UMassAmherst

Toplines
Center for Education Policy/UMass Poll
2026 Annual Massachusetts Educator Survey

Field Dates:	June 2 -August 24, 2026
Sample:	1,179 Massachusetts public K-12 educators
Margin of Error:	2.9%

AMES Principal Directors/Graduate Research Assistant

Prof. Jack Schneider, Ph.D.	schneider@educ.umass.edu
Prof. Tatishe M. Nteta, Ph.D.	nteta@polsci.umass.edu
Prof. Jesse Rhodes, Ph.D.	jrhodes@polsci.umass.edu
Prof. Carey Stapleton, Ph.D.	cstapleton@umass.edu
Adam Eichen - Graduate Research Assistant	aeichen@umass.edu
Brendan Sheran – Graduate Research Assistant	bdsheran@umass.edu

Right Direction/Wrong Track (N = 1,179)

For each statement, indicate whether things are going in the right direction or have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track.

	Do you think the overall state of public PK-12 education in this **country** is generally going in the right direction or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?	Do you think the overall state of public PK-12 education in **Massachusetts** is generally going in the right direction or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?	Do you think the overall state of public PK-12 education in **your district** is generally going in the right direction or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?
Right Direction	6%	33%	38%
Wrong Track	77%	45%	43%
Not Sure	17%	22%	19%

Educational Issues (N = 1,178)

Note: Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages sum to more than 100%.

Currently, there are a number of educational issues in the news. From the following list, please select the top three issues that you believe deserve more attention in the news. (Select up to 3.)

Teachers' working conditions	**42%**
School funding	**42%**
Violence and disruption in the classroom	**39%**
Students' disrupted learning	29%
The inequities in our schools due to issues of race or poverty	25%
The impact of artificial intelligence	25%
Cell phones in schools	23%
Student mental health	19%
School culture	19%
Teacher mental health	17%
The role of standardized tests	15%
Teaching about contentious issues	5%

Classroom Challenges (N = 1,175)

Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages sum to more than 100%.

From the following list, please select the top three greatest obstacles to your success in the classroom. (Select up to 3).

Student disinterest/low motivation	**60%**
Unclear standards or norms around student behavior and discipline	**51%**
Insufficient time for planning, including collaborative planning	**45%**
Student distraction (e.g., with phones or other technology)	**45%**
Student absenteeism	34%
Insufficient curricular materials, including texts	18%
Insufficient training or support around teaching strategies	12%
Unclear standards or norms around evaluating student achievement	11%
Unclear standards or norms around appropriate homework loads	3%

Student Challenges In Class (N = 1,177)

How much do you think each of the following is a problem in your classroom?

	Bullying	Aggressive and/or violent behavior	Absenteeism	Insufficient academic preparation	Use of Artificial Intelligence	Limited English proficiency	Cellphone use
A Big Problem	8%	17%	31%	29%	24%	14%	20%
A Problem	45%	42%	50%	50%	30%	43%	23%
Not a Problem At All	47%	42%	19%	21%	46%	43%	57%

Student Strengths (N=1,177)*

In a sentence or two, what do you think are your students' greatest strengths?

Themes	
Curiosity, Engagement, and the Desire to Learn	34%
Resilience, Perseverance, and Adaptability	17%
Kindness, Empathy, and Community	20%
Creativity, Critical Thinking, and Academic and Technical Skill	14%
Cultural, Linguistic, and Family-Community Assets	7%
Don't know /Missing	9%

Job Assessment (N = 1,179)

We are interested in your assessment of your experience as a teacher in Massachusetts. Do you agree or disagree that your current job is...

	Enjoyable	Fulfilling	Manageable day-to-day	Sustainable over the long run
Strongly Agree	21%	35%	11%	9%
Somewhat Agree	54%	49%	48%	33%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	11%	7%	10%	12%
Somewhat Disagree	11%	9%	26%	31%
Strongly Disagree	3%	1%	5%	16%

MCAS (N = 1,153)

In 2024, Massachusetts voted in favor of eliminating the requirement that a student pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests in Mathematics, Science and Technology, and English in order to receive a high school diploma. From the following list, please rank the following four options from most to least preferred option to establish a new statewide standard for high school graduation.

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Final exams designed and scored by the state, which would be taken in at least one year of high school for each major subject area.	16%	14%	20%	**50%**
Capstone assessments and/or portfolios of student work that would be locally designed and scored.	**30%**	30%	25%	16%
Universal adoption of the MassCore curriculum, which includes four years of ELA and math, three years of science and history, two years of a foreign language, and one year of art.	**30%**	25%	**29%**	17%
College and career planning activities, including completion of FAFSA, training in financial literacy, and work-based learning experiences.	24%	**32%**	27%	18%

Demographic Breakdown of the 2026 Annual Massachusetts Educator Survey

Gender Identity	Men	24%
	Women	75%
	Non-Binary	1%
Age	Under 30	13%
	30-39	29%
	40-49	28%
	50-59	23%
	60 or older	7%
Race	White	90%
	Hispanic or Latino	4%
	Black or African American	4%
	Prefer not to say/Other	3%
	Asian	1%
	Multi-race	1%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	0%
Educational Attainment	4-year college degree	7%
	Post-graduate certificate/Some post-graduate coursework	5%
	Master's degree (M.A., M.S., M.Ed., etc.)	70%
	CAGS or other post-master's work	17%
	Ph.D. or other terminal degree	2%
Live in District Where You Teach	Yes	27%
	No	74%
Years Working at Current School	1-5 years	38%
	6-10 years	20%
	11-15 years	14%
	16-20 years	10%
	Over 20 years	18%
Years Worked as Teacher	1-5 years	17%
	6-10 years	21%
	11-15 years	18%
	16-20 years	14%
	Over 20 years	30%
School Type	Elementary school (e.g. grades K-5 or K-6)	39%
	High school	29%
	Middle school (e.g. grades 6-8 or 7-8)	22%
	Pre-Kindergarten	14%
	Combined elementary and middle school	6%
	Combined middle and high school	5%
	Single Pre-K to 12 school	1%
Primary Educator Role	Early childhood educator	24%
	Elementary educator	21%
	Middle grades educator	25%
	High school educator	30%

*** Thematic Analysis of Open Ended Question on Student Strengths**

Data. 1,079 teachers who expressed substantive responses to the open ended question, "*In a sentence or two, what do you think are your students' greatest strengths?"*

Method. Inductive thematic coding was conducted across all respondents. Five substantive themes were derived, plus a sixth residual category for responses that state no interpretable reason (Don't know/Missing). Each response is assigned to exactly one theme; where a response raised multiple considerations, it was assigned based on its leading or explicitly decisive claim.

Theme 1 — Curiosity, Engagement, and the Desire to Learn (N = 400)

Educators in this theme locate students' greatest strength in their orientation toward learning: curiosity and inquisitiveness, enthusiasm about school, a willingness to try, and a desire to do well.

Illustrative responses:

"Kindergartners have an innate curiosity and are eager to learn."

"My students' greatest strengths are their willingness to learn and their desire to be successful as many are driven to achieve to put them in a better position as they move towards their post-secondary education."

"My students want to learn & understand more about the world they live in when they see the topic is relevant to their lives or their interest is sparked by something curious or even challenging."

Theme 2 — Resilience, Perseverance, and Adaptability (N = 194)

This theme identifies students' strength as their capacity to endure and adjust in the face of adverse circumstances; persevere in difficult academic tasks; and adapt to changing rules, routines, technologies, and social conditions.

Illustrative responses:

"They keep showing up, despite everything life has thrown at them."

"My students are an extraordinarily resilient bunch. Most of them have been through more than anyone I knew when I went to school, and most of them have exhibited the ability and willingness to overcome their challenges."

"My student's greatest strength is their resilience and ability to keep learning despite the challenges they face in their personal lives."

Theme 3 — Kindness, Empathy, and Community (N = 235)

Educators in this theme describe students as kind, caring, compassionate, and empathetic; as accepting and inclusive of difference, with particular and repeated mention of classmates with

disabilities, neurodivergent peers, LGBTQ students, and newcomers; and as collaborative, respectful, and invested in the classroom or school community.

Illustrative responses:

"My students greatest strengths is their compassion for others. They are very accepting and supportive of new students, students with disabilities and LBGTQ students."

"In my district, students are incredible kind to student with different cognitive abilities. They see difference and actively engage in getting to know what makes their classmate special rather than exclude."

"Community is my students' greatest strengths. They understand they are part of something bigger and work well together to help everyone get there together."

Theme 4 — Creativity, Critical Thinking, and Academic and Technical Skill (N = 164)

Respondents in this theme highlight their students' creativity and imagination, critical thinking, and academic skills.

Illustrative responses:

"Creativity and critical thinking are places where my students shine!"

"Academic knowledge, reading and math skills"

"The students are very good at using technology and some programs that help them to work on their studies. The students know very well to search for different resource materials for their academic studies and work on it."

Theme 5 — Cultural, Linguistic, and Family-Community Assets (N = 86)

This theme highlights students' (and families') cultural resources, linguistic abilities, and community and family ties as important strengths.

Illustrative responses:

"My students are all Multilingual Learners, so they have amazing strengths as bilingual students. They are able to make connections and understand language on a deeper level, as well as share a wealth of different cultural experiences."

"My students have a wealth of knowledge from lived experiences that they bring into my classroom. It is because of this that they are able to engage in the curriculum in many different ways."

"A majority of my students come from supportive and stable families that are invested in their education and have the time & resources to help their students and be involved in their education to some extent- that is a huge advantage to them as students and to me as an educator."

Methodology Statement
Center for Education Policy/UMass Poll
2026 Annual Massachusetts Educator Survey

Instrument Design

The AMES survey was developed in partnership with the Massachusetts Teachers Association, the American Federation of Teachers of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, the Massachusetts Parent and Teacher Association, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, Teach Plus Massachusetts, and Phi Delta Kappa International and reviewed, tested, and edited by public school teachers from across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts before official launch. The final instrument comprised 52 questions across five thematic blocks. The survey was administered via Qualtrics and optimized for phone, tablet, and web browsers. A screener question was administered to all respondents asking whether they are currently a Massachusetts public school teacher. For those who answered that they were not, the survey ended and their participation was excluded from the survey.

Sampling and Distribution

A nearly complete population frame of Massachusetts public school teachers was constructed through contact lists of members provided by MTA and AFT (representing approximately 90 percent of the population of teachers). Email addresses for charter school teachers were gathered by undergraduate research assistants from the University of Massachusetts Amherst using publicly available contact information. Where union email records were missing, research staff attempted to locate the respondent's professional email through official school website directories, applying school or district's standard email naming convention. Where no email could be located, or where an identified address was unverifiable, that record was excluded and replaced through resampling. 18,509 unique email addresses were randomly sampled from the population frame, blocked by union or charter school affiliation. These individuals were contacted from June 2 to August 24, 2026 and yielded 1,179 completed surveys. Access was restricted using single-use, individually assigned personal survey links to prevent unauthorized or duplicate participation. The sample was fielded in successive batches to reach target response goals.

Weighting

Survey responses are weighted so that the demographic composition of the weighted sample aligns with the characteristics of the teacher population. In this survey, weights are included to match the sample distribution with the actual population of Massachusetts teachers across gender identity, race/ethnicity, age, area of the state, and grade level taught.

Data and statistics that supported weighting of the population were drawn from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE). Records were retrieved from the Statewide Reports section of the profiles site for the 2024-2025 school year. Each relevant report was downloaded using the site's export features. Weighting targets were derived from reports retrieved in the fall of 2025 including the teachers by race/ethnicity, educators by age groups, and teacher grade and subject reports. The statewide teacher population reported by MA DESE was 77,220.80 FTEs (full time equivalents) which included the following role classifications: Teacher, Co-Teacher, Teacher Support Content Instruction, Virtual Course Teacher, Virtual Course Co-Teacher. Union membership was estimated by dividing the combined reported PK-12 teacher membership of the American Federation of Teachers

Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Teachers Association (n = 72,257) by the MA DESE total which yielded an estimated teachers union membership rate statewide of 93.6%. Membership counts were filtered to exclude higher education members, education support professionals, and other categories outside the DESE teacher classification. This estimate should be interpreted as approximate as union-reported membership categories may not fully align with MA DESE role titles. Additional district-level data were gathered from MA DESE and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Elementary/Secondary Information System (ElSi) to support the analysis of responses by district type and region.

Respondent Communication

AFT and MTA affiliated teachers received an initial email invitation from their unions, while charter school teachers received an email invitation from the AMES team. After the first month of surveying, subsequent emails were sent from the AMES team to all teachers in the sample. All respondents were given a $25 Visa gift card, distributed after verified survey completion.

Data Quality

Response duration was monitored throughout fielding to identify problems. Incomplete sessions were retained for a defined inactivity window before being recorded as partial responses, and expired links were reissued on a batch basis to allow affected respondents to complete the survey.