

January 2020<sup>1</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Teacher Survey  
Executive Summary

*“Teaching has changed throughout the years. It’s not the same.”*

*“I love working with children and teaching, but these days I spend most of my time dealing with behavioral issues, social-emotional issues, excessive data collection...and trying to implement a curriculum that is too challenging for most students.”*

Connecticut ranks among the best states in the country for K-12 education; however, findings from a survey of nearly 1,500 Connecticut teachers should raise alarms because teachers are increasingly disappointed with work and safety conditions, lack of supports for students, an increase in trauma-related incidents, and numerous other issues.

Teachers said their classrooms could be harmful to the health of students and staff, due to mold, rodents, extreme temperatures, and a variety of pollutants as well as having to teach in buildings that should have been repaired years ago.

Due to the lack of resources to address serious student needs, nearly 6 of 10 (58%) teachers have had to evacuate their rooms due to disrupting incidents that threatened the safety of their students.<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, most of the concern for classroom safety comes from elementary teachers.

The state wastes millions of dollars on high-stakes testing every year even when more than 9 of 10 (94%) Connecticut teachers surveyed (i.e., whose students take the SBAC) say SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment) has a negative impact on classroom instruction.<sup>3</sup> This mirrors a national survey in which an equal percentage of teachers (94%) and more than 3 of 4 (77%) parents agree that there are better alternatives to high-stakes, standardized testing for measuring student achievement.<sup>4</sup>

Connecticut differs from most states because it has the youngest kindergarten start age in the U.S.<sup>5</sup> Most (i.e., 3 of 4, 77%) *elementary* teachers responding to the CEA/AFTCT/WFSB survey said they want to change the starting age to at least age five, which is in line with the vast majority of states.<sup>6</sup> Keep in mind that a higher percentage of *elementary* teachers said their students are anxious compared to teachers in higher grade levels. Furthermore, most (i.e., 7 of 10, 70%) teachers surveyed said schools are putting too much emphasis on academic growth and not enough on social growth.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Data used in this report are from three surveys of teachers: [2020 Sources from The Classroom](#), [2019 PDK Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools](#), and CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Connecticut Teacher Survey of January 2020.)

<sup>2</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q22

<sup>3</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q11 counting only responses that there were either a positive or negative impact because not all students take the SBAC test.

<sup>4</sup> PDK pg. K9

<sup>5</sup> <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTanw?rep=KK3Q1801>

<sup>6</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q28 by grade

<sup>7</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q12

The January 2020 CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Teacher Survey of Connecticut’s teachers shows that their concerns are similar to teachers nationwide. Connecticut teachers have well-founded reasons for ringing alarm bells on the status of K-12 education in the state. Most concerning, more than 4 of 10 (44%) Connecticut teachers would *not* choose a teaching career if given another chance.<sup>8</sup> While that number may be shocking, Connecticut teachers are more positive about their profession compared to teachers nationwide. More than half (55%) of teachers across the country do not want their own children to become teachers.<sup>9</sup> Among adults (i.e., not just teachers) nationwide, more than half (54%) do not want their own children to be a teacher.<sup>10</sup> This declining interest in the teaching profession begs the question: How can Connecticut replace public school teachers – who will soon start retiring in large numbers – when fewer people see teaching as a desirable profession?

*“If I could go back and talk to 18-year-old me I would never go into education.”*

*“It is a career where we are overwhelmed, overworked, and underpaid. If I knew how much work I had to bring home every day, I would have changed my career.”*

*“Stagnant wages, ever more difficult working conditions, and constantly increasing (and changing) state mandates, it’s difficult to encourage anyone to enter this profession.”*

### **Need for More Resources to Address Student Needs**

*“I have seen an increase in the number of traumatized students, and the frequency of such incidents, in my 20+ years of teaching.”*

*“30 years ago, fresh out of college, problem behaviors seemed almost rare, and they were less of a threat.”*

Often, toxic stress from repeated traumatic experiences is to blame for student misbehavior. Half (50%) of teachers responding to the survey said students experience traumatic events, and nearly half (47%) say students are anxious.<sup>11</sup> Virtually all teachers surveyed (99%) want support to deal with the root cause of student misbehavior.<sup>12</sup> However, nearly 3 of 4 (73%) teachers say there is currently not enough support available at their school.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, nearly 7 of 10 (65%) teachers surveyed said not enough is being done to promote trauma-informed instruction to help reduce toxic stress among their students.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q21

<sup>9</sup> PDK pg. K4

<sup>10</sup> PDK pg. K4

<sup>11</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q23

<sup>12</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q24

<sup>13</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q19

<sup>14</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q26

Nationally, nearly 4 of 10 (37%) teachers fear for their safety in the classroom.<sup>15</sup> They say the biggest problem in the classroom are students fighting and in-person bullying.<sup>16</sup> In Connecticut, nearly 6 of 10 (58%) teachers have had to evacuate their classrooms because of disruptions that threatened the safety of their students.<sup>17</sup> The problem is most prevalent in elementary schools where more than 3 of 4 (78%) *elementary* teachers in Connecticut have evacuated their classrooms because of a concern for the safety of their students.<sup>18</sup>

*“I’ve had to have many students removed for causing disruptions that threaten the safety and learning of other students.”*

*“I have had to evacuate my classroom on too many occasions due to disruptive students. Sometimes we are out of the classroom for long periods of time. Not only are other students traumatized by this bad behavior, but they are losing valuable instructional time.”*

*“We need better programs for students who cause the need for classroom evacuations and who threaten the safety of other students.”*

*“Especially in the younger grades, students struggle to communicate their trauma and it manifests in violent outbursts.”*

*“When students need to be evacuated, they become very anxious and sometimes fearful for their safety. Student learning does not take place.”*

## **High-Stakes Testing**

Nationally, more than 9 of 10 (94%) teachers and more than 3 of 4 (77%) parents agree that there are better alternatives to high-stakes, standardized testing for measuring student achievement.<sup>19</sup> Both parents and teachers agree that looking at a student’s academic improvement over time is preferred instead of a point in time standardized test like SBAC. Among teachers surveyed whose students take SBAC, more than 9 in 10 (94%) say SBAC has a negative impact on classroom instruction.<sup>20</sup> Connecticut wastes millions of dollars on SBAC testing every year.

*“The superintendent claims we look at the whole child, but he looks only at scores.”*

*“Our principal minimizes the time we spend on social growth and reminds us that it is NOT to take away on time spent to enhance test scores!!!”*

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<sup>15</sup> Voices from the Classroom pg. 23

<sup>16</sup> Voices from the Classroom pg. 23

<sup>17</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q22

<sup>18</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q22 by school

<sup>19</sup> PDK pg. K9

<sup>20</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q11 counting only responses that there were either a positive or negative impact because not all students take the SBAC test.

*“Too much high-pressure testing is hurting students’ mental health.”*

Interestingly, 7 of 10 (70%) teachers surveyed in Connecticut said schools are putting too much emphasis on academics and not enough on social growth among students.<sup>21</sup> The state’s more experienced teachers (i.e., 6+ years teaching, 70%) and elementary teachers (77%) are the most supportive of placing a greater emphasis on social growth.<sup>22</sup> It should not be surprising then that 7 of 10 (71%) teachers responded that anxiety is the greatest challenge facing students.<sup>23</sup> Anxiety among students is reported by a higher percentage of elementary teachers (i.e., 3 of 4, 74%) than for higher grade levels.<sup>24</sup>

*“I have been teaching elementary-aged students for over 20 years, and I am deeply concerned about the lack of social skills students display.”*

*“We are not spending enough time on social and emotional learning in the early years. We are testing K-2 students to death when they need to work on other skills.”*

*“We are not providing students with the social emotional learning at the younger ages that supports the growth of effective coping strategies. They are being asked to be too academic too early.”*

*“The lack of resources for emotionally disturbed children is rampant. We need more social workers and behavior specialist to deal with the number of troubled students in our schools.”*

### **Kindergarten Start Age**

In Connecticut, children must be at least age five by January 1<sup>st</sup> to enroll in kindergarten. This means that a child can start in September as young as four years and eight months. The majority of states require a child to be at least age five to start school in September.<sup>25</sup> It is not surprising then that more than 3 of 4 (77%) elementary teachers responding to the CEA/AFTCT/WFSB survey want to change the starting age to be in line with the vast majority of states, which is at least age 5.<sup>26</sup>

*“Our young learners enter kindergarten, sometimes at four years old, and are expected to complete tasks that some of us did not learn about until 1st and 2nd grade.”*

*“The academic demands are not always developmentally appropriate, and we overemphasize strategies and skills and spend very little time on meaningful content...”*

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<sup>21</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q12

<sup>22</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q12 by teacher years and grade

<sup>23</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q18

<sup>24</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q18 by grade

<sup>25</sup> <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTanw?rep=KK3Q1801>

<sup>26</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q28 by grade

*“We don’t have enough resources or training to deal with students and their various challenges. I teach kindergarten and the curriculum is not developmentally appropriate.”*

## **Sick Schools**

A study of Connecticut schools conducted by the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering (CASE) found nearly 7 of 10 (68%) schools reported indoor environmental problems.<sup>27</sup> In 2017, Fairfield County had 16 days with unhealthy air, and New Haven County had 12.<sup>28</sup> It should not be surprising that nearly half (47%) of teachers responding to the survey reported that either the poor air quality in their classroom or the poor physical condition of their school building interfered with teaching and learning.<sup>29</sup>

The top three problems are:

- 1) classrooms are either extremely hot or cold (nearly 9 of 10, 85%)
- 2) dirty/moldy air vents (half, 49%)
- 3) damaged walls or ceiling tiles (nearly half, 47%).<sup>30</sup>

*“Smell of gas. Broken floor tiles due to ceiling leaks. Old science labs which are not maintained with decades of old supplies stored in lab storage areas with leaks and mold.”*

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<sup>27</sup> Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering. (2000). INDOOR AIR QUALITY IN CONNECTICUT SCHOOLS. Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering, Inc. Retrieved January 31, 2019, from [http://www.ctcase.org/summaries/iaq\\_sum.html](http://www.ctcase.org/summaries/iaq_sum.html).

<sup>28</sup> EPA. (n.d.). *Air Now*. Retrieved December 5, 2018, from EPA: <https://www3.epa.gov/aircompare/>.

<sup>29</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q29

<sup>30</sup> CEA/AFTCT/WFSB Survey Q30