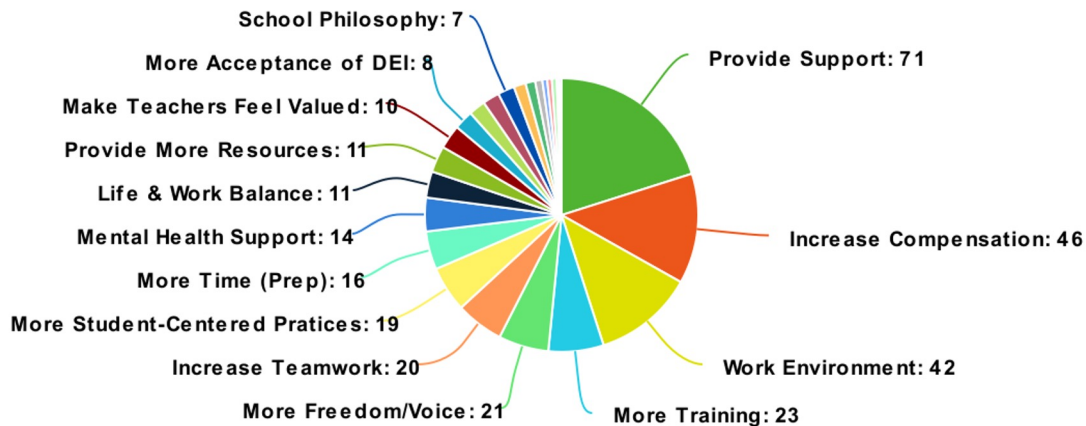
“Having a classroom of 20+, having to produce lesson plans for every assignment, not being able to tailor my classroom schedule and events based on the needs of each individual student, Standardized testing, lack of coverage for sick/mental health days, lack of support after challenging or extreme behavior”

“Not being able to keep up with the constant changes in curriculum and the constant changes in what is expected of young children. I'm worried that it is going to be all testing results instead of individual learning and hands on learning. The students will be reduced to statistics.”

Findings: Ways to Attract and Retain Teachers



What School Could Do to Attract Teachers



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“Supportive and genuine administration, fair compensation for work, realistic expectations and classroom ratios, support teachers in dealing with and understanding of behaviors from students”

“Money toward professional development. Stipends for post graduate studies. Money for supplies—a lot of teachers have to pay for supplies for various activities out of pocket.”



Discussion of Findings and Ties to Practice

Compensation:

Maine has the lowest rate of teacher compensation in the country; Bills to raise the teacher minimum salary and minimum hourly wages for ESPs are on the way. (Leavitt, 2023)

While compensation is an important issue, support in the form of administration, peer, mentor, guardian/parent, and community, is actually more vital to attracting and retaining teachers in the field. Paying teachers long overdue respect helps with recruitment and retention as well. (Leavitt, 2023)

Support:


APA defines social support as:

... the provision of assistance or comfort to others, typically to help them cope with biological, psychological, and social stressors. Support may arise from any interpersonal relationship in an individual's social network..... It may take the form of practical help (e.g., doing chores, offering advice), tangible support that involves giving money or other direct material assistance, and emotional support that allows the individual to feel valued, accepted, and understood.

Practical support for planning and managing challenging behavior, tangible support for resources in the classroom, and emotional support to know they are welcome, valued, important, and accepted for who they are. They also want to teach and balance their work and personal lives.

Freedom:

Politics in the classroom bring with it restrictions on teaching and restrictions on appearance, leaving some teachers and staff feeling as if they have no ownership over their teaching. Those who have had to alter their appearance feel as if they are not welcomed in the classroom space. We need to more broadly consider what it means to be a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace.





Limitations of the Study

- While a statewide sample, not every school district may be represented (19 total).
- Qualitative data was taken from open-ended questions on surveys, not from interviews. Interviews may have produced richer, more detailed and in-depth data.
- Not every respondent provided an open-ended response to the survey question.



Future Directions and New Questions

- Working with districts to share quantitative and qualitative findings from the study, including feedback on job ads and reactions from potential applicants.
 - Analyzing data by district location to understand special challenges for rural school districts.
- Disseminating surveys for educational technicians to learn about challenges for educational support staff in Maine, training needs, recruitment/retention issues, and interest in climbing the career ladder to teacher certification.

