

# NATIONAL TEACHER SURVEY UNCOVERS RIGHT WING CULTURE WAR'S DESTRUCTIVE IMPACT ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

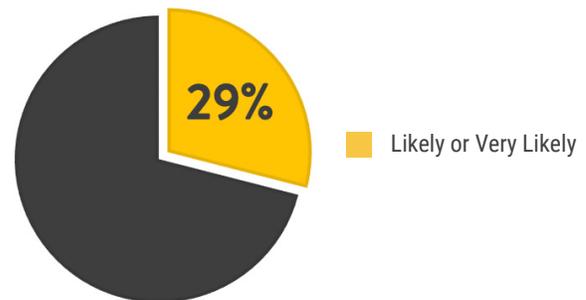
## EFFORTS TO BAN THE TEACHING OF HONEST HISTORY ARE PUSHING MORE TEACHERS TOWARD LEAVING THE CLASSROOM.

Recent public opinion research by SurveyUSA, an independent survey research firm, found that political attacks on public schools threaten to exacerbate the teacher shortage.

Thirty-seven percent (37%) of the 2,000 teachers surveyed say a push for laws that prevent honest teaching and conversations in their classrooms would make them more likely to leave teaching at the end of this school year.

Close to three in 10 teachers surveyed said they are very likely or likely to leave teaching at the end of this school year, a marked increase from a national survey by Rand earlier this year. Prior to the surge in bills banning what can be taught in the classroom, Rand reported the number of teachers who were considering leaving the profession was 1 in 4. Prior to the pandemic, the number was 1 in 6.<sup>1</sup>

**Nearly 3 in 10 Teachers Say They May Leave the Profession in the Next Year**



The SurveyUSA findings are an ominous signal that, if the attacks on teachers and public schools continue, school districts will face even worse teacher shortages next year, leading to bigger class sizes, more uncredentialed teachers, and fewer tutoring and individual learning opportunities to help children and young people get back on track.

## TEACHERS NEARLY UNANIMOUS: STUDENTS NEED TO LEARN HONEST, ACCURATE HISTORY AND THAT RACISM IS WRONG

- **92 percent** say students should be able to learn about historical truths, even when they are uncomfortable.
- **94 percent** say schools should ensure that no students feel unsafe, invisible, or unheard.
- **93 percent** agree with the statement: "So that children can thrive in diverse workplaces, it is

essential for schools to help children learn to value and respect the humanity of every person and to recognize and reject racism."

- **93 percent** agreed with the statement: "Students deserve a thorough and accurate account of American history, including the hard parts, not a whitewashed version, because knowing the full story of the past empowers students to create a better future."

<sup>1</sup> Steiner, Elizabeth D. and Ashley Woo, *Job-Related Stress Threatens the Teacher Supply: Key Findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1108-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-1.html).

# THEIR OWN WORDS: WHAT TEACHERS THINK ABOUT THE RECENT BANS BY POLITICIANS ON TEACHING HONEST AND COMPLETE HISTORY

In response to open-ended questions, educators specifically explained how attacks on teachers and potential restrictions on what they can teach have increased their already-high stress levels and intensified feelings of being undervalued.

“It would be the final incentive to leave the teaching profession. I will not teach if not allowed to respect and address the social and financial challenges facing my diverse group of students.”

- Mississippi middle school teacher

“Discussions in safe spaces like classrooms are an important part of learning different viewpoints and opinions... Students learn from one another and learn to respect each other’s opinions.”

- Kansas middle school teacher

“Limiting classroom discussions so that they steer clear of uncomfortable or touchy subjects defeats the purpose of learning. Being able to freely discuss in classrooms helps students become more open and accepting of other points of view.”

- Pennsylvania elementary teacher

“[You] might as well burn books while you’re at it. Censorship and hiding the truth contributes to ignorance.”

- Texas high school teacher

When asked to imagine how they’d respond to the passage of a law that bans conversations in their classrooms, teachers repeatedly said they would feel “undervalued,” “distrusted,” and “disrespected.”

One experienced South Carolina high school teacher commented that such a law would make her feel “more undervalued than I already feel.” In Arkansas, an elementary teacher with more than five years of experience, said “it would send the message that teachers are incapable of making wise choices for the students in their classroom,” and a New Hampshire elementary teacher said she would feel “silenced, disrespected, unseen, livid, deflated, heartbroken, worthless.”

Teachers frequently emphasized that bills banning conversations in their classrooms are an attack on their professionalism, underscoring that they were trained and credentialed to teach and should be trusted to do so. As one veteran Kansas elementary teacher noted, “It would be an insult to my lifetime of vast experiences and knowledge about such issues ... My job as a teacher is to face and discuss all issues in a safe, secure, supportive environment.”

If banned from sharing accurate history and information about issues like race, “I would feel like a fraud with my students,” a new-to-the-profession high school teacher in Pennsylvania said. A long-experienced New York City elementary teacher said, “It would make me feel like a part of the problem.” Another New York teacher in middle school said it would be “like I’m now living a lie and perpetuating lies.”

## A Key Factor in Whether Teachers Leave the Profession

Teachers made clear the passage of these extreme bans would be a significant factor in whether they would leave the profession.

An Illinois public elementary teacher with more than 20 years’ experience said, “I would feel like I am letting my students down, and I would leave the profession.”

A long-time middle school educator in Mississippi acknowledged, “It would be the final incentive to leave the teaching profession. I will not teach if not allowed to respect and address the social and financial challenges facing my diverse group of students.”

Even teachers who would not themselves be personally affected expressed concern about the impact on colleagues. “In the subject area I teach in, it may not make a big impact,” commented a Minnesota high school math teacher, “but would for others I work with who are quality teachers that might leave the profession if this was to be implemented.”

Others worried that laws restricting classroom discussions would deter others from entering the profession, as a veteran Pennsylvania high school teacher noted: “Teachers are already looked at as lazy, and many people are unappreciative of educators. When educators have to fear that anything they say or do will make them lose their livelihood, who will be an educator?”

An experienced California high school teacher echoed that concern. “Education is based on shared experience, for both the teacher and the student,” she said. “Trying to control teachers through fear is just going to drive them away faster. There is already a teacher shortage in America ... this will just create a big[ger] shortage.”

## Making an Already Difficult Job Even Harder

Many teachers reported the threat of laws banning conversations and fining educators was making them feel anxious and fearful. “It [the law] would make teaching more difficult. It would be like walking on eggshells,” an Indiana high school teacher with 10-20 years’ experience said.

A long-time high school teacher in Arizona commented, “I’d be afraid of students reporting classroom discussions on sensitive topics even when I hadn’t [violated the law], because they misunderstood.”

An elementary teacher from Pennsylvania shared the same concern: “I would also feel like I was under a microscope and worry constantly about my lessons being misconstrued and taken out of context.”

A North Carolina elementary teacher who’s been in the classroom for more than 20 years said she would feel “[t]argeted and worried [that] what I may say will subject me to termination or other consequences.”

In Georgia, another veteran elementary teacher said she would feel “[v]ery anxious. I am an African American woman teaching at a majority white public school. So I would probably stay within my boundaries and proceed with caution.”

Another Pennsylvania teacher reflected on the reality that not everything in the classroom always goes according to plan. “[I would] feel frightened that a topic may come up,” she explained, “and that it would be hard not to allow my students to discuss critically and openly and draw their own conclusions.”

Teachers emphasized that politicians’ extreme bans would inevitably hamper their ability to teach students effectively, fearing that it would “make me feel as if I am not being allowed to fulfill my duty as an educator,” as one Maryland middle school teacher put it. Or in the words of an Arkansas high school teacher, “[I would feel] that I am not being honest with my students. They need to learn about our country’s history, all of it.”

## Teachers Believe These Bans Hurt Students

An experienced South Carolina elementary teacher wrote: “We learn from acknowledging our wrongs and doing what we can to fix it and make it right.” An Ohio middle school teacher shared similar sentiments. “It’s important to learn from history,” she said, “and make ourselves better than our past.” An Ohio elementary teacher accentuated the point: “We need to teach our students about real history, and how we sometimes need to make a wrong right.”

A Louisiana high school teacher stressed that how history is taught is just as important as teaching it: “If

**Words teachers used to describe how bans on what can be taught in the classroom would make them feel:**



we want to see a change in this country and the world we live in, we need to discuss ‘uncomfortable’ topics,” he wrote. “We need to learn from the mistakes in our past to create a more accepting world. Discussing the hard topics and historical events will help our students to not repeat the terrible things we have done to each other in the past. Just telling [them] that something is wrong or bad is not good enough.”

Teachers also highlighted the critical life skills that classroom discussions provide students, and worried that laws restricting those discussions would “[make] it impossible for students to form their own opinions,” in the words of a New York middle school teacher.

A Montana high school teacher underscored that point, emphasizing how discussing difficult topics helps prepare students for their lives as adults in a diverse world: “Laws restricting classroom discussions take away from the students in that classroom. Schools are not there to make you think one way or another, and laws restricting discussions force students to only think in one way. Students should be able to discuss what they believe, with the guidance of their teachers. This helps better prepare them for a world in which they will disagree with others and a world in which their voice matters just as much as other person’s.”

Teachers also said that discussing controversial topics like race in age-appropriate ways benefits students by bringing them together. “Discussions in safe spaces like classrooms are an important part of learning different viewpoints and opinions,” explained a Kansas middle school teacher with more than 20 years’ experience. “Students learn from one another and learn to respect each other’s opinions.”

Discussions about race and other difficult concepts are important even if they are sometimes uncomfortable, according to a Pennsylvania elementary school teacher who’s relatively new to the profession. She explained, “Limiting classroom discussions so that they steer clear of uncomfortable or touchy subjects defeats the purpose of learning. Being able to freely discuss in classrooms helps students become more open and accepting of other points of view.”

## Teachers Believe These Bans Hurt Us All

Teachers warned that laws banning conversations in classrooms will “hurt everyone” in the words of one Oklahoma elementary teacher. Many shared the sentiment that “kids are our future” and they need to learn from past mistakes to better society.

An Arizona middle school teacher underscored the point: “I feel like it would make it difficult to focus on important and sensitive topics that kids these days need to be aware of in order to be compassionate and tolerant citizens in our society as they grow up.”

An Illinois elementary teacher felt laws restricting classroom discussions undercut the very purpose of schooling, writing that “the point of educating is to teach topics in a safe environment to better our future world.” Or, as a Nevada high school teacher urged, “They [students] need to know that we all can work together to solve problems in our towns, states, and national concerns.”

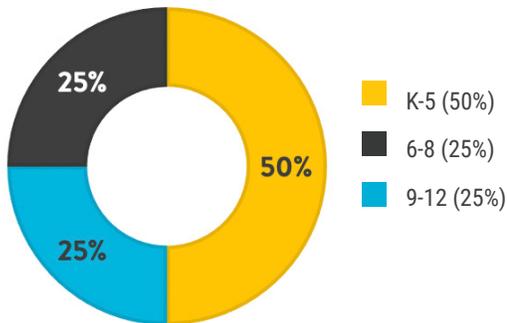
For teachers who recognize the civic mission of school, the laws also seem to be a betrayal of the nation’s core ideals. A veteran Ohio high school teacher said it would make him feel like “we have lost one of the fundamental freedoms that our country was founded on.” A Maryland high school teacher observed that it would be “A total violation of my, and my students’ first amendment rights ... it would be a gross injustice and a huge governmental overreach.”

In Texas, where bans on classroom conversations have already started taking effect and where a state legislator recently asked the Texas Education Agency and school superintendents around the state to report whether schools “possess” any of a list of 850 books he thought “might make students feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress because of their race or sex,” a high school teacher said “[you] might as well burn books while you’re at it. Censorship and hiding the truth contributes to ignorance.”<sup>2</sup>

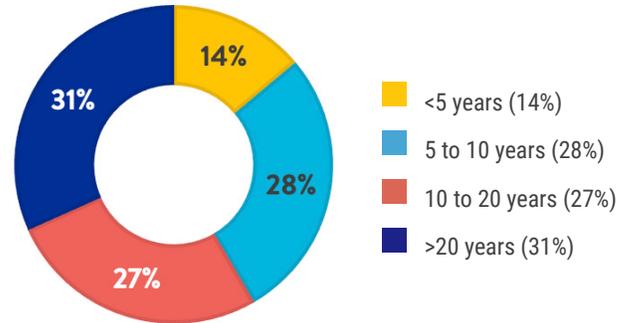
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/28/1050013664/texas-lawmaker-matt-krause-launches-inquiry-into-850-books>

## ABOUT THE TEACHERS SURVEYED

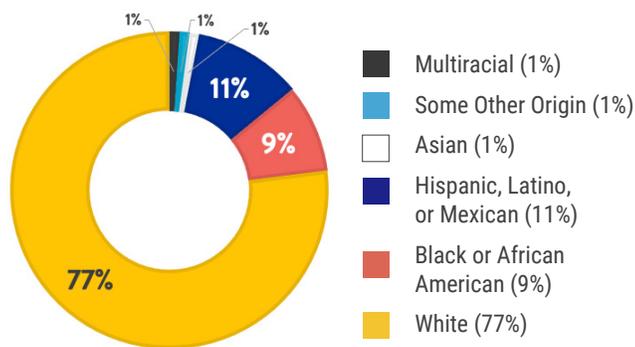
### TEACHING LEVEL



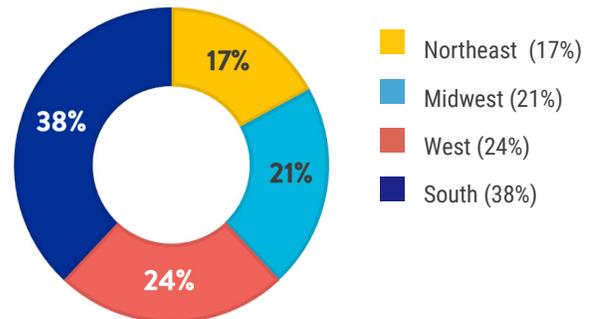
### TIME IN THE PROFESSION



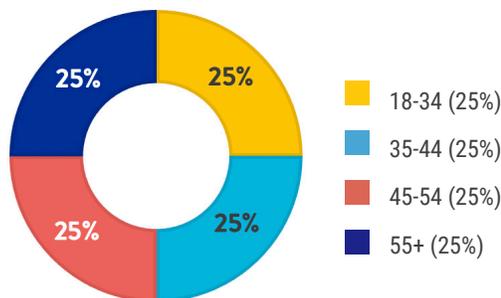
### RACE



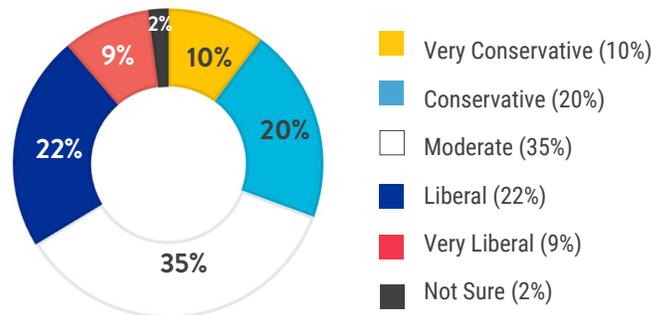
### US CENSUS REGION



### AGE



### POLITICAL IDEOLOGY



SurveyUSA, an independent polling firm, interviewed 2,000 educators who teach kindergarten through 12th grade from across the entire United States from 9/24/2021 through 10/11/2021. The pool of adult survey respondents was weighted to data published by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the US Census Bureau, and the National Center for Education Statistics to ensure that the respondent population matches as closely as is practicable the population of K through 12 educators in the United States. This research was conducted online. The margin of error for the polling data is +/- 2.4 points.

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