

EXPLORING TRENDS AND PERSPECTIVES: A 40+ YEAR STUDY OF TEXAS TEACHERS' MOONLIGHTING PRACTICES AND CAREER CONSIDERATIONS

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Abstract

Moonlighting for teachers has become a topic of interest and concern in the education sector. This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of a biannual longitudinal study which began over 43 years ago, focusing on Texas teachers' moonlighting practices and career considerations. By examining trends since 2016, this paper investigates the prevalence of moonlighting among teachers, the earnings derived from secondary jobs, and the salary threshold that would prompt them to quit moonlighting. Additionally, the study delves into the emergence of teachers' intentions to leave the profession since 2010 and explores the underlying reasons driving these career contemplations. The findings shed light on the evolving landscape of Texas teachers' work-life balance and provide valuable insights for educational policymakers and practitioners alike.

Keywords: *moonlighting, Texas teachers, salary, education*

In the fall of 1980, Sam Houston State University (SHSU) and the Texas State Teachers' Association (TSTA) collaborated to develop a survey aimed at gaining insights into the characteristics of the average teacher in Texas. The survey was distributed to all TSTA members via mail, accompanied by instructions, a consent form, and a return envelope. A deadline was set for the return of completed surveys, and reminders were periodically sent to encourage participation. Upon receiving the completed surveys, the data were averaged to determine the typical profile of a Texas teacher. This methodology remained consistent until 2010 when the survey transitioned to an online format and was emailed to all TSTA members. The returned surveys were still tallied and analyzed as with previous administrations.

Now, 43 years later, the study is still ongoing with the exception of no 2020 data collected due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In every even-numbered year, the survey is sent to all TSTA members with minimal changes. Once the responses are collected, the data are analyzed and presented at various conferences, often attracting media attention.

The 2011 report by Maninger et al. (2011) focused on the "relationships between teachers' self-reported moonlighting practices and (1) how that affected quality of instruction, (2) the commonalities of

teachers who involved themselves in working a second job, and (3) if their salaries were higher, would the participants quit their moonlighting jobs” (p. 69). Although the collected data has shown stability over the course of the 43-year biennial longitudinal study, the research focus has shifted for the purpose of this manuscript.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What trends can be observed in the number of teachers seriously contemplating leaving the teaching profession since 2016, and what reasons are provided for considering a career change?

Research Question 2: What trends have emerged since 2016 regarding the number of teachers engaging in moonlighting, their earnings from these additional jobs, and the salary increase required for teachers to consider leaving their moonlighting positions?

Literature Review

“Throughout the nation, to supplement salaries, many teachers work at other jobs in addition to their teaching, a practice commonly called ‘moonlighting’” (Smith & Cooper, 2018, p. 36). In the most recently published manuscript regarding this longitudinal study, Maninger et al. (2011) reported that 42% of teachers in Texas public schools hold moonlighting positions. In that report, the researchers stated that “a male, head of household, breadwinner, seriously considering leaving the teaching profession was the most likely participant to involve himself in a moonlighting job” (p. 70). They also reported that an average increase of \$5,934 in annual salary would be adequate for them to consider quitting their moonlighting position.

Similarly, Garcia and Weiss (2019) reported, “After accounting for education, experience, and other factors known to affect earnings, teachers’ weekly wages in 2018 were 21.4 percent lower than their nonteaching peers” (p. 1), a phenomenon they call the “teacher pay penalty” (p. 4). In their article, Garcia and Weiss speculate that female dominance historically in teaching positions, being one of very few professions open to women, is partially to blame for the teacher pay penalty. Whatever the reason for this gap between teacher wages and the wages of other professionals with similar education and experience, the authors conclude that teaching salaries are incapable of maintaining a middle-class lifestyle.

Methods

Contact between the researchers and the Texas State Teachers’ Association (TSTA) occurred in spring 2021 to initiate the survey process. The researchers reviewed the survey questions, made minor editorial changes to some items, and added eight COVID-19-related questions.

Once the final survey was prepared, a hyperlink to the web-based survey was provided to TSTA staff who distributed it to members. The return of the completed survey indicated consent. After the survey window expired, the data were analyzed to determine the average response in each category or the responses with the highest frequency.

Sample

The participants in this study were P-12 teachers in the state of Texas who are members of TSTA. The survey was sent through TSTA to an estimated N=5,000 teacher members, and n=688 responses were received, resulting in a 13.8% response rate. This represents a significant decrease compared to the two previous administrations in 2016 and 2018, which received n=837 and n=974 responses, respectively.

Instrument

The survey consisted of 22-29 items including 5-point scaled (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) single choice, multiple choice, and constructed responses. Twenty-two of the 29 items directly relate to moonlighting work beyond a teacher's role as a professional educator (Brown et al., 2019). Demographic items addressed topics such as age, gender, marital status, credentials, income, and teaching experience. Items related to the reasons for and implications of moonlighting addressed morale, self-perception of teaching quality, classroom and lifestyle expenses, hours devoted to teaching and moonlighting, professional stressors, perceptions of the public and state leaders regarding teachers, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching.

Data Collection and Analysis

According to Maninger et al. (2011), the survey was first distributed in 1980 and has been administered biannually since then with the most recent administration in 2022. Data collection procedures have remained consistent across survey administrations, with the primary variation being the shift from paper-based to web-based versions. Over time, additional questions were added to gather more data. For instance, questions related to teaching post-COVID were included in the 2022 survey.

TSTA staff sent an email invitation to members, providing participation details and a hyperlink to access the Web-based survey. Participation was voluntary with no reward or penalty associated with participation or non-participation. Completion of the survey indicated consent. After data collection concluded, the n=688 responses were analyzed by calculating response percentages for objective items while constructed response data underwent qualitative narrative analysis.

Results

To summarize the most recent teacher demographics, the average teacher in Texas is a married female with a bachelor's degree. She teaches K-5, is the primary breadwinner, and resides in an urban setting. She has been teaching for 16 years, earns a salary of \$59,000, and is seriously contemplating leaving the profession. Many of these demographic characteristics align with the results of the 1980 survey, which also showed that the average teacher was a married female with a bachelor's degree, teaching K-5 in an urban setting. The first notable difference is in the annual salary, which was \$14,113 according to the 1980 results. Using the CPI Inflation Calculator (2023), this amount is equivalent to \$52,098 in 2023, suggesting that teacher salaries have slightly adjusted towards a living wage. Another significant change is that in 1980, teaching was the primary household income only 40% of the time, whereas today, 63% of teachers report that their income is the primary household income. This indicates that in the 43 years since this study began, teachers have gone from being primarily a supplemental family income to the primary family income, and with the salary only being slightly corrected to cover cost of

living, this puts teachers' families further behind in maintaining a middle-class lifestyle. See the Appendix for the complete data set.

The first research question focuses on the trends in the number of teachers seriously considering leaving the teaching profession since 2016 and explores the reasons behind their contemplation of a career change. In the 2016 and 2018 surveys, 53% of teachers reported that they were seriously considering leaving the teaching profession. However, this percentage has skyrocketed to 70% in the latest survey. Unfortunately, data regarding this specific item are not available from the 1980 results.

The qualitative responses to the question "If you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, why are you considering leaving?" provided a range of reasons beyond financial aspects. While inadequate compensation was identified as a major factor, teachers also highlighted concerns about classroom safety, lack of discipline, insufficient support from administration, excessive non-teaching duties, low-quality health insurance, excessive focus on standardized tests, large class sizes, lack of respect from school leaders, state legislators, and parents, as well as the negative impact of stressful conditions on their health. Coupled with perceived low quality of health insurance, one teacher wrote, "I cannot afford the copays I require for a major set of tests, so I am having to live in pain even though I have healthcare insurance."

The second research question focuses on the trends related to teachers who engage in moonlighting, their earnings from moonlighting jobs, and the salary increase required for them to quit moonlighting. The survey results reveal an increasing trend in the percentage of teachers involved in moonlighting, rising from 31% in 2016 to 39% in 2018, and most recently, 41% in 2022. Similarly, the earnings from moonlighting jobs have also increased over time, with teachers earning \$5,383 in 2016, \$5,873 in 2018, and \$7,039 in 2022.

When asked about the salary raise needed to quit moonlighting, teachers consistently indicated an amount higher than their earnings from moonlighting jobs. In 2016, teachers stated that an \$8,974 salary raise would be necessary, followed by \$10,559 in 2018 and \$12,106 in 2022. It is noteworthy that 79% of respondents in 2018 and 2022 perceived moonlighting to negatively impact the quality of their teaching. These figures contrast with the 1980 results, where only 22% of respondents engaged in moonlighting, and a salary increase of \$3,398 was considered sufficient to leave a moonlighting position. Adjusted for inflation using the CPI Inflation Calculator (2023), this amount is equivalent to \$12,541 in 2023, strikingly similar to numbers reported in the 2022 survey.

Discussion and Implications

Over the last 43 years, researchers have collected data from Texas public school teachers regarding their participation in moonlighting jobs, outside of their fulltime teaching positions. In that time, teachers reported a financial incentive to work part-time jobs both during the summer break and during the school year, in the evenings and on weekends. Over the last 10 years, the percentage of teachers reporting moonlighting jobs has remained stable, holding steady at 42%. However, the data also indicate an all-time high of 55% of teachers holding summer jobs. This contradicts the recommendations of researchers who suggest rest and exercise (Ogren, 2018) and engaging in professional development (Post, 2014) are more beneficial to a teacher's success throughout the school year. This is potentially true for the way teachers spend their time in the evenings and on weekends, making sure their bodies are strong and rested and their minds are active and engaged in the latest trends in educational theory and practice.

Public teachers in Texas, on the other hand, find it necessary to augment the annual salary provided by public schools with income earned at a part-time job. With an average moonlighting income of \$7,039 and a summer income of \$3,591, teachers are better able to meet the costs of living in the communities in which they teach, helping them to maintain a middle-class lifestyle, otherwise unattainable (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). This augmentation detracts from adequate classroom preparation, adds to fatigue and burnout, and pushes many of them to consider leaving the profession in a time when schools are already grossly understaffed.

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Appendix A

Table 1

Moonlighting Data 2016-2022

	2016 n=837	2018 n=974	2022 n=688
Average Age	49.2	48.2	48.0
Gender			
Male	21%	20%	19%
Female	79%	80%	81%
Marital Status			
Married	62%	60%	57%
Single	29%	39%	35%
Other	9%	1%	8%
Working Spouse/Partner	51%	51%	49%
Highest Degree			
Bachelor	54%	58%	52%
Master	44%	41%	46%
Doctor	2%	1%	2%
Teaching as Income			
Major Income	59%	62%	63%
Minor Income	21%	19%	16%
Equal Income as Spouse/Partner	20%	19%	21%
Teaching Community			
Urban	52%	51%	53%
Suburban	38%	39%	40%
Rural	10%	10%	7%
Grade(s) Taught			
K-5	42%	45%	46%
6-8	26%	23%	22%
9-12	32%	32%	32%
Years of Experience	16.9	17.2	16.4
Received Mentoring			
Yes		44%	33%
No		56%(n=154)	53% (n=159)
Average Salary	\$53,147	\$53,221	\$59,000

	2016 n=837	2018 n=974	2022 n=688
Earn Stipend to Teach Difficult Courses			
Yes		20%	19%
No		80%	81%
Seriously Considering Leaving Profession	53%	53%	70%
Teaching Quality Compared to 5 Years Ago			
Better	22%	26%	13%
Worse	48%	44%	62%
Same	30%	30%	25%
Out-of-Pocket Annual Cost of School Supplies	\$656	\$738	\$846 (n=668)
Out-of-Pocket Monthly Cost of Health Insurance	\$326	\$359	\$846 (n=620)
Weekly Hours Spent Outside Classroom on Related Work	17	17	15
Inadequate Preparation Time	71%	69%	78%
Worst On-the-Job Problem			
Discipline	50%	55%	50%
Paperwork	28%	27%	20%
Drugs	1%	1%	3%
Administration	10%	7%	0%
Safety	0%	3%	2%
All Others (8 categories)	11%	7%	25%
Single Exam Should Not Determine Promotion	95%	94%	96%
Student Exam as Part of Teacher Evaluation			
Strongly Disagree		70%	65%
Disagree		20%	22%
Have Summer Job	49%	56%	55%
Summer Job Income	\$4,330	\$2,746	\$3,591
Have Moonlight Job	31%	39%	41%
Moonlight Extra Income	\$5383	\$5,873	\$7,039
Moonlit Hours Weekly	13.1	14.1	13.3

	2016 n=837	2018 n=974	2022 n=688
Moonlighting Harmful to Teaching Quality	72%	79%	79%
Desire to Quit Moonlighting	86%	85%	87%
Raise Needed to Quit Moonlighting	\$8,974	\$10,559	\$12,106
Believe General Public Has Positive Opinion of Teachers			
Strongly Agree	4%	4%	4%
Agree	26%	29%	14%
Neutral	17%	18%	18%
Disagree	39%	36%	38%
Strongly Disagree	14%	13%	27%
Believe State Leaders Have Positive Opinion of Teachers			
Strongly Agree	2%	1%	1%
Agree	6%	6%	5%
Neutral	12%	13%	9%
Disagree	42%	41%	32%
Strongly Disagree	38%	39%	53%

Appendix B

Teacher Moonlighting and Morale – 2022

Directions: Please answer all the items that apply to you. Comments are welcome with questions that have a designated text box.

* Indicates required question

What is your age?*

What is your gender?*

- Male
- Female

What is your marital status?*

- Married
- Single
- Other:

If married, does your spouse work?*

- Yes
- No
- N/A

What is your highest degree?*

- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctorate

Are you the major breadwinner in your household?*

- Yes
- No
- Equal

In What type of district do you teach?*

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

What grade level do you PRIMARILY teach?*

- K - 5
- 6 - 8
- 9 - 12

How many years have you taught in the public schools?*

Only answer if you are in your first five years of teaching experience. Did you receive the appropriate kind and amount of mentoring to help you become a successful teacher?

- Yes
- No
- Other:

What is your current teaching salary PER YEAR?*

Do you receive a financial incentive or stipend to teach a difficult to staff class (or campus)?*

- Yes
- No

Are you seriously considering leaving the teaching profession?*

- Yes
- No

If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, why are you considering leaving?

If you answered "Yes" that you are seriously considering leaving the profession, would an incentive-based pay system that had the potential to award you more income keep you in the profession?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the level of support for my personal and professional needs provided by my campus administration...

- Substantially Decreased
- Decreased
- Remained the Same
- Increased
- Substantially Increased

As a result of the COVID -19 Pandemic, the level of stress in my professional life...

- Substantially Decreased
- Decreased
- Remained the Same
- Increased
- Substantially Increased

As a result of the COVID - 19 Pandemic, the level of financial pressures/issues...

- Substantially Decreased
- Decreased
- Remained the Same
- Increased

- Substantially Increased

As a result of the COVID - 19 Pandemic, the level of my family and/or personal issues...

- Substantially Decreased
- Decreased
- Remained the Same
- Increased
- Substantially Increased

As a result of the COVID - 19 Pandemic, the amount of my planning time and/or my workload...

- Substantially Decreased
- Decreased
- Remained the Same
- Increased
- Substantially Increased

As a result of the COVID - 19 Pandemic, my students' mastery of educational content...

- Substantially Decreased
- Decreased
- Remained the Same
- Increased
- Substantially Increased

As a result of the COVID - 19 Pandemic, my students' social/emotional needs...

- Substantially Decreased
- Decreased
- Remained the Same
- Increased
- Substantially Increased

As a result of the COVID - 19 Pandemic, the level of my classroom parental support...

- Substantially Decreased
- Decreased
- Remained the Same
- Increased
- Substantially Increased

How is the quality of teaching at your school compared to FIVE years ago?*

- Better
- Worse
- Same

How much do you spend out-of-pocket on school supplies per year?*

How much do you pay PER MONTH out-of-pocket for the health insurance?*

How many HOURS PER WEEK are spent outside of class on school related work?*

Do you have adequate time to prepare and teach?*

- Yes
- No

If you answered "No" to the previous question, what changes could be made?

What is the WORST problem in your school?*

- Drugs
- Discipline
- Paperwork
- Safety
- Other:

Should a single standardized exam determine whether a student gets promoted?*

- Yes
- No

Should a single standardized exam, taken by students, be a portion of a teacher's annual evaluation?

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Do you have an extra job during the SUMMER?*

- Yes
- No

How much EXTRA do you earn during the summer?*

- None
- Other:

Do you have an EXTRA (Moonlighting) job during the REGULAR SCHOOL YEAR to supplement your teaching salary?*

- Yes
Skip to question 36 (next question)
- No
Skip to question 42 (labeled final section)

If your answer to the previous question was "Yes", please answer the following questions.

How much EXTRA money do you earn during the REGULAR SCHOOL YEAR?

How many HOURS PER WEEK during the regular school year do you spend working at the MOONLIGHTING job?

Do you feel that the quality of your teaching would improve if you did NOT have a second job during the regular school year?

- Yes
- No

Would you QUIT the second job if your teaching salary would enable you to give up moonlighting during the school year?

- Yes
- No

How large a raise in your teaching salary would you require to enable you to QUIT moonlighting during the regular school year?

What is your EXTRA job during the school year? (Please give a job title)

Final Section

I believe that the general public has a positive opinion about teachers.*

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I believe that state leaders and legislators have a positive opinion about teachers.*

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

What is your state of residence/employment?*

- Texas
- Other: