

Examining the factors that play a role in the teacher shortage crisis

Key findings from EPI's 'Perfect Storm in the
Teacher Labor Market' series

Report • By [Emma García](#) and [Elaine Weiss](#) • October 15, 2020

The teacher shortage in the United States is an increasingly recognized but still poorly understood crisis.¹ Much attention has focused on the size of the shortage (about 110,000 teachers in the 2017–2018 school year, by one estimate), its monetary costs, and the negative effects of the shortage on students, teachers, and the public education system at large.² But the multiple complex and interdependent causes have received less scrutiny. In 2019, we authored a series of five EPI reports examining the full magnitude of the teacher shortage and the working conditions and other factors that contribute to the shortage. A sixth report on policy recommendations, *A Policy Agenda to Address the Teacher Shortage in U.S. Public Schools*, is being released simultaneously with this summary report. This summary report presents key findings from the first five studies in the series and outlines the policy agenda presented in the sixth report. At the end of this summary report are the infographic fact sheets that were released with the reports.

Data note: The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has announced that weights developed for the teacher data in the 2015–2016 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) were improperly inflated and that new weights will be released (release date to be determined). According to the NCES, counts produced using the original weights would be overestimates. The application of the final weights, when they are available, is not likely to change the estimates of percentages and averages (such as those we report in our analyses) in a statistically significant way nor would it change the key themes described in the series. Please note that EPI analyses produced with 2011–2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data, 2012–2013 Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) data, and 2015–2016 NTPS school-level data are unaffected by NCES’s reexamination.

Documenting the magnitude of the problem and its unequal distribution across low- and high-poverty schools

The first report in the series, *The Teacher Shortage Is Real, Large and Growing, and Worse Than We Thought* (García and Weiss 2019a), establishes that current national estimates of the teacher shortage likely understate the magnitude of the problem: When issues such as teacher qualifications and the unequal distribution of highly credentialed teachers across high- and low-poverty schools are taken into consideration, the teacher shortage problem is much more severe than previously identified. Our analysis of the 2011–2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and 2015–2016 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) microdata from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) shows that the share of public school teachers who do not hold teaching credentials associated with being more effective is either growing or staying the same. From the 2011–2012 to the 2015–2016 school year, there were increases in the shares of teachers who were not fully certified (from 8.4% to 8.8%), who had not taken the traditional route into teaching (14.3% to 17.1%), who had five years or less of experience (20.3% to 22.4%), and who did not have an educational background in the subject they were teaching (31.1% to 31.5%). In high-poverty schools, the shares of teachers without these credentials were even higher: 9.9% were not fully certified, 18.9% took an alternative route into teaching, 24.6% had five years or less of experience, and 33.8% didn’t have an educational background in the subject they were teaching (NCES 2011–2012, 2015–2016).³

Taking a closer look at schools' struggles to hire and retain teachers

The second report in the series, *U.S. Schools Struggle to Hire and Retain Teachers* (García and Weiss 2019b), builds on the research in the first report, employing the same quality and equity angles to show that schools are having difficulties filling teacher vacancies and are, in some cases, having to leave vacancies open despite actively trying to hire teachers to fill them. The share of schools that were trying to fill a vacancy but couldn't tripled from the 2011–2012 to the 2015–2016 school year (increasing from 3.1% to 9.4%), and the share of schools that found it very difficult to fill a vacancy nearly doubled in the same period (from 19.7% to 36.2%). High-poverty schools were hit hardest: They found it more difficult to fill vacancies than did low-poverty schools and schools overall, and they experienced higher turnover and attrition rates than did low-poverty schools (NCES 2011–2012, 2012–2013, 2015–2016).

One factor behind staffing difficulties in both low- and high-poverty schools is the high share of public school teachers leaving their posts: 13.8% were either leaving their school or leaving teaching altogether in a given year, according to the most recent data (NCES 2011–2012, 2012–2013). Another factor is the dwindling pool of applicants to fill vacancies: From the 2008–2009 to the 2015–2016 school year, the annual number of education degrees awarded fell by 15.4%, according to EPI analysis of *Digest of Education Statistics 2018* data (NCES 2018). And the annual number of people who completed a teacher preparation program fell by 27.4% (U.S. Department of Education 2017a, 2017b). Schools are also having a harder time retaining credentialed teachers, as is evident in the small but growing share of all teachers who are both newly hired and in their first year of teaching (4.7% in 2015–2016, up from 4.0% in 2011–2012) and in the substantial shares of teachers who quit who are certified and experienced (90.3% and 77.2%, respectively) (NCES 2011–2012, 2012–2013). It is even more difficult for high-poverty schools to retain credentialed teachers.

Highlighting the role of low relative teacher pay

The third report in the series focuses on one likely reason teachers are leaving the profession and fewer people are becoming teachers: low teacher pay. In the report *Low Relative Pay and High Incidence of Moonlighting Play a Role in the Teacher Shortage, Particularly in High-Poverty Schools* (García and Weiss 2019c), we describe how teacher compensation compares with compensation in nonteaching occupations and call attention to the high share of teachers who supplement their earnings by moonlighting during the school year. First, we highlight earlier EPI/Center on Wage and Employment Dynamics research showing that, after accounting for education, experience, and other factors known to affect earnings, teachers' weekly wages in 2018 were 21.4% lower than their nonteaching peers (Allegretto and Mishel 2019). In 1996, that weekly wage penalty was 6.3%. Our report then adds to the evidence of low teacher pay with new data on moonlighting: In the 2015–2016 school year, 59.0% of teachers took on additional paid work either in the school system or outside of it—up from 55.6% in the 2011–2012 school

year. For these teachers, moonlighting made up a substantial 7.0% share of their combined base salary and extra income (NCES 2011–2012, 2015–2016).

The report goes on to show a correlation between measures of teacher compensation and teachers leaving the profession. For example, teachers who ended up quitting teaching reported receiving, on average, lower salaries than those who stayed at their schools (\$50,800 vs. \$53,300). And relative to teachers who stayed, teachers who quit reported, in the year before they quit, participating less in the kinds of paid extracurricular activities that might complement their professional development—activities like coaching students or mentoring other teachers (33.3% vs. 42.7%)—and more in moonlighting activities outside the school system (18.4% vs. 16.3%) (NCES 2011–2012, 2012–2013).

In high-poverty schools, teachers face compounded challenges. Relative to their peers in low-poverty schools, teachers in high-poverty schools are paid less (\$53,300 vs. \$58,900), receive a smaller amount of income from moonlighting (\$4,000 vs. \$4,300), and the moonlighting that they do is less likely to involve paid extracurricular or additional activities for the school system that not only generate extra pay but also help them grow professionally as teachers (NCES 2015–2016).

Identifying the working environment (school climate) as another key factor

The fourth report, *Challenging Working Environments ('School Climates'), Especially in High-Poverty Schools, Play a Role in the Teacher Shortage* (García and Weiss 2019d), explores another likely factor behind the exodus of teachers from the profession and the shrinking supply of future teachers: teachers' working environments, or school climates. It shows that school climate is challenging because of the presence of widespread barriers to teaching and learning, threats to teachers' emotional well-being and physical safety, and a troubling lack of teacher influence over school policy and over what and how they teach in their classrooms. Students are coming to school unprepared to learn (as reported by 27.3% of teachers) and parents are struggling to be involved (as reported by 21.5% of teachers), conditions that are largely byproducts of larger societal forces such as rising poverty, segregation, and insufficient public investments. And more than one in five teachers (21.8%) report that they have been threatened and one in eight (12.4%) say they have been physically attacked by a student at their current school. Compounding the stress, more than two-thirds of teachers report that they have less than a great deal of influence over what they teach in the classroom (71.3%) and what instructional materials they use (74.5%), which suggests low recognition of their knowledge and judgment (NCES 2015–2016).

The poor school climate affects teacher satisfaction, morale, and expectations about staying in the profession. One in 20 teachers (4.9%) say that the stress and disappointments involved in teaching are not worth it, more than one-fourth of teachers say they think about leaving teaching at some point (27.4%), nearly half express some level of dissatisfaction with being a teacher in their school (48.7%), and more than half say they are not certain that they would still become teachers if they could go back to college and

make a decision again (57.5%) (all data are from NCES 2015–2016 except for the share of teachers who are not sure they would become teachers if they could start over again, which is from NCES 2011–2012).

The data suggest a relationship between tough climates and quitting. When we compare teachers who ended up quitting with those who stayed, we find that larger shares of quitting teachers had reported, prior to leaving, that they were teaching unprepared students (39.0% vs. 29.4%), experiencing demoralizing stress (12.5% vs. 3.6%), lacking strong influence over what they teach in class (74.6% vs. 71.4%), and not being fully satisfied with teaching at their school (60.5% vs. 43.3%) (NCES 2011–2012, 2012–2013).⁴

Finally, consistent with findings in the companion reports in the series, teachers in high-poverty schools have it worse: Relative to their peers in low-poverty schools, larger shares of teachers in high-poverty schools report barriers to teaching, threats to physical safety and attacks, a lack of supportive relationships, and little autonomy in the classroom.

Examining early career supports and professional development and other career advancement opportunities for teachers

The fifth and second-to-last report published in the series, *The Role of Early Career Supports, Continuous Professional Development, and Learning Communities in the Teacher Shortage* (García and Weiss 2019e), examines the early career supports available to novice teachers in the first year of their careers as well as the continued learning opportunities available to teachers throughout their careers. The report describes a mixed picture around the available systems of supports, with the set of supports already broadly offered in the schools constituting a strong foundation to build upon, but with multiple weaknesses to address if we want to help teachers do their jobs better and advance in their careers. On the positive side, large shares of first-year teachers work with a mentor (79.9%) and participate in teacher induction programs (72.7%), and large shares of teachers of all experience levels access certain types of professional development such as workshops or training sessions (91.9%) or activities focused on the subjects that teachers teach (85.1%). However, novice and veteran teachers largely don't get the time and resources they need to study, reflect, and prepare their practice. Small shares of first-year teachers are released from classroom instruction to participate in support activities for new or beginning teachers (37.1%) or receive teachers' aides to enhance classroom management and one-on-one attention for students (26.9%). For all teachers, only half have released time from teaching to participate in professional development (50.9%), less than a third are reimbursed for conferences or workshop fees (28.2%) or receive a stipend for professional development accessed outside of regular work hours (27.3%), and only one in 10 teachers (9.4%) receives full or partial reimbursement of college tuition. In addition, teachers have limited access to some of the types of professional development that are highly valued and more effective: Only about one-fourth or fewer of teachers attend university courses related to teaching, present at workshops, or make observational visits to other schools (NCES 2011–2012, 2015–2016).⁵

Further, teachers are not by and large immersed in the kinds of learning communities that can support their teaching and career growth. In a learning community, teachers have opportunities to cooperate and coordinate and have a say in school policy and classroom instruction and management. Our fourth report, on school climate (described above), highlights important statistics that reflect not only the poor working conditions for teachers but also the lack of learning communities in schools. As noted earlier, we found that more than two-thirds of teachers report that they have less than a great deal of influence over what they teach in the classroom (71.3%) or what instructional materials they use (74.5%), which suggests low consideration for their knowledge and judgment. Less than half of teachers strongly agree that the administration's behavior is supportive and encouraging (49.6%) or that there is a great deal of cooperative effort among the staff members (38.4%). Just 11.1% of teachers report having a great deal of influence in determining the content of professional development programs (NCES 2015–2016).

The systems of supports are particularly weak, the resources available are particularly lacking, and the scores on most indicators of a strong learning community are low in high-poverty schools, where, if anything, stronger supports for teachers are needed.

Although the link between these supports and the teacher staffing crisis is less direct than in the previous reports, these supports are nonetheless critical aspects of the teaching profession. Our data suggest a relationship between these systems of professional supports and teacher retention. When we compare teachers who stayed in teaching with those who quit teaching, we observe that larger shares of staying teachers had received early support in the form of an assigned mentor (77.0% vs. 69.2%), had found their subject-specific professional development activities very useful (27.4% vs. 19.5%), and had worked in highly cooperative environments (38.7% vs. 33.9%) (NCES 2011–2012, 2012–2013). Strengthened systems of supports have the potential to help teachers do their jobs better, progress in their profession, and gain satisfaction with and a sense of ownership of their careers. These supports are essential to guaranteeing the quality of the teaching workforce and to professionalizing teaching.

A call to action

The shortage of teachers documented and analyzed in this report harms students, teachers, and the public education system as a whole. Lack of sufficient, qualified teachers and staff instability threaten students' ability to learn and reduce teachers' effectiveness, and high teacher turnover consumes economic resources that could be better deployed elsewhere. The teacher shortage makes it more difficult to build a solid reputation for teaching and to professionalize it, which further contributes to perpetuating the shortage. In addition, the fact that the shortage is distributed so unevenly among students of different socioeconomic backgrounds challenges the U.S. education system's goal of providing a sound education equitably to all children.

The sixth and final report of the series, *A Policy Agenda to Address the Teacher Shortage in U.S. Public Schools* (García and Weiss 2020), presented a comprehensive policy agenda to confront the teacher shortage in the nation's public schools. To summarize, the

agenda has two main components: a set of foundational system-level recommendations that tackle the broad education context and thereby approach the problem in a way that will actually solve it, followed by specific policies targeting the factors that contribute to the teacher shortage and that, if implemented together, could go a long way toward solving the teacher shortage problem.

The agenda recommends that, at the outset, we increase public investments in education and treat teachers as professionals and teaching as a profession. These two system-level recommendations are critical to improving the context in which the teacher shortage operates and thus automatically lessening the teacher shortage and making the targeted recommendations easier to implement or even unnecessary in some cases. The third of the system-level recommendations is to understand that the teacher shortage is caused by multiple factors and thus can be tackled only with a comprehensive set of long-term solutions—an understanding that moves us away from single “magic remedy” solutions frameworks that have the appeal of an easy quick fix but are not at the scale of the problem. Finally, the fourth foundational recommendation calls for understanding that the complexity of the challenge calls for coordinated efforts of multiple stakeholders, including schools and school districts, parent-teacher associations, school boards, teachers unions, and states.

The targeted policies in EPI’s teacher shortage policy agenda plot a course to return teaching to a profession in which teachers are compensated on par with their college-educated peers, operate in environments where they can teach effectively, get the training they need early in their careers and the professional development they need throughout their work lives, and see their professional judgment and expertise respected and incorporated into school policies and programs, i.e., having a role in shaping what goes on in their classrooms and their schools. Specifically, the targeted policies call on school districts, state and federal policymakers, and other institutions and stakeholders involved to:

- Raise teacher pay to attract new teachers and keep teachers in their schools and the profession. This would be achieved through increasing teacher base pay across the board, enacting higher increases to teacher base pay in high-poverty schools, adequately funding pension benefits and removing obstacles to accessing them, considering programs that reduce the major financial burdens that are barriers to entering and staying in the teaching profession, and acknowledging and taking steps to address other financial burdens that arise when teachers in under-resourced schools must take on social services roles.
- Elevate teacher voice, and nurture stronger learning communities to increase teachers’ influence and sense of belonging. This includes increasing teacher autonomy and influence, and nurturing stronger learning communities through acknowledging and fostering teacher collaboration.
- Lower the barriers to teaching—such as students coming to school unprepared to learn, hungry, and sick, or threats to teachers’ physical safety and mental health—that affect teachers’ ability to do their jobs and their morale. It is imperative that school districts hire support personnel with the right qualifications to help mitigate barriers to

learning, and that disciplinary policies are revisited.

- Design professional supports that strengthen teachers' sense of purpose, career development, and effectiveness. Strategies to achieve this would include ensuring that teachers have access to coherent, high-quality, lifelong systems of supports and that teachers are engaged in designing these systems; and providing teachers with the option of meaningful second jobs that offer career advancement, not just survival.

The “Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market” series of reports acknowledges the need for more research on the factors that are prompting teachers to quit and dissuading people from entering the profession and on the solutions to the teacher shortage problem. There are likely drivers to the shortage that our series did not address because we lack the data to assess them. Likewise there can be policy solutions that our series did not advance because their effectiveness has not yet been tested with adequate methods, at a national scale, or using a broadened look at the multiple factors at play. We call for continued research on the problem and urge that researchers and policymakers scrutinizing teacher labor markets and the drivers of the teacher shortage use the quality and equity framework used in our series. Using this framework will help protect and improve the equity and excellence in our education system.

About the authors

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Elaine Weiss is the lead policy analyst for income security at the National Academy of Social Insurance, where she spearheads projects on Social Security, unemployment insurance, and workers’ compensation. Prior to her work at the academy, Weiss was the national coordinator for the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education (BBA), a campaign launched by the Economic Policy Institute, from 2011 to 2017. BBA promoted a comprehensive, evidence-based set of policies to allow all children to thrive in school and life. Weiss has authored and co-authored EPI and BBA reports on early achievement gaps and the flaws in market-oriented education reforms. She is co-author, with former Massachusetts Secretary of Education Paul Reville, of *Broader, Bolder, Better*, published by Harvard Education Press in 2019. Weiss came to BBA from the Pew Charitable Trusts, where she served as project manager for Pew’s Partnership for America’s Economic Success campaign. She has a Ph.D. in public policy from the George Washington

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Data sources used in the series

The data used in the series of reports and summarized here rely mainly on the 2011–2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), the 2012–2013 Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS), and the 2015–2016 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS). The surveys collect data on and from teachers, principals, and schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.⁶ All three surveys were conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the U.S. Department of Education. The survey results are housed at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which is part of the Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES).

The NTPS is the redesigned SASS, with a focus on “flexibility, timeliness, and integration with other Department of Education data” (NCES 2019). Both the NTPS and SASS include very detailed questionnaires at the teacher level, school level, and principal level, and the SASS also includes very detailed questionnaires at the school district level (NCES 2017). The TFS survey, which is the source of data on teachers who stay or quit, was conducted a year after the 2011–2012 SASS survey to collect information on the employment and teaching status, plans, and opinions of teachers in the SASS. Following the first administration of the NTPS, no follow-up study was done, preventing us from conducting an updated analysis of teachers by teaching status the year after the NTPS. NCES plans to conduct a TFS again in the 2020–2021 school year, following the 2019–2020 NTPS.

The 2015–2016 NTPS includes public and charter schools only, while the SASS and TFS include all schools (public, private, and charter schools).⁷ We restrict our analyses to public noncharter schools and to teachers in public noncharter schools.

Endnotes

1. This summary is released at a time when we are experiencing the unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic for all sectors—education included. For teachers and for

teacher labor markets, it is anticipated that the pandemic will exacerbate some of the problems we discussed in these reports just as the need to focus on pandemic relief and recovery measures delay attention to the problems identified here.

2. According to Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2016), the gap between the number of qualified teachers needed in the nation's K–12 schools and the number available for hire in the 2017–2018 school year was about 110,000 teachers. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) and the Learning Policy Institute (2017) estimate that filling a vacancy costs \$21,000 on average, and Carroll (2007) estimates the total annual cost of turnover at \$7.3 billion per year. According to Strauss (2017), that estimated annual cost of turnover would exceed \$8 billion at present. A lack of sufficient, qualified teachers threatens students' ability to learn (Darling-Hammond 1999; Ladd and Sorensen 2016). Instability in a school's teacher workforce (i.e., high turnover and/or high attrition) negatively affects student achievement and diminishes teacher effectiveness and quality (Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff 2013; Jackson and Bruegmann 2009; Kraft and Papay 2014; Sorensen and Ladd 2018). And high teacher turnover consumes economic resources (i.e., through costs of recruiting and training new teachers) that could be better deployed elsewhere.
3. A teacher is considered to be in a high-poverty school if 50% or more of the students in his/her classroom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs. A teacher is considered to be in a low-poverty school if less than 25% of the students in his/her classroom are eligible for those programs.
4. The response to the question revealing what we refer to as demoralizing stress is particularly telling: The share of teachers who said that the stress and disappointments involved in teaching weren't really worth it was 3.5 times as large among those who ended up quitting than among those who stayed.
5. For the statistics in this paragraph, the data for first-year teachers come from NCES 2015–2016; the data for all teachers come from NCES 2011–2012.
6. The 2015–2016 NTPS microdata do not produce state-representative estimates. The forthcoming 2017–2018 NTPS microdata will support state-level estimates.
7. The forthcoming 2017–2018 NTPS microdata will include private schools.

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Why is it a struggle to adequately staff schools?

The perfect storm in the teacher labor market

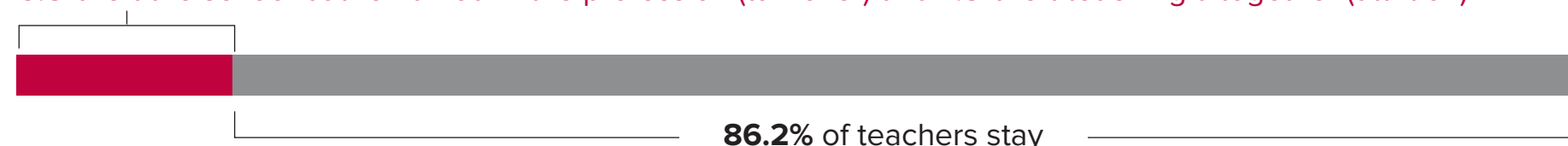
The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought. In the past decade, the interest in teaching as a career has dwindled, jeopardizing the quality of the education that children in America's public K–12 schools are receiving.

Vanishing teachers ♦

According to most recent data, 13.8% of teachers are either leaving their school or leaving teaching altogether after the school year, creating vacancies behind them.

13.8% of teachers aren't in their position a year after:

6.5% left the school but remained in the profession (turnover) and 7.3% left teaching altogether (attrition)



Shrinking supply ♦

High turnover and attrition is not the only problem. The number of people on track to pursue a career in teaching significantly declined from 2008 to 2016.

↓15.4%

drop in number of people awarded education degrees

↓37.8%

drop in number of people enrolled in teacher preparation programs

↓27.4%

drop in number of people completing teacher preparation programs

Hiring challenges ♦

Considering the disappearance of teachers, it is no surprise that principals had a hard time filling teacher vacancies in the 2015–2016 school year.



36.2% of schools were able to fill a vacancy but found it very difficult (doubling from 19.7% in the 2011–2012 school year)

9.4% of schools were trying to fill a vacancy and couldn't (tripling from 3.1% in the 2011–2012 school year)

Credential disparities ♦

Vacancies are affecting the education students are getting because the teaching workforce is less stable and is becoming less experienced. The challenges are more acute for high-poverty schools. For example, they have a larger share of new teachers and of novice teachers.

	Overall	Low-poverty school	High-poverty school
Share of all teachers who are newly hired	11.2%	10.1%	12.1%
Share of all teachers who are newly hired and in their first year of teaching	4.7%	3.7%	5.3%

Source: Emma García and Elaine Weiss, *U.S. Schools Struggle to Hire and Retain Teachers: The second report in the "The Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market" series*, Economic Policy Institute, April 2019

go.epi.org/teachershortages

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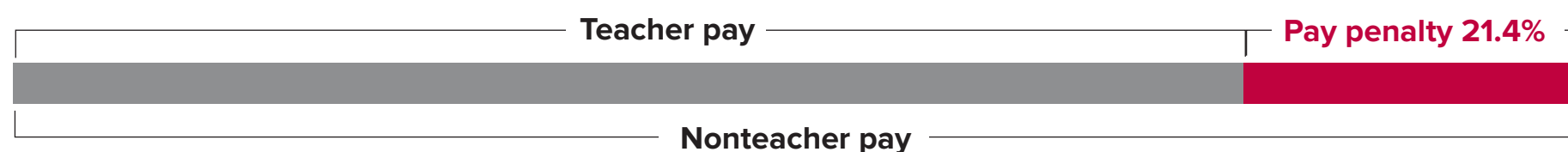
How do we know that low pay is a factor in the teacher shortage?

The perfect storm in the teacher labor market

The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought. One concrete reason why teachers are leaving the profession and why fewer people are interested in becoming teachers is low pay. Financial stress is even greater for teachers in high-poverty schools.

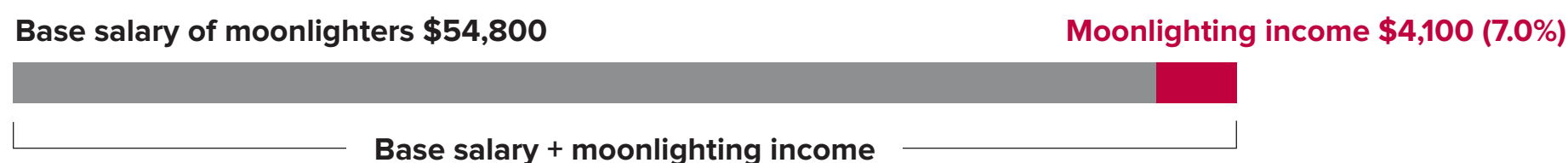
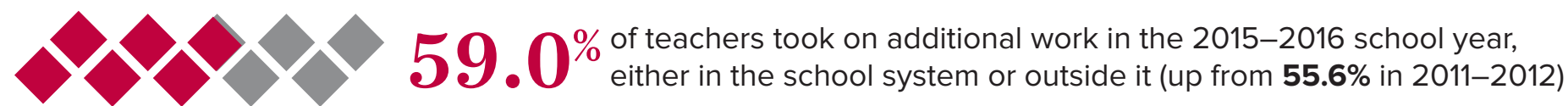
High pay penalty ♦

Teachers are paid a lot less than other comparable college graduates: teachers' weekly wages in 2018 were 21.4% lower (the pay penalty was 6.3% in 1996). People who enter teaching today are putting themselves at a financial disadvantage.



More moonlighting ♦

Another indicator that teacher pay is low is that a growing number of teachers are taking second jobs, on top of their full-time jobs at school. For these teachers, moonlighting during the school year makes up a substantial share of their total income.



Hardships in high-poverty schools ♦

Relative to teachers in low-poverty schools, teachers in high-poverty schools are paid less (\$53,300 vs. \$58,900), and earn less from moonlighting (\$4,000 vs. \$4,300), and the moonlighting that they do is less likely to involve paid activities for the school system that would help them grow professionally as teachers. (Data are for 2015–2016.)

Lower salaries among teachers who quit ♦

Teachers who ended up quitting had a lower average base salary than those who stayed, and they were more likely to have supplemented it with work outside the school system before they quit.

Salary (in 2011–2012)



Share who earned pay from moonlighting outside of the school system



Source: Emma García and Elaine Weiss, *Low Relative Pay and High Incidence of Moonlighting Play a Role in the Teacher Shortage, Particularly in High-Poverty Schools*, EPI, May 2019. The teacher pay penalty comes from Sylvia Allegretto and Lawrence Mishel, *The Teacher Weekly Wage Penalty Hit 21.4 Percent in 2018, a Record High*, EPI and CWED, April 2019.

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How do we know that tough work environments are a factor in the teacher shortage?

Teachers face real challenges to succeeding at their jobs, which helps explain why some teachers are leaving the profession and fewer people are interested in becoming teachers.

Teachers report barriers to teaching ♦

Large shares of teachers report that barriers to teaching caused by poverty and other societal forces are a “serious problem” in their school:

Students come to school unprepared to learn **27.3%** Parents struggle to be involved **21.5%** Students are apathetic **18.4%**

Teachers report insufficient support and a lack of say over their work day ♦

Even larger shares of teachers say they don’t get a great deal of support from administrators and fellow teachers and don’t have much influence on what and how they teach in class:



Teachers report physical threats ♦

More than one in five teachers report that they have been threatened and one in eight say they have been physically attacked by a student at their school. Teachers in high-poverty schools are more exposed to these threats.

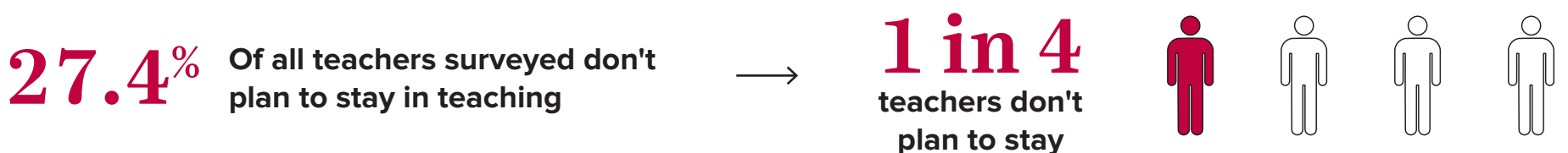
	Overall	Low-poverty school	High-poverty school
Share of teachers who have been threatened	21.8%	15.8%	25.8%
Share of teachers who have been physically attacked	12.4%	9.5%	14.8%

Working environments were worse among teachers who quit

Teachers who quit were more likely than teachers who stay to report teaching unprepared students (39.0 percent vs. 29.4 percent), to say stresses of teaching aren't worth it (12.5 percent vs. 3.6 percent), and to report little influence over what they teach in class (74.6 percent vs. 71.4 percent).

A quarter of current teachers plan to or may quit

According to most recent data, 27.4% of all teachers don't see themselves staying in teaching for the rest of their careers.



Source: Emma García and Elaine Weiss, *Challenging Working Environments (“School Climates”), Especially in High-Poverty Schools, Play a Role in the Teacher Shortage*, Economic Policy Institute, May 2019. Findings are based on 2015–2016 survey data, except for the shares of quitting versus staying teachers experiencing a given challenge, which are based on 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 survey data.

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There is room to improve the professional supports that play a role in the teacher shortage

The demands of teaching are constantly changing. Ensuring that teachers have broad access to strong professional supports can help teachers update their knowledge and teaching skills and advance in their careers, making teaching a more appealing profession.

Some highly valued professional development activities are not broadly available ♦

There is limited access to some of the types of professional development that research has found most valuable, with low shares of teachers:

26.6%

Accessing university courses

23.1%

Presenting at workshops

21.6%

Making observational visits to other schools

Time to access supports is limited ♦

Teachers largely don't get the time and resources they need to study, reflect, and prepare their practice.

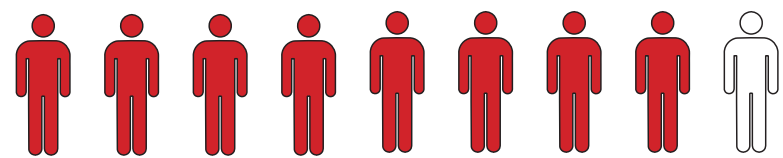
49.1% do not get time away from teaching to participate in professional development

72.7% do not receive a stipend for professional development accessed outside of regular work hours

71.8% are not reimbursed for conferences or workshop fees

90.6% do not receive any reimbursement of college tuition

Teachers don't have a say in their professional development opportunities ♦



8 in 9

teachers have less than a great deal of influence determining the content of their professional development

Teachers' satisfaction with professional development is low ♦

1 in 4

find subject-specific professional development very useful

1 in 4

find professional development related to using computers for teaching very useful

1 in 5

find professional development related to student discipline and classroom management very useful

Supports play a role in the teacher shortage ♦

There is a relationship between the professional supports offered and teacher retention.

Found their subject-specific professional development activities very useful



True for:

27.4% of teachers who stayed

19.5% of teachers who quit

Worked in highly cooperative environments



True for:

38.7% of teachers who stayed

33.9% of teachers who quit

Source: Emma García and Elaine Weiss, *The Role of Early Career Supports, Continuous Professional Development, and Learning Communities in the Teacher Shortage*, Economic Policy Institute, July 2019. Findings are based on 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 survey data, all for K–12 public school teachers.

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There is room to improve the early career supports that play a role in the teacher shortage

New teachers must adapt the theoretical knowledge they acquired in their teacher education programs to the realities of the classroom. Ensuring that new teachers have broad access to strong early career supports can help build teacher effectiveness and confidence, make teaching a more appealing profession, and help retain teachers.

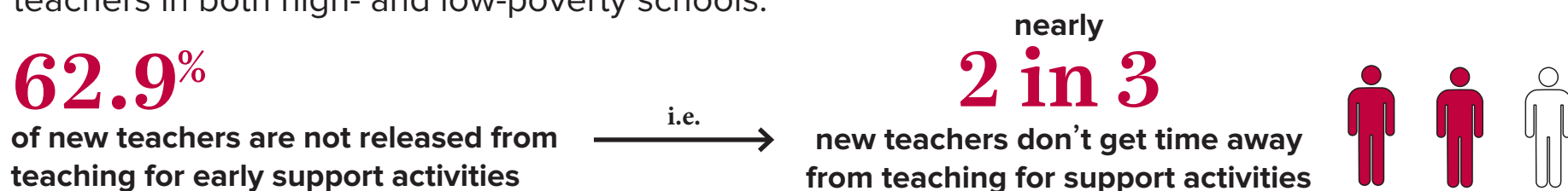
Early supports are broadly available but unevenly distributed ♦

While large shares of first-year teachers in U.S. public schools receive early-career supports, lower shares of new teachers in high-poverty schools access those supports.

	Overall	Low-poverty school	High-poverty school
Share of new teachers assigned a mentor	79.9%	83.7%	78.3%
Share of new teachers in an induction program	72.7%	75.8%	70.9%

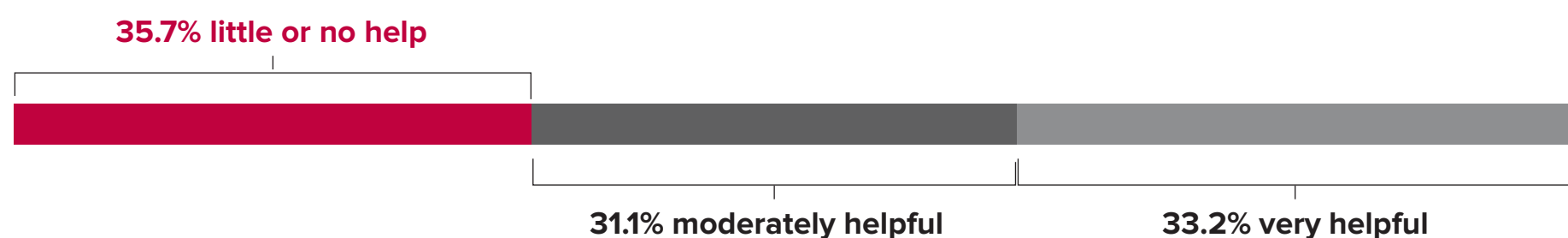
Time to access supports is limited ♦

Most new teachers don't get the time they need to prepare their practice—and that holds true for teachers in both high- and low-poverty schools.



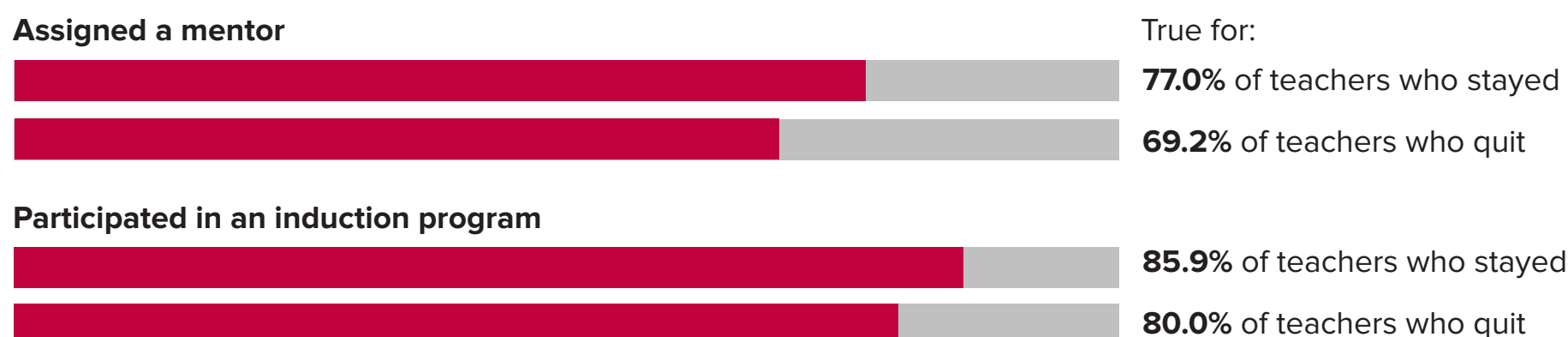
Some supports aren't very helpful ♦

Only a third of new teachers think working with mentors improved their teaching a lot.



Supports play a role in the teacher shortage ♦

There is a relationship between early supports and teacher retention. Larger shares of teachers who stayed in their schools had received early supports than did teachers who quit teaching.



Source: Emma García and Elaine Weiss, *The Role of Early Career Supports, Continuous Professional Development, and Learning Communities in the Teacher Shortage*, Economic Policy Institute, July 2019. Findings are based on 2015–2016 data, except for shares of staying vs. quitting teachers receiving early supports, which are based on 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 survey data, all for K–12 public school teachers.

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