

# Nearly half of California teachers may quit within a decade, survey finds

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Nearly half of California teachers may leave the profession within the next decade, according to a March 2026 report from the Education Week Research Center, exposing the deepening collapse of public education in the wealthiest state in the US. The findings are not simply a “staffing challenge” or a temporary morale problem. They are a warning sign of a broader social crisis produced by decades of capitalist austerity, social inequality and the subordination of education to private profit.

The annual “State of Teaching” survey, conducted between August and November 2025 among 5,802 educators nationwide, found that approximately 45 percent of California teachers expect to retire or quit within 10 years, significantly above the national estimate of roughly 35 percent. California teachers recorded a slightly higher morale score than the national average, but the so-called “Teacher Morale Index” remained abysmally low overall, with California at 16 on a scale ranging from -100 to +100, compared to the national average of 13.

Education Week Research Center director Holly Kurtz acknowledged that teacher morale across the United States has sunk to some of the lowest levels in recent memory. California’s aging workforce partly explains the elevated projected departures, she noted, with the average California teacher now 45.5 years old compared to 42.9 nationally.

But the causes of the crisis run far deeper than demographics.

A January 2026 survey by the California Teachers Association found that 40 percent of educators were considering leaving the profession in the near future. Nearly half cited financial pressures as a central factor, while 54 percent said they personally knew coworkers who had already quit because they could no longer survive economically.

Teachers pointed to chronic overwork, expanding class sizes and deteriorating school conditions. They demanded more planning time, smaller classes, mental health days and stronger support in dealing with disruptive classrooms increasingly shaped by social misery, poverty and years of

institutional neglect.

These conditions are not unique to California. The teacher shortage is an international phenomenon. Across the US, Australia, Britain, the Netherlands and numerous other countries, public education systems are hemorrhaging educators after decades of cuts, privatization and impossible workloads. During the pandemic alone, roughly 2.6 million US educators left K-12 and higher education jobs.

The global character of the crisis exposes the fraud of claims that the problem stems from local “mismanagement” or isolated policy failures. What is unfolding is the consequence of a worldwide capitalist system that treats education not as a social right, but as an expense to be minimized in favor of war and austerity.

The conditions described in the California survey are themselves the outcome of decades of bipartisan attacks on public education. Teachers’ demand for classrooms of 20 to 24 students is presented by politicians and administrators as unrealistic or financially impossible. In reality, it is the bare minimum required for meaningful instruction.

Overcrowded classrooms are not accidental. They are the direct product of systematic defunding stretching back decades. While billions flow to corporations, military spending and tax breaks for the wealthy, public schools are forced to operate with fewer teachers, crumbling infrastructure and increasingly inadequate support services.

California, home to some of the largest concentrations of wealth on Earth, exemplifies this contradiction. The state boasts hundreds of billionaires and massive technology fortunes while teachers struggle with unaffordable housing, stagnant wages and exhausting workloads. In many districts, educators work second jobs or commute hours because they cannot afford to live in the communities where they teach.

The social consequences are devastating. Students facing poverty, homelessness, food insecurity and mental health crises enter schools stripped of counselors, nurses and support staff. Teachers are expected to absorb the consequences of every social breakdown produced by capitalism while receiving neither the resources nor the

staffing necessary to do so.

Central responsibility for this catastrophe lies with the Democratic Party and the trade union apparatus that functions as its industrial police force.

California is effectively a one-party Democratic state. The governor's office, legislature and most major school districts are controlled by Democrats. The destruction of public education has occurred under their watch and with their active participation.

Governor Gavin Newsom has repeatedly imposed austerity budgets while presenting himself as a defender of progressive values. Democratic administrations across California have overseen school closures, budget cuts and the continued expansion of charter schools that siphon funds from public education into privately managed operations.

The teacher unions, affiliated with the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, have played a critical role in suppressing opposition.

For years, these organizations have subordinated educators to the Democratic Party while isolating and sabotaging struggles by teachers seeking to defend public education. During the pandemic, the unions collaborated in the reopening of schools despite widespread opposition from teachers and parents concerned about unsafe conditions and mass infection.

Teacher strikes in Oakland, Los Angeles and Sacramento were systematically shut down before educators could mobilize broader support from other sections of the working class also entering struggle. Contracts were pushed through containing wage increases that failed to keep pace with inflation while fundamental issues such as class size, staffing shortages and deteriorating working conditions remained unresolved. What followed were layoffs.

The most naked betrayal came last month, when UTLA, with a Tuesday strike date looming for all 77,000 Los Angeles Unified School District employees, announced a tentative agreement behind closed doors on the Sunday before the strike—cancelling what would have been the first simultaneous walkout of teachers, classified staff and administrators in the district's history, and deliberately severing the possibility of unified action with 30,000 SEIU Local 99 support workers.

The deal itself told the full story: wage increases of as little as 8 percent over two years against Los Angeles inflation running at 3.4 percent, with transportation costs up over 9 percent and gas prices approaching \$6 a gallon. Class sizes, chronic understaffing and special education caseloads were left essentially untouched, while the contract contained no meaningful protections against the layoffs flowing from the district's \$877 million deficit, layoffs explicitly permitted under conditions of enrollment decline or program changes,

the exact conditions the district was already citing.

The survey's findings are the accumulated result of these betrayals. The unions function as labor-management apparatuses tasked with containing social opposition. Their primary political role has become channeling educators into support for the Democratic Party, including early endorsements of administrations that have done nothing to reverse the collapse of public education.

The human cost will fall overwhelmingly on working class communities. Affluent districts, backed by private fundraising and concentrated wealth, are better positioned to absorb staffing shortages. Poorer communities across South Los Angeles, the Inland Empire and the Central Valley face escalating instability, overcrowding and the replacement of experienced educators with undertrained or temporary staff.

This deepening inequality is entirely consistent with the class logic of capitalist education policy. Public schools serving working class students are systematically starved of resources while privatization schemes funnel billions into charter school chains, testing companies and educational technology corporations seeking new profit streams.

Public education cannot be defended through appeals to the same political and union forces responsible for dismantling it. Teachers must build independent rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by educators and linked with parents, students and the broader working class, to organize a genuine struggle against austerity and privatization. Recent experience has shown that the union apparatus, tied to the state and corporate interests, cannot be reformed.

The crisis facing educators is not simply about wages or retention, but about the priorities of society itself. Vast resources exist to provide high-quality education, smaller classes, fully staffed schools and decent living standards for teachers. The real obstacle is capitalism, which subordinates social needs to private profit. The growing teacher exodus exposes a social order incapable of guaranteeing quality public education as a democratic right.



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