

PRESS RELEASE



September 16, 2019 Online at www.proedtn.org

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CULTURE, DISCIPLINE, AND SALARIES

Bureaucrats keep piling on more requirements of educators with barely a nod of appreciation. Fewer occupations have undergone more changes than those in public education. Three critical issues often cited by our educators for leaving our profession are school culture, student discipline, and teacher salaries.

The [National School Climate Center](#) notes that “empirical research has shown that when school members feel safe, valued, cared for, engaged, and respected, learning measurably increases, and staff satisfaction and retention are enhanced.” Bad school culture is a barrier to student learning and quality teaching.

Business leaders have long recognized the connection between employee working conditions and productivity. Establishing positive working conditions for school staff improves the learning conditions for students. Quality instruction cannot be provided if staff morale is low, the staff does not feel supported by school administration and/or the staff turnover is high. Teacher recruitment and retention is a critical role in any school or district. Factors such as teacher-administrator relationships, collegiality, job expectations, and participation in decision-making, are among the most important reasons in whether or not teachers choose to stay at their school or in the profession. Lack of student discipline, inadequate administrative support, and lack of respect are all frequently cited reasons as to why teachers leave the profession, almost as much as salary and working conditions. We continue to place children with serious and chronic behavior issues into regular classrooms, where the teacher is already overwhelmed with other students also with behavior problems. Instruction time is lost every time a teacher has to deal with discipline issues. Some students need attention and intervention beyond the scope of what a classroom teacher can provide. It is imperative that a school and district adopt policies that support effective classroom management as well as instruction for all students. Districts must have policies in place that protect all students’ right to learn.

To be clear, student discipline is a serious issue and it must be addressed, both at the state and local level. Any assault that causes an injury to students or teachers should be a police matter. One possible policy is better tracking of time an educator spends on discipline issues. For example, do parents have the right to know if one student disrupts their own child’s education so frequently their child loses instruction time? We need to document all discipline incidents so corrective courses of action can be taken at the building level, district level, and state level. We should work to reduce unnecessary suspensions and expulsions in our schools, by looking at this data on a regular basis and providing better training for all staff.

In [California](#), schools will no longer be allowed to suspend elementary and middle school students from school for disrupting classroom activities or defying school authorities. The state of California undermined local control of schools and made it harder for teachers to manage their classroom. Their one-size-fits-all disciplinary requirement will likely have a chilling effect on teacher recruitment and retention. Let’s hope policymakers in other states have more forethought and common sense than their counterparts in California. Without discipline, students cannot learn. Students themselves must respect rules and authority.

The Comptroller's Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) proved [through research](#) that there was a slightly more than 6 percent increase total in average classroom salaries in fiscal years 2016, 2017, and 2018 through the Instructional Salaries and Wages category of the Basic Education Program (BEP). More than \$300 million in new,

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SUMMARY

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recurring state dollars was appropriated. Unfortunately, as most Tennessee teachers recognized, those dollars did not actually end up in teacher pockets. We must support our teachers and make sure the dollars allocated to their salaries reach them as policymakers intended. This was addressed in Tennessee through subsequent legislation in 2019. We know that many teachers still struggle to support their own families, particularly in places where the cost of living is higher. Salaries must be a priority.

Increasing student achievement takes adequate resources, as well as focus and collaboration to address school culture, student discipline, and teacher salaries. Teachers need the support of their administrators, their district, and the state. If we want to see increased student achievement and student learning, it is paramount that the state and districts work to address issues together. Immediate teacher recruitment and retention efforts will be largely determined by the success or failure on these issues, particularly in chronically hard-to-staff schools.

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JC Bowman is the Executive Director of Professional Educators of Tennessee, a non-partisan teacher association headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided that the author and the association are properly cited. For more information on this subject or any education issue please contact Professional Educators of Tennessee. To schedule an interview please contact [Audrey Shores, Director of Communications](#), at 1-800-471-4867 ext.102.