



2026-2027

School Workforce Trends Report

Navigating Retention, Burnout,
and Support in K-12



School professionals continue to show up for students every single day, even as the job becomes more demanding. From staffing shortages and growing student needs to burnout and safety concerns, today's school workforce is navigating a level of pressure that many can no longer ignore.

To better understand what educators and school-based specialists are experiencing right now, Soliant Health surveyed 1,000 school employees across the U.S. about the challenges shaping their work, what matters most in an education role, and what kinds of support would make the biggest difference.

28.9%
considered
leaving their
role in the
past year

**Work-Life
Balance**
outranks Salary
as the top job-
choice factor

58.3% of SLPs
considered leaving in
the past 12 months,
placing them at the
highest flight risk

Key Takeaways for **District Leaders**

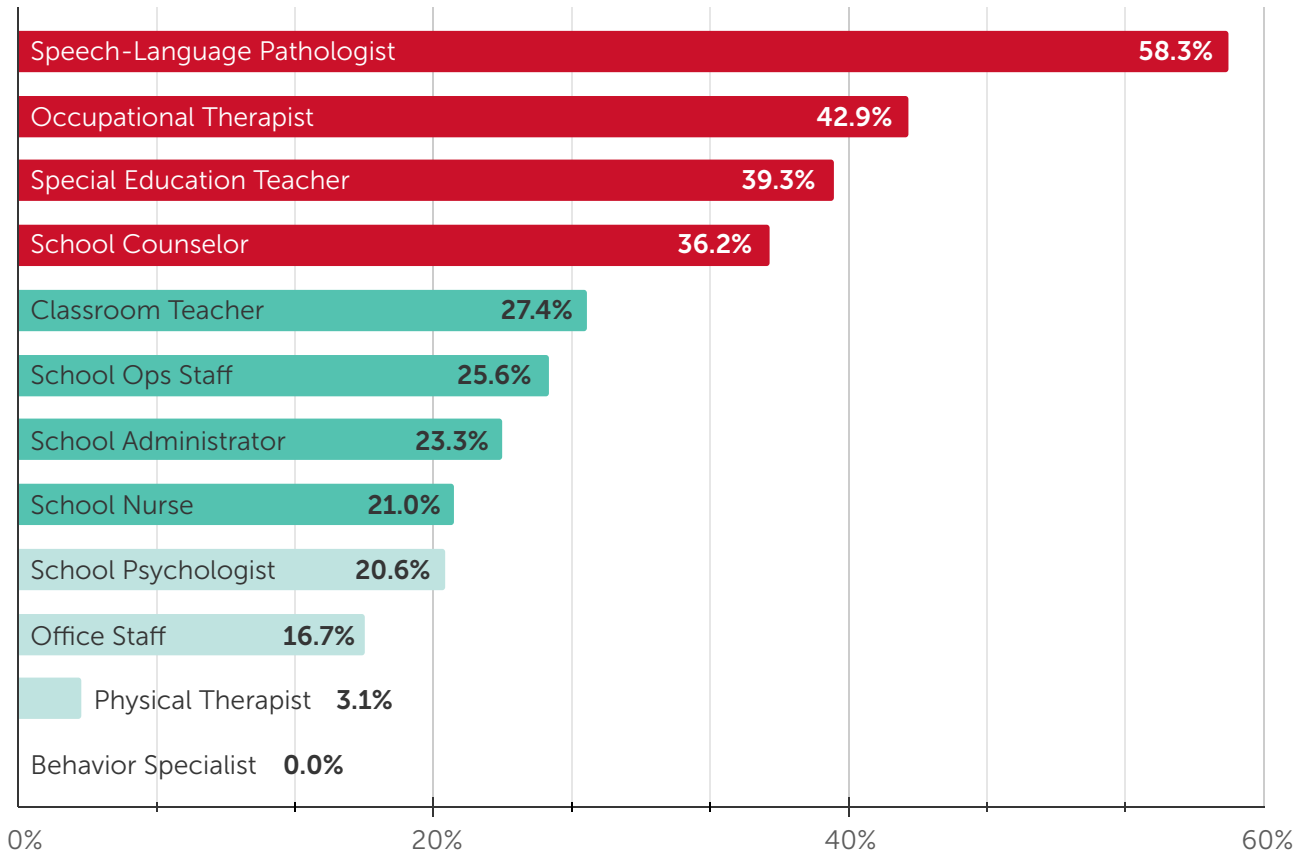
- **Retention Risk is Role-Specific:** Overall flight risk sits at 28.9%, but specialized roles like SLPs (58.3%), OTs (42.9%) and Special Education Teachers (39.3%) face the steepest departure threats.
- **Culture and Balance Outrank Salary:** Financial compensation is not the primary driver of job choice. Work-life balance (29.4%) and job stability (29.1%) lead as top factors, with both selected roughly 1.5 times more often than salary (19.7%).
- **Burnout is a Compound Issue:** Burnout isn't driven by a single factor. Student behavior, staffing gaps, high caseloads, and safety concerns are tightly clustered as top drivers, requiring holistic operational relief.

Retention Risk is **Real**

Nearly 3 in 10 school professionals (28.9%) have considered leaving their role in the past 12 months. However, looking at overall averages hides severe pressure points within specialized clinical and instructional roles.

Specialized service providers and special education staff show the clearest alarm signals. Speech-Language Pathologists (58.3%) and Special Education Teachers (39.3%) represent critical retention risks. Additionally, only **12.8% of all respondents plan to stay in education until retirement**, with 71.6% anticipating an exit within 4 to 10 years.

FLIGHT RISK BY ROLE



Data Source: Survey data collected by Opinion Matters (see methodology section for more information)

High Risk (>30%) Moderate Risk (20%-30%) Lower Risk (<20%)

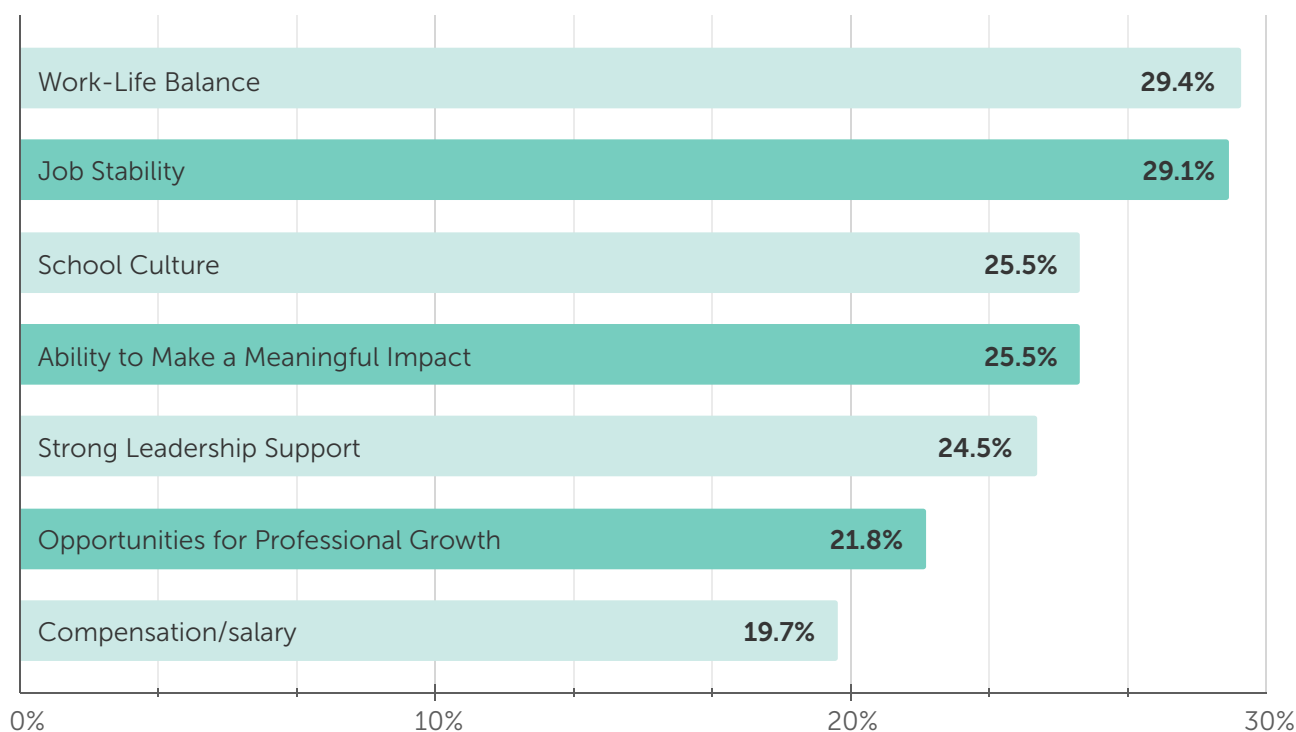
MID-CAREER DANGER ZONE

Mid-career professionals (ages 35–44) are the most vulnerable age demographic, with **35.0% considering leaving** in the past year—nearly double the rate of 25–34-year-olds (17.7%). Meanwhile, school nurses report the shortest anticipated runway in the field, with a mean expected time remaining of just 4.95 years.

Salary is Not the Top Reason People Choose Jobs

When evaluating new job opportunities, educators and school specialists prioritize personal and environmental stability over financial compensation. **Work-life balance** (29.4%) and **job stability** (29.1%) were selected as the top factors, followed closely by **supportive school culture** (25.5%) and the **ability to make a meaningful impact** (25.5%).

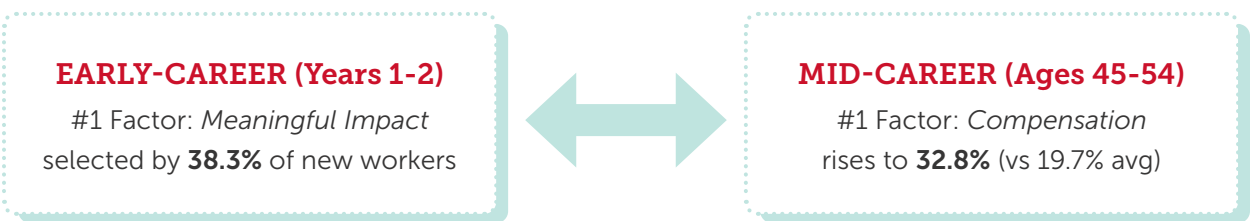
TOP FACTORS WHEN CHOOSING A ROLE



Data Source: Survey data collected by Opinion Matters (see methodology section for more information)

CAREER STAGE SHIFTS MOTIVATORS

Job priorities shift *significantly* as professionals advance through their careers:



Burnout is Not Being Driven by **One Single Issue**

The top six burnout factors in schools are clustered within 4 percentage points of each other, demonstrating that educators face a compound crisis rather than a single pain point.

TOP CONTRIBUTORS TO EDUCATOR BURNOUT



Data Source: Survey data collected by Opinion Matters (see methodology section for more information)

ROLE-SPECIFIC STRESS PROFILE

Special Education Teachers: Point heavily to student behavior challenges (27.4%) and high caseloads (25.2%).

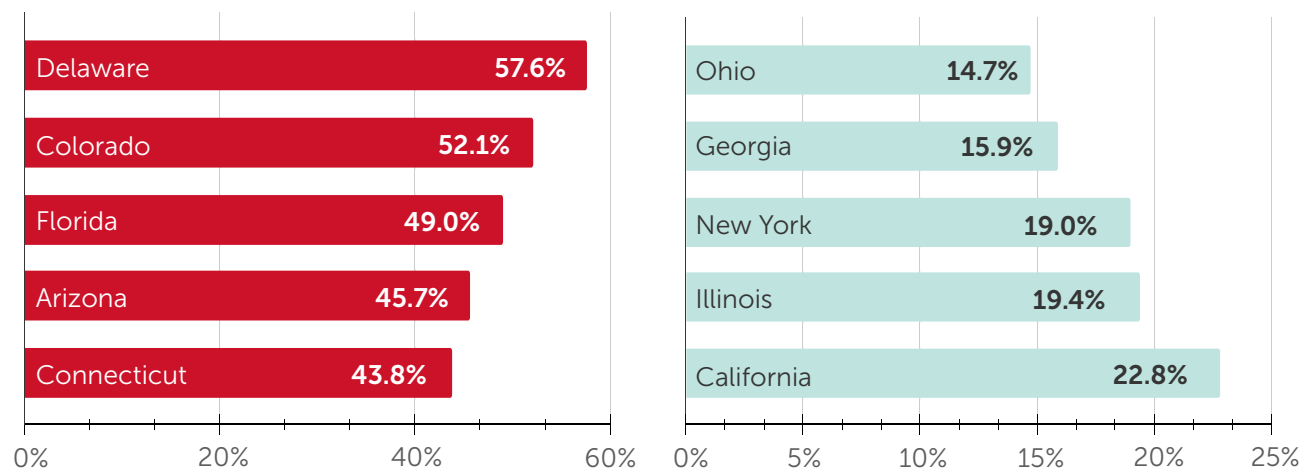
Classroom Teachers: Cite staffing shortages (24.2%) as their single primary driver of day-to-day strain.

School Psychologists: Over-index on student behavior (27.9%), high caseloads (25.0%), and student mental health needs (23.5%).

School Professionals Are Asking for **Structural Support**

When asked what would most improve their ability to do their job effectively, educators prioritized operational stability over standalone pay increases. Leading requests include **strong leadership support** (18.1%), **improved safety measures** (17.1%), **better mental health resources for students** (17.2%), and **additional support staff** (16.2%).

RETENTION COMPARISON (% Considering Leaving)



Data Source: Survey data collected by Opinion Matters (see methodology section for more information)

■ Highest Flight Risk ■ Highest Retention Stability

REGIONAL INSIGHTS

Florida (49.0% Flight Risk): Driven by safety concerns (26.5%) and high caseloads (18.6%). Top ask: additional support personnel (18.6%).

Georgia (15.9% Flight Risk): Highly stable with a 29.5% retirement rate, but strained by administrative paperwork (27.3% top burnout driver). Top needs: extra staff, smaller caseloads, and reduced paperwork (22.7% each).

Ohio & Connecticut: Both states highlighted *improved educator voice in district decisions* as their #1 required support lever (32.4% in OH, 25.0% in CT).

The Path Forward

Addressing school workforce challenges for the 2026-2027 school year requires more than simply filling open vacancies. District leaders must combine tactical recruitment with structural, on-the-ground support.



Protect High-Risk Roles

Target SLPs, OTs, and SPED teachers with dedicated support staff, caseload caps, and paperwork relief.



Lead Recruitment with Culture & Balance

Highlight work-life balance, job stability, and supportive leadership in job descriptions rather than focusing solely on salary.



Intervene Early for Mid-Career Retention

Create specialized retention pathways for mid-career staff (years 5–15), who face significantly higher flight risk than entry-level peers.



Elevate Educator Voice in Decision-Making

Incorporate staff input into scheduling, safety policies, and operational changes to build administrative trust.

About Soliant

Behind every staffing challenge is a student who needs support and a school professional doing their best to meet that need. Soliant partners with districts nationwide to help fill critical staffing gaps with qualified school-based professionals, so students get the services they need and educators get the support they deserve.

Learn more about Soliant's trusted [staffing solutions](#) today and start building stronger, more sustainable teams that students rely on most.

About The Report

The Soliant 2026 School Workforce Trends Report is based on a survey of 1,000 U.S. school employees conducted by [Opinion Matters](#) between March 13–24, 2026. Respondents included instructional staff, therapists, and school support professionals across age groups and states.

Explore the full report at soliant.com/blog/soliant-2026-school-workforce-trends-report