

Horace Mann Educator Advisory Panel Survey*

Horace Mann Market Intelligence

March 2019

Early Days as an Educator

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Retirement Readiness

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*The Horace Mann Educator Advisory Panel has been in place since 2004 and consists of educators from across the country. Educators that sign up for the advisory panel are asked to complete 4 to 5 online surveys each year. Survey topics include a mix of educational-related topics and topics related to insurance and retirement. Currently, around 1,700 educators belong to the panel and are mostly Public K-12 teachers. Less than 15% of the panel members are Horace Mann customers.

Early Days as an Educator: Key Highlights

In February 2019, 569 educators responded to the latest Horace Mann Educator Advisory Panel survey. This survey asked educators about their experiences on their first day and first year in the classroom.

- The most common misconception of new teachers is that all students are well motivated and eager to learn. Many underestimated the behavior problems they ultimately encountered. Additionally, inadequate parental support along with their own inexperience and poor planning helped create a mild sense of chaos in that first week.
- A good mentor and support from veteran teachers is critical in the first year but there were mixed opinions about administrators. Some teachers got valuable guidance from their principal while others said their principal was overly critical and unhelpful.
- Classroom management and building relationships with students are the greatest challenges for new teachers. Many relied on advice from mentors and other teachers. Listening to students and getting them involved in rule setting, trying alternative teaching methods, and regularly communicating with parents were also helpful.
- At some point, over half questioned their decision to become a teacher citing disruptive or abusive student behavior and lack of administrator support as key reasons. Eventually though, passion for teaching and perseverance prevailed.
- The importance of connecting and establishing trust with students, and finding a good mentor were reiterated when asked what critical piece of information would have been helpful on that first day in the classroom.

What did you envision about your first week as an educator?

561 educators responded

Students wanting to learn

- Fully engaged, motivated students
- Immediate respect and connection
- Fun getting to know everyone
- Students listening
- Ability to empower students
- Enjoying all aspects of teaching
- Lots of learning

Classroom setup

- Classroom beautifully set up
- Lesson plans and curriculum ready
- Anxious about filling time
- Establish class rules

Positive emotions

- Fun and exciting
- Scary but challenging
- Confident / easy
- Hard work
- Great experience

Example Quote(s)

*"I was excited, and looking forward to a fulfilling career."
"That I would be successful and make a difference in student lives."
"Everyone would be eager to learn, listen, and follow directions."
"I expected students that wanted to learn and ready to have fun."
"All my parents and students would love me"
"Knowing they'd be as eager to learn as I was to teach."
"Exciting -a perfect classroom with the best kids ever ready to learn."*

*"I envisioned a perfectly decorated classroom, students who listened and followed directions."
"I envisioned planning out the perfect lessons that I would present and students would learn."
"I was somewhat apprehensive about classroom management. I wanted to be in control but caring at the same time."
"I was nervous about filling a 90 minute class usefully."
"Going over rules and setting expectations."*

*"I expected a lot of excitement, nervousness, and fun."
"Fun and scary."
"That it was going to be easy and the students were going to be excited because new teacher new year."
"Excitement, making a difference, a lot of work."*

Were your expectations accurate? How were you wrong?

556 educators responded

Expectations not accurate

- Students not motivated
- Unrealistic expectations / didn't plan well
- Discipline problems
- Overwhelmed
- Lack of family support
- Needed classroom supplies

Accurate expectations

- Had a great mentor
- Yes, but more work than expected
- Students were great, met expectations
- Youth helps
- Yes, but administrators not helpful

Accurate – 46%
Not Accurate – 54%

Example Quote(s)

“My students were not eager to learn and did not want to attend school.”

“... it has never been the rosy, Disney romantic experience that I thought it would be.”

“Everything takes longer than planned in your first few years.”

“The kids would not stop talking, running around, playing or crying. On my very first day in the classroom, one student stabbed another in the hand with his pencil.”

“My first week of teaching was definitely difficult. By lunchtime, I was wishing I'd majored in something else, and by Friday I was in my boss' office asking to be released from my contract.”

“No, it wasn't fun. It was downright scary, and more difficult than I had anticipated.”

“No! I had no supplies and was told to go buy them.”

“I planned ahead really thoroughly and asked advice from colleagues, and ended up using my time well. It was a good week.”

“My expectations were relatively accurate. I misjudged the amount of time I would spend at school each day.”

“I met tons of new people. The kids were great and easy to relate to.”

“Yes we totally connected because I wasn't ancient.”

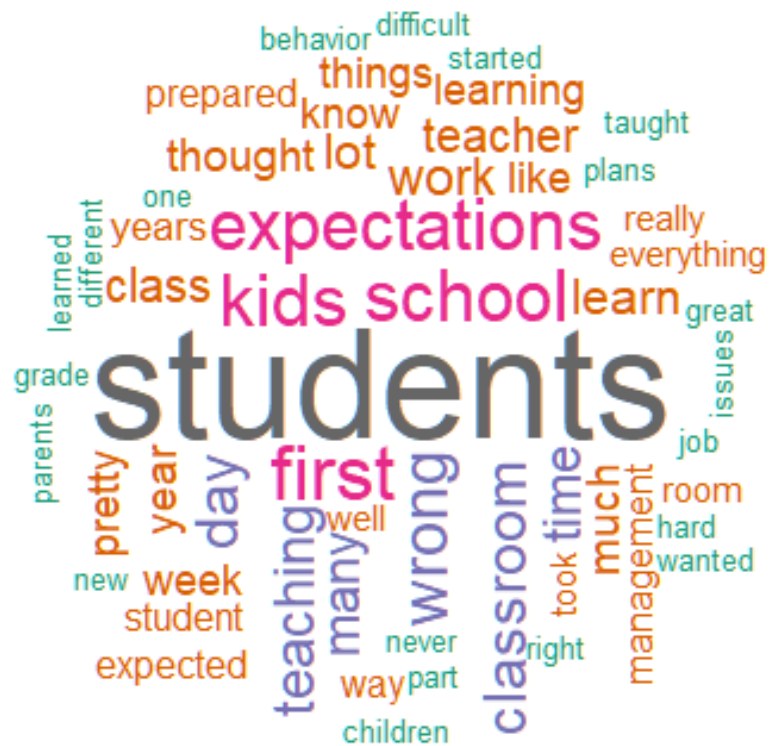
“It was much work. Being young helped.”

“I thought that building administrators would be more in touch with staff.”

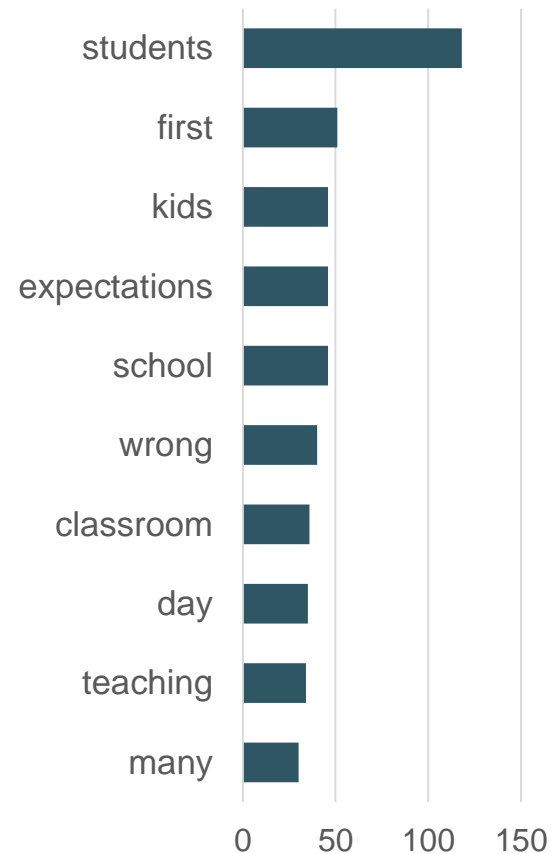
Were your expectations accurate? How were you wrong?

561 educators responded

Word Cloud



Word Frequencies



Words that were mentioned 10 or more times were used in the word cloud.

What's the best and worst classroom pet to have and why?

545 educators responded

Best Classroom Pets

- Fish
- Therapy dog or cat
- Rabbit
- Lizard
- Turtle

Worst Classroom Pets

- Snake
- Rodent (hamster, gerbil, rat, hedgehog)
- Pets aren't good in the classroom
- Rabbit, anything with fur
- Turtle
- Bird

Example Quote(s)

"Best- Fish because they are easy to care for and can teach responsibility to all."

"Best pet, fish. Fun to look at easy to take care of them."

"My therapy dog. She was so calming for my students, other students in the school, as well as for me!"

"The best is an emotional support animal that is trained because kids can snuggle and read with it."

"I loved having a rabbit in my classroom but it was a lot of work and I took him home every night."

"Best = lizard or other low maintenance and quiet animal."

"A turtle is the best because they are interesting to watch, and calming. "

"Worst - a snake because really who wants to play with a snake."

"Worst, rodent of any kind. They are messy, smelly, and are a worry during a weekend or extended days off"

"Any live pets are bad because they smell up the classroom and they usually die at some point."

"Any pet is a bad idea in a classroom. There are too many complications and it can take away from learning and relationship building."

"turtle - carries many diseases"

"A caged bird. Cruel , messy and noisy."

"Anything with fur...too many allergies for kiddos."

What's the best and worst classroom pet to have and why?

561 educators responded

Word Cloud



Top adjectives describing classroom pets

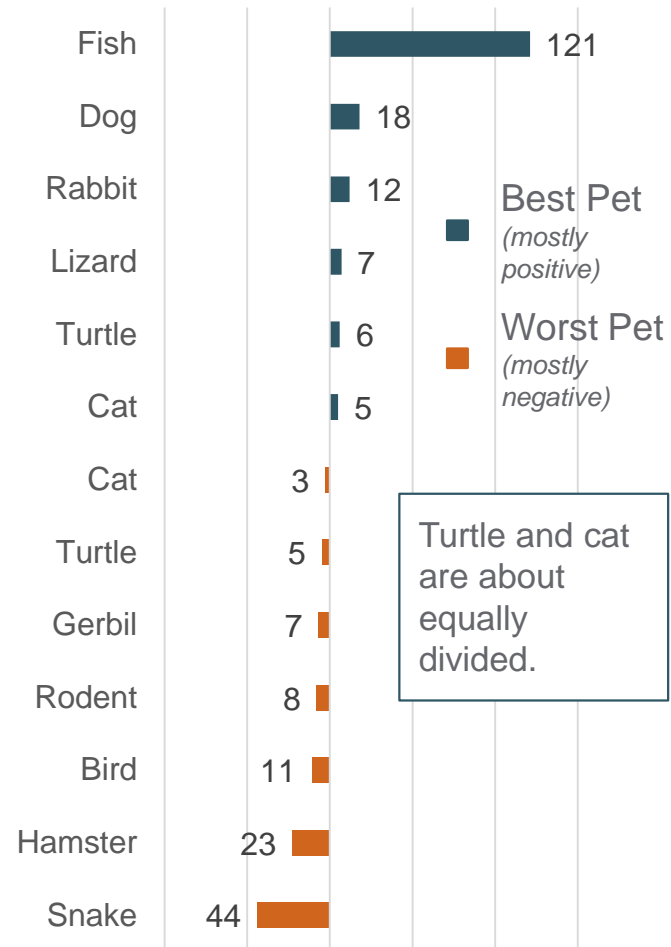
Best pets:

- Easy
- Friendly
- Calming
- Interesting
- Fun

Worst pets:

- Messy
- Hard
- Noisy
- Allergic
- Afraid
- Scary
- Difficult

Word Frequencies



What was your greatest challenge during your first year and how did you meet that challenge?

562 educators responded

Teaching challenges

- Classroom management
- Accepting limitations / lack of experience
- Dealing with difficult parents
- Proving ability to parents and other teachers
- Lesson planning / covering curriculum
- Time management
- Too much advice

Student challenges

- Building relationships with students
- Dealing with bad behavior
- Motivating students, keeping them engaged
- Large class size, teaching multiple grades or classes
- Managing diverse needs
- Establishing classroom routine

Solutions

- Got support from veteran teachers, mentors, administrators
- Listened to students and provided guidance
- Communicated with parents / got parents involved
- Took control of the class
- Found alternative approaches and methods
- Spent more time planning
- Provided love, kindness, rewards

Example Quote(s)

“Classroom management - clear expectations”

“I was given 32 students my first year. It was most difficult. Especially without experience.”

“Helicopter parents not wanting their child to accept responsibility.”

“The other teachers. Older teachers are hard to deal with.”

“I taught 6 different preps at a small school. Staying on top of planning was a challenge.”

“Balancing home and work time.”

“Being good enough for my principal. Listening to his advice so I could keep my job.”

“Building relationships with my students. I was only 4 years older than my students and I was new.”

“Correcting behavior, not taking behavior personally.”

“Managing student engagement with curriculum.”

“The class sizes were so big. It was hard to get to know the students.”

“Differentiating for the needs of each child.”

“Lesson planning and daily routines.”

“Help from mentor, senior teachers, patience of my wife!”

“Learn how to diversify lessons and listen to students ideas”

“Sent a weekly info sheet to let parents know what was going on.”

“It wasn't until I implemented procedures that I managed to curtail discipline problems before they arose.”

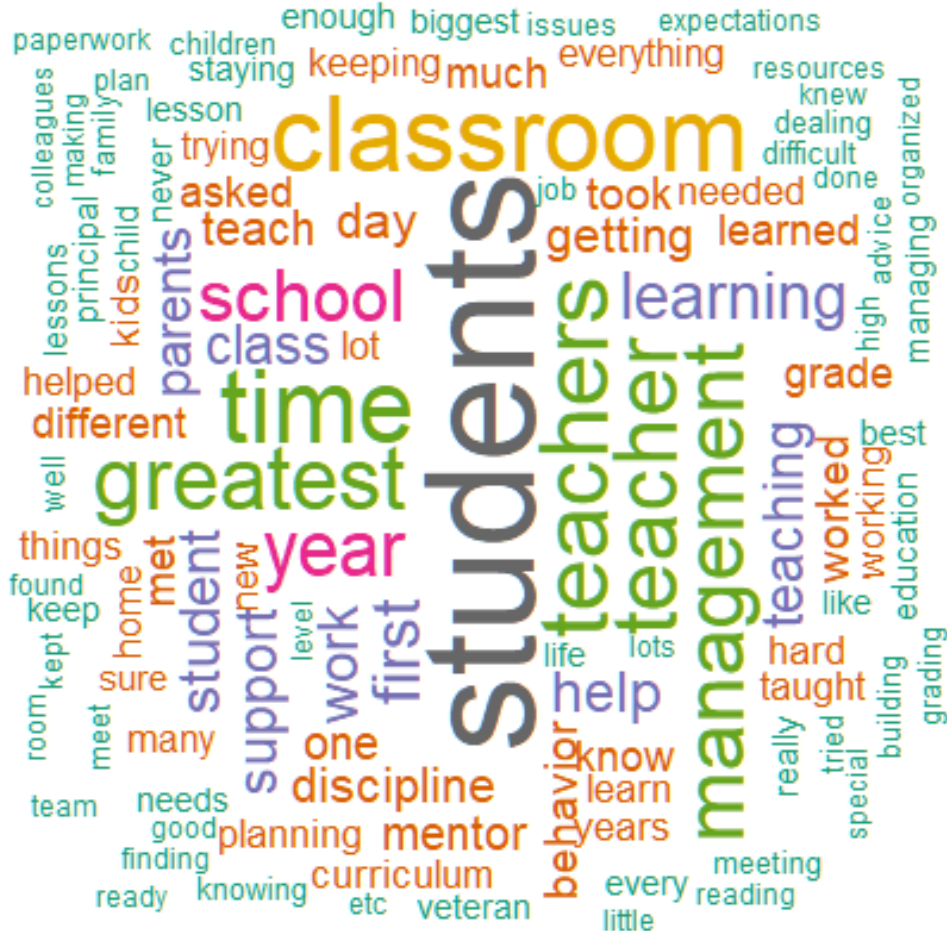
“Greatest challenge was the ESL students, and I met the challenge by finding other alternatives.”

“I have learned to show the kids I love them while also demonstrating high expectations.”

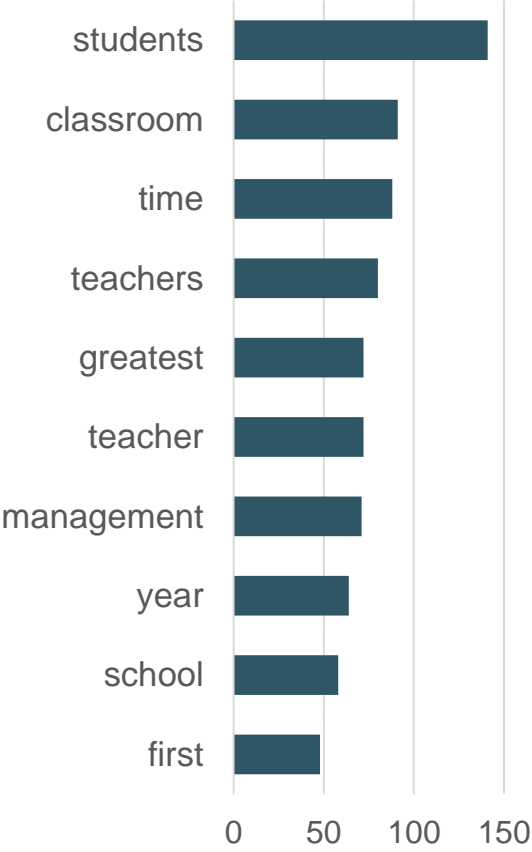
What was your greatest challenge during your first year and how did you meet that challenge?

561 educators responded

Word Cloud



Word Frequencies



Words that were mentioned 10 or more times were used in the word cloud.

What's the best "teacher fuel" you wish you ate/drank as a first year teacher?

523 educators responded

Drinks

- Coffee: iced coffee, black coffee, mocha, Starbucks coffee, favorite coffee drive-through
- Plenty of water
- Energy drinks
- Fruit juice

Meals

- Eat a good breakfast / prepare for the day
- Plan lunch or bring lunch from home
- Good nutrition and healthy diet

Snacks

- Fruit/nuts
- Chocolate!
- Power bars or energy bars
- Baked goods

Lifestyle

- Sleep
- Exercise
- Take time

Example Quote(s)

"Caffeine! (I did not drink coffee at that time, I do now!)"

"Coffee and smoothies"

"Water ... drink more water."

"5 hour Energy shots"

"Vitamin C- lots of orange juice and WATER- lots and lots of water"

"Breakfast, just making time to prepare myself"

"Eating a healthy breakfast."

"Lunch brought from home rather than the cafeteria food"

"I wish I ate a well balanced breakfast and prepared a simple lunch."

"Healthier food in general"

"An apple a day"

"Bananas and hard boiled eggs"

"Chocolate"

"Almonds and water"

"Granola bars and protein bars and of course COFFEE"

"Sugar snacks like pastries."

"Sleep, take time for myself. Ask someone for clarification when needed."

"Morning exercise"

"... time to refuel, reflect, and plan."

Was there a moment when you questioned whether or not you made the right career choice?

Yes – 57%, No – 43%

What led you to that moment?

323 educators responded

Students

- Disruptive or abusive behavior in the classroom
- Crowded classroom / managing diverse needs
- Gangs, violence, threats

Administration

- Not supportive / overly critical
- Changes in philosophy
- Incompetent
- Unrealistic expectations

Parents

- Irrate and abusive parents
- Parents who don't hold their kids accountable
- Parents controlling the school / school board members

Job performance and preparedness

- Lack of confidence
- Skills weren't adequate for the teaching assignment
- Work load was stressful
- Limited training

Curriculum

- Constant changes in curriculum
- No help with curriculum
- Unreasonable rules

Example Quote(s)

“Behavior/disrespect of students”

“A year of a crowded inclusion class that was more special ed. than gen ed. “

“Dealing with gang kids and having a gun brought to campus by a student while I was pregnant.”

“Feeling like I could never do anything right in the eyes of administrators.”

“Changes in administration philosophies in education.”

“Working for administrators who don't know what they're doing.”

“Being threatened by a parent.”

“The day a student told me not to call his mom because she would open a “can of whoopass” on me. Then, I called and she did.”

“The parents ran the school, and we teachers had to go to board meetings each month because we would be skewed over the tiniest matters.”

“Knowledge of what to do.”

“The challenges faced in an urban school environment definitely had me questioning my career choice.”

“Limited training and support.”

“Walking into a completely empty classroom with nobody to help me fill it or work on curriculum.”

“Unrealistic laws, policies, and procedures forced on us by lawmakers ... “

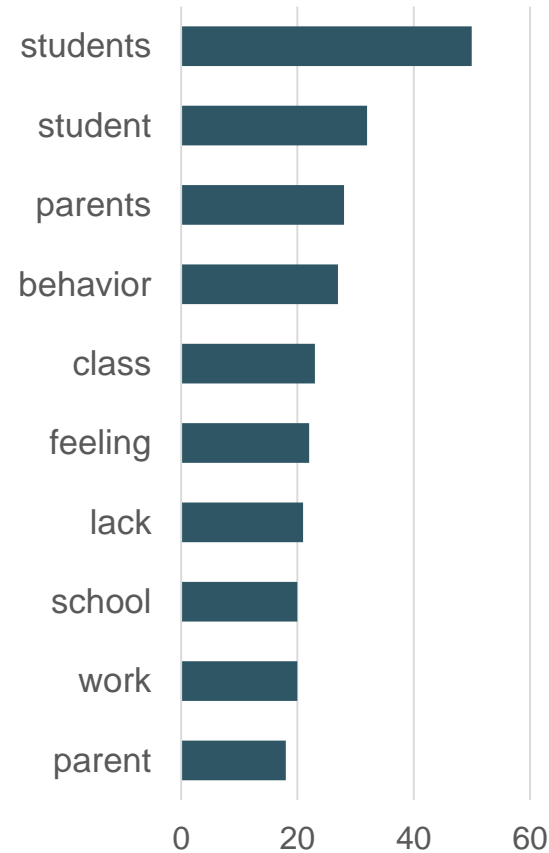
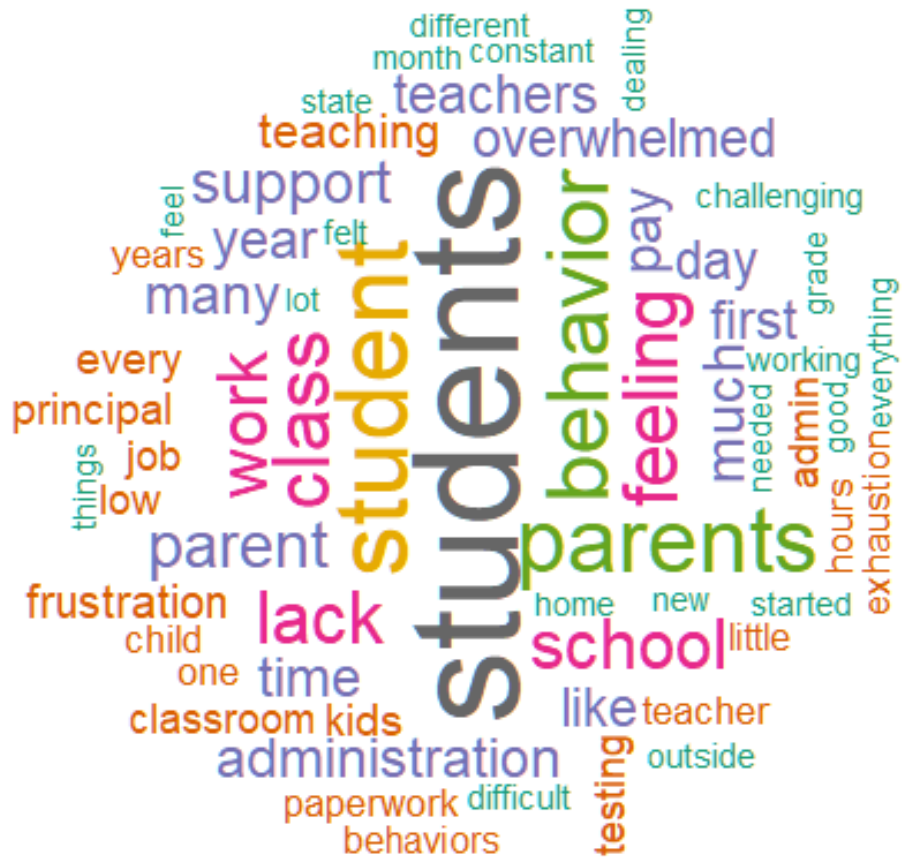
Was there a moment when you questioned whether or not you made the right career choice?

What led you to that moment?

323 educators responded

Word Frequencies

Word Cloud



Words that were mentioned 5 or more times were used in the word cloud.

Was there a moment when you questioned whether or not you made the right career choice?

Yes – 57%, No – 43%

What made you stick it out?

324 educators responded

Love teaching

- Teaching is a lifelong dream
- Compliments from other teachers
- Wanted to be successful
- Advice from principal or coworker

All about the students

- Wanted to provide an opportunity for children to learn
- Helping and connecting with students
- Committed to the career

Example Quote(s)

“I always wanted to be a teacher and I was living my dream. I wasn’t ready to give that up.”

“Passion for teaching.”

“I was recognized by my school and district leaders as a good teacher and promoted to literacy coach.”

“Co-teachers and parents who said I was a good teacher.”

“I wanted to be a better teacher.”

“Having another teacher in my field to ask questions and talk with about situations.”

“It’s always been about my students. Just experiencing so much together as teacher and student is the most rewarding reason to “stick it out.”

“I wanted the students who came to class to learn, to have that opportunity.”

“I truly love working with kids.”

“Realizing that I was connecting with these students.”

“I think what keeps me in education is my grit and determination to make things better for the next generation.”

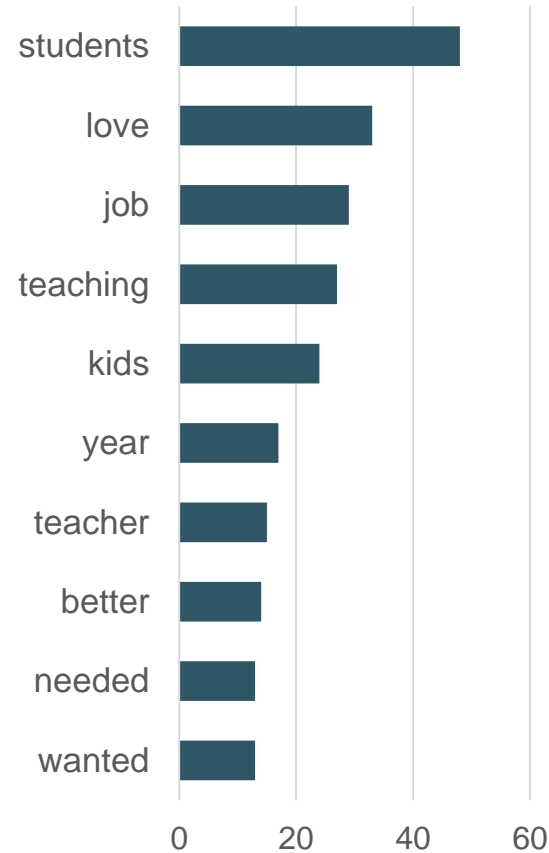
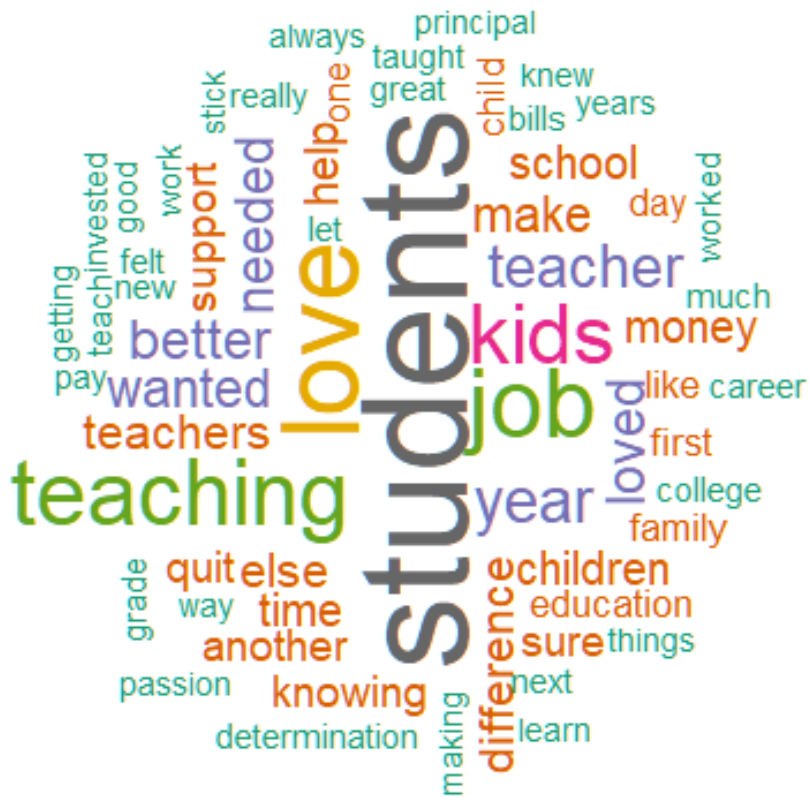
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Word Frequencies

Word Cloud



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Was there a moment when you questioned whether or not you made the right career choice?

Yes – 57%, No – 43%

How did you overcome it?

316 educators responded

Support from colleagues, students, and family

- Support from other teachers and mentors
- Visit other teachers' classrooms
- Administrative support
- Support from parents and family members
- Help from others to build self-confidence

Maintain focus on students

- Better classroom management
- Learned to appreciate student diversity
- Students sometime feel greater stress than the teacher

Work environment

- Changed schools or jobs
- Gained experience
- Went back to school or continued learning through staff development
- Put in extra hours to meet challenges

Example Quote(s)

“Went to many workshops with teachers with lots of experience and learned from the best.”

“It was also helpful to visit other teachers' classrooms to see first hand how they dealt with issues.”

“Found a mentor.”

“Other teacher friends and administrator support.”

“With a lot of help from friends and my mom who was also a teacher.”

“Kept pushing myself and working on my confidence.”

“I got better at classroom management. I learned to quit assigning homework and I had students correct their own work.”

“I just kept trying new methods of teaching my students; new strategies to make it work.”

“Realized that not all my students were going to be ‘A’ students, but if I could help all students improve their education at least a little (some more than others) I was doing my job.”

“... reminded myself multiple times a day that these students were living with far more stress than I could ever imagine and I was their safe person.”

“I resigned from my 1st job. Now, I have been a special education teacher for 8 1/2 years. I love it.”

“Perseverance and great teammates.”

“Got my masters and found a new district.”

“I worked late, constantly seeking information that could help me while the Internet was still in its infancy, and somehow managed to make it 3 years.”

What one piece of information do you know now that would have been helpful to know on your first day?

551 educators responded

Build relationships

- Get to know your students
- Communicate with parents
- Develop good relationship with administrators and staff

Meet challenges

- Establish trust / be an advocate for your students
- Treat students fairly
- Instill discipline / set expectations
- Learn from mistakes and be patient

Teacher training and development

- Find a good mentor
- Take classes, attend workshops
- Maintain enthusiasm
- Get help from parents

The school environment

- A difficult career but rewarding
- Extra time is required
- Socialize with other teachers
- Understand the school's culture

Example Quote(s)

"As you build relationships with students and build a learning community, things get better."

"Get a big calendar and write everything on it to stay organized."

"Also, contact parents regularly."

"Do not EVER alienate the secretaries/office manager or the custodians!"

"You cannot teach a child if they do not trust you."

"Be firm, but fair."

"Treat all kids fairly. They value fairness from a teacher."

"Students need to know the expectations for behavior and those expectations need to be implemented consistently."

"It's okay to mess up, everybody does."

"The importance of a good mentor."

"Take classes, attend workshops to stay abreast of current methodologies and learn to laugh a lot."

"The amount of technology training and use required, exponential since starting career."

"Enjoy the start of your career. Try to keep that excitement."

"Parental help is an important component in the educational process."

"All days will not be good, but you will love the job."

"The time you are required to put in this job to be able to do a good job."

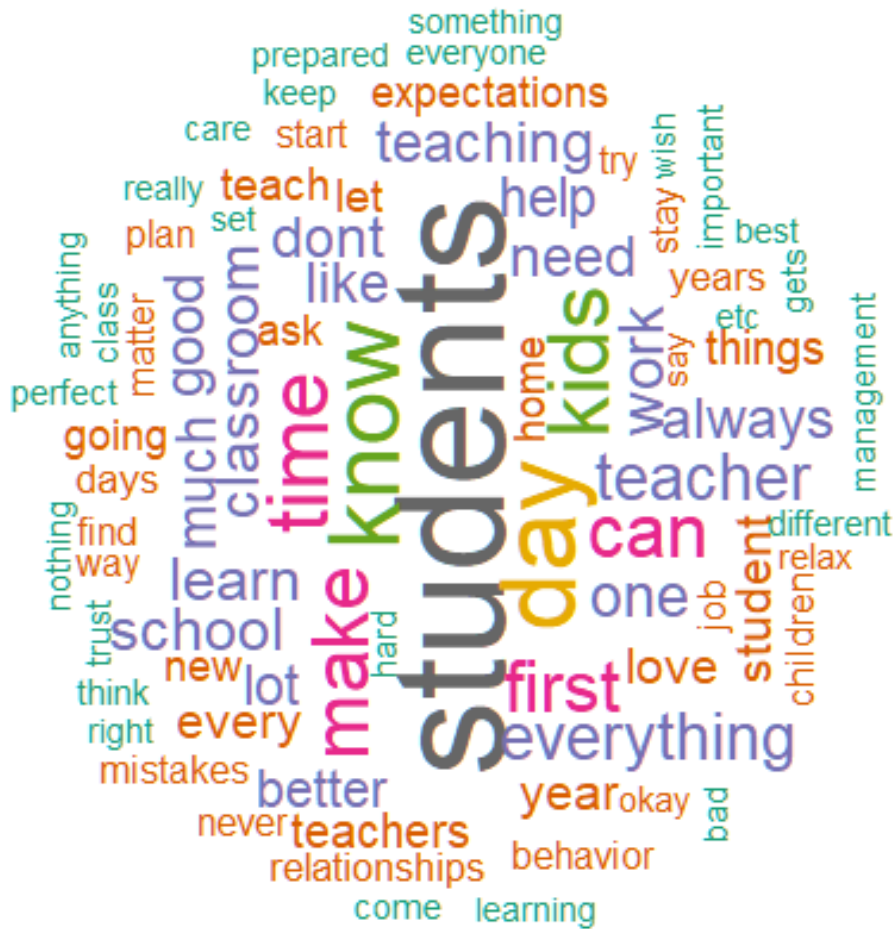
"Find other teachers to socialize with and support each other."

"It's important to have a clear understanding of the student population you are working with, school norms, community issues, etc."

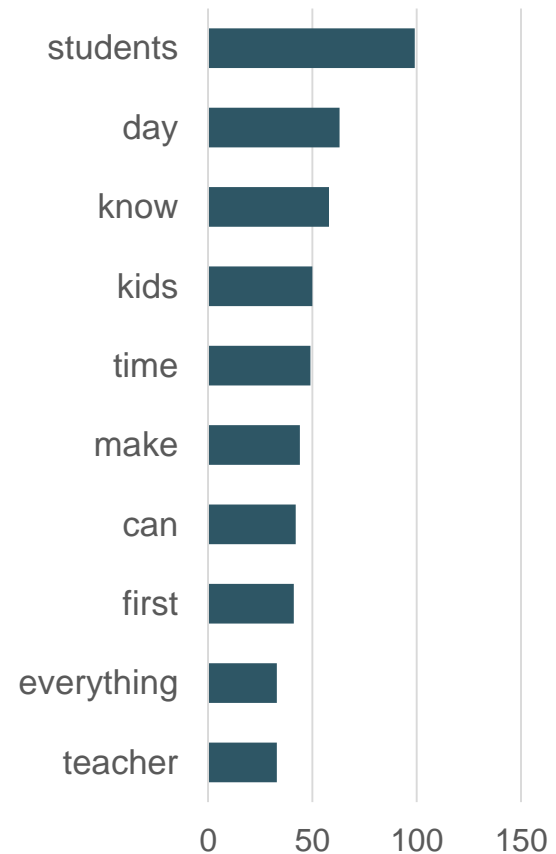
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551 educators responded

Word Cloud



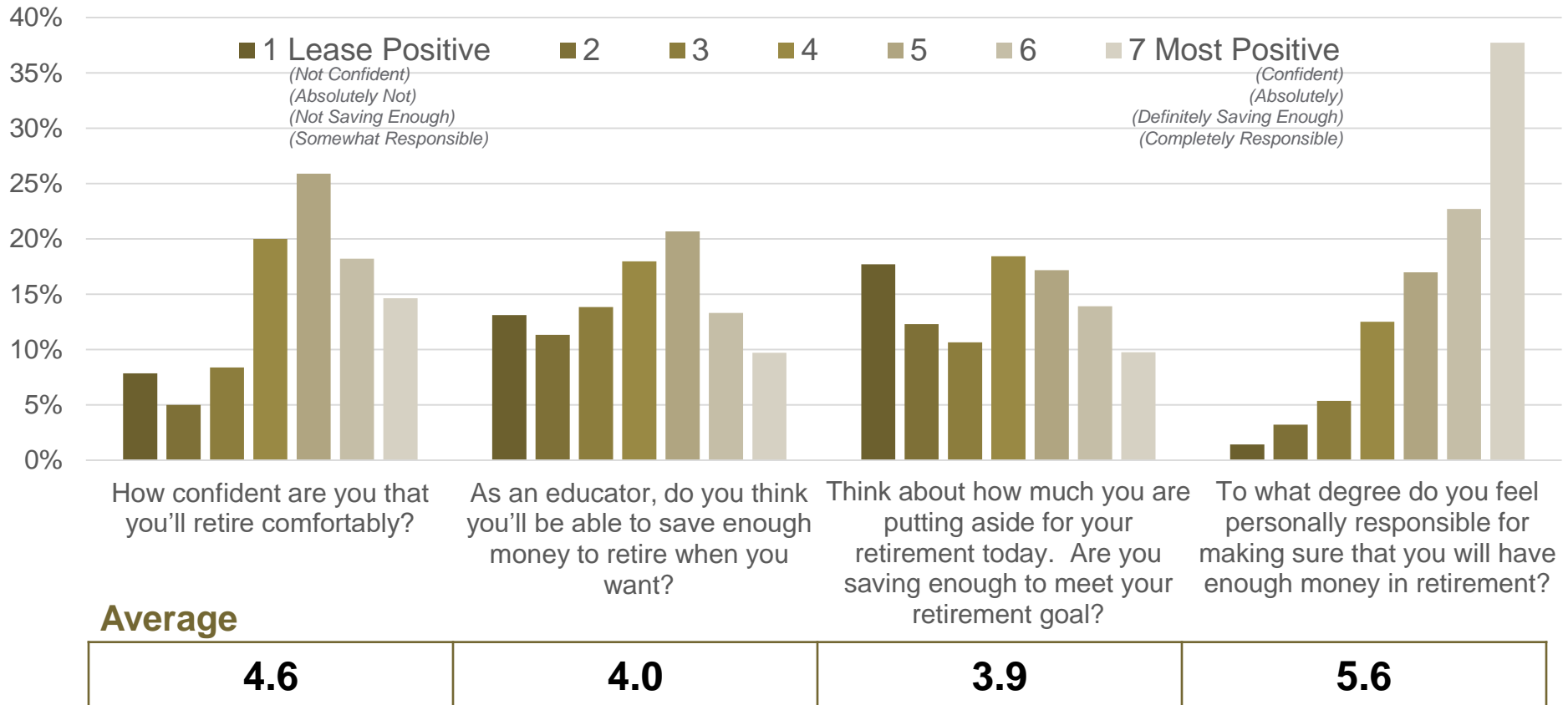
Word Frequencies



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Retirement Readiness

Retirement Readiness Index = 4.5 on a 7 point scale



n=560

The Retirement Readiness Index combines educator responses to four general retirement questions into a single indicator of overall retirement preparedness.