



# Survey of Florida Teachers Who Switched from Public to Private Schools

By Ron Matus, Dr. Amy Stringer and Dr. Ronda Dry

## *Key findings*

- **The switchers are happier.** Former public school educators in Florida who switched to private schools are happier in their new environs, with 92 percent more satisfied or far more satisfied, according to a new survey of 177 educators who switched sectors.
- **They like the values proposition.** “Better alignment with morals and values” was the leading reason they were more satisfied, at 67.9 percent.
- **They like the freedom.** Other top reasons included more freedom to teach (66.7 percent); less bureaucracy (62.9 percent); and less pressure with standardized testing (61.6 percent).
- **They didn’t have a tough time switching.** Most respondents (85.6 percent) said they did not face significant challenges moving from public to private schools. The few who did cited lower pay and reduced retirement and health care benefits.
- **They’re politically diverse.** 36.6 percent of the switchers identified as Republican, 19.4 percent as Democrat, 16.6 percent as independent, and 3.4 percent as something else.

## *Introduction*

The steady expansion of education choice in Florida over the past quarter century has spurred options and opportunities for families and students – and for educators. Tens of thousands of Florida educators are working in charter schools, private schools, virtual schools, and other options that did not exist a generation ago, and anecdotal evidence suggests growing numbers are migrating between sectors. The growth of private school choice has been especially strong. Between 2011-12 and 2021-22, the number of education choice scholarships in Florida (including education savings accounts) rose from 64,439 to 215,817, according to data from the Florida Department of Education and Step Up For Students.

We wanted to learn more about the educators who moved from public to private schools – about their reasons for making that switch, and whether the change impacted job satisfaction. So we surveyed private school teachers and administrators statewide to identify 177 switchers.

A lop-sided majority – 92 percent – were happier after switching. Perhaps that’s not a huge surprise. But the top reason they listed for increased satisfaction – being in a school that’s more in line with their morals and values – is at odds with conventional wisdom.

Their collective motivations for switching don’t fit neatly into anybody’s ideological box, either. Some felt stifled by bureaucracy. Some don’t like high-stakes testing. Some felt more comfortable in schools that better synched with their worldviews. Just as parents have myriad reasons they value learning options, so do teachers.

Our survey is but one snapshot of a fast-changing landscape in public education. We don’t have similar data from other groups of switchers – for instance, from public school teachers in Florida who previously taught in private schools. We don’t know how switcher rates vary from sector to sector, or state to state. Still, the survey findings synch with insights recently shared with us by teachers who left public schools to start their own private schools. (Our special report on that can be found [here](#).)

In both cases, teachers appear to be signaling their preference for educational environments that maximize their autonomy. Policymakers in Florida and beyond who are wrestling with challenges in teacher recruitment, retention, and satisfaction should respond accordingly.

## Methodology

Between May 13 and June 10, Step Up For Students emailed a survey to private school leaders in Florida. We asked them to fill out the survey, and to distribute it to classroom teachers and other administrators in their schools.

We sent the survey to 3,730 unique emails. We received 682 completed responses. Of those responses, 177, or 25.7 percent, indicated they had previously worked in a public school as an administrator, classroom teacher, or both. This report focuses on their answers.

## Findings

Most respondents indicated their last role in public school was as a classroom teacher.

See Figure 1.

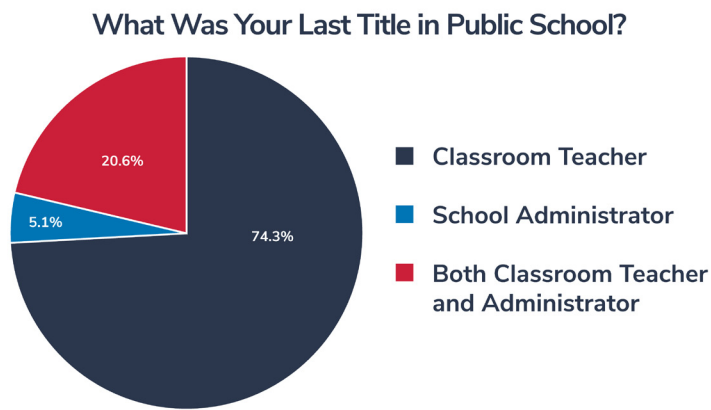


Figure 1.

## Findings (continued)

Most respondents (70.3 percent) had worked in public schools 10 years or less.

See Figure 2.

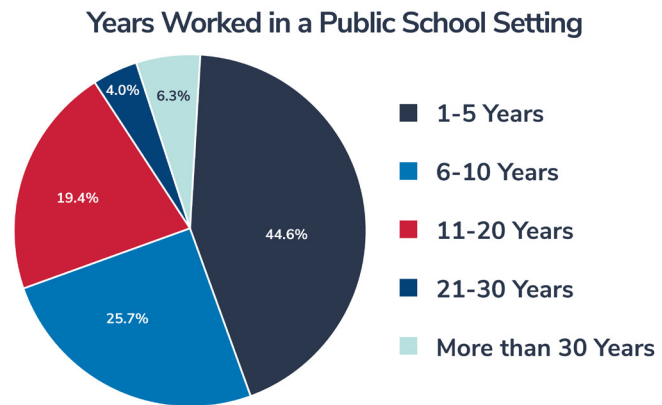


Figure 2.

Most respondents (59.1 percent) had worked in private schools 10 years or less.

See Figure 3.

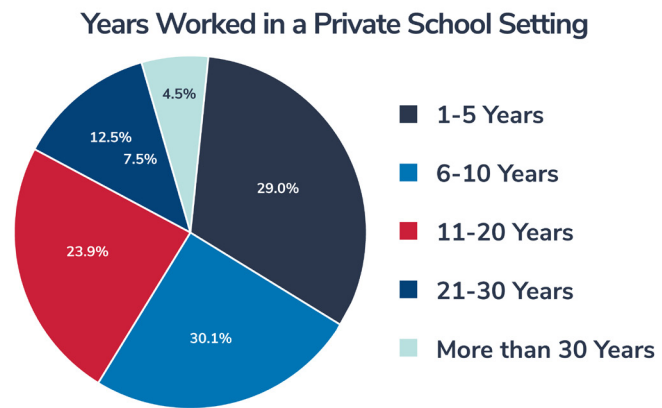


Figure 3.

Most respondents are administrators in their current private schools.

See Figure 4.

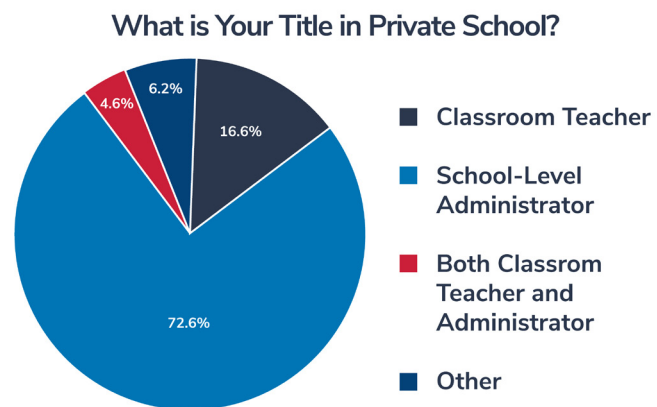


Figure 4.

## Findings (continued)

The respondents are politically diverse.

See Figure 5.

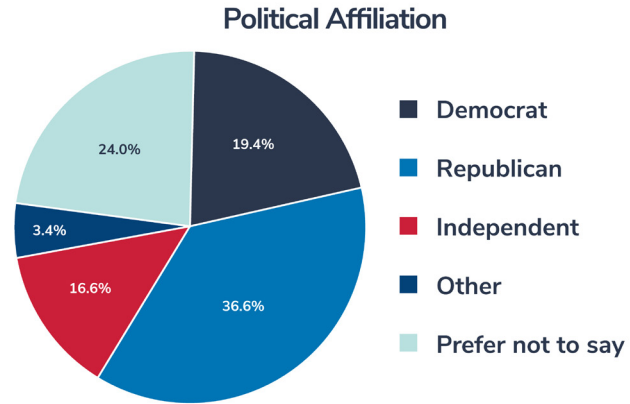


Figure 5.

The vast majority of respondents (85.6 percent) reported no significant challenges in switching to private schools. Those who did cited reduction in pay (84.0 percent), reduction in retirement benefits (76.0 percent), and reduction in healthcare benefits (68.0 percent) as the primary challenges.

When respondents were asked why they left public schools, the most common responses were too much bureaucracy (44.6 percent), too much focus on standardized testing (41.6 percent) and not enough freedom to teach (37.6 percent). (Respondents could select more than one reason.)

See Figure 6.

### Why Did You Leave Your Position in a Public School?

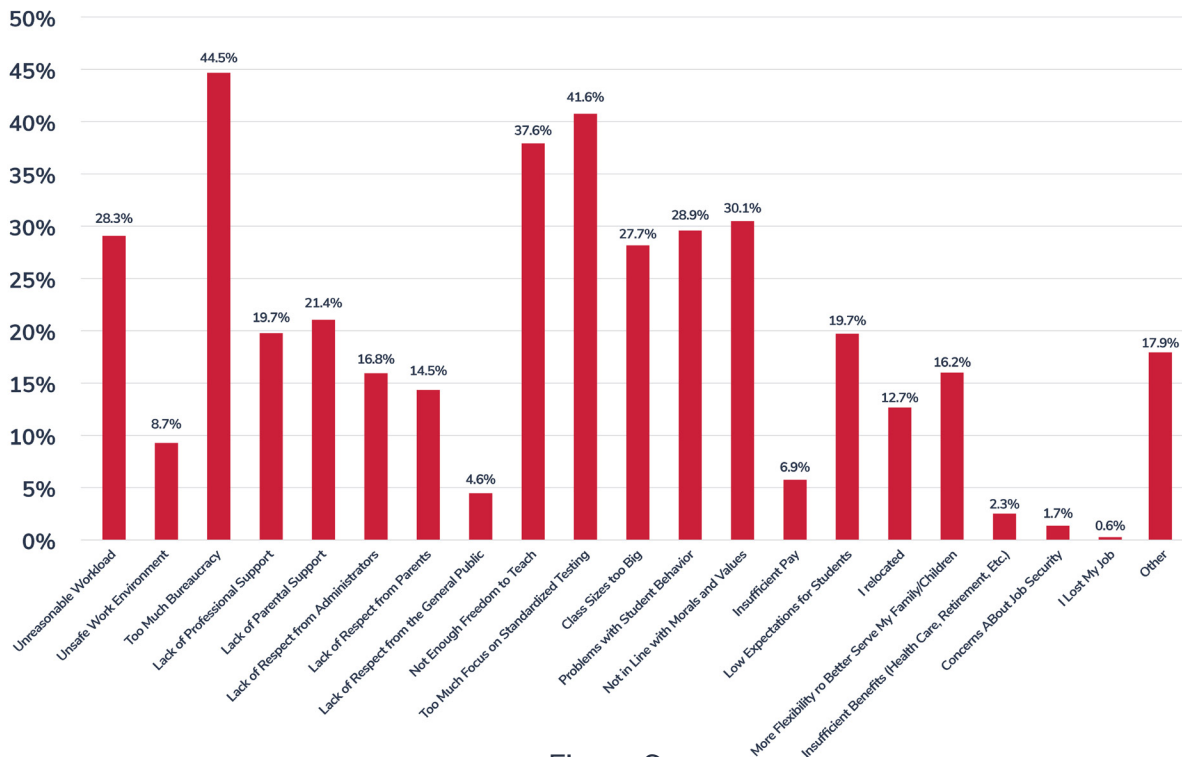


Figure 6.

## Findings (continued)

Respondents were overwhelmingly more satisfied at their private schools, with 92.0 percent reporting they were either more satisfied or far more satisfied.

Only one respondent reported less satisfaction in moving from public to private school, and no one indicated they were far less satisfied

See Figure 7.

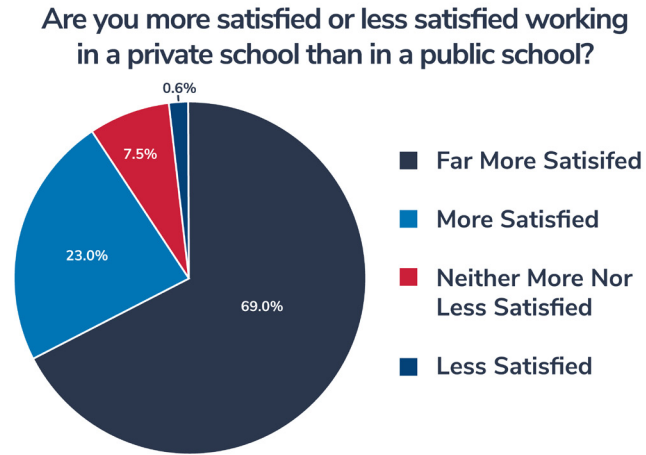


Figure 7.

Among the top reasons for greater satisfaction: better alignment with morals and values (67.9 percent), more freedom to teach (66.7 percent), less bureaucracy (62.9 percent), and less pressure with standardized testing (61.6 percent). (Respondents could select multiple reasons.) Most were also more satisfied with smaller class sizes (56.6 percent) and greater parental support (52.2 percent).

See Figure 8.

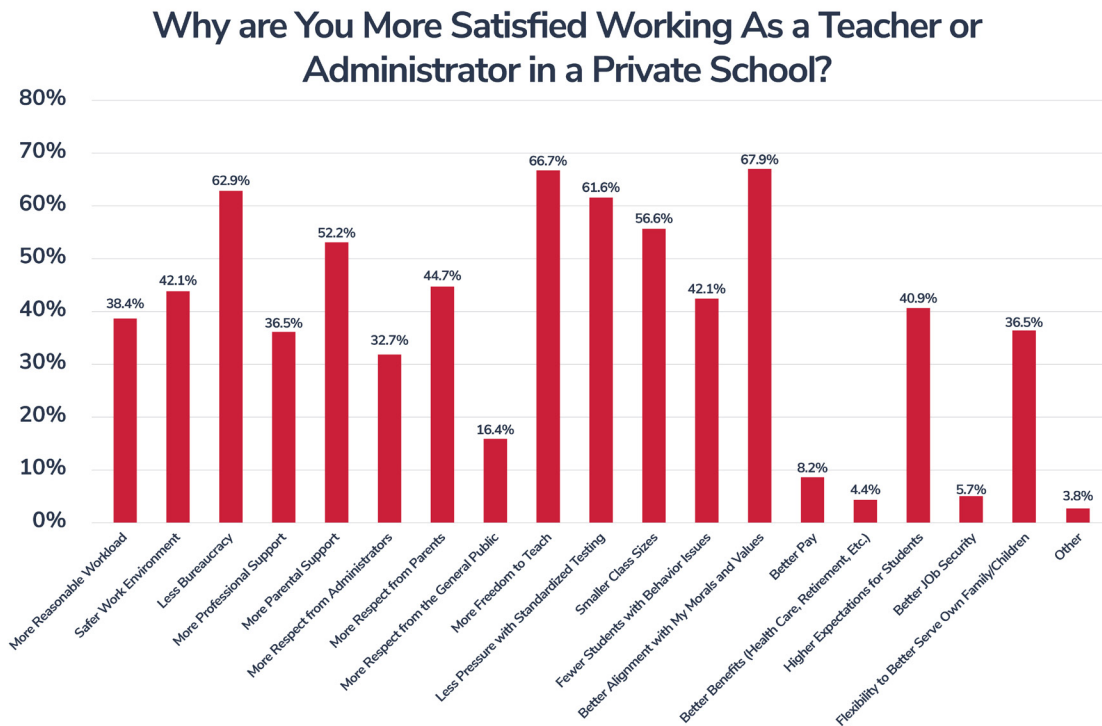


Figure 8.

## ***Discussion***

These are not joy-filled times for America's public school educators. A national survey of public school teachers earlier this year found only 12 percent were "very satisfied" with their jobs, down from 62 percent in 2018 and the previous low of 33 percent in 1986.

Offering teachers more employment options via a more diverse education system might help.

Our survey of Florida private school educators who previously worked in public schools found 92.0 percent were more satisfied working in private schools. At the same time, 85.6 percent said they did not face significant hurdles making the switch. These high marks come despite long-standing compensation disparities between public and private school educators.

For this group of switchers, at least, other factors mattered more: More freedom to teach. Less bureaucracy. And above all else, a better match with their morals and values.

Education choice advocates rightly emphasize how education choice programs in states like Florida and Arizona are benefitting families. But those increasingly pluralistic education systems are also expanding options for educators, so they too can find environments that maximize their talents and well-being.

More choice may not only bring more options to more educators, but more happiness.

## ***About the Authors***

**Ron Matus** is Director, Office of Policy, Innovation, and Empowerment, at Step Up For Students.

**Dr. Amy Stringer** is Research Manager, Enterprise Data and Research, at Step Up For Students.

**Dr. Ronda Dry** is Senior Director, Customer Experience, at Step Up For Students, and a former classroom teacher and principal.

## ***About Step Up For Students***

Step Up For Students is a nonprofit that administers four education choice scholarship programs in Florida that will serve nearly 300,000 students in the 2022-23 school year: the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship, the Family Empowerment Scholarship, the Hope Scholarship and the New Worlds Reading Scholarship Accounts.