

A background photograph of a classroom scene. A female teacher with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a white t-shirt, is sitting on the floor and reading a colorful picture book to a group of young students. One boy in the foreground, wearing a white shirt, is looking at the book. Other students are visible in the background, some looking at the book and others looking away. The room has bookshelves filled with books and blue storage bins on a shelf in the background.

Teacher Voice: An open solicitation of teacher perspectives

Data gathered and provided to the Teacher Vacancy Taskforce

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Taskforce Background & Objectives

Background. The Teacher Vacancy Task Force (TVTF) is designed to help address staffing challenges facing Texas public schools. The TVTF Force will rely heavily on the presence and input of current teachers with the charge to ensure that Texas schools are equipped with a comprehensive set of strategies to address these challenges, working to:

- Understand the challenges districts are currently facing related to teacher vacancies.
- Share best practices for addressing critical teacher vacancy and shortage areas, including exploring opportunities for certification, placement, and hiring flexibilities.
- Develop recommendations for regulatory or other policy changes for TEA.
- Provide feedback on TEA initiatives designed to help impact vacancies.

Objectives. The overall objective is to capture broad perspectives directly from teachers on the issue of teacher shortages across Texas. More specific objectives include:

- Better understand the challenges (and opportunities) facing Texas teachers.
- Assess the current teacher experience and understand areas of potential policy change.
- Determine barriers and other non-sustainable conditions that may be driving teachers out of the profession.
- Collect and evaluate proposed solutions and sustainable teacher support models.

Survey Background & Limitations

- The Teacher Vacancy Taskforce was formed by the Texas Education Agency in March 2022.
- One taskforce member launched an open, on-line survey, soliciting teacher feedback, not intended to be a scientific study.
- The questionnaire was prepared in Google Forms, then advertised via a post on Facebook with an accompanying invitation link to complete the survey.
- Respondents were asked to answer three open-ended questions. Responses were anonymous; however, providing name and/or contact information was optional to survey participants. Screener questions were not included; and respondent profile questions only included the following, optional self-identifiers: teacher grade level and subject.
- There was no verification process associated with the survey, so any individual could respond, and individuals could respond more than once. No information was available as to regional or district-level patterns in the response. Similarly, there was no attempt to develop a formal sampling design or assigned quotas across any target population(s), thus anyone who was aware of the survey and self-motivated to reply to the on-line posting provided feedback.
- The survey remained open, collecting responses from March 11, 2022 to May 14, 2022.
 - 22,572 total responses were gathered
 - Of these, 2,905 respondents self-identified as something other than a teacher, and those responses were removed
 - Out of the remaining 19,667 responses, 172 self-reported as having resigned or retired within the last three years.

Survey Background: Questionnaire

Three open-ended questions were asked:

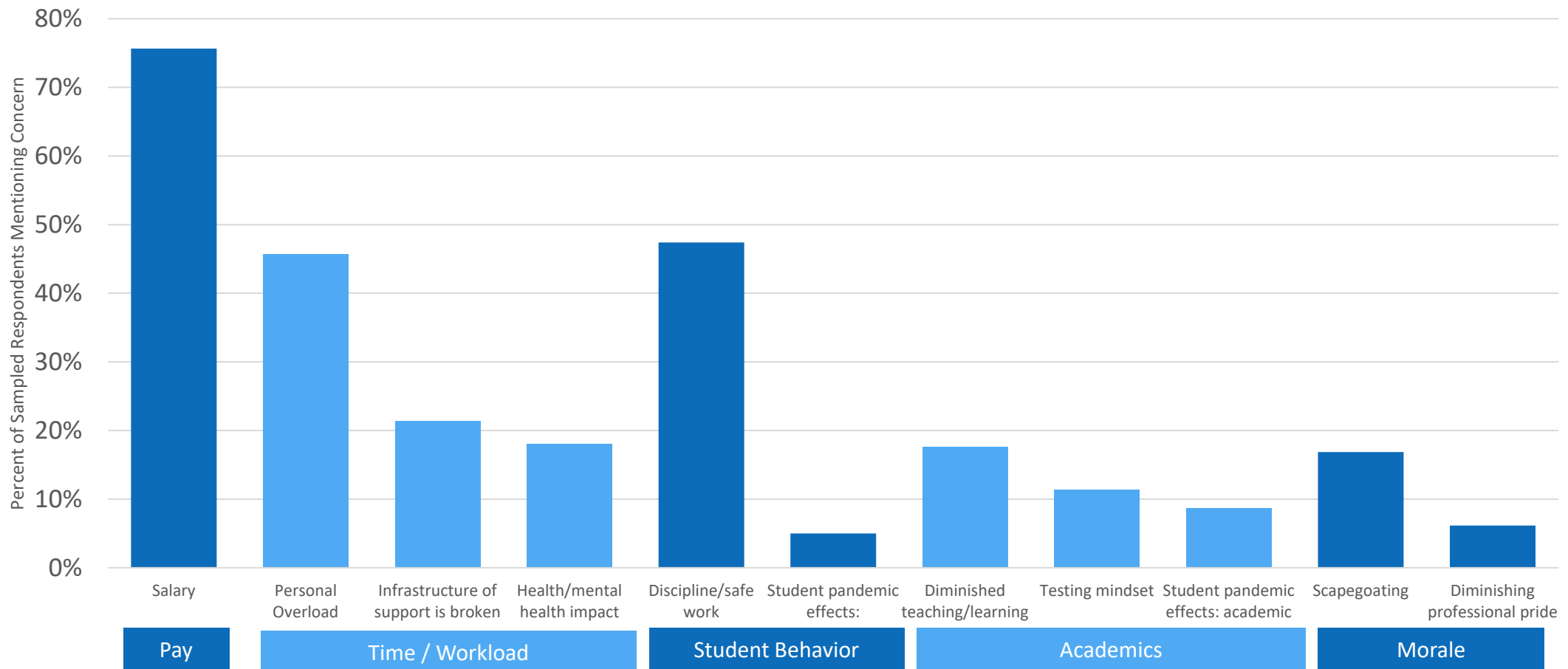
1. Please list the issues or reasons you believe are causing teacher shortages across Texas and the nation.
2. Please list some possible solutions that you think may mitigate teachers leaving the profession.
3. Please add any additional information that you want to share.

Survey Background: Synthesizing Feedback Collected

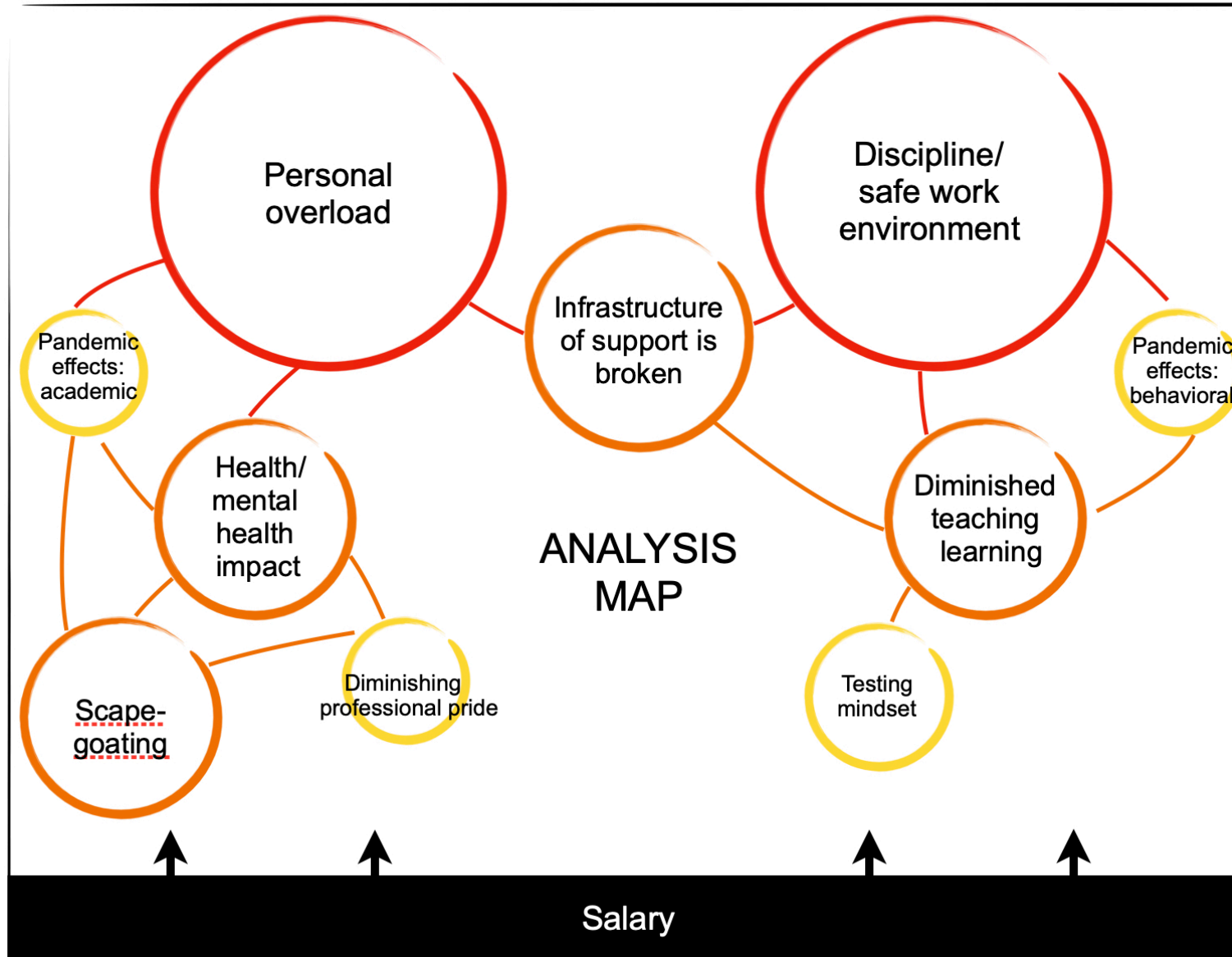
- Given the open-ended nature of the data gathered, TEA has attempted to synthesize the feedback into key findings.
- TEA staff conducted a sample methodology to quantify and construct a picture of what is most important to teachers. Samples of 1000 elementary and 1000 secondary teachers were randomly selected from the 19,667 responses. An additional sample of 172 teacher respondents who self-identified as retired or resigned within the last three years were also included in this analysis. (Of note, determining specific grade level and/or subject for survey respondents proved difficult as these questions were provided in an optional, open-ended format.)
- Given the open approach to the survey, caution should be used in interpreting results.
- Responses were reviewed as a whole, and categories of feedback themes were identified. Then all responses were assigned to one or more categories, based on what the respondent discussed. The categories are as follows:
 - Financial Growth:
 - Salary
 - Time / Workload:
 - Personal overload
 - Infrastructure of support is broken
 - Health/mental health impacts
 - Student Behavior:
 - Discipline/safe work environment
 - Student pandemic effects: behavioral
 - Academics:
 - Diminished teaching/learning
 - Testing mindset
 - Student pandemic effects: academic
 - Morale:
 - Scapegoating
 - Diminishing professional pride

Key Findings: Quantitative Results

Respondents highlighted multiple concerns, with the most frequently mentioned concern being financial. In some cases, there is some notable variation in responses between elementary & secondary, and for those recently retired/resigned.



Key Findings: Quantitative Results



- Random sample of 1,000 elementary teachers
- Random sample of 1,000 secondary teachers
- 172 recently retired/resigned (since 2019)

Key Findings: Narrative Examples

Pay

- *"I work at least one day every weekend. I grade papers at night. One 45-minute planning period is not enough time to prep for three different classes (one of which is college-level with no additional pay), grade papers, call parents...I love teaching, but if things do not change, I will be looking for another job. I have been teaching for 15 years, but this lifestyle is not sustainable for me or my family."* (10th/11th grade chemistry)

Time / Workload

- *Public education is the only profession that offers no meaningful incentive for excellence. For teachers to pursue an increase in compensation, they must leave the classroom. This is the most counterintuitive model for ensuring quality and recruitment of educators.* (10th grade social studies)

Key Findings: Narrative Examples

Student Behavior

- *Disruptive behaviors are a large barrier to successful teaching...There is a definite rise in unmanageable behaviors. A teacher can have exceptional classroom management, and still be unable to deliver quality content because of these behaviors. (Pre-K-4th grades)*

Academics

- *If teachers could focus on lesson planning and teaching, quality of instruction and student learning will go up. (Recently resigned, 1st-4th grades)*

Morale

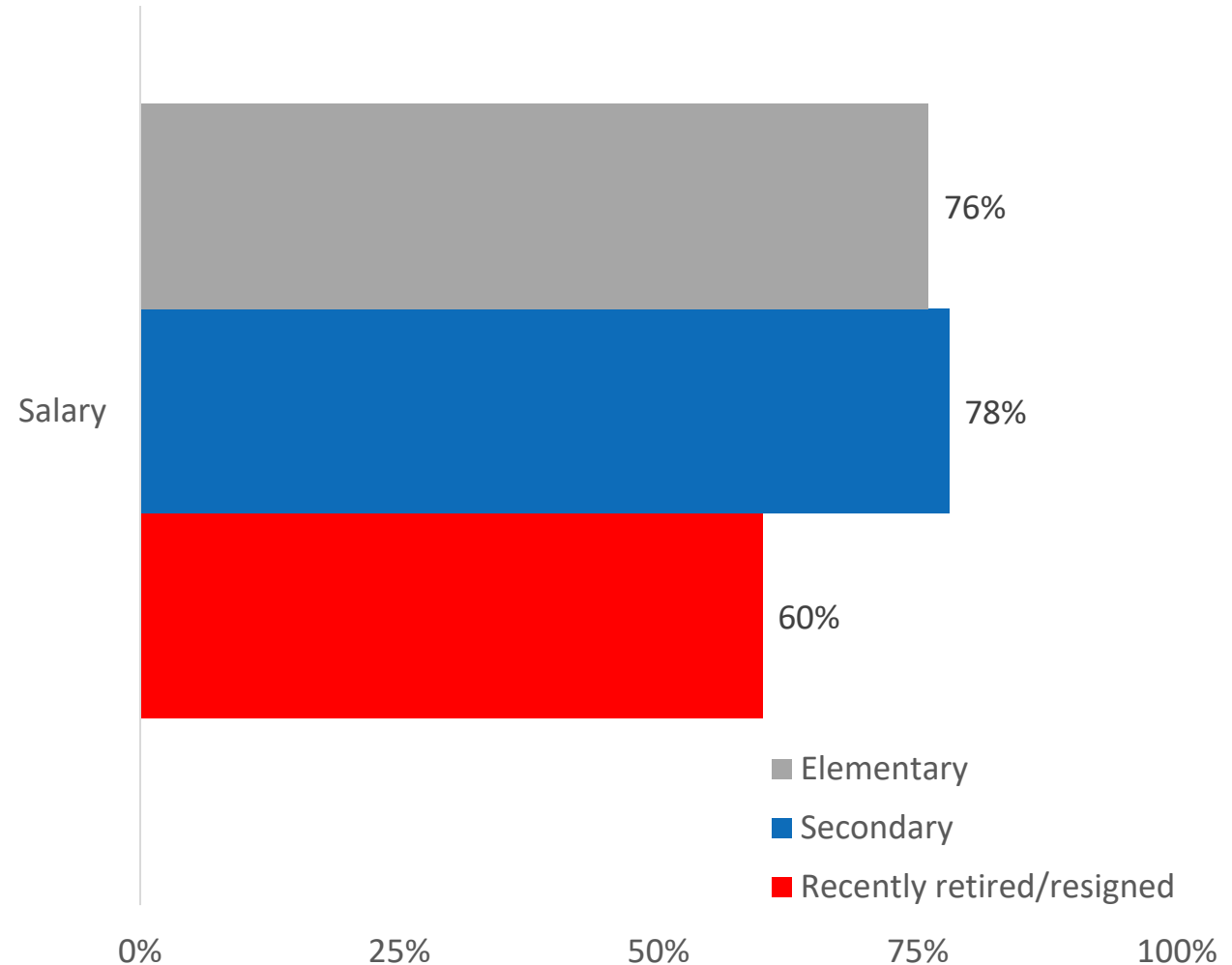
- *"I can not look someone in the eye right now and recommend them take on this career because although I love it with my whole heart and it's very rewarding, it is completely draining me physically, mentally, and emotionally." (2nd grade)*

A photograph of a family of four—two adults and two children—gathered around a white table in a bright, modern home setting. They are all looking at a laptop screen, appearing to be in a collaborative work or study session. The father, in the center, is pointing at the screen. The mother, on the right, is also looking at the screen. Two children, a girl on the left and a boy on the right, are also focused on the laptop. The background shows large windows and a contemporary interior design.

Professional and Financial Growth

Area of Concern: Financial Growth

Salary was cited more than all other issues as a concern. Notably, fewer teachers who recently resigned/retired cited salary concerns.



Teachers want to grow professionally and financially

- *We just hired someone who knows zero content, has terrible classroom management, uses MY lessons every day, and leaves early every day. She gets paid more than I do. This system is broken. I am one of the teachers leaving the profession. (8th grade science)*
- *Taking on more responsibility in the “real world” is a promotion, a level up, and a challenge one should be honored to do. Teachers are losing motivation because this culture isn’t present in education. (11th grade English)*
- *Last STAAR test my algebra 1 class had a 100% pass rate and I asked for a raise. I was told no. We can tell teachers they’re bad at their job when kids fail, but give them nothing when they succeed? (Recently resigned, 6-12th grades)*

Teachers want the incentives to align

- *Literally zero incentive to be excellent, as it only results in increased responsibilities on campus and less time for your students. (11-12th grade English)*
- *Bad teachers rewarded with less work, while good teachers are overworked. (10th grade history)*
- *We want to be treated like professionals...Right now it is very hard to get rid of poor teachers...We need to work on cleaning up our profession and hopefully the task force will figure out how to recruit good teachers. (8th grade)*

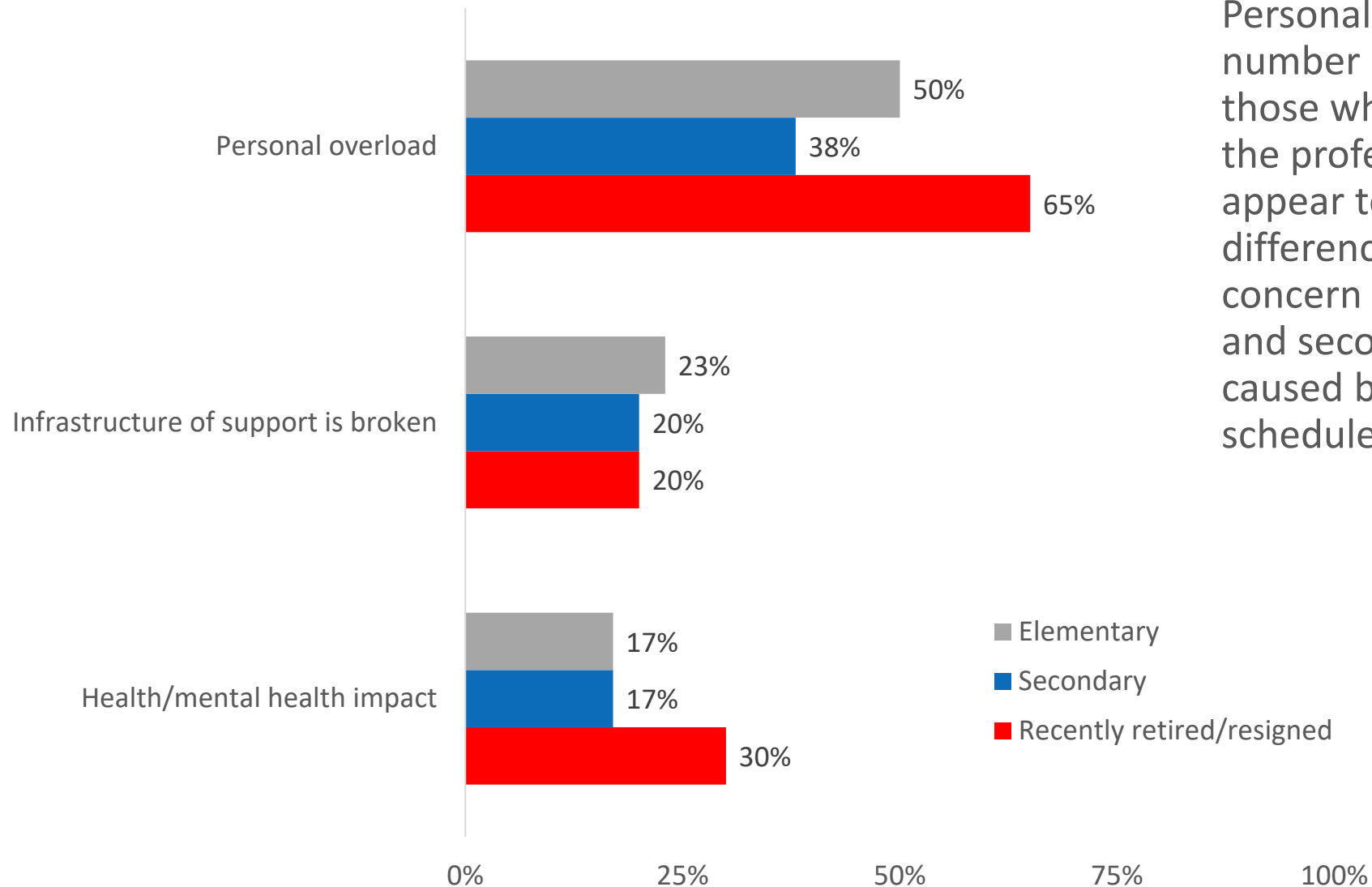
Among those who left, a supportive, solutions-oriented culture was lacking

- *Admin honestly does not get honest answers when they talk to teachers. We simply don't want the problems that come with saying anything that is not perky and positive. (Recently retired)*
- *Hostile Admin when teachers expressed their stress and feelings of being overwhelmed. Told if you have nothing positive to say do not speak. Asking for help or support was not encouraged. (Recently retired, 6-8th grades)*
- *I resigned from teaching this past year after 9 years and these are my honest thoughts. I never had enough courage to say how I really felt in team/faculty meetings because it was highly frowned upon to speak out. If it was not positive, then no one wanted to hear it. (Recently resigned, 6th grade)*
- *I retired as soon as I was eligible...low pay was NOT the problem. Being overworked and under-appreciated was what defeated me. (Recently retired)*

A background photograph of a school hallway with large windows. A group of students, mostly wearing backpacks, are walking up a set of stairs. The scene is brightly lit by natural light from the windows. The text "Teacher time & workload" is overlaid on the lower-left portion of the image.

Teacher time & workload

Area of Concern: Time / Workload



Personal overload was the number one issue cited for those who had recently left the profession. There appear to be notable differences in the level of concern between primary and secondary, potentially caused by how elementary schedules are structured.

The teaching role is often structured with too many duties to allow for excellence

- *Even on the best days, I felt like I could never get it all done in order to be a great teacher. I could be an average to below-average teacher all day long, but that didn't suit me or my dreams. (Recently resigned, 2nd-3rd grades)*
- *Too difficult to ever take a day off without serious anxiety... I was heartbroken to leave. Everything became so stressful. I cried daily. My anxiety was at an all time high. More and more pressure and more and more duties assigned. I can assure you I would teach for teacher pay, but I can't do it with the expectations placed on teachers anymore. Even more pay isn't enough to do a quality job to meet all the expectations. (Recently resigned, 7th grade)*
- *Teaching is like 2 full time jobs. At school you teach and support students. At home you answer emails, grade, plan, and analyze data. Each year districts add more and more to the plates of teachers with minimal pay increase. There is no such thing as balance...This is a crisis. What will we do with the children, the future, when there are not enough teachers to teach? (Recently resigned, ESL)*

The teaching role is often structured with too many duties to allow for excellence

- *If you are a good teacher, you will be loaded down with so much that you will burn out within a few years. (4th-6th grades)*
- *So many "one more things" have been added to what teachers are expected to do in the past two years and nothing has been taken off a teacher's plate... Most important: If you do a great job, you get more work. If you do a bad job, you get less work, easier schedule, and easier kids to teach. (7-8th grades)*
- *Teachers are expected to do an extreme amount of things in a short amount of time. We are not only planning and teaching kids, we are filling out endless paperwork, completing classes to better our teaching, several meetings a week during our "planning time", and many more things. All that leaves us very little time to actually plan and prep activities for the kids. Admin wants memorable lessons, which I agree, but we are never given the time to plan those. (2nd grade)*

The infrastructure of support is broken

- *Aides are not being managed well, substitutes are not showing up to fill in when teachers are out or in professional development, aides are pulled to substitute. (1st grade)*
- *It feels like we lose at least one paraprofessional a month. (1st grade)*
- *With lack of substitutes many teachers are covering classes during their conference time and have no planning time during the day. Need to pay substitutes at least what we are paying for fast food workers...aides salaries are not a living wage. Schools don't function without them. At our school they have become teachers daily due to shortages. (7th grade)*
- *New roles need to be created to take some of the load off teachers. (Recently retired, 4th grade)*

The workload is negatively impacting teacher health

- *I resigned this year, not because I want more pay, but because I am absolutely worn out. I've done everything I can to keep going: exercise, eating well, sleep, friends/church/community, and even antidepressants. But more and more is added to my plate yet nothing is taken off. Jeans passes and toxic positivity are not the answer. We need real support. (Recently resigned, 2nd grade)*
- *Review procedures that are time consuming and figure ways to simplify them. Reduce meetings and keep as emails. I resigned in December after 16 years and much soul searching and many tears. My level of exhaustion was negatively affecting my health and ability to care for my family. I didn't think I'd leave teaching before retirement but just couldn't keep up this year. (Recently resigned, high school)*
- *Not enough time in the day to actually plan and get work done so of course I'm working on my own time and sacrificing my health and wellness from the stress. Inability to take a day off if sick or have a personal issue such as a funeral because we don't have subs. It's beyond the point of being acceptable and we are just tired of being treated so poorly. So, the solution is, we're done. Leaving the profession for good. (10-12th grades)*

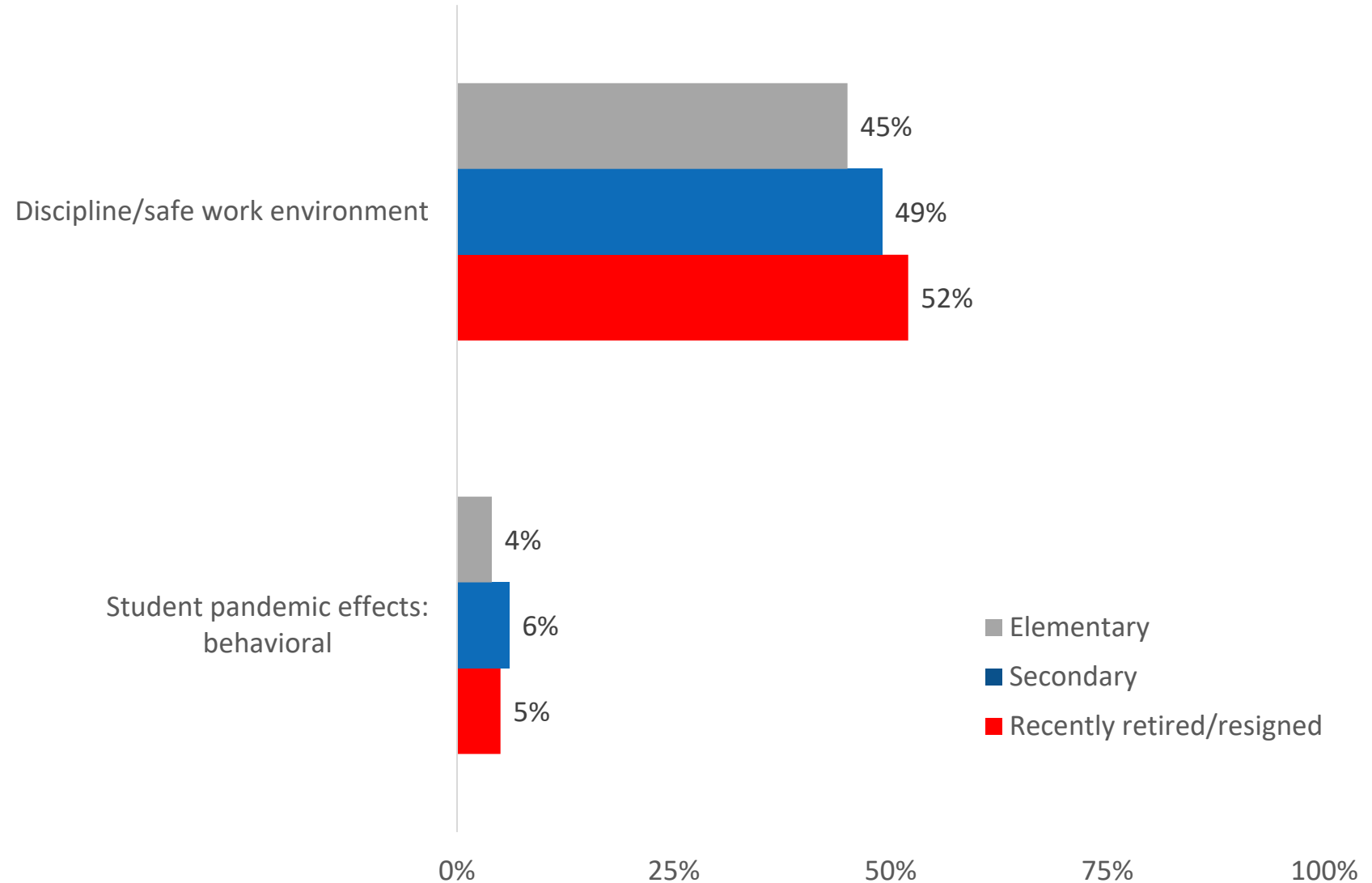
Teacher perspectives on possible solutions

- *I am offended to my core that a proposed solution to teacher shortages is to hire LESS qualified people. Just because there is another adult in my building does not mean I am doing less work; on the contrary, if under-qualified people are hired to fill teaching positions, that will inevitably create MORE work for those of us who are committed to providing our students with the education they deserve. (HS math)*
- *Take some of the clerical work away—Hire lower paid wage earners to do the mountain of clerical duties that degreed teachers are now doing. We are being paid to make copies, input data, file, & monitor hallways...these tasks do not require degreed individuals. (9-10th biology)*
- *We love teaching, we love our kids! Take all the extra stuff away and people wouldn't want to quit. (4th-5th grades)*



Student Behavior

Area of Concern: Student Behavior



Student behavior concerns

- *Lack of support from administration in regard to behavior in the classroom...not taking the steps to ensure the safety of the teacher or other students in the classroom. If they do remove the student that is having behavior problems then they only have them for five minutes, have them sit in the office for a second, give them a prize and then return them to the classroom...Lack of consequences for behavioral issues then being told that the problem is our classroom management. (Pre-K)*
- *Students must have immediate consequences for disruptive behavior. The rights of the rest of the class and the teacher must be AT LEAST as valuable and protected as the rights of the disruptive student. (7th grade)*
- *Schools need to have the ability to remove students who pose a threat to the safety of others. Teachers should not fear for their safety going to work everyday. (11 grade history)*

Student behavior concerns

- *Students are frequently absent, usually with parental knowledge. I have about 15% of students missing anywhere between 10-90 days of school already this year. I can't teach students if parents don't make them come to school. (11-12th history)*
- *Student misbehavior is astronomical and admin in my building are so busy putting out fires, you're lucky if they come when you have a kid throwing desks. I do everything, but actually teach during my day. I come to school anxious about what kid is going to physically hurt me/others during the day. (2nd grade)*

Pandemic aftereffect: behavior development

- *The children are not ok. HEAR ME. LISTEN TO US. The children are not ok. I teach 2nd grade. I have kids cry every single day. Many. Often. I've taught 2nd grade for a decade. I have the number of students crying in a week that used to cry in a year. My kids have never had a normal school year. They are experiencing severe emotional and social repercussions from the pandemic, and that affects behavior, which is not good at all. It's immature, it's often, and it's impeding learning. I feel like a correctional officer most days. Or a therapist. And I cannot do anymore. (2nd grade)*
- *Student needs are greater than ever before and I do not have the resources to meet the emotional and educational needs of 180 11-13 yr olds...The students are feral and have immature social skills for their age. Teachers can't teach content if their students are missing basic soft skills. (7-8th grades)*

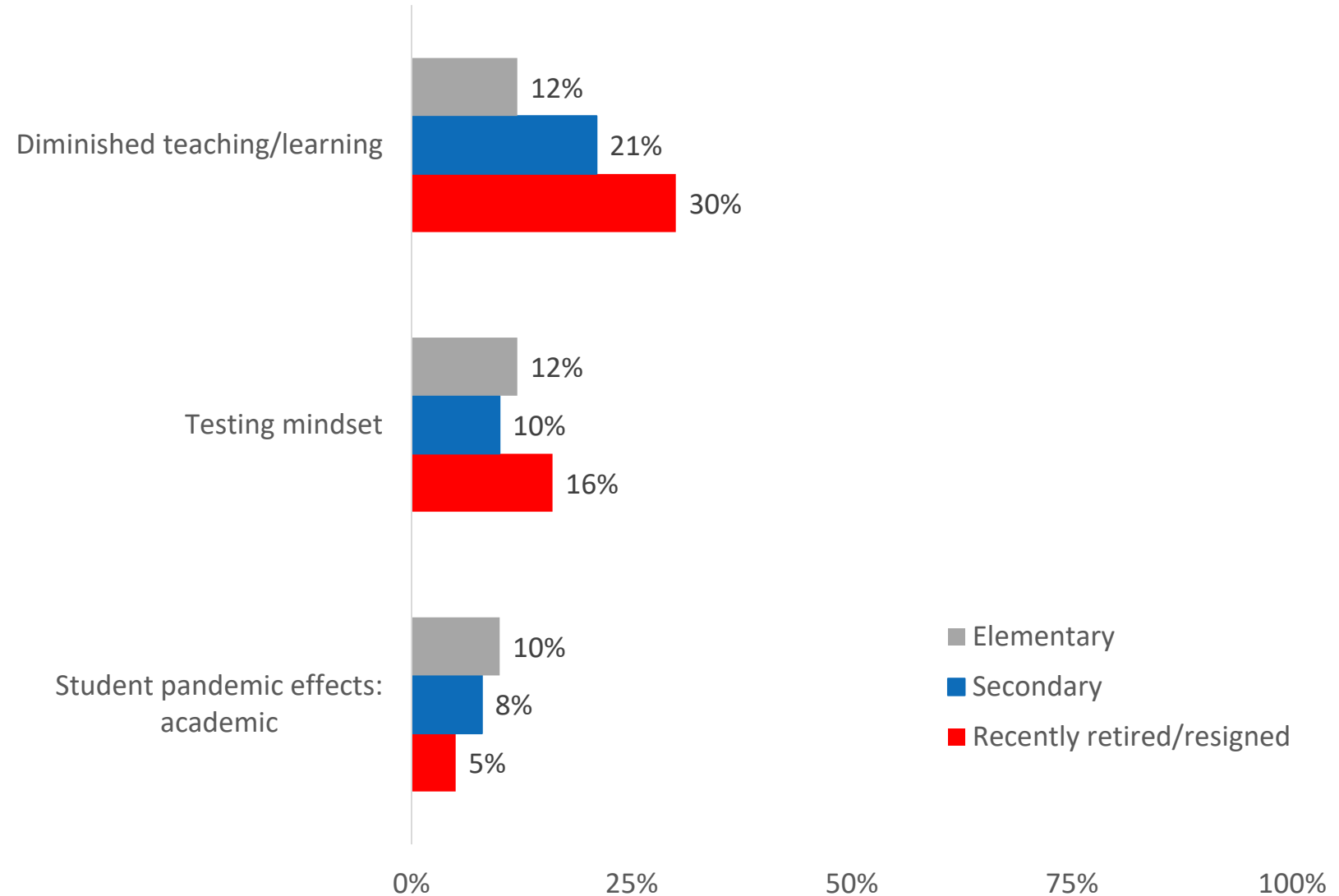
Teacher perspectives on possible solutions

- *More support with atypical behaviors which means unfortunately more people and/or small class sizes and/or more counselors, it may also mean removing those students from the classroom (they are keeping others from learning) or providing daily counseling, social skills classes and/or put them in a class with a smaller teacher student ratio with a support person (I am referring to something outside of sped, it would be a gen Ed model that possibly could fall under 504). (Kindergarten)*
- *Schools need qualified mental health professionals and social workers to meet the needs of students and families. Teachers do not have the expertise or the time needed to address these issues...Students deserve professionals who are trained to help them, not overworked teachers. Teachers, social workers, and counselors should be a team with each person providing services within their field of expertise. (11-12th grade history)*

A photograph of a young Black male student sitting at a desk, smiling and looking at a laptop. He is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. His right hand is on the laptop keyboard, and his left hand is resting on his chin. On the desk next to the laptop is a white coffee cup on a saucer and a stack of books. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor setting.

Academics Concerns

Area of Concern: Impact on Academics



Teachers express concern about factors preventing students from meeting academic goals

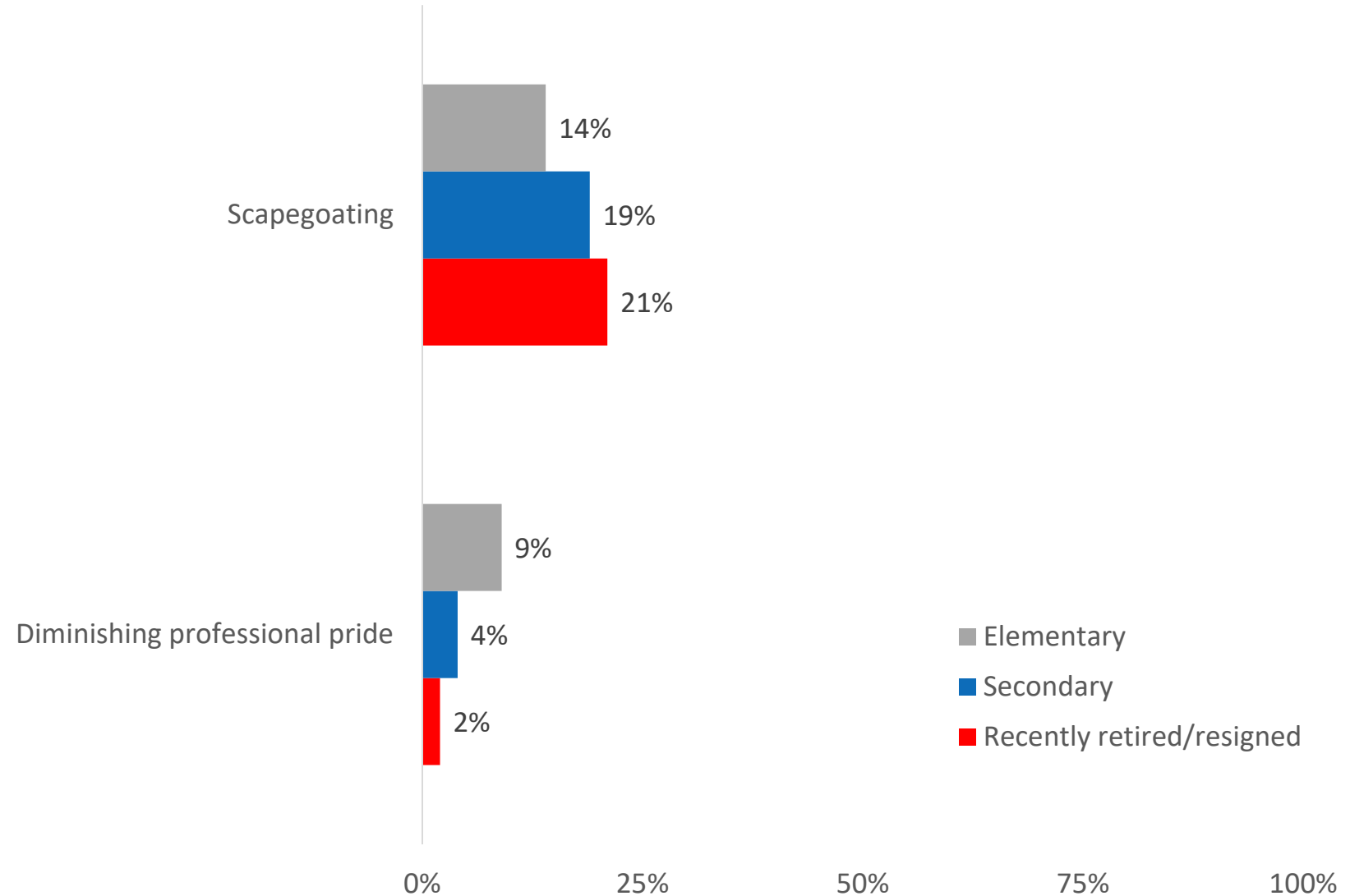
- *Students are not accountable for their grades. A student can literally fail all of their classes, do no work whatsoever, yet be pushed to the next grade level. They know this. It's been learned. (Recently resigned, 6-8th grades)*
- *Here's a biggie for me: students and parents not being held responsible for attendance, but teachers being held accountable for students' lack of STAAR growth (despite attendance far below the required 90% rate). (4th grade)*
- *Kids are so far behind but we are pretending like these gaps don't exist. We are getting crucified for dropping scores. Meeting after meeting after meeting about how we aren't reaching our STAAR goals. It's our fault, always our fault, that the kids aren't learning. It's our fault that we can't close impossible gaps. (8th grade ELA)*

Teachers express concern about factors preventing students from meeting academic goals

- *My worth as a teacher is measured on 1 day by 1 test. Nothing else is factored into that. How many days was the student absent? What grade level can the student actually read on? (Because most of my students are not on the appropriate reading level)...State testing really doesn't bother me. But that shouldn't be the main thing that deems if I am an effective teacher or not. (7-8th grades)*
- *Lessen paperwork. If I have 112 students—10 SPED and 12 504s that have 8 accommodations each it becomes impossible to meet needs. (Recently resigned, 5th grade)*
- *Inclusion is not worth it if no ends up learning... Teachers are only one person and simply can not be held responsible for tailoring an education for all ability levels. (Recently resigned, 6-8th grades ELA)*
- *To much to teach (for instance, there are so many 1st grade math TEKS that I feel like I'm doing 'drive by teaching' and not able to deepen understanding.) (1st grade)*

Morale

Area of Concern: Impact on Morale



Teachers express concern about the profession

- *The crushing weight of expectations from ourselves and society (2nd grade)*
- *If current teachers are happy and treated with respect, they will be more likely to recruit others. In the current climate, most of us would discourage our students and our own children from entering the classroom. (HS math)*
- *My mom was disappointed when I decided to become a teacher. It hurt my feelings, but I did it anyway. Now, the thought of encouraging my own kids to go into this profession is something I'd have a hard time doing. I don't want them living overwhelming and stressful lives, feeling undervalued and underpaid. At this time, I don't know many people that would encourage pursuing teaching to our upcoming generation, and I think that's an incredibly scary problem...the scarcity of promising educators will be the next pandemic. (1st grade)*

Teachers note COVID's impact

- *This is not new news...The pandemic only ripped off the veil...Teachers didn't start leaving or retiring because of the pandemic. Those flood gates have been opening for a long time. COVID just pushed out a tidal wave, exposing the increasing rise in the tide. (Recently retired, Kindergarten)*
- *We didn't flinch, we just kept teaching when administrators didn't have solutions or answers. (Pre-K)*
- *In a matter of two years, we go from zero to hero. When the world shut down, we figured out how to still teach despite having too few resources or training to do so. (9-12th grades)*
- *In April of 2020, teachers were heroes. Parents suddenly home with their children were so appreciative of how we structure the days to include quality instruction, social-emotional lessons, nutrition, exercise, all of it. Coming back in August of 2020 was HARD. (3rd-5th grades)*
- *I'm not sure how we went from being the heroes of 2020 to the enemy of 2022. (2nd-5th grades)*

Teacher perspectives on possible solutions

- *Realize that COVID changed everything. It is time to redesign education. There can't be the same systems in place from before COVID. The kids and teachers have changed. Some expectations need to go away, but a new set of standards can be set. It's time to redesign education for a post-COVID world. (Recently resigned, 10th grade biology)*
- *We need to completely rethink the way we teach school. It is time for Texas to be innovative and forward thinkers in education. We can keep doing what we have always done and try patching it...OR we can create new roads that will make us the leaders of education in the US and the world! (Kindergarten)*
- *What if teaching were a highly sought-after career that our best and brightest aspired to? Imagine the transformative potential. At this point, you have to be a fool in one way or another to want to be a teacher. The benefits do not outweigh the personal, professional, and economic downsides and it isn't even close. (4th-12th grade music)*