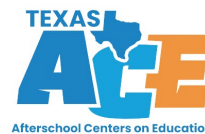


# Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant Evaluation: Texas Afterschool Centers on Education



## Descriptive Results of the Frontline Staff Survey (Spring 2023): Executive Summary

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Submitted to the Texas Education Agency

**The Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program** addresses the needs of students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. The Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (Texas ACE), funded by the federal 21st CCLC grant program, provide students with opportunities for academic enrichment, tutoring, and a broad array of other services, programs, and activities. The Texas ACE programs also provide literacy and engagement opportunities to adult family members of participating students.

As a condition of receiving federal 21st CCLC funding for this program, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) must conduct a statewide evaluation of the Texas ACE program. TEA contracted with the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) to conduct this evaluation. The evaluation comprises a series of data collection activities and attendant reports covering program characteristics, program implementation, exploration of the relationships between program characteristics and student outcomes, and program impact.

During the 2022–23 school year, the focal year for this report, the Texas ACE program was operating at **701 centers** (350 Cycle 10 and 351 Cycle 11) that are mostly school campuses. The programs were managed by 96 subgrantees (50 Cycle 10 and 46 Cycle 11) that have been awarded funding in 5-year cycles. Cycle 10 ended July 31, 2023, and Cycle 11 will end July 21, 2026, if funding remains available.<sup>1</sup>

**The focus of this report is on the work experience and perceptions of Texas ACE frontline staff** at these Cycle 10 and Cycle 11 centers, as conveyed to AIR through a survey administered in spring 2023. In all, AIR received **3,353 complete frontline staff survey responses and 800 partial survey responses from 602 centers**, representing 86% of the 701 active centers. This survey data collection effort was the third and final data collection undertaken by AIR on the specific topic of Texas ACE staffing; the results of the first two data collection efforts related to staffing were published in the report titled [\*Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant Evaluation: Texas Afterschool Centers on Education Descriptive Study of Project Director and Site Coordinator Perspectives on Staffing \(2021–22\)\*](#) (the 2021–22 Perspectives on Staffing Report).<sup>2</sup> **Because this report is essentially a “part two” on the subject of staffing, the findings in Exhibit ES1 are presented alongside findings from the 2021–22 Perspectives on Staffing Report.**

<sup>1</sup> Cycle 12 began operating in fall 2023. Cycle 12 programs will be included in future evaluation reports. The number of grants and centers active during 2022–23 is based on TX21st System data.

<sup>2</sup> Vinson et al. (2023).

## Exhibit ES1. Findings Highlights

No.	2021–22 Perspectives on Staffing Report	2022–23 Frontline Staff Survey Report
1	<p><i>TX21st staffing data for 2021–22 showed that Texas ACE programs relied heavily on school-day teachers, with teachers making up 41% of all 2021–22 school-year staff.</i></p>	<p>The TX21st data for 2022–23 presented in this report are in line with this previous finding, with about 38% of program staff being school-day teachers. It may therefore be of some assurance that school-day teachers responding to the frontline staff survey were generally experienced (with 46% indicating 5 years of experience or more), and about 87% said that they would likely work in the program during the subsequent year (73% indicating “yes” and 14% indicating “probably”).</p>
2	<p><i>The vast majority of project directors (86%) and a solid majority of site coordinators (64%) reported that it was a challenge “maintaining a work environment that isn’t overly stressful.”</i></p>	<p>About 63% of staff taking the frontline staff survey indicated that they “never” or “hardly ever” experience stress in the Texas ACE program. Another 30% indicated that they experience stress “sometimes.” However, about 8% of the respondents said that their work has been stressful “often” (6%) or “always” (2%). Notably, youth development workers and college students are disproportionately represented in this minority group, with 13% of youth development workers and 14% of college students saying that their work in the Texas ACE program was “often” or “always” stressful. Because at least some staff in every staff type reported stress at these levels, this finding indicates that creating less stressful working conditions for these two staff types may be a priority.</p>
3	<p><i>Nearly three quarters of project directors (72%) indicated that staff turnover had at least a moderate impact on the operation of their programs.</i></p>	<p>Eighty-six percent of frontline staff survey respondents said they plan to work in the program in the subsequent year (71% “yes,” 15% “probably”). However, 3% indicated “probably not,” 3% said “no,” and 9% were “unsure.” This may mean that turnover rates improved between 2022 and 2023, or, if not, that the departure of even a minority of staff constitutes a “moderate impact” for project directors. It is also possible that the actual turnover rate is higher than the frontline staff survey suggests, since staff planning to leave the program might be less likely to take the survey.</p>
4	<p><i>Roughly a third of the project directors relied more on paraprofessionals/ teacher assistants and youth development workers since the pandemic to fulfill their staffing needs. The 2021–22 Perspectives on Staffing Report also noted that seeking out and hiring college students may constitute a useful strategy for some programs.</i></p>	<p>Reliance on nonteacher staff—and youth development workers and college students in particular—is presented in a different light given the findings of this report. In addition to Finding 2 (concerning higher stress levels for these staff types), youth development workers and college students seem to lag behind other staff when it comes to overall job satisfaction, with only 44% of each group saying that they were completely satisfied with their job. In addition, 32% of youth development workers expressed dissatisfaction with pay, as do 28% of college students, compared with 9%–16% for other staff types. Centers interested in hiring (or retaining) youth development workers and college students also may need to reassess their training for these staff: 12% of youth development workers and 17% of college students indicated being only “a little prepared” or “not at all prepared” by their initial orientation. Finally, 45% of youth development workers and 52% of college students selected “more work hours” as a “top three” desired change.</p>

No.	2021–22 Perspectives on Staffing Report	2022–23 Frontline Staff Survey Report
5	<i>About half of the project directors (51%) reported that they increased pay to certified teachers as a way of making staff positions more attractive.</i>	According to the frontline staff survey data, school-day teachers earn an average of about \$31 an hour working in the Texas ACE program. Regardless of whether this is an increased level compared with 2021–22 (unknown), many staff—teachers and nonteachers—indicated a desire for increased pay, with 67% of staff selecting “improve pay and/or benefits” as a “top three” desired job-related change. As already indicated, pay seems to be of most importance for youth development workers and college students, who are paid the least compared with other staff (at about \$14 an hour each).
6	<i>More than half of the project directors (54%) reported that being more intentional about being supportive and responsive to staff needs was an effective approach to reducing turnover.</i>	The findings in this report show that a strong majority of frontline staff survey respondents (more than 85%) say that they are very satisfied with relationships with their peers, students, and program leadership, and, as already noted, a similarly high proportion of staff said that they will likely continue working in the program in the subsequent year (86%). These points support the idea that a positive work environment matters (or, at minimum, these findings provide no contrary evidence). That said, youth development workers and college students may need particular attention from site coordinators and project directors, as highlighted by Findings 2, 4, and 5.

The findings of this report are generally positive. As suggested by the findings outlined in Exhibit ES1, however, TEA may find it useful to further explore ways to support youth development workers and college students in particular.

### Frontline Staff Survey Representativeness

The 4,153 frontline staff survey responses (partial and complete) represent about 36% of the 11,519 total school-year staff reported in Texas 21st Student Tracking System (Tx21st) for 2022–23.<sup>3</sup> However, the TX21st staff data represent staff from across the entire school year, whereas the survey data present a single point in time during the school year; it is unknown how the respondent pool aligns with staff actively working in the Texas ACE program during late March and April 2023. By staff type, however, respondent proportions are roughly

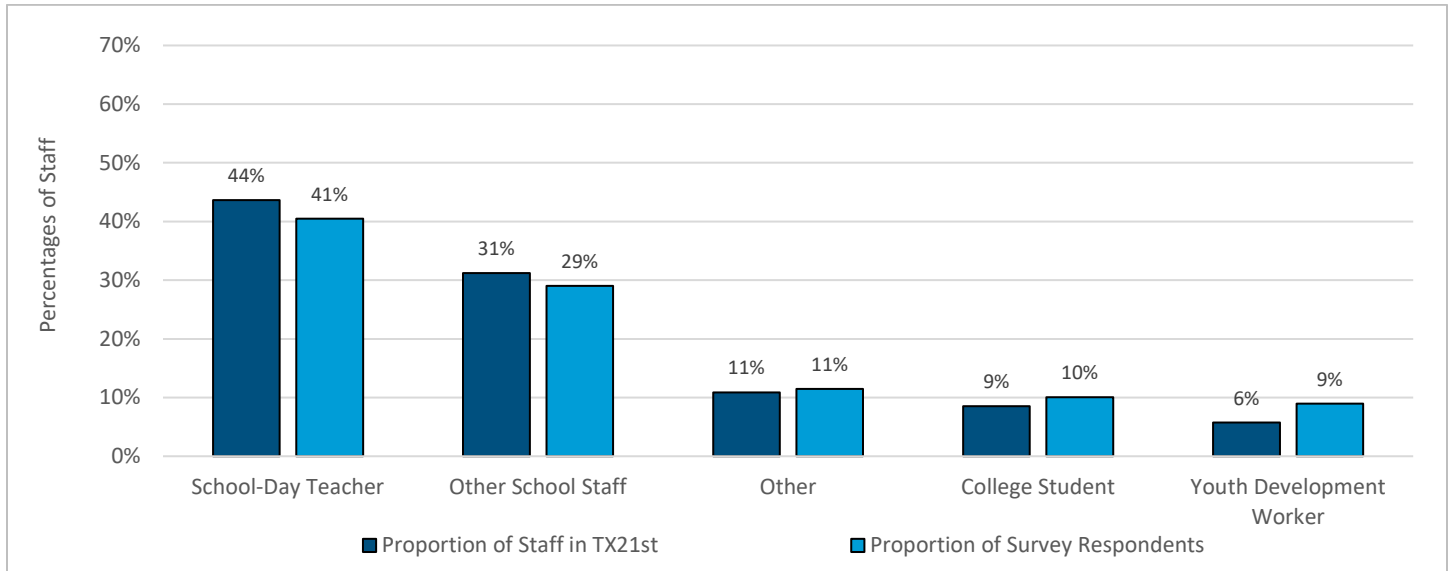
in line with the TX21st data, with the caveat that the number of responses from family engagement specialists, partner staff, and volunteers were very low. See Exhibit ES2.

### Summary of the Survey Findings

The frontline staff survey covered multiple topics, ranging from initial job training and professional development to job-related stress and overall job satisfaction. A summary of findings appears here. Note, however, that only the first survey questions concerning staff role (to ensure that respondents actively led activities) and staff type (to exclude high school students) were required questions. All subsequent questions could be left blank at the discretion of the respondent. Question-specific *n* counts are therefore presented throughout this report.

<sup>3</sup> A partial survey is merely a survey that the respondent did not finish (fairly common with longer surveys). Partial surveys still provide valuable data (just not for all questions) and are therefore included in this analysis.

**Exhibit ES2. Texas ACE Frontline Staff Survey Respondent Staff Types Compared with TX21st Total Staff Reported for School Year 2022–23, by Proportion of Total Staff**



Source. TX21st Student Tracking System data, 2022–23 school year, and frontline staff surveys collected by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2023.

Note. TX21st  $N = 10,473$ , and staff survey  $N = 4,081$ . Staff types reported on the frontline staff survey were not identical to categories reported in TX21st. Unmatched categories are grouped as “other.” TX21st categories classified as “other” include parents, community members, and staff reported as “other.” Staff survey categories classified as “other” include partner staff, family engagement specialists, volunteers, and staff reported as “other.” “High school students” was omitted because high school students were not included in the frontline staff survey administration. Texas ACE – Texas Afterschool Centers on Education.



**Frontline Staff Survey Respondents’ Experience, Gender, Race, and Ethnicity**

A majority of staff responding to the survey reported 2 years of experience or less in afterschool programming (53%), although school-day teachers—the largest group of staff—tended to report more experience in afterschool than other staff types. Youth development workers (who work closely with youth on life skills and educational goals) and college students tended to report less experience than other staff types. See Exhibit ES3.

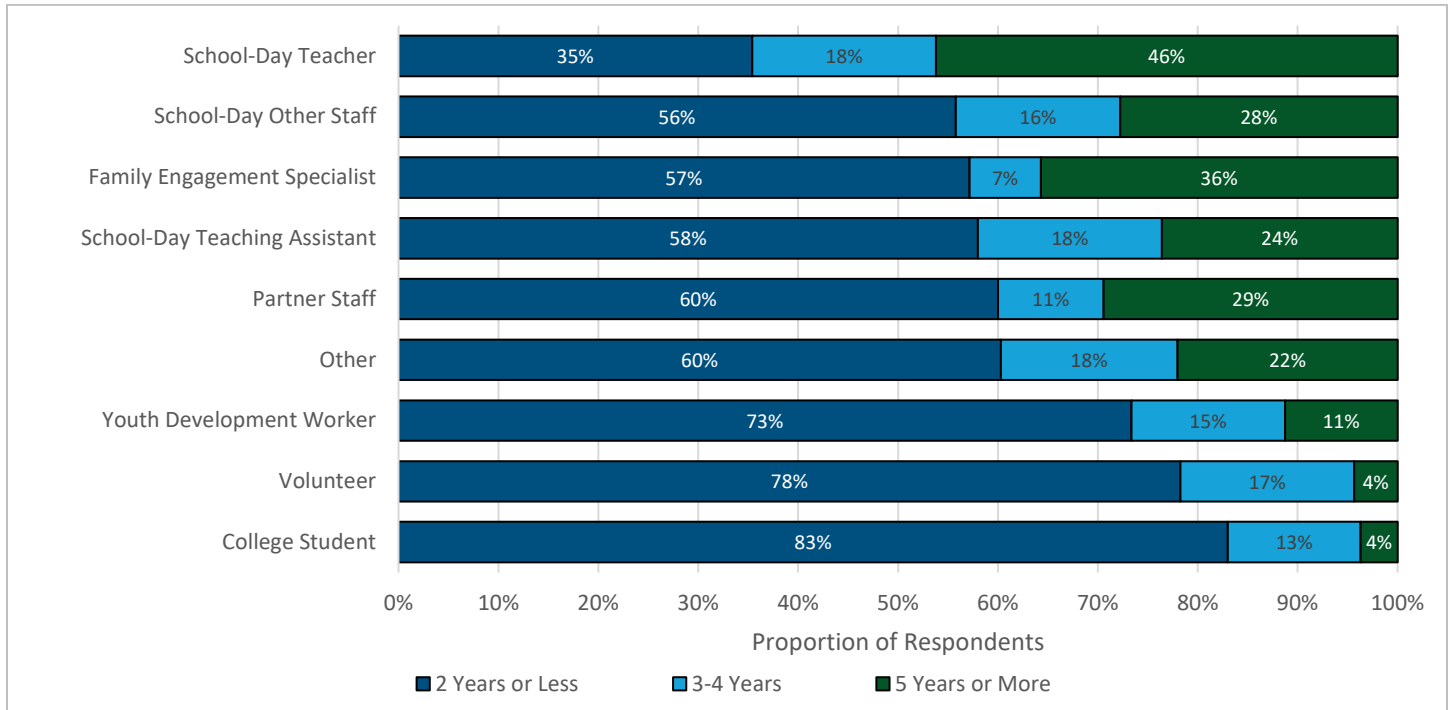
In terms of gender, race, and ethnicity, most survey respondents were female (78%), White (68%), and Hispanic (63%), although not necessarily all three. A sizable minority of staff (14%) were Black.



**Hiring, Orientation, and Professional Development**

Staff responding to the survey indicated feeling at least somewhat prepared for their job based on initial job training and orientation, with 84% saying that their orientation and training left them “very prepared” or “somewhat prepared.” However, about 12% of youth development workers and 17% of college students said that their initial job preparation left them only “a little prepared” or “not at all prepared.” In terms of requested improvements for professional development, the most commonly selected options were “more” (with 1,510 respondents selecting this option, or about half of the respondents answering this question) and “at more convenient times” (selected by 1,043 respondents, or about a third of the respondents who answered this question).

**Exhibit ES3. Texas ACE Frontline Staff Survey Respondent Years of Experience in Afterschool (Spring 2023 Frontline Staff Survey), by Staff Type**



Source. Frontline staff surveys collected by the American Institutes for Research in spring 2023.

Note. School-day teachers, *N* = 1,649; school-day teaching assistants, *N* = 814; school-day other staff, *N* = 364; family engagement specialists, *N* = 14; youth development workers, *N* = 364; partner staff, *N* = 85; college students, *N* = 406; volunteers, *N* = 23; other, *N* = 345. Texas ACE – Texas Afterschool Centers on Education.



**Activity Leadership**

The survey included questions about the types of activities the respondent leads or helps lead. The most reported activity type was homework help, with 65% of staff indicating that they lead or help lead this activity. School-day teachers were most likely to report leading tutoring, with 61% of teachers saying that they lead or help lead tutoring. School-day teachers also were most likely to indicate that they create their own activities without activity guides, curriculum, tools, or training provided by the program (with 53% of school-day teachers indicating that they plan activities this way).

Respondents also were asked how many hours they work in the program each week and how many students are typically in their activity sessions. Concerning hours per week, the overall average was 10.8 hours. Youth development workers, however, reported an average of 19.8 hours, whereas school-day teachers reported 6.5 hours. Youth development workers also reported the second highest group size for activities, with an average of 29.8 students per activity (the highest group size being reported by “other” staff). Of note, college students also had a high average number of students per activity session, at 26.5 per activity.



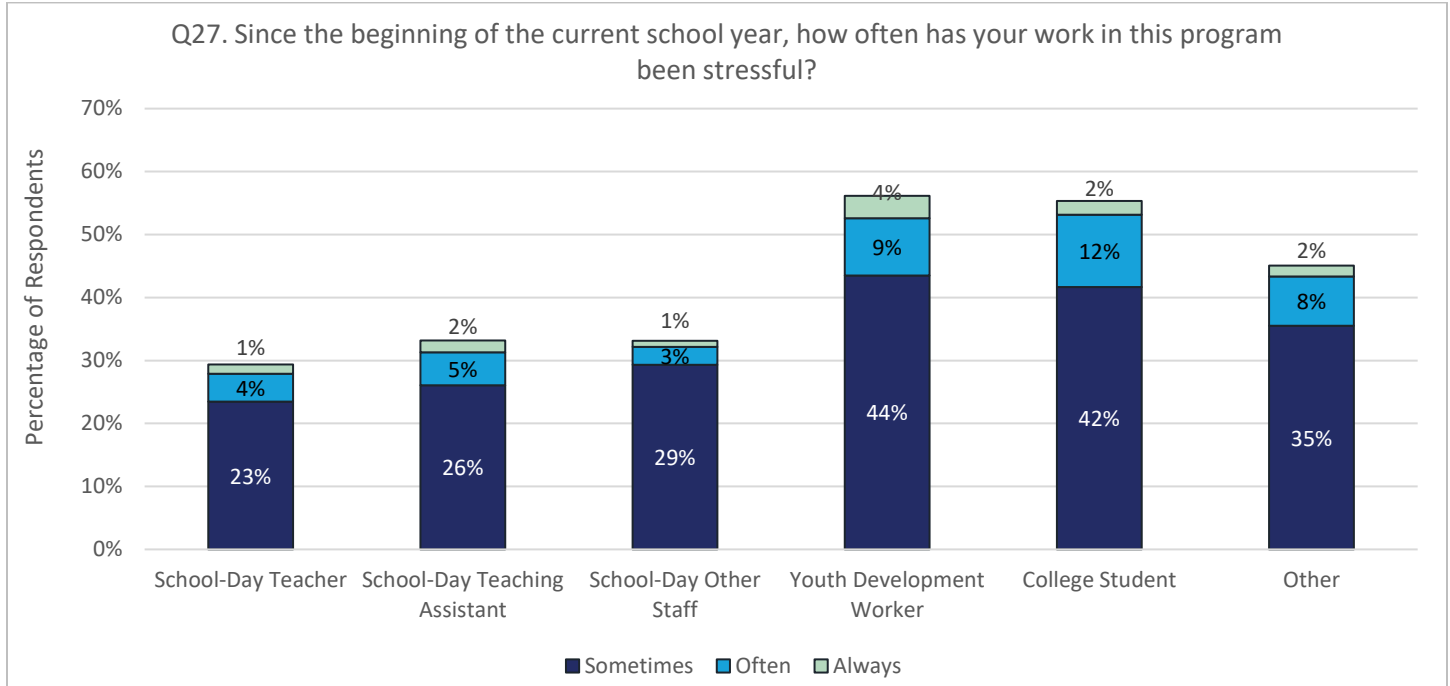
### Work Experiences, Stress, and Desired Changes

The largest section of the frontline staff survey was dedicated to questions on staff job satisfaction, workplace challenges, work-related stress, and desired job changes. Overall, staff reported positive experiences working in Texas ACE programs, with a strong majority of staff (more than 85%) indicating that they are “very satisfied” with relationships in the program, whether with other staff, leadership, or students. Workplace challenges are, for most staff, minor or not a challenge at all (about 90% of staff reported that each challenge asked about on the survey was “minor” or “not a challenge”), and most staff (92%) indicated that they experience work-related stress only sometimes, hardly ever, or never at all. For those staff who do experience stress (of any

frequency), most reported that they are coping with it very well (44%) or fairly well (38%).

There are notable and consistent differences in the staff responses to these questions when viewed by staff type, however. Youth development workers and college students reported less job satisfaction, higher levels of challenge, higher levels of stress, and less coping ability than did other staff types. Notably, more than half of the youth development workers and college students reported experiencing stress in their work at least “sometimes,” with 12% of youth development workers and 14% of college students indicating that they experience stress “often” or “always.” Also, 21% of youth development workers and 24% of college students said that they were coping with their stress only “somewhat well” or “not well at all.” In these ways, these two staff types stand out clearly in the data. See Exhibit ES4.

**Exhibit ES4. Texas ACE Staff Work-Related Stress (Frontline Staff Survey, Spring 2023), by Staff Type**



Source. Frontline staff survey collected by the American Institutes for Research in spring 2023.

Note. School-day teachers, N = 1,440; school-day teaching assistants, N = 687; school-day other staff, N = 314; youth development workers, N = 308; college students, N = 365; other, N = 293. Texas ACE – Texas Afterschool Centers on Education.



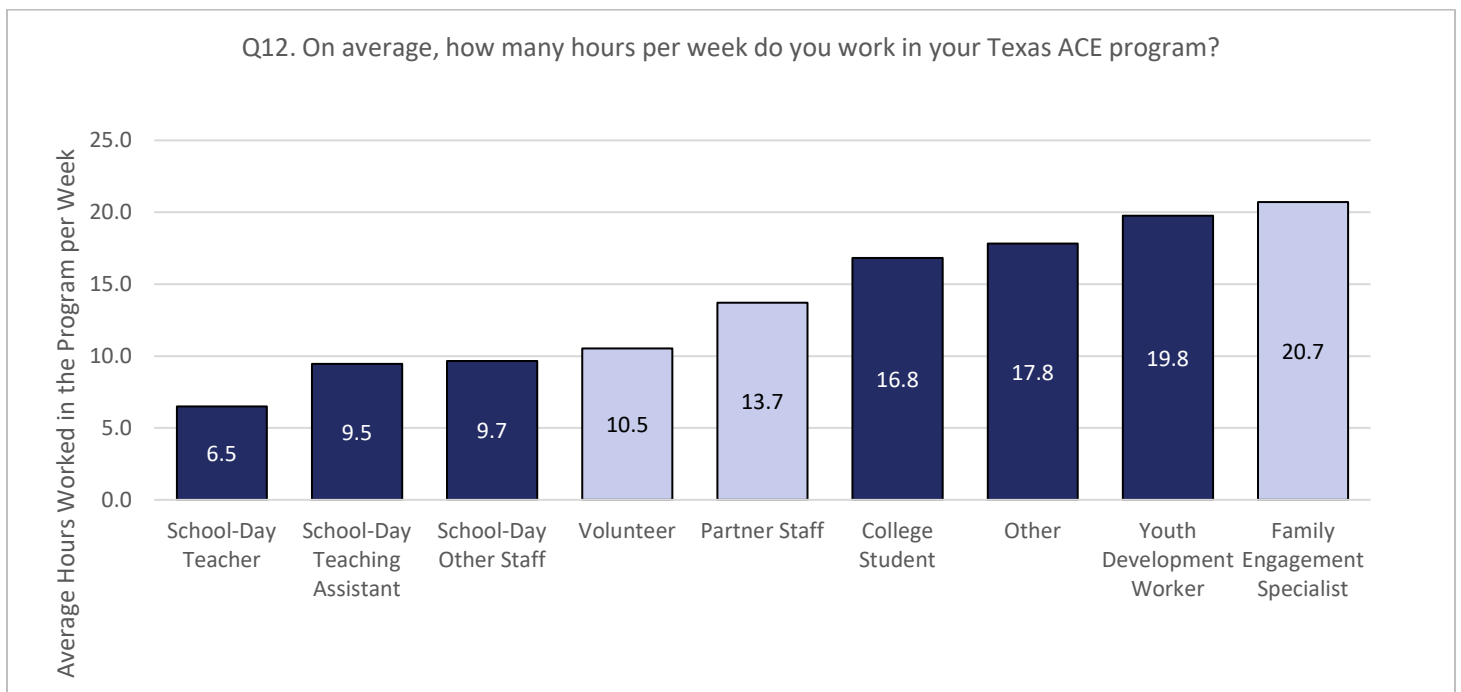
Finally, respondents were asked to indicate, from a list of 21 items, their top-three desired changes to improve their work experience in the Texas ACE program. By far the most selected response option was “improve pay and/or benefits,” with 67% of survey respondents selecting this option. All staff types selected this as their top change priority, but youth development workers and college students were most likely to select it (73% and 71%, respectively). Of particular note given the satisfaction, challenge, and stress data just mentioned, however, youth development workers and college students also were most likely to select “more work hours” as a highly desired change, with 45% and 52%, respectively, selecting this option. For reference, average hours worked are presented in ES5, by staff type.



### Job Satisfaction and Pay

Near the end of the survey, respondents were asked about overall job satisfaction and the level of pay. In terms of overall job satisfaction, 60% said that they were “completely satisfied” with their Texas ACE job, whereas another 30% said that they were “mostly satisfied.” Less than 2% indicated any level of overall job dissatisfaction. In terms of pay, the vast majority of staff responding to the survey were paid hourly, with an average hourly rate of \$23.80. However, youth development workers and college students reported a much lower average rate, at about \$14 per hour each. See Exhibit ES6.

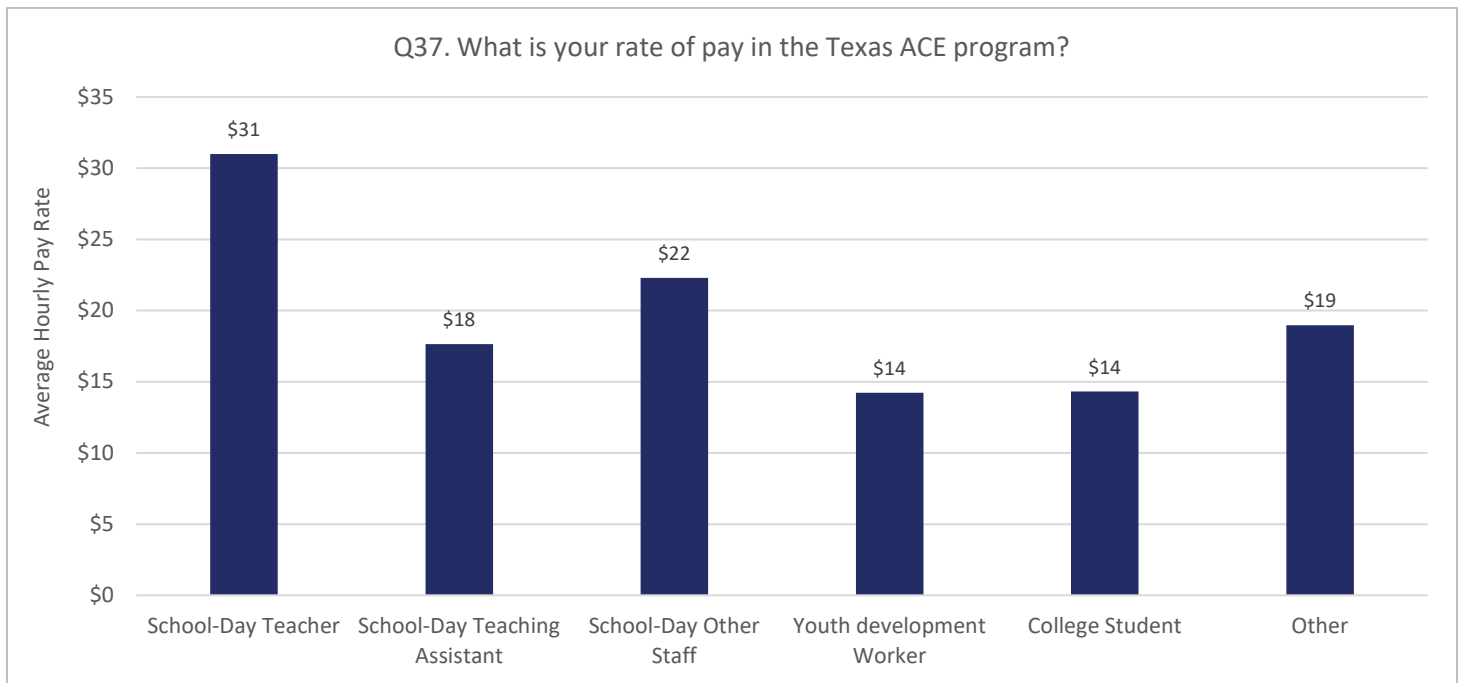
**Exhibit 20. Average Hours per Week as Reported by Texas ACE Staff (Frontline Staff Survey, Spring 2023)**



Source. Frontline staff survey collected by the American Institutes for Research in spring 2023.

Note. N = 1,525 for school-day teachers, 738 for school-day teaching assistants, 333 for school-day other staff, 14 for family engagement specialists, 324 for youth development workers, 83 for partner staff, 379 for college students, 20 for volunteers, and 311 for other staff (3,728 total). Texas ACE – Texas Afterschool Centers on Education. Lighter-shaded bars indicate low N size.

## ES6. Texas ACE Program Staff by Hourly Pay Rate (Spring 2023 Survey), by Staff Type



Source. Frontline staff survey collected by the American Institutes for Research in spring 2023.

Note.  $N = 2,663$ . Texas ACE – Texas Afterschool Centers on Education

### Discussion

The data presented in this report are best understood as a continuation of the analyses associated with the 2021–22 Perspectives on Staffing Report, mentioned earlier. Overall, the findings present a positive view on staffing at Texas ACE programs, with two important caveats. First, it is unknown the extent to which staff with more negative experiences may have either left the

Texas ACE program prior to the spring 2023 survey or simply chose not to respond to the survey given existing stress and workloads. Second, youth development workers and college students, as previously mentioned, appear to have lower job satisfaction, elevated stress, and more challenge leading activities compared with other staff types.