

# TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF: IDENTIFYING, AVOIDING, AND TREATING “BURNOUT” WITH *BRAD MEYER*

Burnout = state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.

Stress = too much; Burnout = not enough

## **3 Main Causes of Burnout:**

Work-related  
Lifestyle  
Personality

## **Symptoms and Signs of Burnout:**

Physical  
Emotional  
Behavioral

## **4 Stages of Burnout:**

Physical, Mental, and Emotional  
Shame and Doubt  
Cynicism and Callousness  
Failure, Helplessness, and Crisis

## **4 Immediate Steps Towards Recovery**

Support  
Confront  
Grieve  
Acquire

## **Preventing Burnout:**

Seek Social Support to Manage Stress  
Get Moving  
Reframe the Way You Look at Work  
Eat a Healthy Diet  
Reevaluate Priorities



**Dr. Brad Meyer** ([www.Brad-Meyer.com](http://www.Brad-Meyer.com)) is the Director of Percussion Studies at Stephen F. Austin State University (Nacogdoches, TX). He is currently the Secretary for the Texas Chapter of PAS and the incoming Chair for the PAS Health & Wellness Committee. Dr. Meyer is a proud endorsee of Yamaha Instruments, Zildjian Cymbals, Vic Firth Sticks and Mallets, Evans Drumheads, and Tycoon Percussion.

# **HELPFUL RESOURCES**

“Job Burnout: How to Spot It and Take Action”

[www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642](http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642)

“Preventing Burnout”

[www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/preventing-burnout.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/preventing-burnout.htm)

“Music Teacher Burnout: Not Burned Out...But Crispy Around the Edges”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-8MyvNhXzI>

“The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness”

by Williams, Teasdale, Segal, Kabat-Zinn

“The Mindful Musician: A Percussionist’s Guide to Application of Mindfulness Techniques in Music”

by Jonathon Berry (*Percussive Notes*, Vol. 54, No. 3, July 2016)

“9 Ways to Reduce Burnout”

by Brad Meyer (*Percussive Notes*, Vol. 54, No. 1, March 2016)

“Burnout and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Dr. Geri Puleo at TEDxSetonHillUniversity”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFkl69zjzLI>

# 9 Ways to Reduce Burnout

By Brad Meyer

**A**lmost everyone has or will have to deal with “burnout”—a mental collapse due to stress—when it comes to teaching and/or performing in the field of music. People are often afraid to discuss mental issues like burnout because some infer that if someone is burned out, that person has lost his or her love of music; however, that is not the case at all. Burnout is a natural experience in the extreme ebb and flow of being in such a creative, passionate, and demanding field. Here are nine ways of reducing burnout based on academic research and personal recommendations.

## 1. HAVE A ROUTINE THAT INCLUDES QUALITY REST AND BREAKS

Musicians often forget to give themselves breaks because of the relentless nature of their field. Music is inherently something that you can never perfect and can always improve with more practice. Nonstop practice without breaks and/or rest can result in the law of diminishing returns, where the time spent on a project does not lead to efficient amounts of results. One way to make sure you take breaks and get good rest is to schedule them so they are a mandatory part of your day.

- **Consistent sleep.** Everyone says sleep is important but it is one of the first things people reduce during stressful times. There have been numerous studies on the detriment of reducing one's sleep schedule, especially in regards to mental efficiency (e.g., “Patterns of Performance Degradation and Restoration During Sleep Restriction and Subsequent Recovery: A Sleep Dose-Response Study” from the *Journal of Sleep Research*, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1046/j.1365-2869.2003.00337.x/full>). Not getting enough sleep can make the time you are awake less productive. To fix this, try going to bed at a consistent time every night and waking up consistently every day. When going to bed, turn off all distractions (smartphone, tablet, TV), and dedicate that time to trying to relax and fall asleep. In the beginning, you may find yourself lying awake, but if you stay consistent with your schedule, your body will learn that it can shut down and sleep at a consistent hour.

The same idea about scheduling sleep should apply to when you wake up. Trying to “catch up” on sleep by oversleeping (as many people

especially try to do on weekends) can ruin your sleep cycle by pushing back the time it is used to being awake, which then pushes back the time your body will want to go to sleep.

- **Take real breaks.** Sometimes if we get a break, we continue to ruminate (thinking about the same thing over and over) on what we “should be” doing, instead of enjoying the break. A good way to take a break is to remove yourself from the work situation. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology has a resource titled “Tooling and Studying: Effective Breaks,” which has several methods for making breaks effective, including study in blocks of time (50 min. study/10 min. break), getting up and moving, scheduling meal breaks, and turning off your phone when you study and turning it back on during your breaks (<http://web.mit.edu/uaap/learning/study/breaks.html>). If you are practicing in an office, practice room, or rehearsal space, try going outside and either walking around a building or sitting on a bench. Try to be present in your moment outside by *experiencing the break*. Listen to the sounds of nature (or traffic), or look up and notice the trees, clouds, or people that are around you. Finding ways to get your mind mentally focused away from the task/job that is making you feel burned out will help you return to the task at hand with more mental energy and concentration.

## 2. EXERCISE

One thing that is almost universally agreed upon is that exercise is good for the body and mind. Developing an exercise routine can help balance hormones in your body and help increase energy throughout the day. Many people have the misconception that working out will rob you of energy that you could have used later; in fact, working out has the opposite effect. Exercise will increase your mental awareness while boosting your level of physical energy for the day, which is why many people recommend working out in the morning. Researchers have found that “individuals who exercised at least two to three times a week experienced significantly less depression, anger, cynical distrust, and stress...and higher levels of coherence and a stronger feeling of social integration.” (“Physical Exercises and Psychological Well-Being: A Population Study in Finland” by Peter Hassmén, Nathalie Koivula, and Antti Uutela,

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S009174359905972>). You do not need to become a body builder or an endurance athlete, just try to enjoy the experience of improving your body.

## 3. RELY ON YOUR FRIENDS

Friends are an invaluable resource for when you experience burnout. Friends can provide an open ear to vent to, a shoulder to cry on, or a healthy distraction from current dilemmas. Do not be afraid to share issues with your friends. One of the best ways to deal with difficult issues is to talk through them out loud. When we think through problems within our own head, we tend to focus on issues that would sound preposterous to ourselves if we said them out loud. Talking to someone gives you the opportunity to explain your situation and to get a response you might not have thought about already. Friends also can provide sympathy and laughter. Both of these can make us feel less overwhelmed by the difficulties of being a person involved in music. The Mental Health Foundation has a great article titled “Friendship and Mental Health” (<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-a-z/F/friendship/>) about how you can utilize your friends to strengthen your mental health, and how to be a good friend by listening to someone who is having problems or mental health issues.

## 4. DO SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Some people make music their only focus in life, which is easy to do because there are so many ways to become more involved in music; however, having a non-musical activity in your life can give you the mental release you need so that when you return to your musical activities, you will be refreshed and energized. There are numerous activities you can become involved with, such as joining an athletic team (basketball, baseball, disc golf, etc.), finding a hobby (painting, woodworking, model building, etc.), exploring places near where you live (hiking, camping, biking, etc.), or something else that is not related to music. The point is to get away from music so when you return, you will have a fresh and open mind. The saying “distance makes the heart grow fonder” can definitely be applied to reduce or stave off burnout.

## 5. MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIES

Burnout is often fed by such negative mental actions as rumination and repetitive “what if-ing,” which can exacerbate problems that may not even exist. The best thing you can do is to learn how your brain works so that you can calm down negative mental responses to stress. Things like mindfulness and meditation are great tools to help you deal with stress on all levels. There are numerous podcasts and books on both of these topics; one podcast on mindfulness I recommend is UCLA’s Mindful Awareness Research Center’s “Weekly Podcast at the Hammer” (<http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=107>).

- **See a therapist regularly.** An additional step in helping create strong mental health strategies is to see a licensed therapist regularly. Charles (Chuck) Bryant from the podcast *Stuff You Should Know* is paraphrased as saying, “I’m not concerned for people in therapy, I’m concerned for those who *aren’t* in therapy.” He is saying that people who are in therapy are actively trying to get better, while people who are not in therapy might not have the guidance or instruction to know where to start in order to get better. Everyone could use a little bit of help from time to time, so do not be afraid to see a therapist/counselor. Even if feel you are mentally healthy, it would not hurt to find new strategies for dealing with life’s problems before those problems actually arise.

## 6. RESHAPE YOUR MENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Sometimes your mental attitude about a task or assignment is the reason for burnout. This tends to be the case with students. Many people view jobs/work/practicing/assignments as something that needs to be done so you can move on to the next item at hand; however, this can create a sense of always yearning to move forward. Instead, focus on the exercise/etude/piece as an *opportunity* to become better in that moment. It is great to be motivated to progress in your studies/education, but progressing should be a natural part of the learning curve. Viewing tasks as opportunities to get better at certain skills or concepts will be more fulfilling and beneficial in the long term, rather than moving through material just to say that you have done it. This can especially be witnessed when students run through exercises just to say that they have played their exercises, instead of doing exercises with a mental focus to become better at a skill or group of skills that is being isolated.

Another example of not approaching material with the correct mental focus is the musician who only learns part of a composition or works on it so that he can “play through it” in order to tell others that he has already played that piece. While it might feel good to say you have “played” “Merlin” (or any other extremely technically demanding piece), you will not benefit

from the challenges of the piece as much if you do not put in the amount of time and energy to perform the whole piece with a high level of quality. A good motto I use is, “Work on the quality and the quantity will come.”

## 7. DO SOMETHING NEW, INVIGORATING WITHIN MUSIC

Many times we get stuck doing the same types of things over and over in music. If you are known for playing timpani, you might play in orchestras all the time. If you are known as being a good drumset player, you may play in jazz combos all the time. You can get your “creative juices flowing” by doing something new musically—for example, playing a different style of music, starting a chamber group, researching new ways to perform/teach, organizing a performance in a place you have never played, learning a new instrument, etc. As the saying goes, “Variety is the spice of life.” Varying your musical activities can help create a renewed sense of meaning and purpose.

## 8. PLAY SOMETHING CHALLENGING OR EASY

If you only perform challenging music, the challenge can become the reason why you are experiencing burnout. Just because a composition is touted as being difficult does not necessarily mean it will be personally fulfilling for you. Constantly performing pieces like this can make you feel like a modern-day Sisyphus—continually struggling to roll a boulder uphill, just to get there and realize that you have to do it again.

The same is true on the other end of the musical spectrum. If you play easy music all the time, you can feel like someone who is at a desk job. This is especially common with percussionists who play regularly occurring gigs where the music does not seem particularly varied. In this case, try pursuing something significantly more musically and/or technically demanding outside of your regular gigs. That new challenge may lead to a sense of renewed musical growth and self-expression.

## 9. PUSH THROUGH

Sometimes burnout happens at a time when you cannot stop and take a break to recharge your mental batteries. This can be one of the hardest situations when trying to deal with burnout. It is almost always easier to give up on doing something, rather than pushing through, but sometimes you will need to persist in order to keep your job, make money to pay bills, or fulfill a musical expectation where quitting is not an option. It will be difficult, but you need to stick to some type of routine you have developed in the past that you know works for you. Sometimes you will have to plan your day down to the minute and then force yourself to stick to that schedule. Even though it can feel like you are “going through the motions,” uti-

lizing your time towards a goal can eventually give you some sense of direction.

The worst thing you can do in a situation like this is to constantly think about what you have to do. Instead, like Nike’s motto exclaims, “Just do it!” I have met many people who, when they get overloaded or feel they are experiencing burnout, spend more time talking about the things they need to do rather than just doing those things. Pushing through with a sense of brute force can sometimes help overcome burnout. On the other hand, pushing through immediate burnout can also lead to long-term burnout in the near future.

Pushing through can be extremely beneficial when you are in a tough situation, especially in regards to deadlines. It can also give a sense of accomplishment or fulfillment that leads to breaking away from feelings of burnout; however, pushing through can also increase feelings of burnout once the task has been completed. Pushing through can be a temporary fix, but is most likely not a permanent solution.

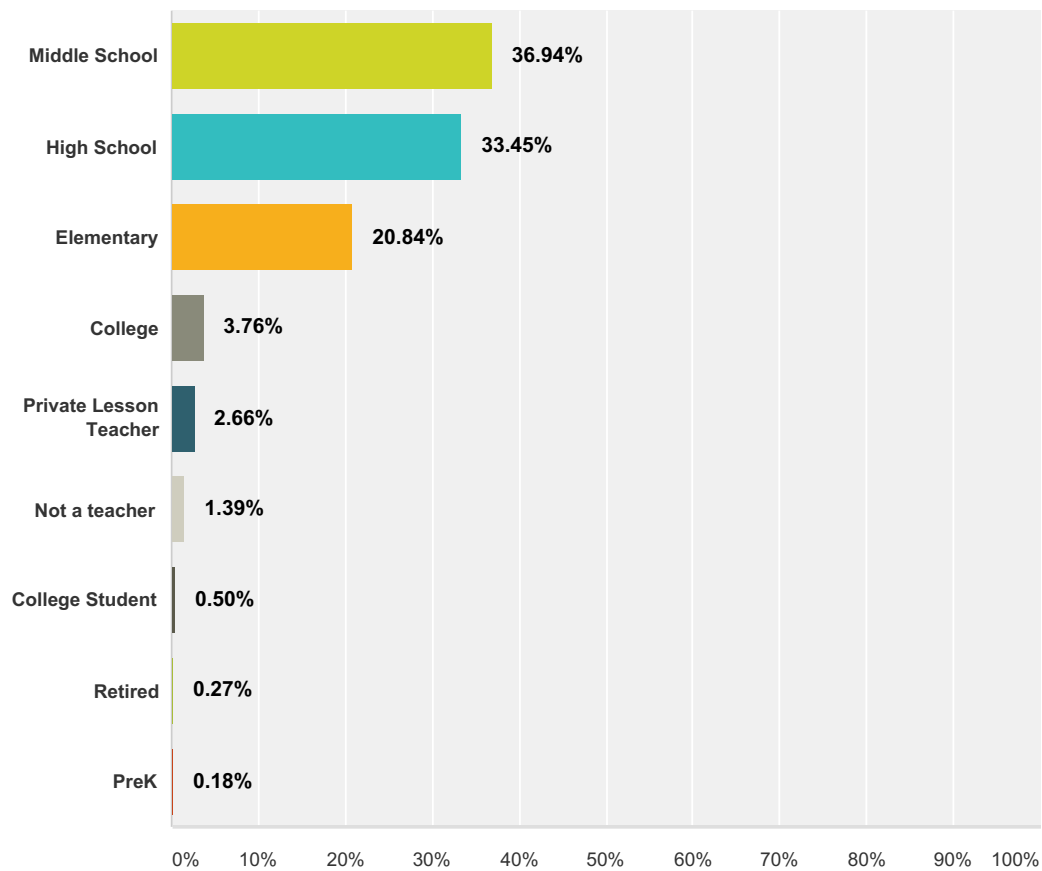
## CONCLUSION

These nine strategies are not the only ways to reduce burnout, but they are a good place to start if you are having trouble thinking of what you can do for yourself. One of these strategies may work for you the next time you have feelings of burnout, but may not work the following time. It is important to try new ways of dealing with mental stress, because we all mentally change throughout our lives and how we deal with stress. Just know that you are not alone; everyone deals with stress and burnout throughout their life. Without the difficult times, the great times would not be as great!

**Dr. Brad Meyer** is the Director of Percussion Studies at Stephen F. Austin State University (Nacogdoches, Texas) where he directs the percussion ensemble, steel band (Jacks of Steel), and teaches private percussion lessons. Meyer frequently tours to universities and high schools both nationally and internationally to present recitals, workshops, master classes, and clinics on various topics, including electro-acoustic percussion, contemporary marimba, concert snare drum, marching percussion, percussion ensemble, steel band, and world music. His performances and clinics have taken him to Austria, Taiwan, France, South Africa, and Slovenia. Meyer was also a faculty member at the Interlochen Arts Camp in 2015. Meyer has written several compositions for concert snare drum, multi-percussion, and percussion ensemble published through Bachovich Publications. For more information, visit <http://www.Brad-Meyer.com>. **PN**

## Q1 What is the primary grade level you teach?

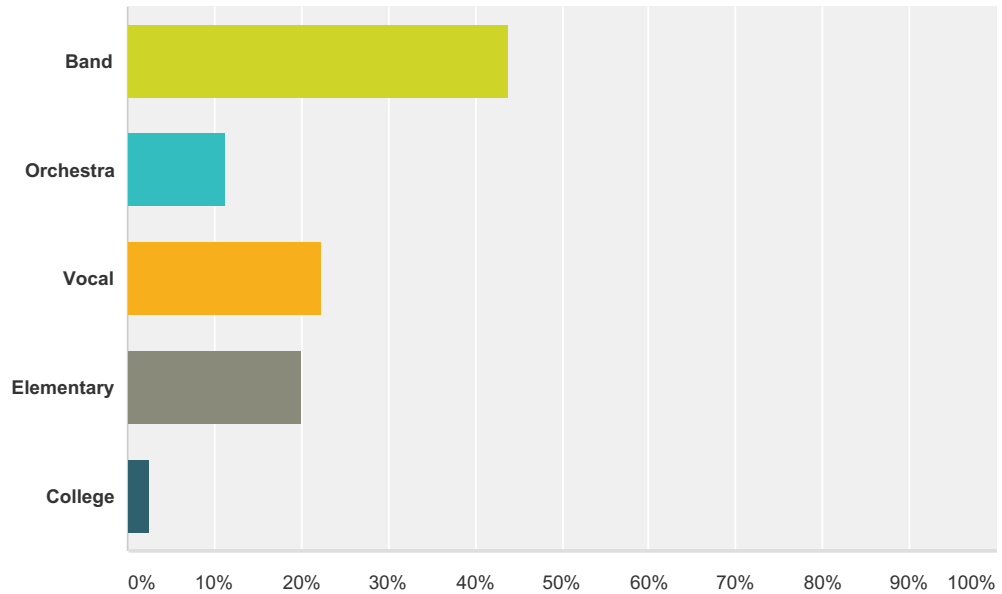
Answered: 3,378 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Middle School	36.94% 1,248
High School	33.45% 1,130
Elementary	20.84% 704
College	3.76% 127
Private Lesson Teacher	2.66% 90
Not a teacher	1.39% 47
College Student	0.50% 17
Retired	0.27% 9
PreK	0.18% 6
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,378</b>

## Q2 What is your primary TMEA Division?

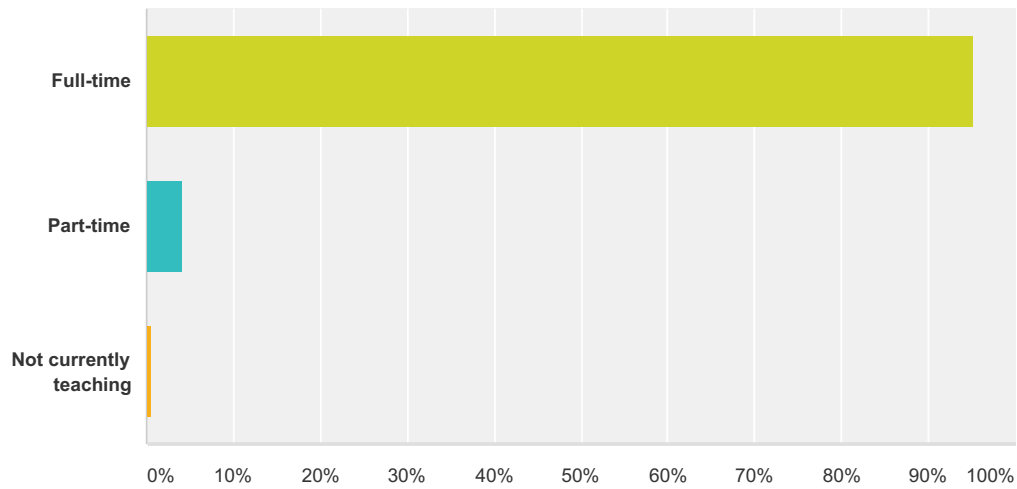
Answered: 3,378 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Band	43.78%	1,479
Orchestra	11.34%	383
Vocal	22.32%	754
Elementary	20.13%	680
College	2.43%	82
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,378</b>

### Q3 Is your job part- or full-time?

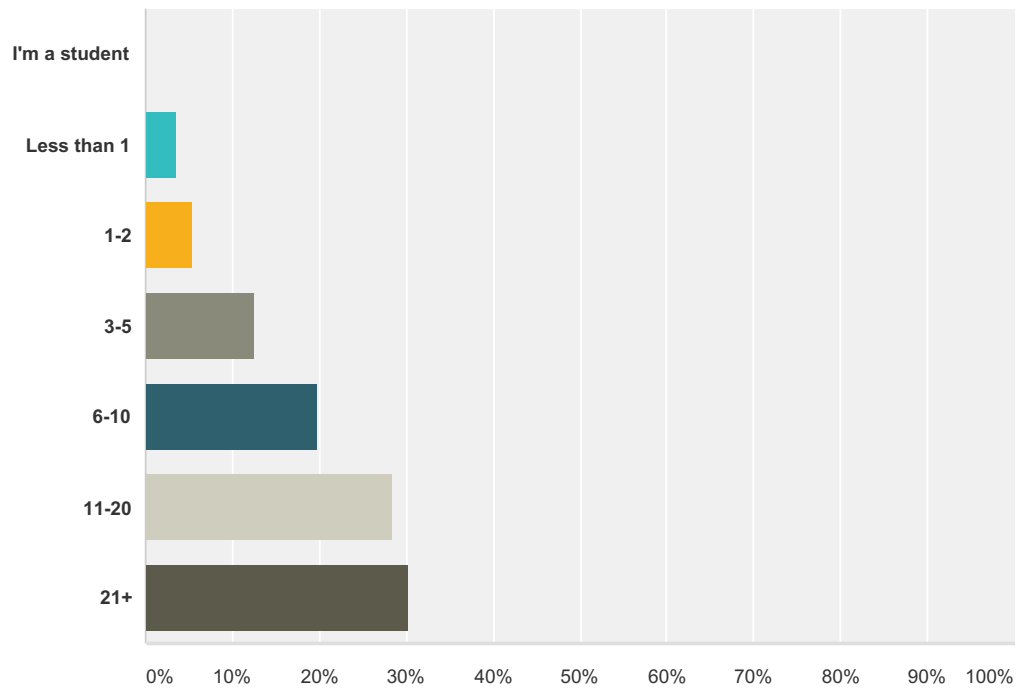
Answered: 3,378 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Full-time	95.23%	3,217
Part-time	4.11%	139
Not currently teaching	0.65%	22
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,378</b>

## Q4 How many years have you taught music?

Answered: 3,378 Skipped: 0

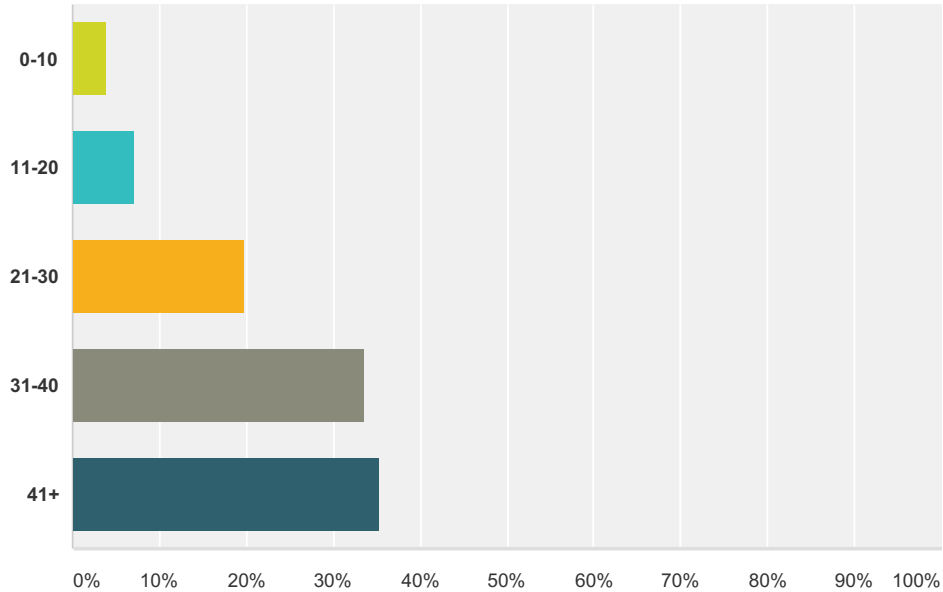


Answer Choices	Responses
I'm a student	0.00% 0
Less than 1	3.58% 121
1-2	5.45% 184
3-5	12.43% 420
6-10	19.89% 672
11-20	28.30% 956
21+	30.34% 1,025
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,378</b>



### Q5 How many contact hours (directly interacting with students) do you spend during the work week?

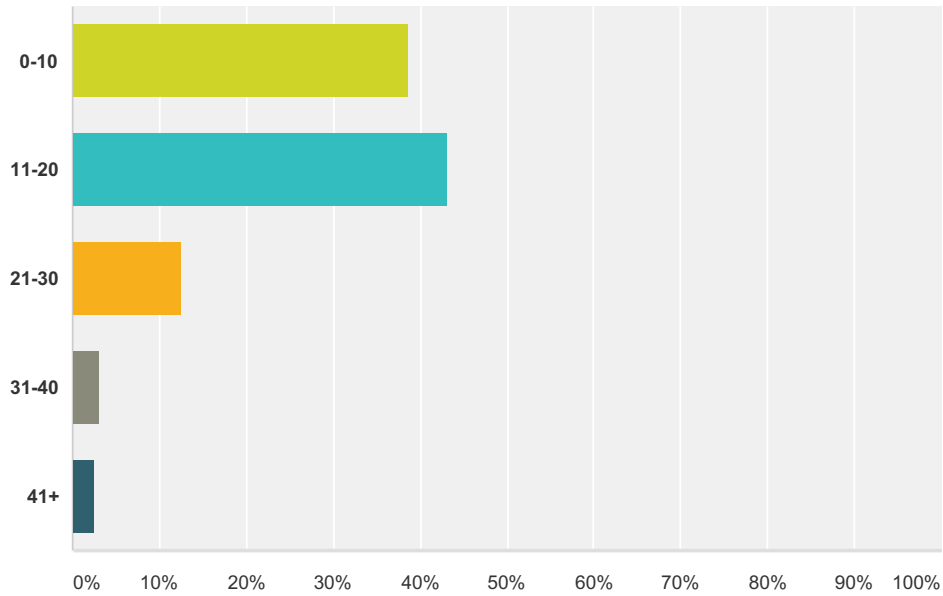
Answered: 3,288 Skipped: 90



Answer Choices	Responses	
0-10	3.98%	131
11-20	7.12%	234
21-30	19.92%	655
31-40	33.67%	1,107
41+	35.31%	1,161
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,288</b>

**Q6 How many non-contact work hours do you spend during the work week (administrative work, planning, communications, etc.)?**

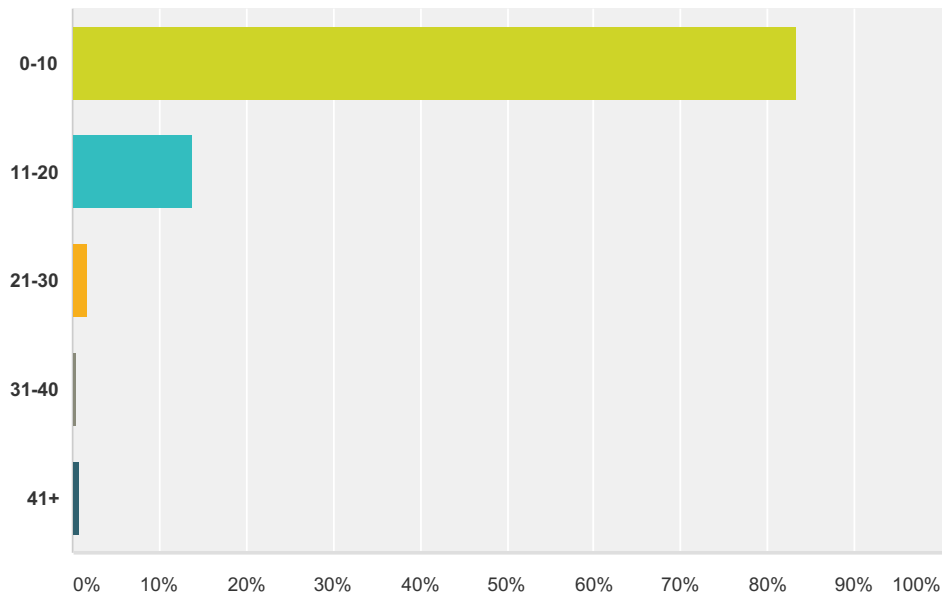
Answered: 3,288 Skipped: 90



Answer Choices	Responses	
0-10	38.66%	1,271
11-20	43.19%	1,420
21-30	12.53%	412
31-40	3.10%	102
41+	2.52%	83
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,288</b>

## Q7 During the work week, how many hours do you usually spend working from home?

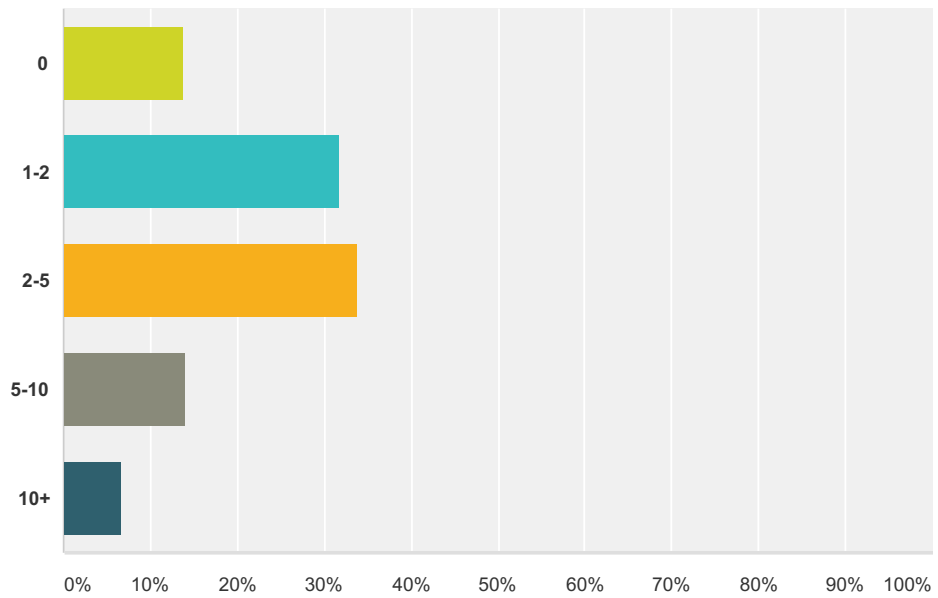
Answered: 3,288 Skipped: 90



Answer Choices	Responses	
0-10	83.39%	2,742
11-20	13.84%	455
21-30	1.58%	52
31-40	0.43%	14
41+	0.76%	25
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,288</b>

## Q8 How many hours do you usually work each weekend?

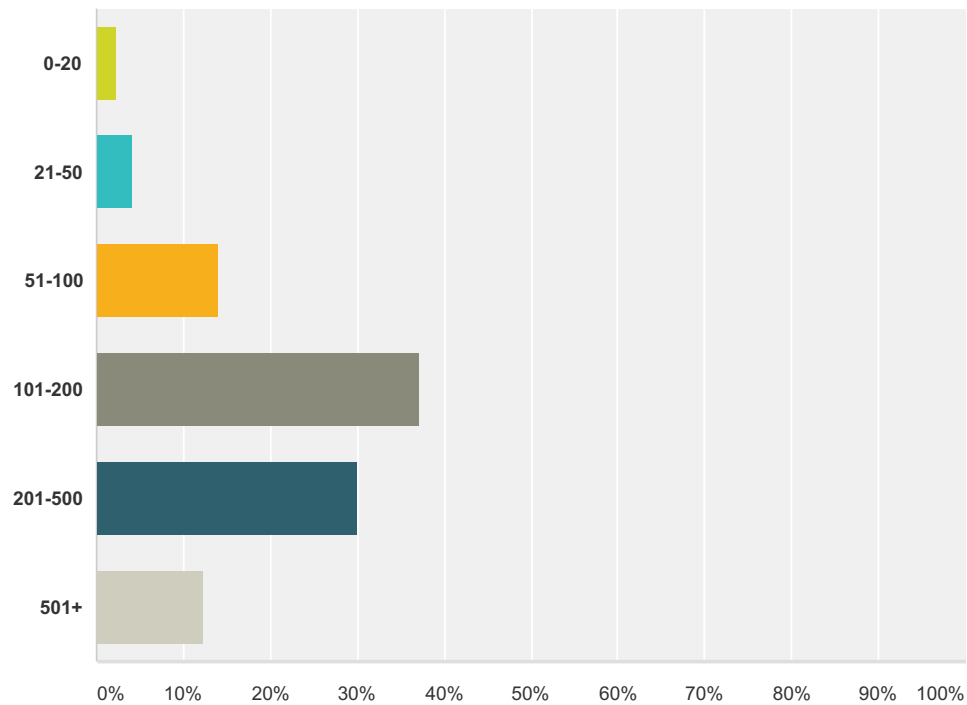
Answered: 3,288 Skipped: 90



Answer Choices	Responses	
0	13.69%	450
1-2	31.78%	1,045
2-5	33.82%	1,112
5-10	13.96%	459
10+	6.75%	222
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,288</b>

## Q9 How many students do you teach directly every week?

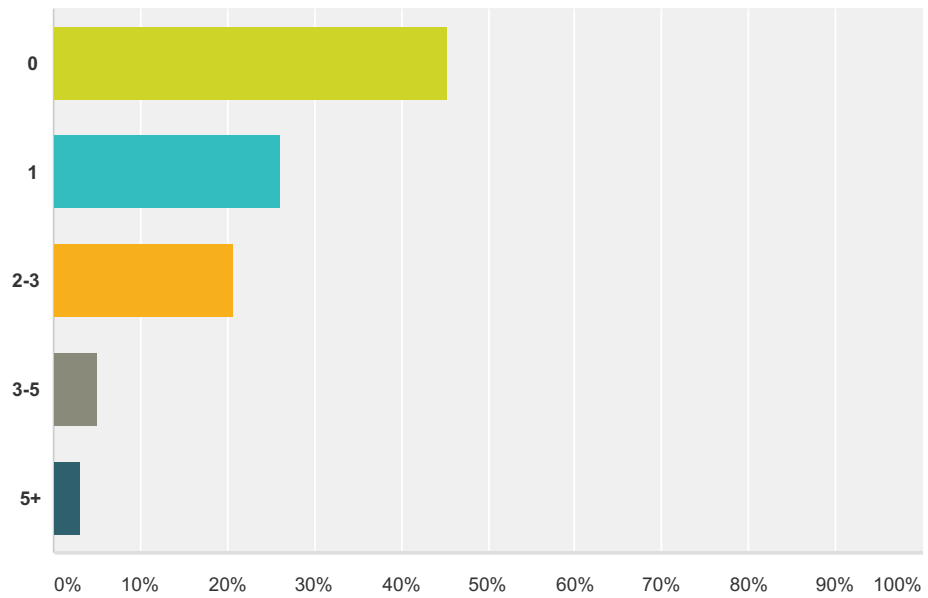
Answered: 3,274 Skipped: 104



Answer Choices	Responses
0-20	2.23% 73
21-50	4.18% 137
51-100	13.93% 456
101-200	37.26% 1,220
201-500	30.02% 983
501+	12.37% 405
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,274</b>

## Q10 How many teachers work with you to teach those students?

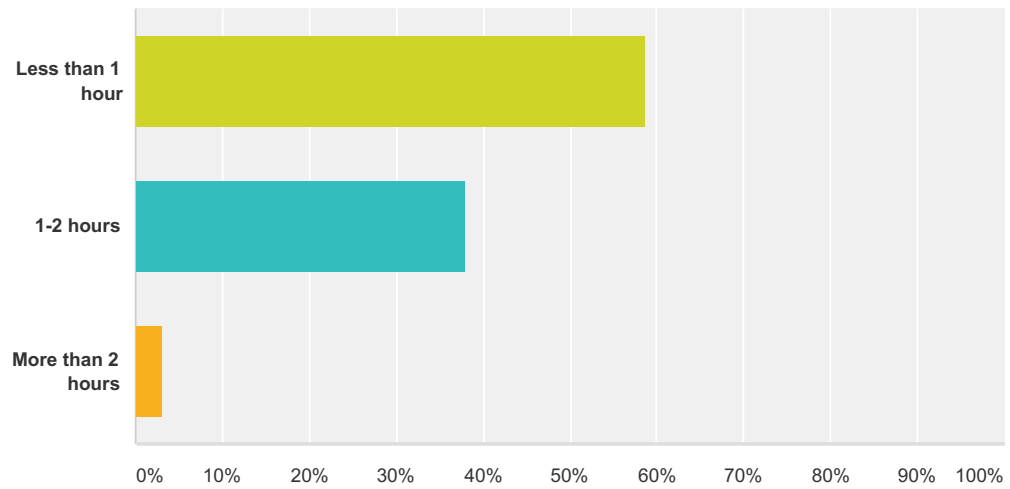
Answered: 3,274 Skipped: 104



Answer Choices	Responses	
0	45.20%	1,480
1	26.15%	856
2-3	20.59%	674
3-5	4.92%	161
5+	3.15%	103
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,274</b>

## Q11 How much earlier than your official school start time do you arrive?

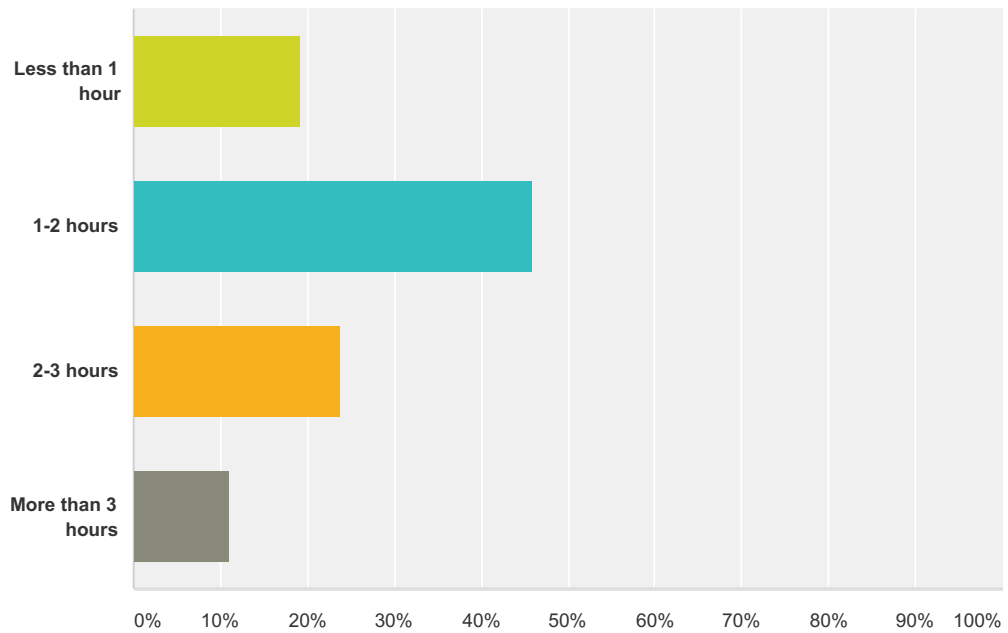
Answered: 3,251 Skipped: 127



Answer Choices	Responses
Less than 1 hour	58.69% 1,908
1-2 hours	38.08% 1,238
More than 2 hours	3.23% 105
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,251</b>

## Q12 How much later than the end of the school day do you usually leave?

Answered: 3,251 Skipped: 127

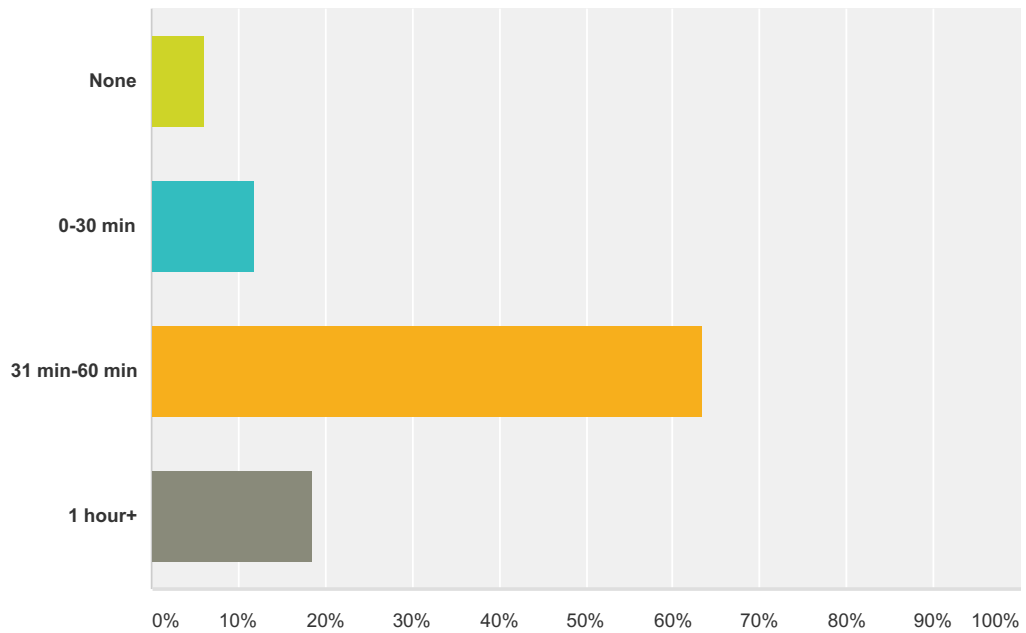


Answer Choices	Responses	
Less than 1 hour	19.19%	624
1-2 hours	46.02%	1,496
2-3 hours	23.75%	772
More than 3 hours	11.04%	359
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,251</b>



### Q13 How much conference time do you have each day?

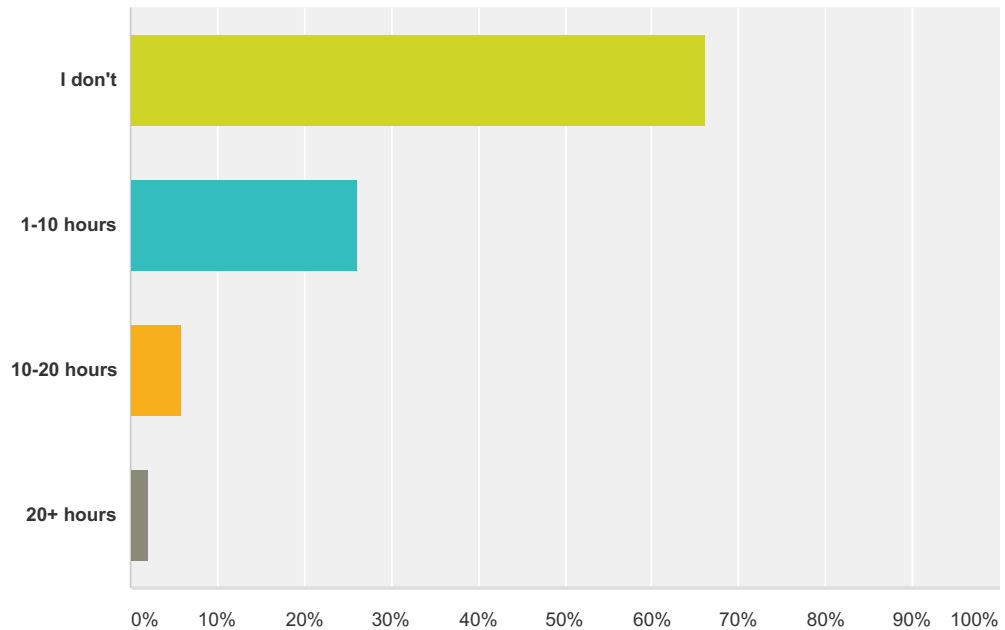
Answered: 3,251 Skipped: 127



Answer Choices	Responses
None	6.00% 195
0-30 min	11.97% 389
31 min-60 min	63.52% 2,065
1 hour+	18.52% 602
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,251</b>

### Q14 If you have an additional non-teaching job, how many hours do you work there each week?

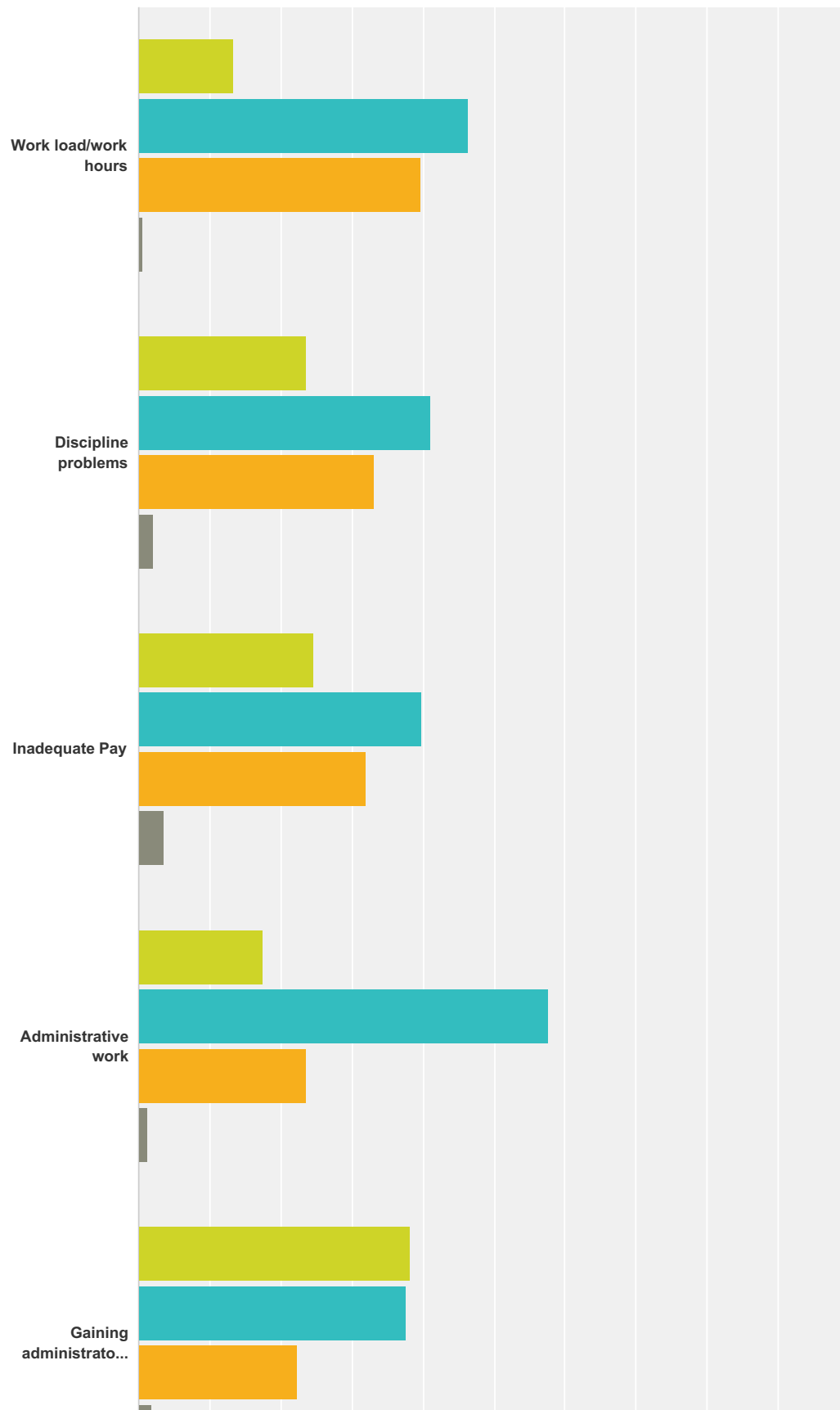
Answered: 3,242 Skipped: 136



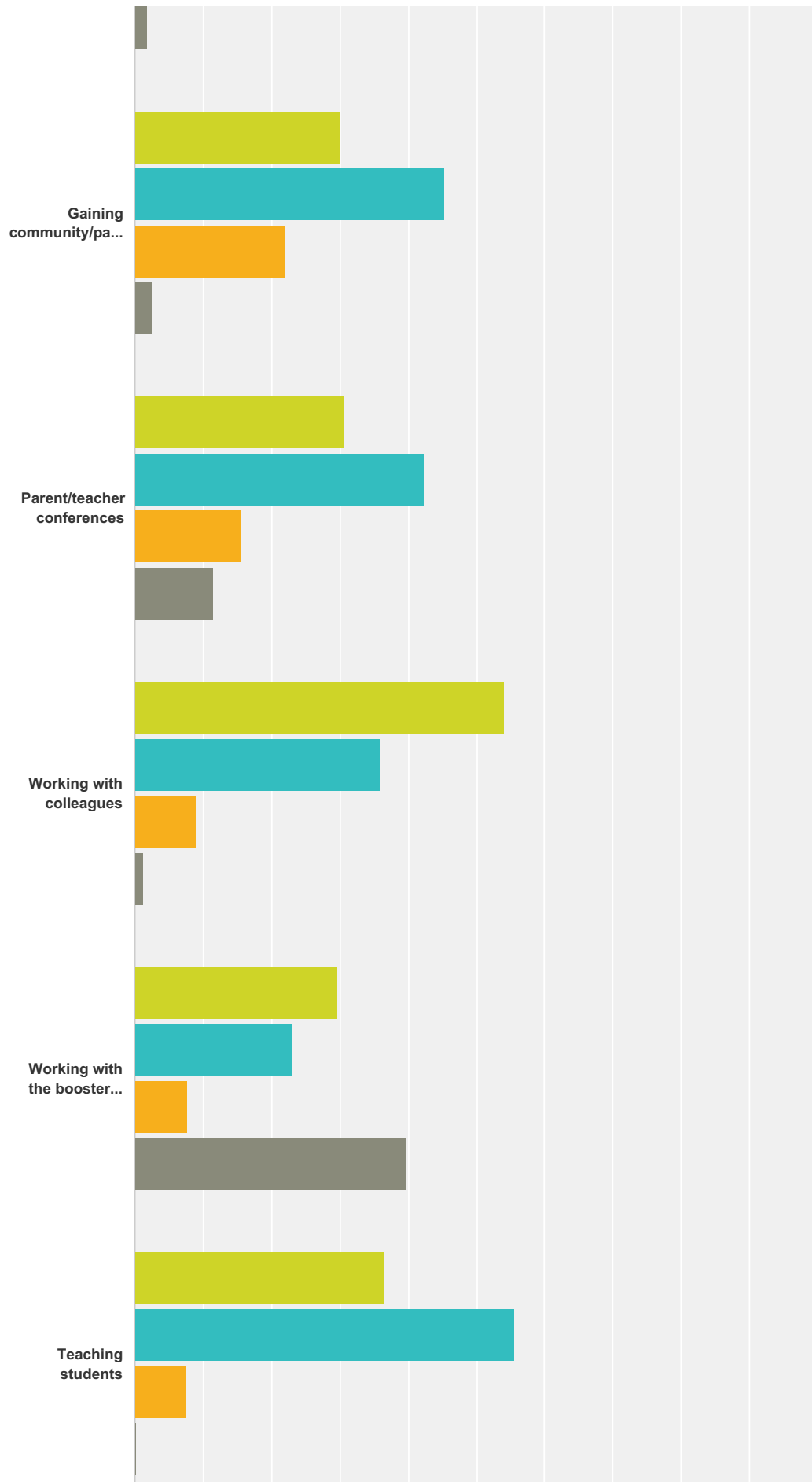
Answer Choices	Responses	
I don't	66.13%	2,144
1-10 hours	26.06%	845
10-20 hours	5.77%	187
20+ hours	2.04%	66
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,242</b>

### Q15 How stressful are the following?

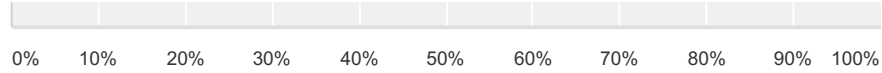
Answered: 3,202 Skipped: 176



# Balance or Burnout: March 2016 Survey of TMEA Members



## Balance or Burnout: March 2016 Survey of TMEA Members

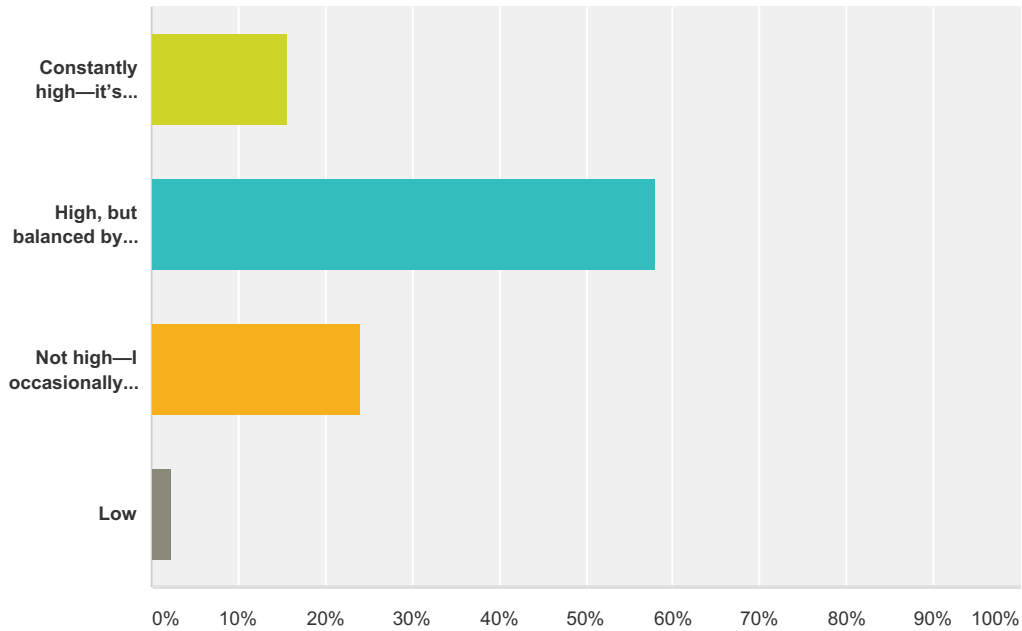


■ Not Stressful
 ■ Somewhat Stressful
 ■ Very Stressful
 ■ N/A

	Not Stressful	Somewhat Stressful	Very Stressful	N/A	Total
Work load/work hours	<b>13.37%</b> 427	<b>46.34%</b> 1,480	<b>39.70%</b> 1,268	<b>0.59%</b> 19	3,194
Discipline problems	<b>23.52%</b> 750	<b>41.20%</b> 1,314	<b>33.21%</b> 1,059	<b>2.07%</b> 66	3,189
Inadequate Pay	<b>24.55%</b> 785	<b>39.87%</b> 1,275	<b>32.02%</b> 1,024	<b>3.56%</b> 114	3,198
Administrative work	<b>17.64%</b> 562	<b>57.56%</b> 1,834	<b>23.57%</b> 751	<b>1.22%</b> 39	3,186
Gaining administrator support	<b>38.17%</b> 1,220	<b>37.52%</b> 1,199	<b>22.37%</b> 715	<b>1.94%</b> 62	3,196
Gaining community/parent support	<b>30.03%</b> 959	<b>45.37%</b> 1,449	<b>22.14%</b> 707	<b>2.47%</b> 79	3,194
Parent/teacher conferences	<b>30.68%</b> 981	<b>42.28%</b> 1,352	<b>15.57%</b> 498	<b>11.48%</b> 367	3,198
Working with colleagues	<b>54.02%</b> 1,727	<b>35.81%</b> 1,145	<b>8.98%</b> 287	<b>1.19%</b> 38	3,197
Working with the booster club	<b>29.62%</b> 946	<b>23.01%</b> 735	<b>7.64%</b> 244	<b>39.73%</b> 1,269	3,194
Teaching students	<b>36.59%</b> 1,169	<b>55.62%</b> 1,777	<b>7.48%</b> 239	<b>0.31%</b> 10	3,195

## Q16 My job-related stress is:

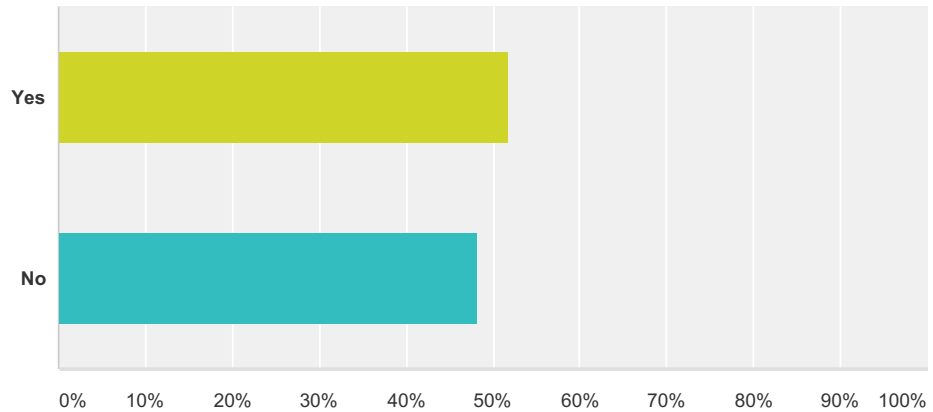
Answered: 3,200 Skipped: 178



Answer Choices	Responses	
Constantly high—it's unmanageable	15.59%	499
High, but balanced by other activities/interests	58.06%	1,858
Not high—I occasionally feel stressed, but not constantly	24.00%	768
Low	2.34%	75
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,200</b>

**Q17 Right now, do you feel burned out by your work? (e.g., you're mostly overwhelmed, exhausted, feel isolated, underappreciated, experience high anxiety, have no enthusiasm)**

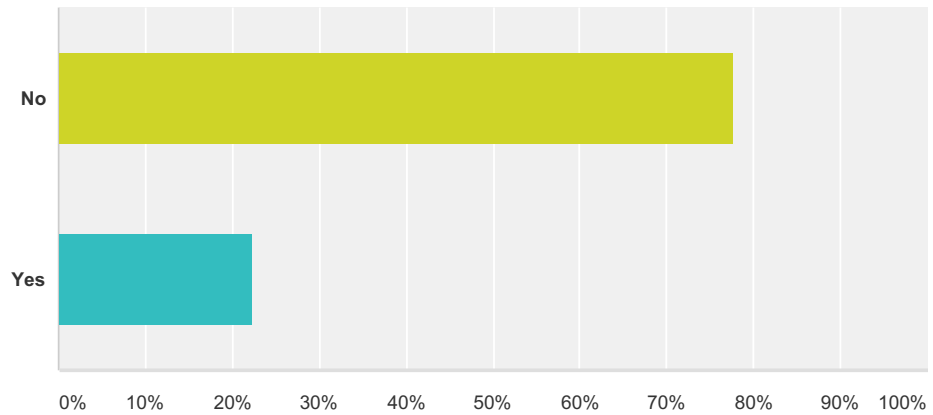
Answered: 3,189 Skipped: 189



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	51.80%	1,652
No	48.20%	1,537
Total		3,189

### Q18 Have you ever taken a break from teaching or sought other employment because of burnout?

Answered: 3,193 Skipped: 185

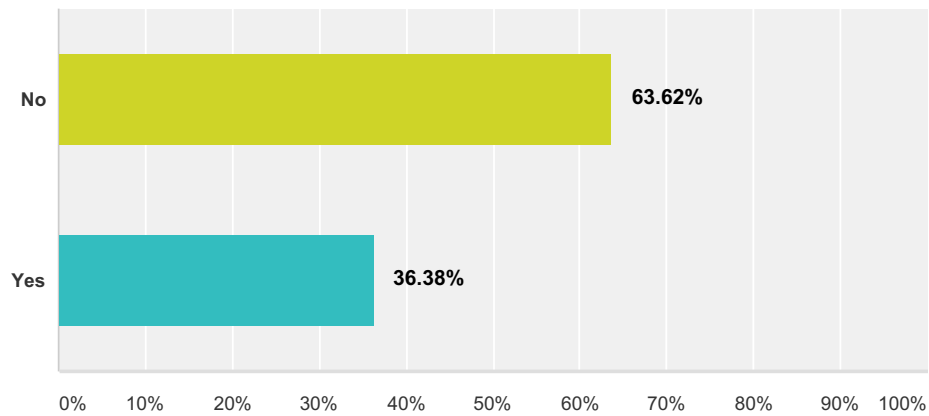


Answer Choices	Responses	
No	77.64%	2,479
Yes	22.36%	714
Total		3,193



## Q19 Are you considering a career change because of burnout?

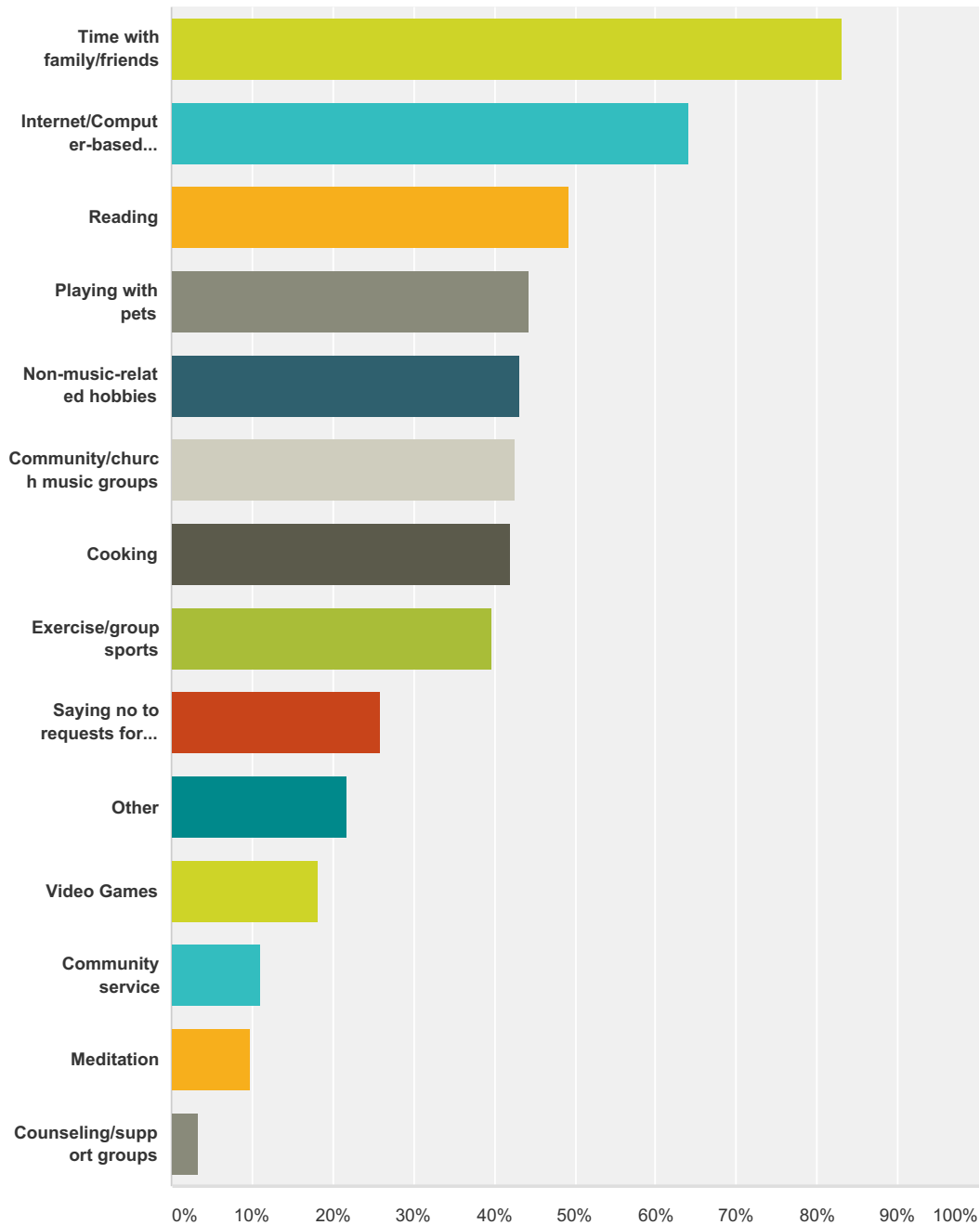
Answered: 3,191 Skipped: 187



Answer Choices	Responses	
No	63.62%	2,030
Yes	36.38%	1,161
Total		3,191

## Q20 Which of the following are typically part of your Monday-Friday outside of work?

Answered: 3,166 Skipped: 212



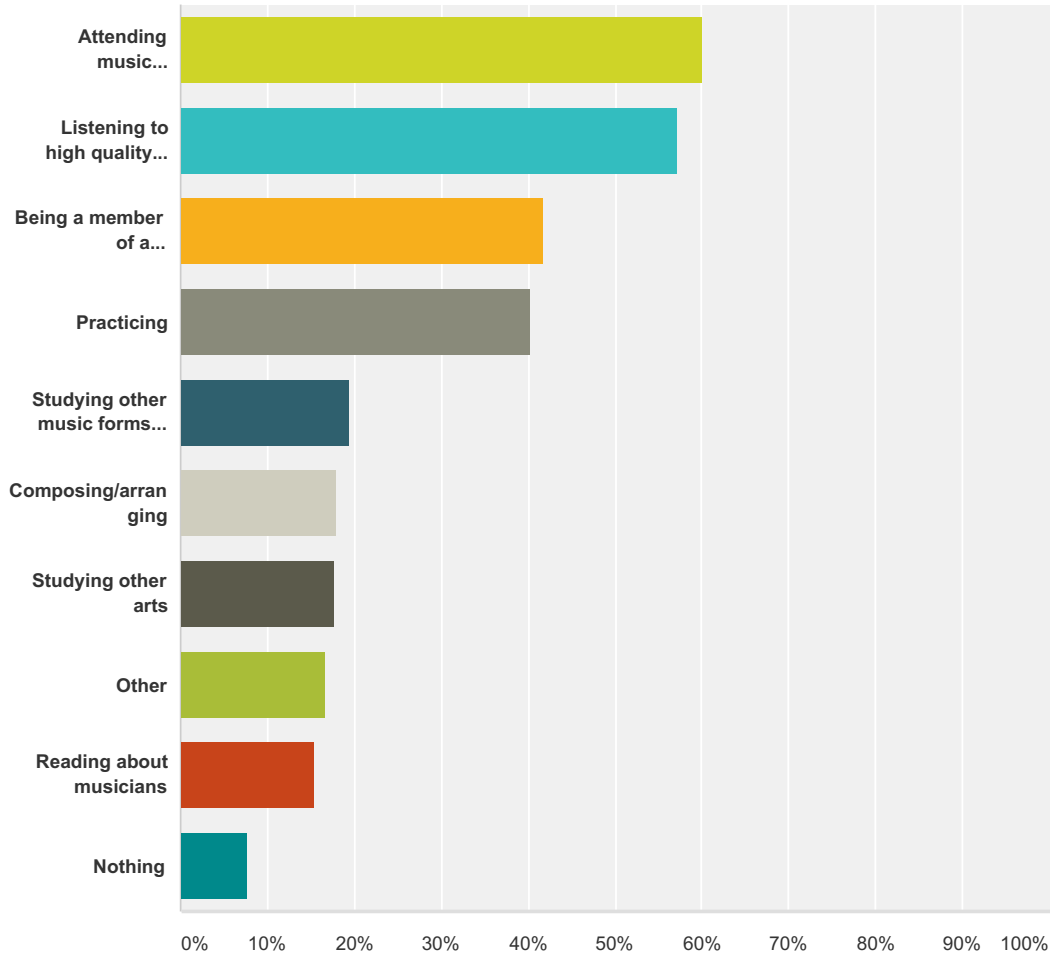
Answer Choices	Responses	
Time with family/friends	83.13%	2,632
Internet/Computer-based activities (surfing, social media, etc.)	64.15%	2,031
Reading	49.31%	1,561

## Balance or Burnout: March 2016 Survey of TMEA Members

Playing with pets	44.22%	1,400
Non-music-related hobbies	43.30%	1,371
Community/church music groups	42.58%	1,348
Cooking	41.91%	1,327
Exercise/group sports	39.64%	1,255
Saying no to requests for my time	25.96%	822
Other	21.73%	688
Video Games	18.13%	574
Community service	11.05%	350
Meditation	9.76%	309
Counseling/support groups	3.28%	104
<b>Total Respondents: 3,166</b>		

## Q21 What outside of work fuels your passion for music? (where you're not teaching/directing)

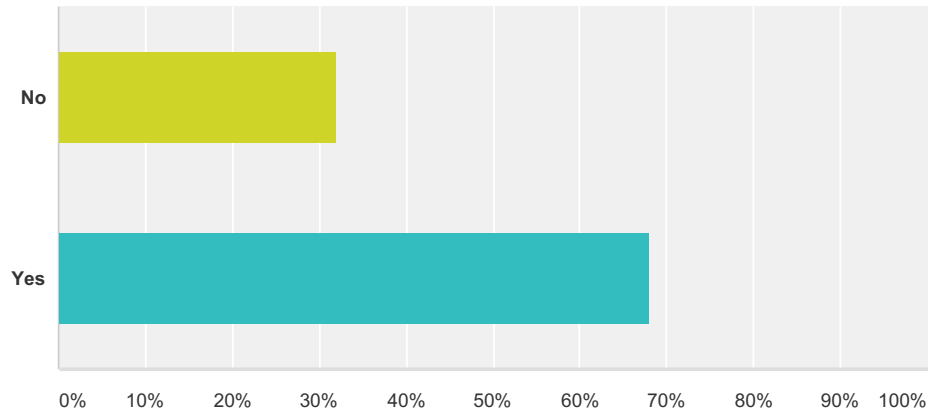
Answered: 3,165 Skipped: 213



Answer Choices	Responses
Attending music performances	60.16% 1,904
Listening to high quality recordings	57.12% 1,808
Being a member of a community/church music group	41.80% 1,323
Practicing	40.22% 1,273
Studying other music forms than the one I teach	19.40% 614
Composing/arranging	17.88% 566
Studying other arts	17.79% 563
Other	16.62% 526
Reading about musicians	15.48% 490
Nothing	7.71% 244

**Q22 Do you have someone you turn to when you need help coping with work-related challenges? (a designated mentor or someone who simply fills that role for you)**

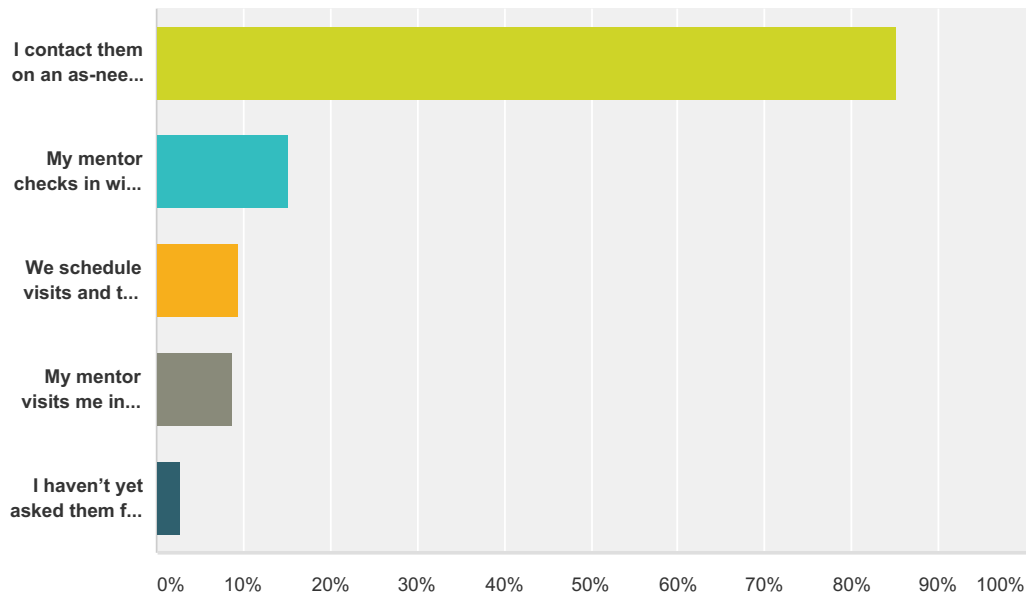
Answered: 3,175 Skipped: 203



Answer Choices	Responses	
No	31.94%	1,014
Yes	68.06%	2,161
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,175</b>

## Q23 When do you interact with this mentor/supporter?

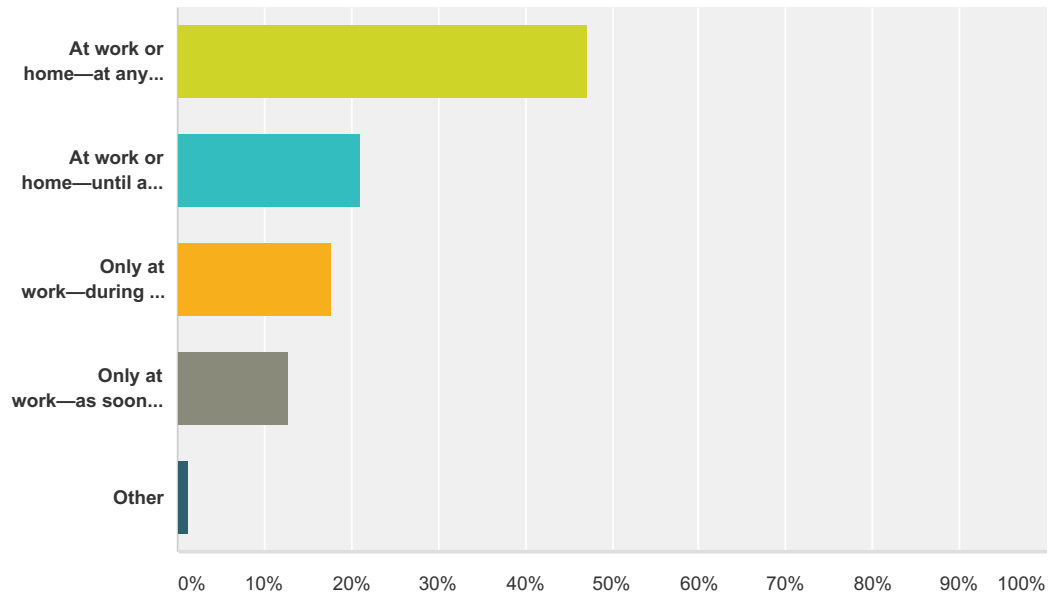
Answered: 2,151 Skipped: 1,227



Answer Choices	Responses	
I contact them on an as-needed basis	85.22%	1,833
My mentor checks in with me occasionally to see how I'm doing	15.30%	329
We schedule visits and talk about any issues I may be having	9.44%	203
My mentor visits me in the classroom to offer feedback	8.69%	187
I haven't yet asked them for help	2.70%	58
Total Respondents: 2,151		

## Q24 When do you usually respond to work-related communications (e.g., emails, voicemails, texts)?

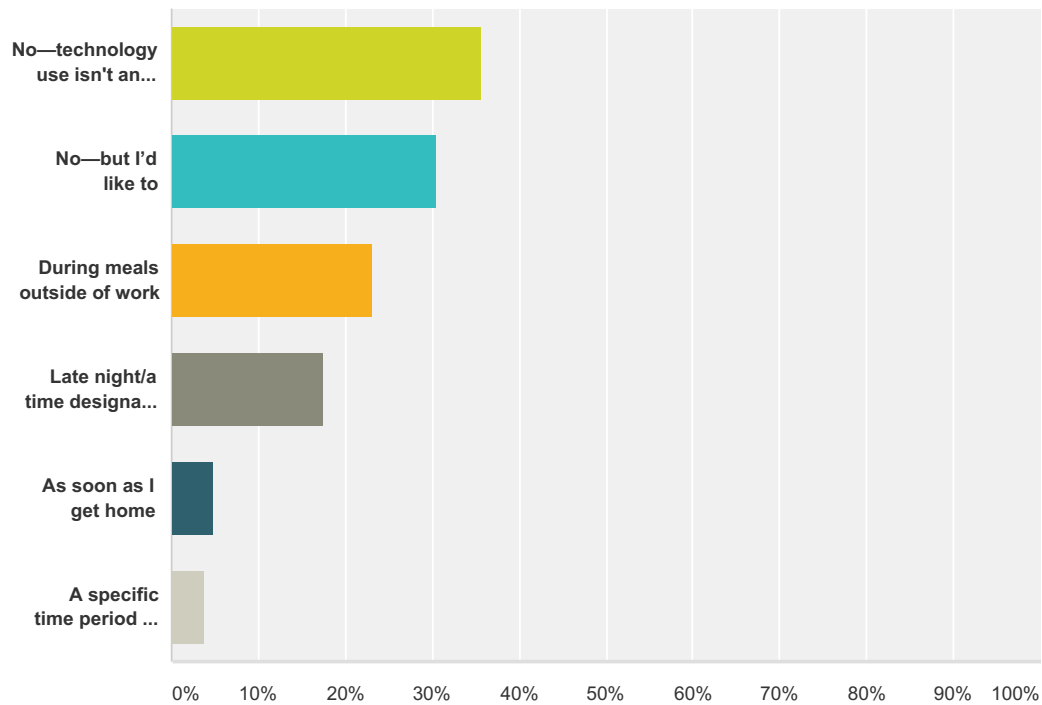
Answered: 3,146 Skipped: 232



Answer Choices	Responses	
At work or home—at any time	47.11%	1,482
At work or home—until a designated cutoff time	21.14%	665
Only at work—during a specific time period	17.83%	561
Only at work—as soon as I receive them	12.75%	401
Other	1.18%	37
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,146</b>

## Q26 Do you designate any time in your weekday as tech-free?

Answered: 3,088 Skipped: 290

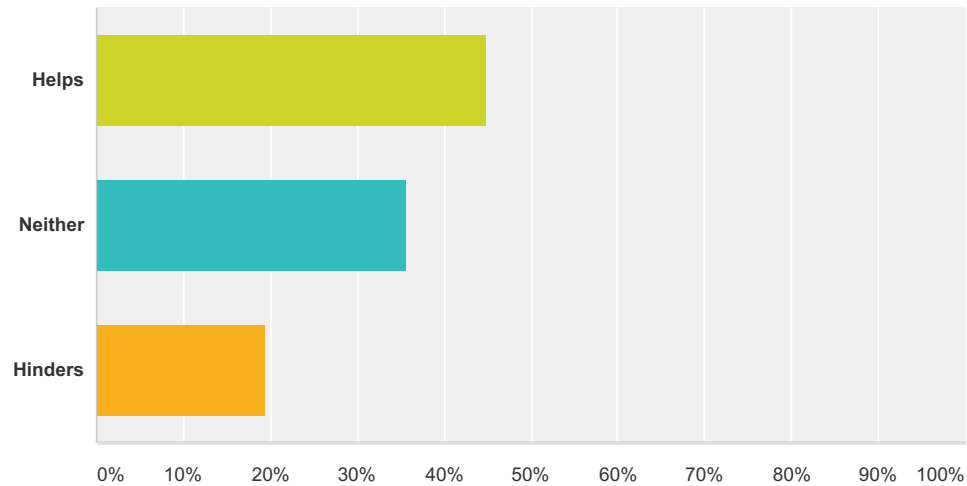


Answer Choices	Responses	
No—technology use isn't an issue for me	35.75%	1,104
No—but I'd like to	30.47%	941
During meals outside of work	23.19%	716
Late night/a time designated before sleep	17.45%	539
As soon as I get home	4.86%	150
A specific time period set aside each day	3.66%	113
Total Respondents: 3,088		



**Q27 In general, do you believe the way you use your personal tech devices helps or hinders your ability to achieve balance?**

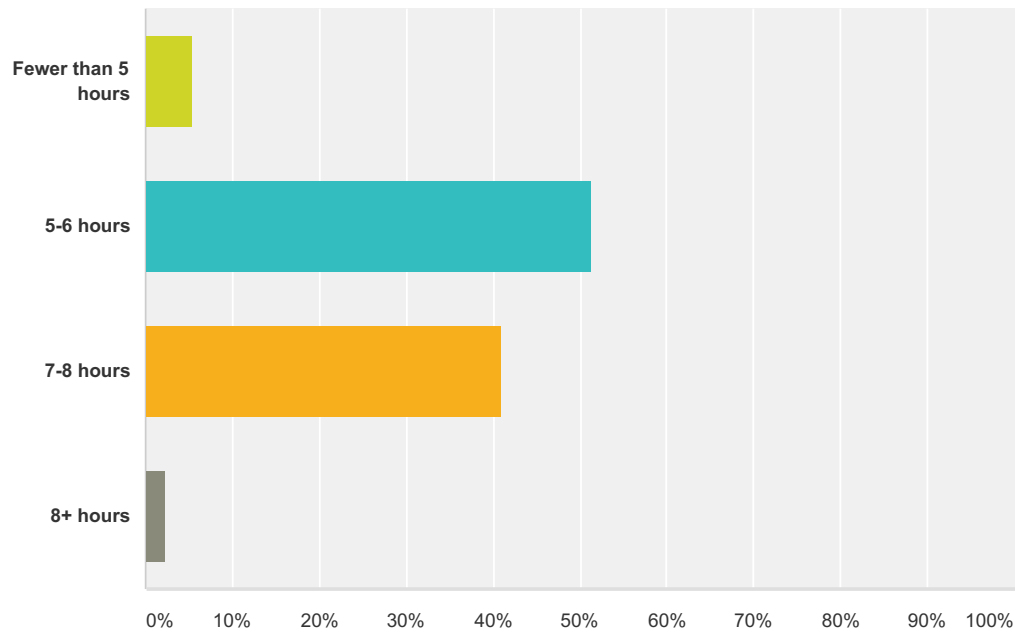
Answered: 3,139 Skipped: 239



Answer Choices	Responses	
Helps	44.92%	1,410
Neither	35.62%	1,118
Hinders	19.46%	611
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,139</b>

## Q28 How many hours of sleep do you usually get?

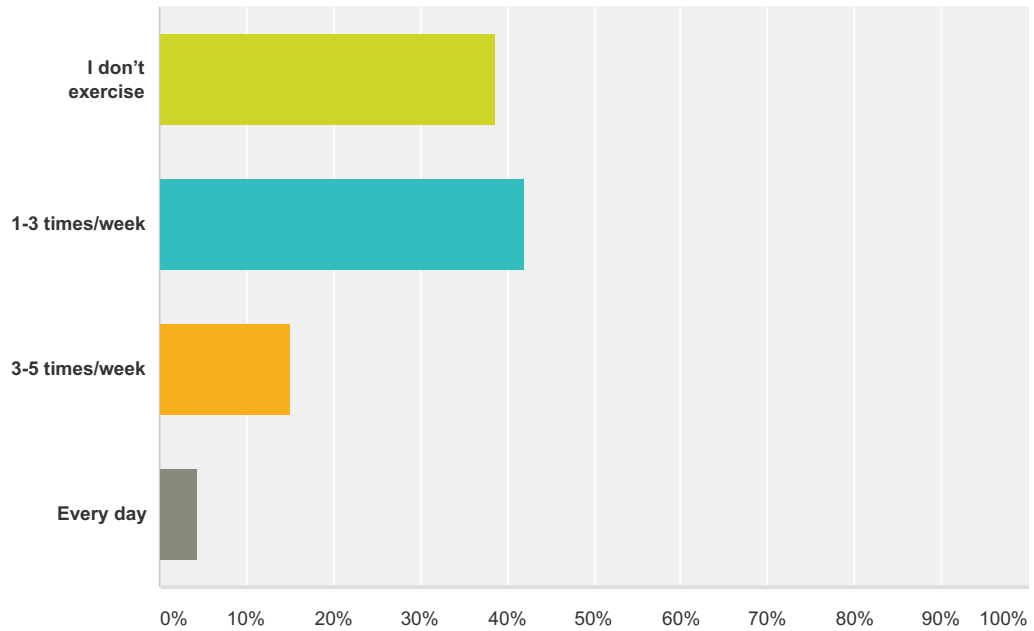
Answered: 3,133 Skipped: 245



Answer Choices	Responses	
Fewer than 5 hours	5.36%	168
5-6 hours	51.45%	1,612
7-8 hours	40.82%	1,279
8+ hours	2.36%	74
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,133</b>

## Q29 How often do you exercise?

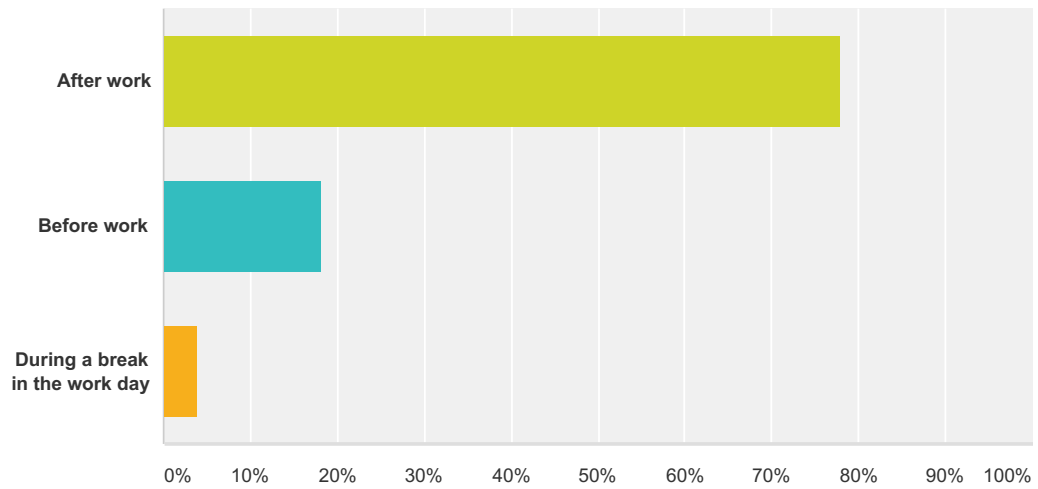
Answered: 3,133 Skipped: 245



Answer Choices	Responses	
I don't exercise	38.65%	1,211
1-3 times/week	42.00%	1,316
3-5 times/week	15.03%	471
Every day	4.31%	135
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,133</b>

### Q30 When do you exercise during the week?

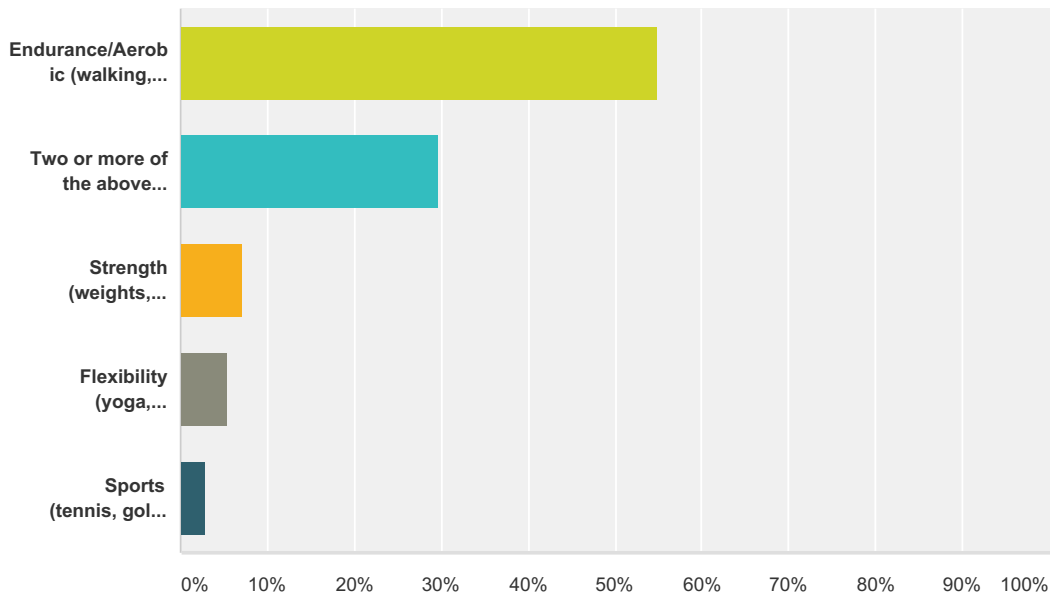
Answered: 1,909 Skipped: 1,469



Answer Choices	Responses	
After work	77.79%	1,485
Before work	18.23%	348
During a break in the work day	3.98%	76
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,909</b>

### Q31 What is your most common type of exercise?

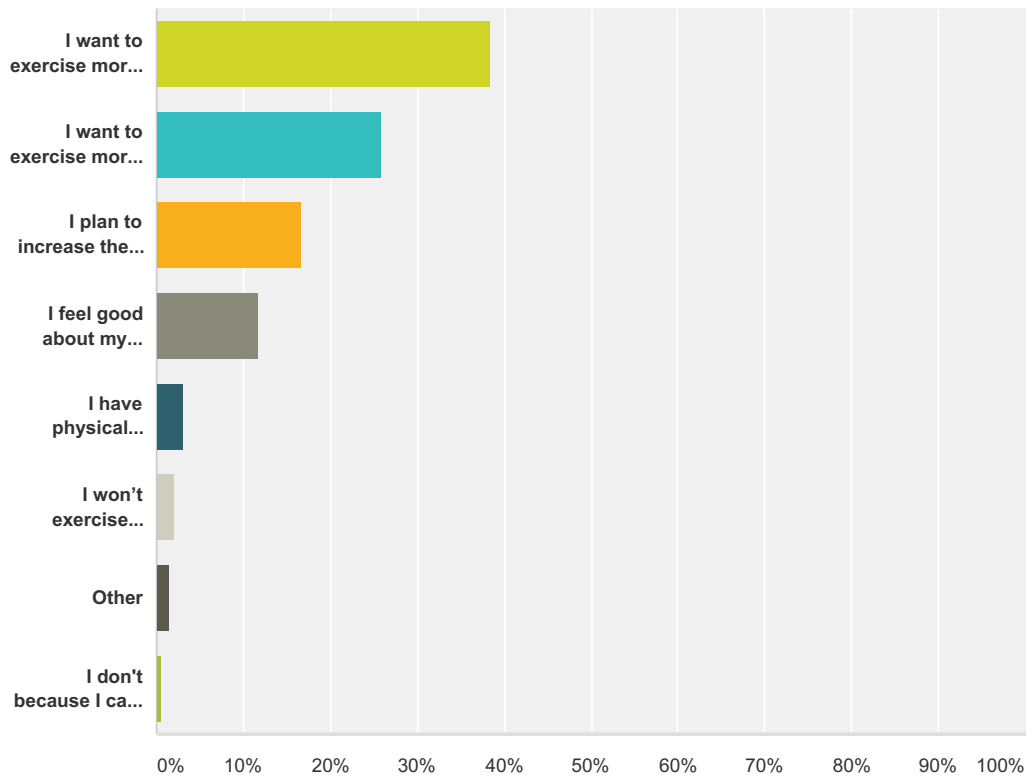
Answered: 1,914 Skipped: 1,464



Answer Choices	Responses	
Endurance/Aerobic (walking, jogging, cycling)	54.86%	1,050
Two or more of the above equally	29.68%	568
Strength (weights, resistance bands)	7.05%	135
Flexibility (yoga, stretching)	5.43%	104
Sports (tennis, golf, softball, etc.)	2.98%	57
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,914</b>

### Q32 Describe how you feel about the amount of exercise you get:

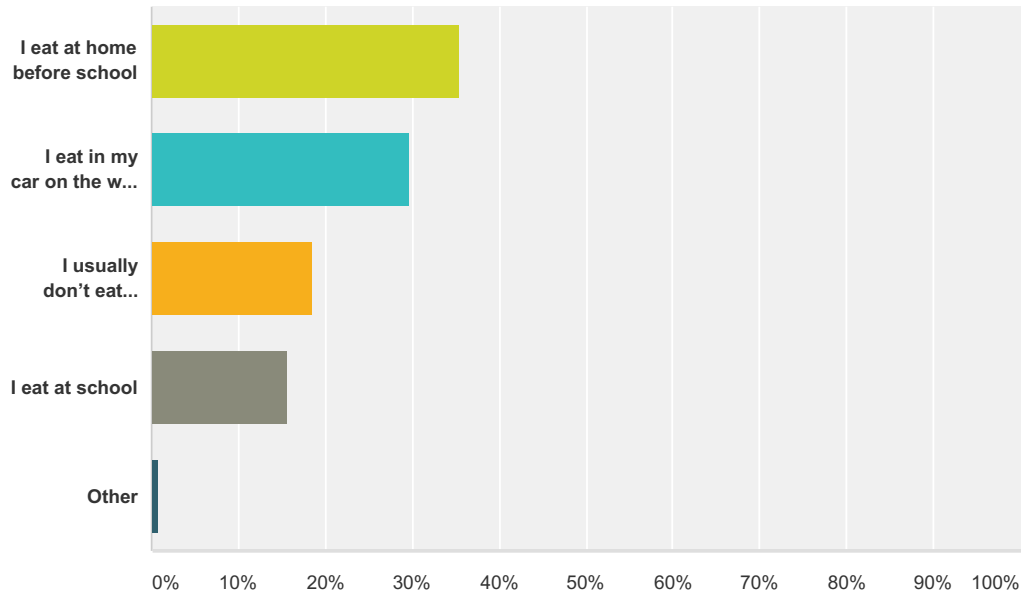
Answered: 3,113 Skipped: 265



Answer Choices	Responses	
I want to exercise more, but I have no time	38.45%	1,197
I want to exercise more, but I can't find the motivation	25.86%	805
I plan to increase the amount of exercise I get	16.67%	519
I feel good about my exercise	11.60%	361
I have physical issues/limitations that prevent me from exercising	3.18%	99
I won't exercise because I really dislike it	2.06%	64
Other	1.51%	47
I don't because I can't afford an exercise facility membership	0.67%	21
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,113</b>

### Q34 Your breakfast:

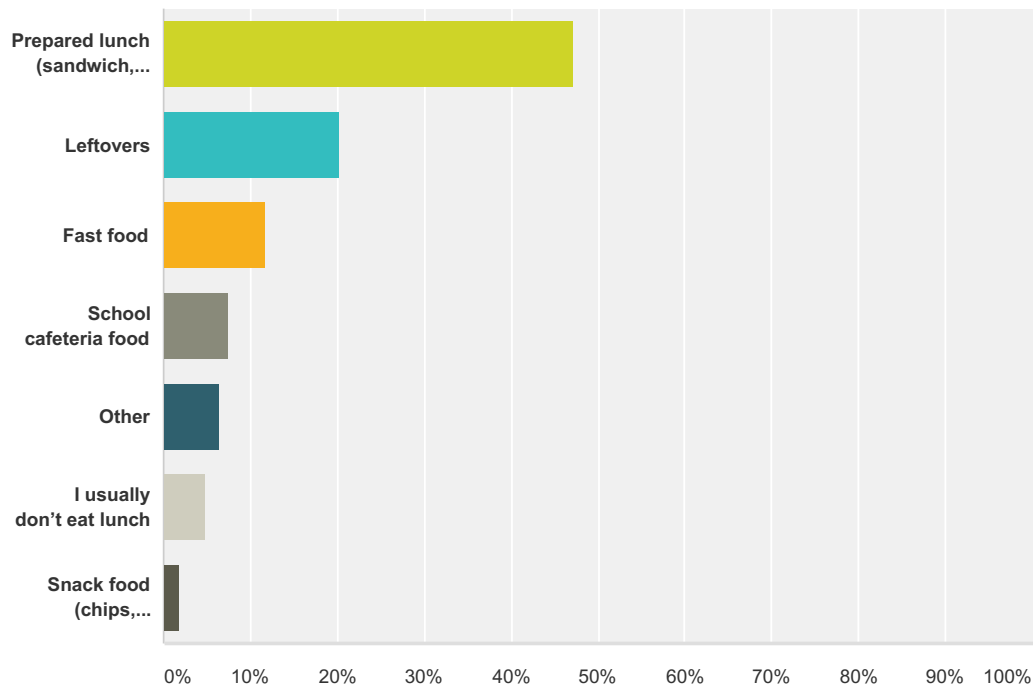
Answered: 3,106 Skipped: 272



Answer Choices	Responses	
I eat at home before school	35.48%	1,102
I eat in my car on the way to school	29.56%	918
I usually don't eat breakfast	18.48%	574
I eat at school	15.58%	484
Other	0.90%	28
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,106</b>

### Q35 What describes a typical lunch during the week:

Answered: 3,109 Skipped: 269

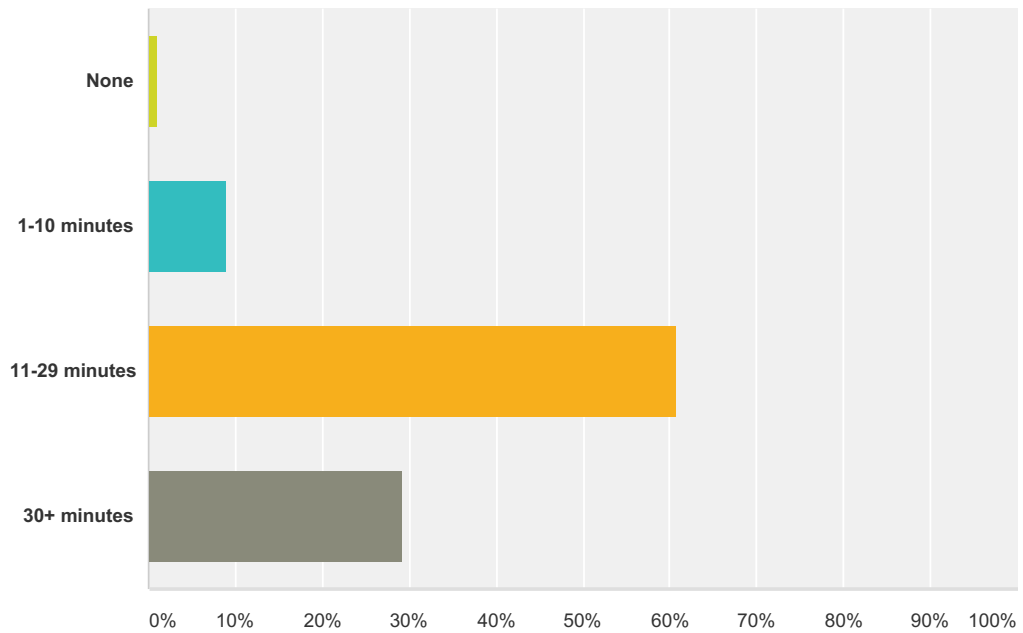


Answer Choices	Responses	
Prepared lunch (sandwich, etc.)	47.25%	1,469
Leftovers	20.30%	631
Fast food	11.71%	364
School cafeteria food	7.59%	236
Other	6.47%	201
I usually don't eat lunch	4.73%	147
Snack food (chips, crackers, popcorn, vending machine food)	1.96%	61
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,109</b>



### Q36 How much time is usually available to eat lunch?

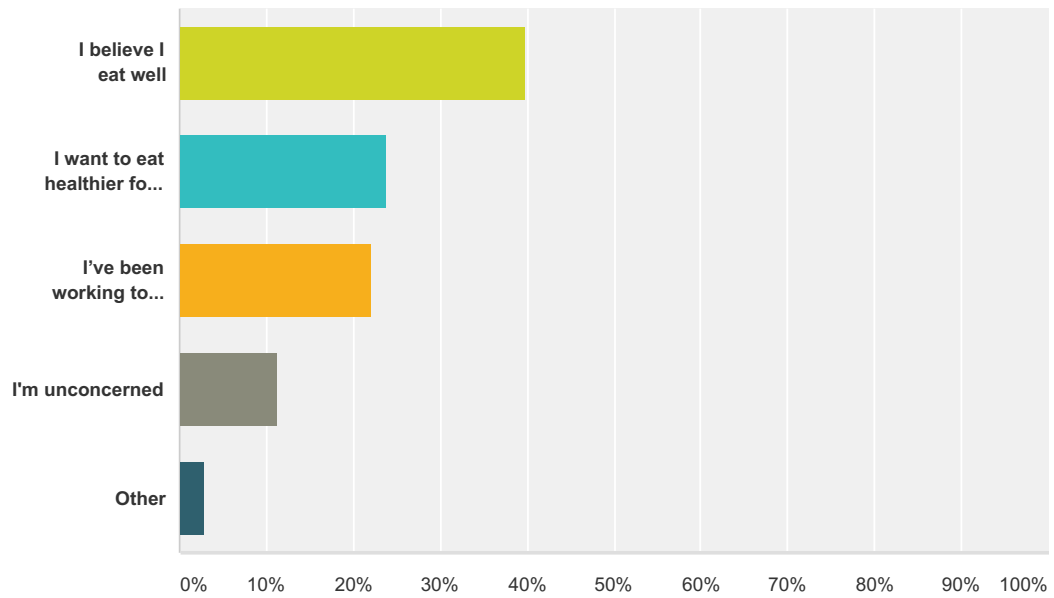
Answered: 3,106 Skipped: 272



Answer Choices	Responses
None	1.09% 34
1-10 minutes	8.92% 277
11-29 minutes	60.82% 1,889
30+ minutes	29.17% 906
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,106</b>

### Q37 What do you think about your lunch food choice:

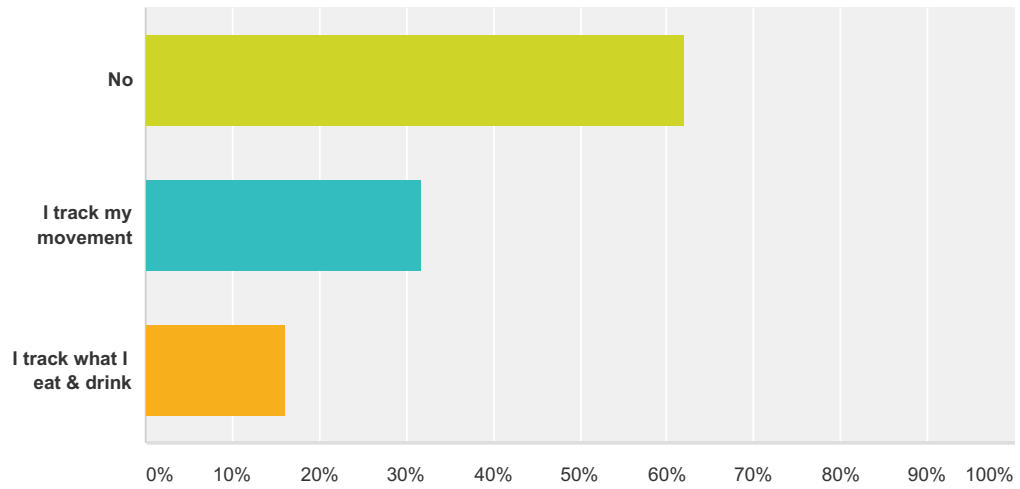
Answered: 3,101 Skipped: 277



Answer Choices	Responses	
I believe I eat well	39.79%	1,234
I want to eat healthier food, but don't feel able (schedule, cost, knowledge, etc.)	23.80%	738
I've been working to change my lunch choices to be healthier	22.06%	684
I'm unconcerned	11.35%	352
Other	3.00%	93
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,101</b>

### Q39 Do you use an app or other means for tracking your movement and/or what you eat & drink?

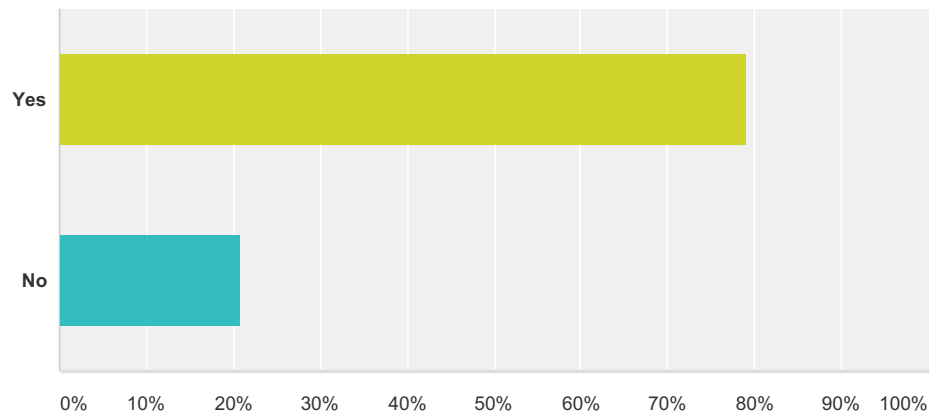
Answered: 3,103 Skipped: 275



Answer Choices	Responses	
No	61.97%	1,923
I track my movement	31.78%	986
I track what I eat & drink	15.98%	496
Total Respondents: 3,103		

### Q40 Do you believe this tracking helps you make healthier choices?

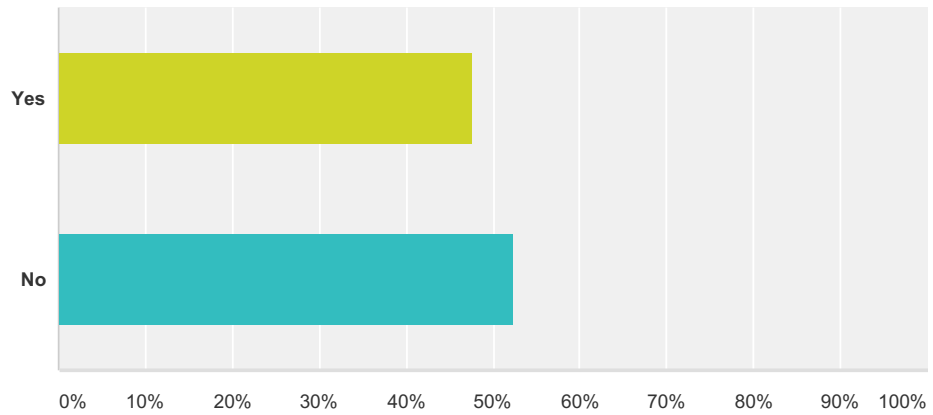
Answered: 1,177 Skipped: 2,201



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	79.10% 931
No	20.90% 246
Total	1,177

## Q42 Do you believe you currently have a healthy balance in your work and non-work life?

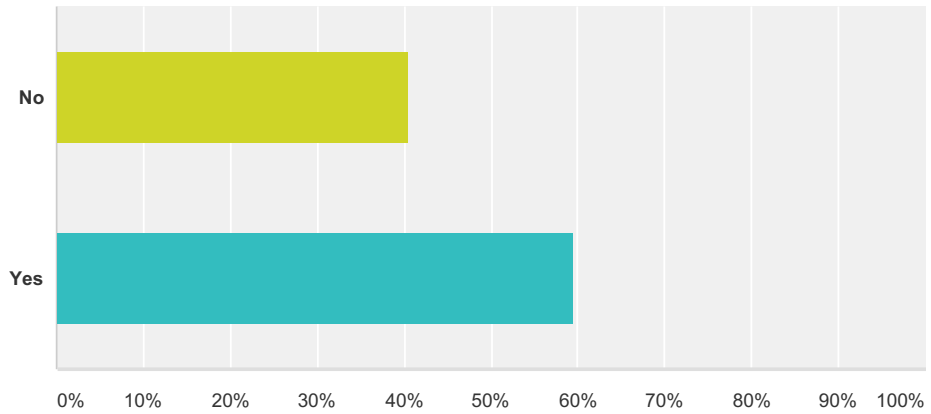
Answered: 1,181 Skipped: 2,197



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	47.67%	563
No	52.33%	618
Total		1,181

**Q43 Since you began teaching, at some point did you change your eating and/or exercise habits and experience a better sense of balance and reduced stress?**

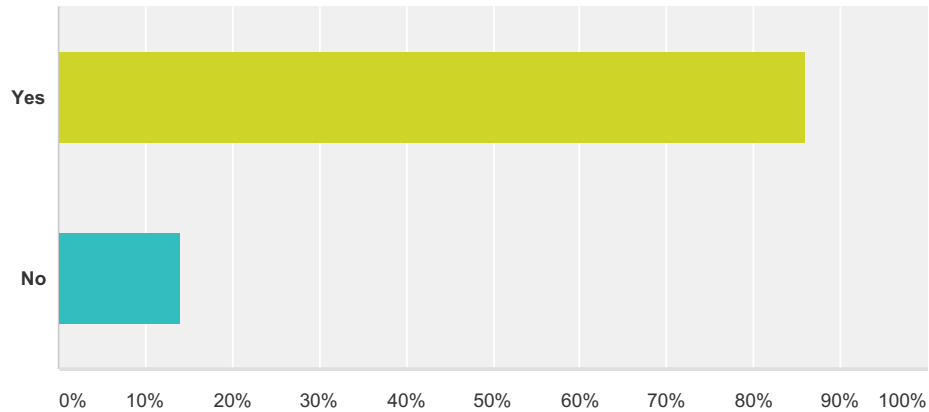
Answered: 3,089 Skipped: 289



Answer Choices	Responses	
No	40.40%	1,248
Yes	59.60%	1,841
Total		3,089

**Q45 Would you like TMEA to publish stories about TMEA members who have significantly changed their approach to wellness and who believe it has helped them achieve a better work/life balance?**

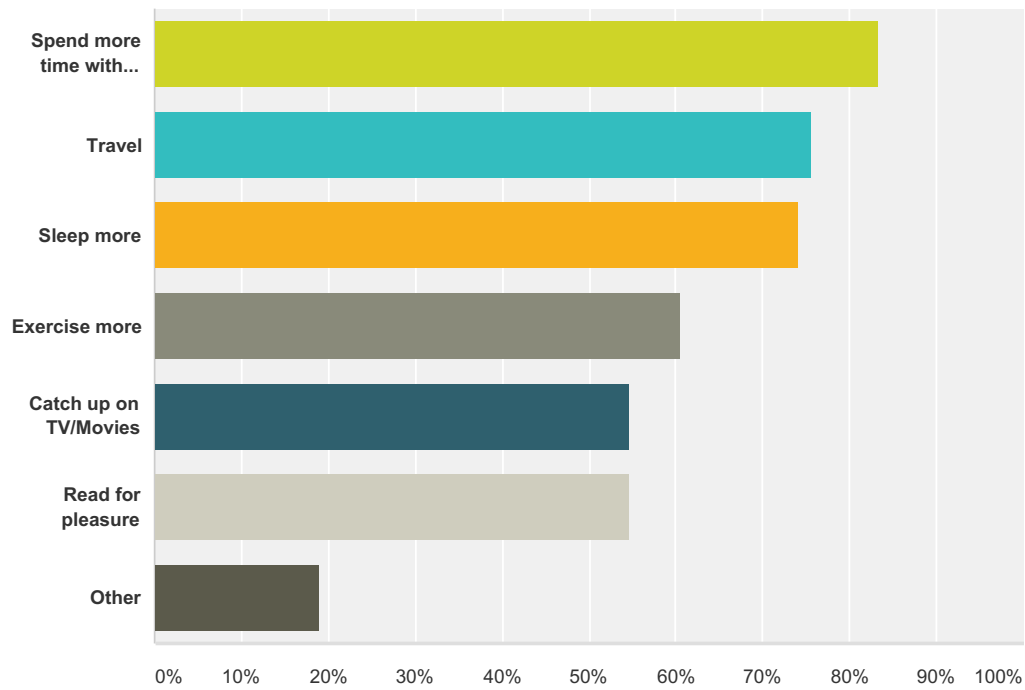
Answered: 3,021 Skipped: 357



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	86.10%	2,601
No	13.90%	420
Total		3,021

## Q47 What will you do this summer for restoration? Whatever it is—enjoy!

Answered: 3,076 Skipped: 302

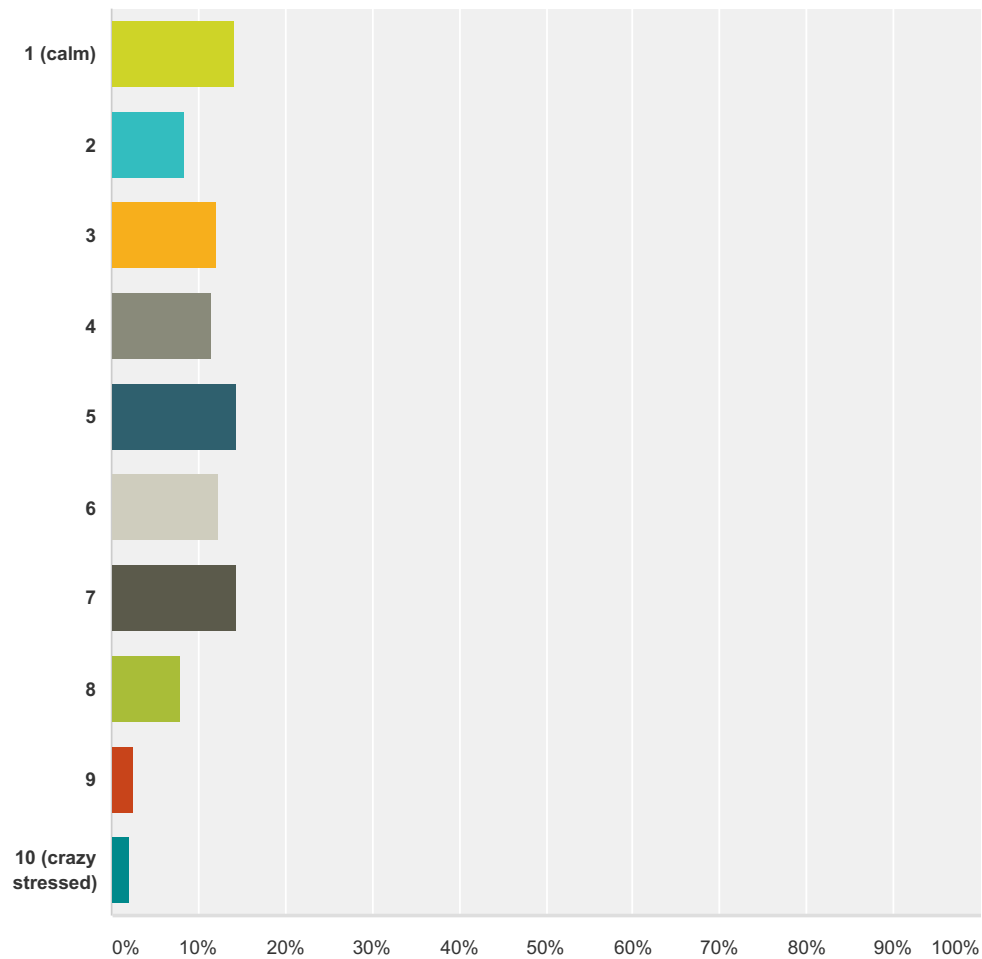


Answer Choices	Responses	
Spend more time with family/friends	83.36%	2,564
Travel	75.62%	2,326
Sleep more	74.09%	2,279
Exercise more	60.50%	1,861
Catch up on TV/Movies	54.78%	1,685
Read for pleasure	54.75%	1,684
Other	19.08%	587
Total Respondents: 3,076		



## Q48 How would you rate your stress level now that you've finished this survey?

Answered: 3,075 Skipped: 303



Answer Choices	Responses	
1 (calm)	14.24%	438
2	8.29%	255
3	12.20%	375
4	11.48%	353
5	14.50%	446
6	12.39%	381
7	14.50%	446
8	7.93%	244
9	2.47%	76
10 (crazy stressed)	1.98%	61

# May 2016 TMEA Member Survey: Exercise

**Q: If you have a specific strategy or advice for regularly including exercise in your demanding schedule that you believe others would find accessible, please share:**

In addition to the answers published in the May 2016 issue of *SOUTHWESTERN MUSICIAN*, the following are a representative sample of the answers members supplied.

- I decided that exercise is like work, or a medical appointment. I now give it that level of priority, so I follow through. I also set mini goals and wear a tracker to maintain awareness.
- I joined a teacher Zumba class that meets after school. The other teachers use positive peer pressure to motivate me to continue.
- I listen to podcasts of my favorite talk shows while I am working out.
- I make a cup of coffee the night before and keep it in a thermos next to my bed. When I wake up, I drink coffee, and by 6 a.m. I'm awake and ready for a nice 45-minute workout.
- I recently lost 50 pounds from healthier eating and exercise. The biggest excuse I had for not exercising was that I was "too tired." Once I decided it was a priority, I was less tired and much happier.
- Camp Gladiator! Awesome program and some districts offer discounts and many locations are on campuses.
- Use the stairs. Park at the back of the parking lot. Get up and away from screens and media.
- Find a few exercises that you feel comfortable with that only take a couple minutes. Do these 4 or 5 exercises right before every shower so you don't have to worry about getting sweaty. They don't have to take long or even be that intense, I started with one set that took about 5 minutes. It is all about building the act into your schedule. Once you get in the habit, you'll want to increase the intensity and change up the exercises, leading to it taking longer, but you won't mind because it has just become your routine.
- I think too many of us approach exercise as optional—it's not! You feel better, have more energy, get sick less, get hurt less, and have a better life in general just by committing 30 minutes five times a week to you.
- I wake up at 4:45 a.m. and workout in my garage. It was really tough at first, but after a little time (about two weeks) I got used to it. Now I feel great after, and my head is clearer when it's time to work.
- I work out after school in my classroom with DVDs and invite others to participate with me.
- I use a app called Daily Burn and 12-Min Athlete. I get up about 5:30 a.m. and do one or the other, or I wait until after school to do the workouts. My strategy? I took a cruise with my wife in 2009 and in all my pictures I looked gross. Fast-forward to now—I have a three-year-old son and another cruise in the future. It's my motivation to get up, train, and eat right. Plus my band students love seeing my progress. Kids like to know you care about yourself and they may do the same things.
- My campus coworkers and I do Fitbit challenges. We try to up our steps and we have challenges on the weekdays and sometimes on weekends.
- I sprint from parking lot to my room (about 100 yards) about eight times a day (I teach at multiple campuses). It feels good!
- The PE teacher and I have the same off-period and we walk around the school during that time. It helps to have an exercise buddy.
- If you need "me" time, exercise is a great way to get it and it pays back tenfold in energy. Pop in some earbuds and listen to your group's recordings for the day while you exercise, or listen to other high-quality recordings!
- I make calls on walks, and I take walking meetings with students and staff.
- I became a Beachbody coach and have an accountability group that I check in with every day via Facebook. Most of us are involved in music in some way so we can relate.
- Find something you like. Put it in your schedule. Say no to other things to make this a routine. You're worth it!
- Find a video series you can do from home. It's easier to fit in if you don't have to account for time driving to a gym.
- The only way I can find the time to exercise more during the week is if I go before school. I joined a gym where I can shower and get ready and that has helped immensely. I pack my gym bag and lunch the night before and set my workout clothes out so that when my alarm goes off at 5 a.m. I don't have to think about anything. I get to the gym around 5:45 and either take a group class or do my own thing. Something that helps me get out of bed that early is bribing myself with my favorite expensive shampoo and conditioner and the fluffiest towel. It sounds silly but at 5:30 am sometimes it's the only thing that gets me to the gym.
- Get a dog who won't let you relax until you walk.
- I detest exercise just for the sake of exercise! However, I love having a purpose in physical activity. At home I have 4 dogs, 8 cats, and 1 horse. I am quite busy and active feeding and working with them everyday. I get plenty of physical activity and I enjoy whatever I'm doing with them: playing fetch, mucking manure, feeding, training and riding my horse, etc.

# May 2016 TMEA Member Survey: Food

**Q: If you have snack/lunch strategies or choices that support a healthy lifestyle and complement a teacher's hectic schedule and energy demands, please share:**

In addition to the answers published in the May 2016 issue of *SOUTHWESTERN MUSICIAN*, the following are a representative sample of the answers members supplied.

- Once a week, I restock the work refrigerator with healthy items, including fresh fruits and veggies, lean sandwich meats, and whole wheat rounds, yogurt, etc.
- I make a green smoothie for breakfast every morning, and drink it at work during planning time while I am setting up for my day.
- I make salads in mason jars on Sunday night. Putting dressing in the bottom of the jar and layering keeps the lettuce fresh all week. I usually eat a salad and a Greek yogurt and feel great about it.
- I order a meal delivery service. The meals are prepared in a healthy way and in healthy sizes. I used to eat fast food several times a week. I now have less frequent heart burn and headaches.
- I participate in Weight Watchers and that helps me make smart eating choices no matter where I am.
- My wife and I spend time every weekend planning every dinner for the week ahead. We buy groceries at the beginning of the week. We make meals at home that provide healthy leftovers for lunches the rest of the week.
- While not specific to healthy choices, we force ourselves (choir and band directors) to stop everything and eat lunch together daily and just have a little adult time that is also fun.
- Chop your veggies on Sunday and put things in small grab bags so packing a lunch is easy.
- Make five salads ahead of time and have them in separate containers in the refrigerator.
- Every Monday, the music department takes turns bringing in a home-cooked meal. We don't answer phones (for our 20 minutes) and sit around in the orchestra office and share great food.
- Healthy Choice Steamers are low calorie, high protein, great taste, and mostly affordable.
- I make breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks for the entire week for my family on Sundays. (This requires some fridge tetrises...but that's good for your brain!) I put everything in sandwich bags and group items for a meal in gallon bags. Cook on Sunday and reheat throughout the week. This allows for healthier meals, less thinking, and no cooking (or dishes) during the week.
- High calorie snacks, like nuts, can help keep you going if you cannot sit down for a proper meal.
- I buy tuna and salmon in pouches and put that on a sandwich thin. I eat in my office while I do administrative things.
- I do all my cooking for the week on the weekend or on an easy night and portion everything for the week. It makes packing healthy snacks and lunches easy. I also try to cook two weeks' worth of dishes that freeze well for weeks when I don't have time to cook. On holidays, I try to find new recipes to add variety.
- I use six pack bags—insulated lunch bags with multiple compartments for food and liquid. I have easy access to my healthy snacks throughout the day, especially when I have sectionals and rehearsals after school.
- This is year 20 for me (with no years off). I have a well-stocked store room with a good size fridge. Every week I bring table fruit on Monday. I have cans of lean meat, nuts, string cheese, dehydrated veggie chips. I didn't really start eating breakfast regularly until year 15. I wish I did it earlier.
- You must take care of yourself during the school day. Snacks are good between the end of the school day and the beginning of after school rehearsals. More importantly, you must drink enough water during the day. Dehydration can compound so many other issues and make you feel even more tired, stressed, and run down.
- I buy large frozen items like bags of chicken and frozen vegetables, keep them in the mini fridge, and keep a Pyrex bowl at work. This way I can heat up some, store some if I run out of time, and only have to bring stuff in on Mondays.
- I try to walk a few times a week for half my lunch time. Our weather here is typically decent enough for doing that. I eat something quick when I return before my next class.
- Packing a lunch is definitely how I support a healthier lifestyle. I gained 10 pounds my first year of teaching because I ate the school lunch. I usually pack a simple lunch (sandwich, popcorn or crackers, fruit, & yogurt) with extra snacks packed with protein and fiber.
- I love Whole30 which is a program that teaches you to eat healthy to balance life and not let food control it. I usually meal prep on Sunday and Monday and have enough meals for me and my husband for the week.
- I prep my lunches and snacks on Sunday afternoons for the entire week. I plan out meals for the week. Portion them out, put them in containers ready to go in the morning so there is no excuse to not eat healthy.

# May 2016 TMEA Member Survey: Fitness Tracking

## Q: If you have a strong recommendation for a specific fitness tracking system, please advise:

The following are a representative sample of the answers members supplied. Of those who use a tracking device, 79% believe it helps them make healthier choices.

- A mix: Fitbit and My Fitness Pal
- Android Phone App: MapMyFitness
- Any health app that lets you input your workout and food date easily. You can Google a top-ten or top-five health app list and choose one that suits you.
- Apple Watch and the My Fitness Pal app.
- As a district, we use Movband. We have designated challenges throughout the year, and the personnel with the most moves or steps during that specified time receive prizes - gift cards, cash, etc.
- Been using a Fitbit tracker for 2 years. I started with a belt clip, now I wear a watch. The app is great for showing and comparing stats, and you can log your food and exercise
- Couch to 5K, Samsung S Health
- Daily Dozen by Dr McGregor
- Fit Bit and My Fitness Pal and Map my Run
- Fit Bit Surge Watch
- FitBit and LoseIt! app
- Fitbit and Weight Watchers
- Fitbit Charge HR- but take it off when you play the piano—it will count as steps!
- Garmin vivofit. Cheaper than a fit but, just as good.
- Get a Fitbit. I use the one that is not worn on my wrist, but in my pocket. That way it doesn't count when I conduct. I make an effort to get 10,000 per day.
- I love my Jawbone Up3 band because my Apple watch is too generous. Having heart rate info is helpful so my next band would probably have heart rate monitoring as well.
- I love My Fitness Pal. It's free and has hundreds of foods already programmed in.
- I love Plant Nanny, an app that allows me to visualize how much water I am drinking in a fun way, without seeming too serious.
- I recently got a BellaBeat Leaf, which I really like because unlike the FitBit, the Leaf looks like jewelry, so I'm more likely to remember to wear it.
- I use a Jawbone UP 2 to track my movement and sleep cycles. I love it!
- I use the 21 Day Fix app to track both nutrition and workouts.
- Lose It! (available for smartphones and on the web) helps me track my food intake, exercises, and weight management. It has weight management programs for a variety of lifestyles and health needs. It also syncs with other apps that track exercise and nutritional data.
- 21 Day Fix
- 7-minute workout
- My Net Diary app and Runkeeper
- My Withings Activite Pop watch is a smart analog-reading watch that also has a step-tracker built right onto the face, so I can easily look at it and see where I'm at to 10,000 steps.
- Runkeeper app tracks my movement walking, and reminds/prods me when I miss more than 2 days.
- The Apple Watch really helps remind me to get up and move around every hour, as well as tracking steps and calories burned.
- Weight Watchers Online

# May 2016 TMEA Member Survey: General Advice

## **Q: If you could offer one piece of advice to new teachers to help them maintain balance in their demanding job, what would it be?**

In addition to the answers featured in the May 2016 issue of *SOUTHWESTERN MUSICIAN*, the following are a representative sample of the more than 1,500 answers to this question that members offered:

- Perform more literature. Do not make competition the sole reason for performance. Make the performance of great music the driving force for your program.
- Plan ahead for the year and prepare as much material as you can.
- Learn how to say no to administrators who want you to do more than you can handle safely.
- Laugh every day! Find that moment in every rehearsal where you relax and enjoy the students!
- If you're being asked to put aside your job to assist elsewhere, start looking for a new position. I struggled three years thinking it was normal to be asked to teach other subjects on the fly, perform front office work, and leave my classes with the PE teachers to fill in for absent teachers. After I left that district, I regained my love of teaching and realized that the situation I was in wasn't normal.
- Make time to take care of yourself mentally and physically. You will be a much more effective teacher if you are healthy!
- Organization and planning are key.
- Recognize that the first few years are completely demanding--there is never enough time so schedule time off.
- What your systems/routines/habits are doesn't really matter as long as they work for you. Find ways to put the stuff that needs to happen but doesn't excite you on autopilot and make room in your mind for what does excite you.
- Schedule your hobbies and exercise just like you would schedule your work day or plan your lesson. You are important and no one will be looking out for your personal wellbeing if you don't.
- Be humble enough to want to improve. Don't blame the kids for bad rehearsals.
- Don't underestimate the help that students can give you! They feel pride in helping keep the room tidy, setting up and tearing down, as well as doing light librarian work.
- Ask reliable parents and students to alphabetize forms, make copies, run fundraisers, etc.
- Work with a proactive physician. Always get an annual physical. Monitor your health. Find a compatible cognitive therapist.
- You can't do everything right the first time. Allow yourself to make mistakes--it's the only way you truly learn.
- Keep a notebook in your pocket or on your phone of things you want to change. Review your notes weekly to build a concise list for next year.
- Don't keep junk food at school! I easily stress eat after school everyday! Limiting myself to healthy snack has made a difference.
- Choose deliberately, set boundaries, and work to let go of anyone or anything that makes it hard or impossible to enforce those boundaries.
- As much as possible, leave work at work. Go home at the end of the day and do something you enjoy that is completely unrelated to your job.
- Develop a hobby--music-related or not--a passionate interest about something outside of music education.
- Create limits for yourself and stick to them. Do not work past X. Do not respond to emails after Y.
- Don't allow yourself to be married to your job.
- Be positive and motivate your students to not only be better musicians but also better people.
- Do your very best from day one. Think about what you want your program to look like. Set your standard and work ethics early and follow through.
- Don't come into your first job with high performance expectations. High school and middle school kids won't play at the level of your college peers. Prepare yourself to really work to improve tone, rhythm, and rehearsal etiquette.
- Don't take it too seriously--we got into this field to share music with kids, not win every possible contest at the expense of our sanity.
- Every year it does get better. If you are miserable, switch schools before you decide to switch careers.
- Exercise. Eat well. Get your sleep. Find an outside performance opportunity. Develop an outside interest.
- Family and self must come first or you won't be able to do your job well. There is no such thing as a music emergency and no amount of work stress brought home is worth the burden it puts on you or your family.
- Get connected in a church or other spiritual community.
- Understand the expectations of this profession and realize that the time spent on helping students to become successful is worth the struggle. Keep grinding and know that you're making a difference!
- Save money for the future, and don't buy "everything" just because you now have an income. Try to leave weekends for family and friends. Find an interest outside of music. Keep practicing your instrument/voice and form a chamber music group for fellowship. Your family/relationships comes first. Be happy in the small things. Don't covet other programs, because not all programs are the same. Have goals that you can meet in your community.





# How's Your Balance?

by Karen Cross

**S**ome marathoners will tell you that the final 10K of a race is the most difficult. Even though they have 20 miles behind them and *only* 6.2 to go, they're in pain. And despite that pain, they need to step up their pace. At this point, some marathoners *hit the wall*. They struggle to find the energy and will to finish what they've trained for so long to do.

Well into another school year's final stretch, it might feel like you're in the last 10K of your own marathon—hastening your pace to complete additional performances, competitions, standardized testing, group trips, recruiting efforts, and end-of-year tasks that have no musical relevance. Are you in a confident sprint to the finish? Or are you stumbling in a confused haze, searching for the motivation to make it across?

This is the time of year when many music teachers complain about being burned out, and some even begin to look for other work. As a professional organization of Texas music educators, we wanted to better understand how our members perceive their work load and its effects. We especially wanted to learn from those who have managed to achieve a healthy balance in their lives so we could share their valuable strategies. To that end, TMEA recently surveyed its active teacher members about workload, stress levels, and wellness. The information offered here is based on 3,378 responses (26% of our active membership). While we didn't approach this as a scientific study, we do believe the results are significant and revealing, and we hope you find them helpful.

## Who Participated?

The divisional affiliation of the survey participants aligns with the divisional representation of our 12,700+ active members. The grade levels taught also mirrors the profile of our total membership.

Participants' teaching experience is also varied:

- 121 are in their first year (4%)
- 604 have taught 1–5 years (18%)
- 672 have taught 6–10 years (20%)
- 956 have taught 11–20 years (28%)
- 1,025 have completed over 21 years of teaching (30%)

Thanks go to all who participated. You helped establish a meaningful reflection of our membership through this survey.

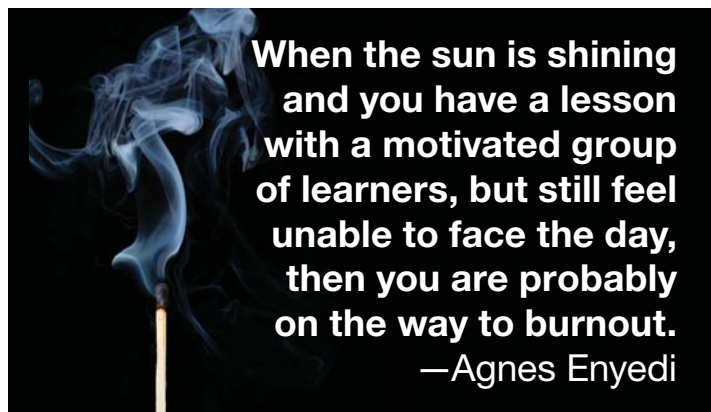
## What We Learned

We asked questions about workload (hours worked, students taught), job-related stress, burnout, support systems, non-work activities, fitness, food choices, and more. We asked open-ended questions to gain advice from members in areas that could help teachers achieve better work-life balance. Given our space limitations, we can't print everything we learned, so for even more feedback from this survey, go to [www.tmea.org/balanceresults](http://www.tmea.org/balanceresults).

## Hours Worked and Students Taught

Survey results revealed that for most teachers, a 60-hour work week is often the norm. Over 70% reported spending more than 31 hours directly interacting with students each week. Within that group, more than 55% spend another 11–30 hours at school with other work. They also work up to 10 hours during the week at home. And on the weekends, most spend up to 10 more hours working from home.

We found that 59% of teachers usually arrive up to one hour before school starts, 38% arrive up to two hours early, and 3% are there two hours or more before the start time. In this final group, over 45% also stay more than two hours after school.

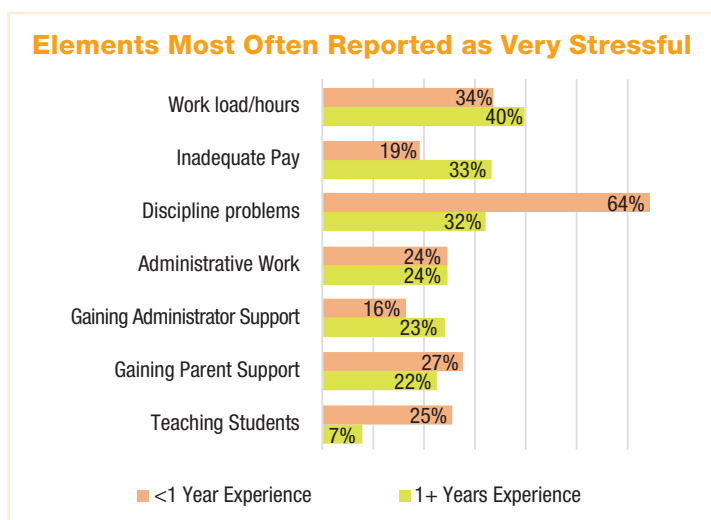


Over 45% of our teachers reported being the only one responsible for the music instruction of their students, and the following results tell us that the majority of our teachers are instructing between 100 and 500 students:

- 0–50 students: 3%
- 201–500 students: 34%
- 51–100 students: 11%
- 501+ students: 13%
- 101–200 students: 39%

### Job Stress

Everyone experiences stress for many reasons every day. Hearing a certain ringtone can immediately trigger negative thoughts; catching a glimpse of your unread email count can make you feel overwhelmed. While grounded by the desire to share your joy of music with your students, you are also responsible for *so much* that has *so little* to do with music. As our survey reflects, these other responsibilities are often what raise teacher stress levels. It's interesting to note that first-year teachers are the only group with significant numbers who said that teaching students is *very stressful*. The following chart includes those elements of work that over 20% of members identified as *very stressful* and shows the difference between responses by first-year teachers and teachers with one or more years of experience:



Over 58% of teachers report that their job-related stress is high *but* is balanced by other activities/interests. However, 16% report having constantly high and unmanageable stress levels. With job stress at that level, burnout can become a real issue.

### Are You Burned Out?

We'll admit that our stress levels spiked when we reviewed responses to the questions about teacher burnout. While unrealistic, we still didn't want to learn that burnout was leading any member to consider a career change. However, of the 3,191 members who answered, 1,161 (37%) said they are considering a career change because of burnout. If you replied *yes* to that question, we hope that what you read here will help you know you're not alone and will equip you with strategies to combat that burnout in the future.

The charts on the following page offer a view by TMEA division and by experience level of members who said they are currently burned out and who say they're considering a career change because of burnout. When reviewing the charts, be sure to consider the number of member replies shown here as the response rates might be too limited to draw meaningful conclusions:

Members Who Answered Questions About Burnout						
	Years of Experience					
Division	<1	1–2	3–5	6–10	11–20	21+
Band	50	69	165	276	421	402
Orchestra	15	24	54	75	87	107
Vocal	28	48	101	139	194	207
Elementary	23	34	77	135	179	204
College	0	1	3	10	18	46

We also inspected this information by grade level taught, and within the middle and high school group, by division. That information is shared in charts on the following page as well.

### What Others Say About Burnout

In addition to our survey results, we reviewed several other sources on burnout. We focused mostly on teacher burnout, and where possible, music teacher burnout. Christina Maslach, a leading researcher in this topic, offers a notable definition of burnout: "A syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's instruction), and reduced personal accomplishment."

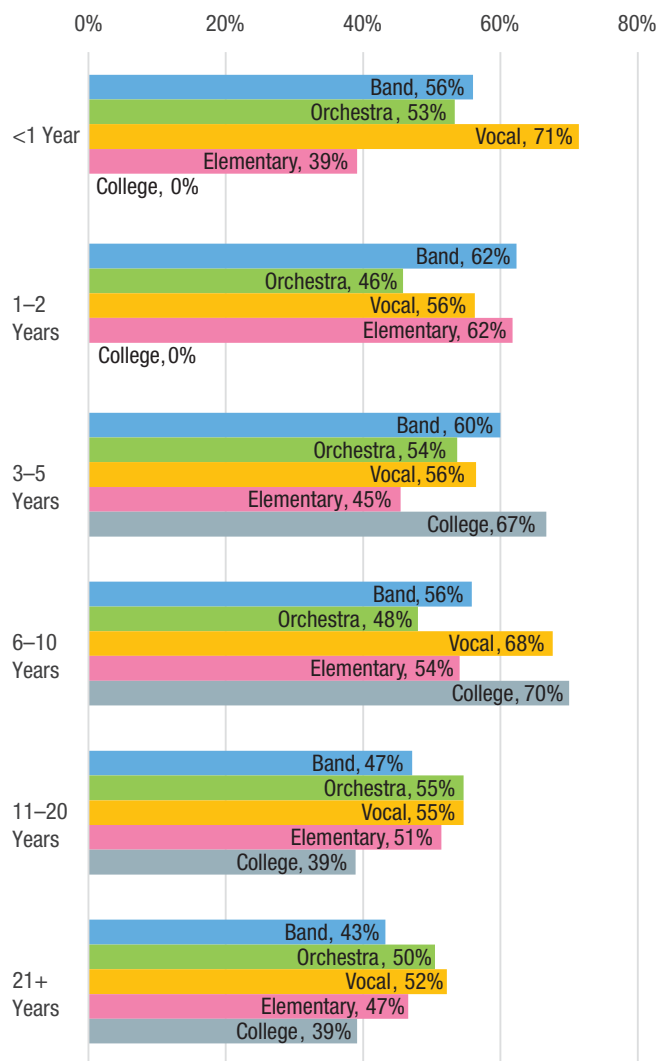
Common advice from these resources conveyed that teachers need to realize that burnout is common, there are ways to cope with it, and it's not necessarily a sign that you are in the wrong job. These sources also explain that when people say they're burned out, what they're experiencing might not be severe enough to be classified in that way. For example, being exhausted by your job isn't burnout. You simply have a very demanding job, mentally and physically, and it's going to exhaust you. *It should.*

In May 2015, teacher trainer Agnes Enyedi explained, "All of us feel tired, even exhausted at times, but this is perfectly normal if you have a full schedule. Some of us may also have felt like calling in sick and staying in bed on a rainy Friday morning, just before a lesson with a challenging group. That's also understandable. But when the sun is shining and you have a lesson with a motivated group of learners, but still feel unable to face the day, then you are probably on the way to burnout."

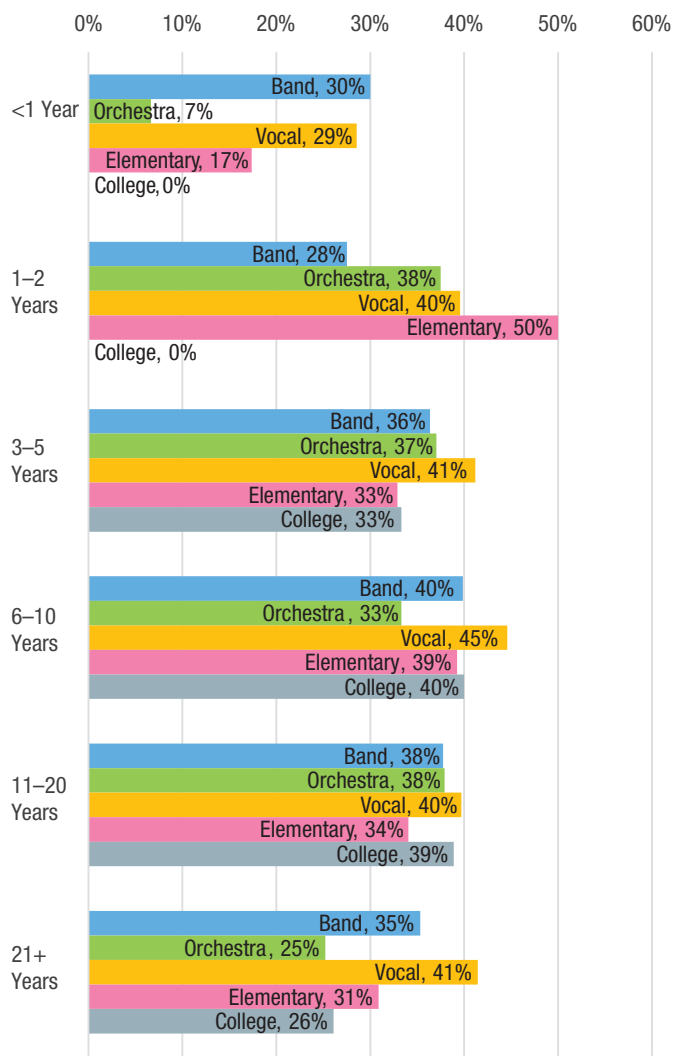
Another researcher and presenter on the topic of music teacher burnout is Barbara McClain, professor of music education for the University of Hawaii in Honolulu. McClain has studied and published articles and an online instructional video on the

# Music Teachers Who Report Being Burned Out and Music Teachers Considering a Career Change for That Reason

## Currently Burned Out: By Years Taught/Division

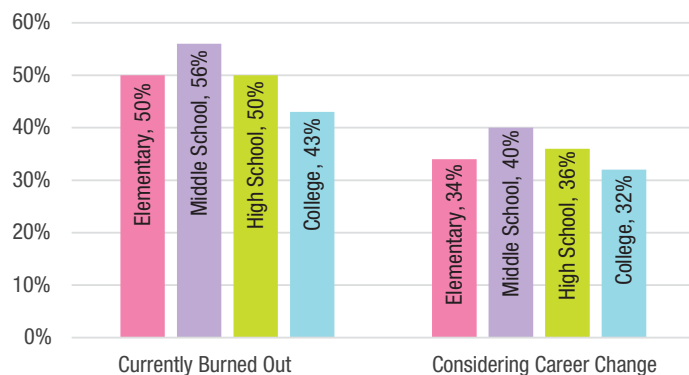


## Considering a Career Change: By Years Taught/Division

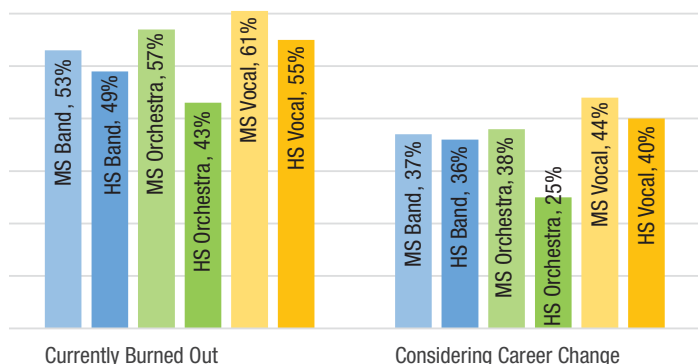


Overall Response: Currently Burned Out: 52% / Considering a Career Change: 37%

## By TMEA Division Only



## Middle & High School Teachers by Division





topic. We found her resources on this topic particularly informative. To read her publication “Music Teacher Burnout,” go to [www.tmea.org/burnout-mcclain](http://www.tmea.org/burnout-mcclain) and to watch her instructional video on this topic at [www.tmea.org/burnoutvideo](http://www.tmea.org/burnoutvideo).

As McClain states, if you’re interested enough to learn more on this topic, you’re probably not severely burned out. If you were, you wouldn’t have the motivation to learn more. With that, we’ll turn the focus to the survey questions that yielded answers by members who have learned how to achieve a balance in this demanding job.

### Do What Works for You

Teachers who reported having a healthy balance in their lives also reported much lower incidence of burnout. Their comments emphasize that when trying to achieving balance, one size definitely does not fit all. If you need to improve your work-life balance, you *will* have to make changes. So read the strategies our members offer and do something—*now*. If what you try first isn’t right for you, try something else. There isn’t a miracle cure for burnout, and there also isn’t a single remedy that can help everyone manage it. However, if you will do something to improve your work-life balance, you’re on the right track.

### To Unplug or Not to Unplug?

You don’t have to look far to find stories about the influence of technology on our lives—positive and negative. With Internet connectivity on devices in our pockets or even on our wrists, we can be constantly informed and connected. Over 47% of teachers report that they answer emails and voicemails at *any* time of day, whether at work or at home. Depending on your perspective, this level of connectivity might bring you relief or stress.

While 36% of teachers report that their technology use is not an issue, the remaining 64% have designated times in their day as tech-free or they say they want to begin that practice.



Regardless of how you use technology in your personal life, members repeatedly pointed out that it’s critical to limit responding to work-related emails while at home. Their comments didn’t focus just on the technology use but rather on how the convenience can lead to hasty replies you might later regret. Many members establish times during which they handle emails and voicemails (and they communicate that with parents to set an expectation). Some members view emails at home, but they won’t act on them until the workday. The following are just a few of the ways our members handle emails and voicemails to reduce the stress often associated with them.

### Member Advice on Handling Emails and Voicemails

- A weekly email bulletin to my students and parents usually keeps them in the loop so that my email is not too stressful.
- For stressful emails, click reply and delete the address in the “To” field so you don’t accidentally send before you’re ready. Type away. Save to drafts. Let it sit for a while. Edit your response. Send (and blind copy an administrator if it is a serious issue).
- Don’t check email before bed!
- I set up email folders by event (Region, UIL, fall concert, etc.) and by group (department, choir, school, etc.), and I create one “To Do” folder. Every time I open an email I must either delete it, respond to it, or put it in a folder.
- I use the Remind app for two-way communication with parents for my afterschool groups. It is much more convenient because I can access it with my phone, iPad, or laptop. I can communicate with individual parents or groups. It allows me to set office hours and other customizations.
- I save the text of emails I will likely send again and flag that text for reuse the next year.
- I tell parents I prefer to be contacted by phone. Texts (and sometimes emails) tend to get confusing. I try to answer each voicemail the day I receive it.
- I check email and voicemail three times daily: morning, conference, and at the end of the day.
- I do not automatically have my work email connected to my phone. I have to log in to check it. I don’t want to see work emails until I’m in work mode.
- I print emails that require more time for a response and post them on a cork board next to my desk so that I don’t forget them.
- Unsubscribe to as much junk as possible and delete unimportant emails ASAP. When sending a possibly controversial email, get a coworker to proof it to ensure a professional tone is being used.

### Find Support

Feeling completely isolated is one of the key symptoms of the most extreme burnout. And in the music teaching world, that’s a real concern. Many of our members serve as the sole music teacher on their campus, and music programs are often physically and programmatically segregated from the rest of the school. Our survey showed that more teachers who said they have no one to turn to for support answered that they are burned out and considering a career change (10% higher response rate).

With over 12,000 music teacher members in TMEA, we should be poised to prevent this experience of complete isolation. If you’re not already, get connected by attending music teacher meetings and events (Region meetings, the TMEA convention, Regional workshops). If you’re new to the profession, join the TMEA Mentoring Network so you can establish a connection with a veteran teacher who is ready to listen and offer support during these first years ([www.tmea.org/mentor](http://www.tmea.org/mentor)). Veteran teachers who took this survey stressed the importance of having someone to turn to with your questions who can offer you support,

objective criticism, and guidance. Even if you work with other music teachers, it's important to have someone outside your work group who can be supportive and objective.

### Sleep

While this might be one of the most critical factors in reducing stress and maintaining balance, it's also one we often sacrifice. We all know we need sleep and that it should be consistent. From our survey, we found that 56% of teachers usually get 6 hours of sleep or less, and 44% get 7 hours or more. If you're in the first group, consider changing something in your routine to help improve your sleep habits.

### Get Moving

Of all the elements examined in this survey, the one that appeared to have the most radical influence on a healthy work-life balance is exercise. Overall, 48% of teachers believe they have a healthy balance. When you limit the responses to those who also report exercising daily, that healthy-balance percentage flies to 71%.

While most of our members report exercising at some level, 39% report not exercising at all, but within that group, 80% want to increase their exercise. If you're physically able, this is clearly an area that can help you improve your work-life balance. One common point made by many members is that even when you don't believe you have enough time to exercise, just *do something*. The following are some valuable suggestions from members who are managing to incorporate exercise into their busy schedule.



### Member Advice on Getting Exercise

- As an applied music instructor, I exercise in between lessons to clear my head and alleviate the problems of sitting all day. In those 10 minutes I do jumping jacks, pushups, planks, or burpees. It's really helps in relieving stress.
- On days that I get home before 6 P.M., it is the first thing that I do with my husband and son. We all watch a 30-minute workout video together and do the exercises in our living room.
- I leave work in time to make it to the gym at least three times per week, no matter what. I started about a year ago, and I feel so much better now that I'm 20 pounds lighter.
- Going to the gym took too much time for me. On my home

treadmill, I can watch shows, read, or listen to music 30 minutes five times a week.

- Do it before work. Afterward, you are too tired! Go 30–45 minutes, and make it really count. It takes a while to get used to getting up even earlier, but it so worth it!
- Get a friend and make each other accountable!
- I change into my workout clothes before I leave work. This keeps me from backing out on my exercise plans.

**I remind myself that my personal health comes first. All other possible successes of life are diminished if my personal health is reduced to back-burner status.**

- Protein/energy shakes near the end of the workday help me feel like I have the energy to go to the gym.
- I cycle to and from work. It is a great way to start and end my workday and guarantees me at least a moderate amount of exercise and outdoor time almost daily.
- I started with 6 pushups and kept at it until I got to 50. Then I gradually added sit-ups and squats and some stretching. Now I also do pull-ups and a few barbell exercises, and I plan to add walking and other exercises. This has been gradually growing for about two years. The big thing has been not to get overwhelmed by the pressure of adding too much at once.
- Do short workouts that are realistic. Start small so you do something—a 15-minute walk around the neighborhood is a good start. Get outside!
- Too many of us approach exercise as optional—it's not! You will feel better, have more energy, get sick less, get hurt less, and have a better life in general just by committing 30 minutes five times a week to you.
- I use an app called Seven. It's just 7-minute workouts a day—very manageable for a busy schedule.
- Jog with the cross country team before school. The younger kids are slower. The coaches appreciate having someone out there to act as a sweeper on long runs. The kids love to see you out there with them.
- My partner teacher and I have made a YouTube playlist of Zumba videos that we work out to immediately after school. We bring our clothes and project the video in my classroom.
- I get on the treadmill for a fast-paced walk for the duration of four songs. By not designating a specific time requirement, it feels simpler. Eventually you can add another song or intensity little by little.

### Choose the Right Fuel

Like finding time for exercise during the week, eating well also poses a significant challenge for many teachers. Over 47% of teachers responded that they have been trying to eating healthier lunches or they want to but don't feel able. Fortunately, hundreds



of teachers provided advice on how they've been able to sustain a healthy approach to eating during the school day. As you review some of their ideas, keep in mind that those who reported daily exercise *and* eating well at lunch had a much lower rate of burnout and a much higher rate of a healthy work-life balance.

- Preparation is key. I eat lots of veggies and lean protein that I prepare. Drink lots of water! Dehydration in the afternoon is a major cause of fatigue.
- Cook breakfast ahead (e.g., breakfast casseroles and other things you can freeze for the week).
- Eating a few nuts or raisins or vegetables during the passing periods can help maintain energy.
- Put frozen fruit in a plastic bag, and by the time you have a break to eat it, it's thawed but still cold.
- I always have SlimFast or Special K protein shakes and granola bars on hand for emergency lunch or pick-me-ups if I'm short on time.
- I boil several eggs and keep them at home to grab for a quick breakfast or snack. I keep fresh fruit, cheese, and crackers in my office to snack on. I try to keep things like hummus, guacamole, or soup on hand.
- I buy fully cooked frozen chicken breasts and salads from the store. Every day I bring a chicken breast and a salad. It's quick, easy, and healthy. I could make them myself and save money, but I know I won't!
- I set a 9:30 P.M. alarm on weekdays, and at that time, I pack my lunch for the next day and start getting ready for bed.
- I often use a food diary to keep track of what I'm eating throughout the day. This helps me be accountable for the unhealthy snacks I would otherwise absently be eating.
- I pack three or four small nutritious snacks (protein bars, low-fat cheese sticks, a boiled egg, etc.) and eat one snack during each of my 15-minute breaks because I don't have a proper lunch break. This keeps me going, and keeps body chemistry steady.
- I plastic-wrap individual servings of an egg casserole and put them in the freezer. In the morning, I toss one in my lunch bag and it's thawed by lunchtime—easy protein.
- An apple and a spoonful of peanut butter is simple and a great pick-me-up!
- I use the My Fitness Pal app on my phone to track everything I eat. My concern is calories. Tracking calories has

prompted me to eat healthier foods since they tend to be lower in calories. Better quality food equals more consistent energy.

- Stay hydrated throughout the day. It is hard to do this when you have limited restroom opportunities, but your body will pay the price in the long run if you do not hydrate.

### Listening to the Voice of Experience

Survey responses show that to lessen the effects of burnout, it is essential to establish personal and professional habits that positively influence your work-life balance. While not revelatory information, it's worth repeating given that recent studies tell us that 40–50% of teachers leave the profession in the first five years. While we would like to believe that doesn't apply to Texas music teachers, our survey results are that 35% of music teachers who are within their first five years are considering a career change because of burnout.

With that in mind, we asked teachers to offer general advice on how to maintain better balance. With over 1,500 responses, we hope one or more of the following might resonate with you, whether you're a first-year or fifteenth-year teacher.

### Member Advice on Achieving Balance

- Ask for help *when* you need it. (It's not a question of *if*—everyone needs help.)
- Be patient with your students. Be patient with yourself.
- I've been doing this for 37 years and I have learned that my students benefit most when I slow down and enjoy each moment with them. Nothing—no contest, no performance—is more important than the people who are involved.
- Keep practicing your instrument/voice and form a chamber music group for fellowship.
- Be consistent and pursue constant professional growth. Attend workshops throughout the year.

**Everyone can use a hand**

The TMEA Mentoring Network links successful music education professionals with new Texas music educators and offers a proactive program of one-on-one mentoring to each new music teacher.

**If you need a mentor, sign up.  
If you can serve as a mentor, sign up.**

**[www.tmea.org/mentor](http://www.tmea.org/mentor)**



- Don't sweat the small stuff—after you figure out what the small stuff is. It may take several years, but you *will* get the hang of it.
- Find a support person to talk with, to be a sounding board, counselor, and confidant. Don't allow yourself to become isolated.
- Don't try to be a superhero your first year. It's okay to suspend a project for the weekend and get it done first thing Monday morning. Perform for the sake of performing, not ratings.
- Don't take extra church jobs or community children's choir jobs until you have at least a year under your belt.
- Don't try to have the best *band*, try to have the best *students*.
- Make a list of the things that must be done today, this week, and this month. That way you know what really needs to get done and you can stop worrying about not getting it all finished!
- Q-TIP: Quit Taking It Personally. Don't stress out over things at work. Kids and coworkers will respond to something negatively every day of your career.

## **It gets better, but it never stops. If you are going to be great, you will have to learn the discipline to prepare and the discipline to walk away.**

- A tired, burned-out teacher is a teacher who will, sooner or later, leave the profession, or worse, stay in the profession in that state. I almost became that teacher. Instead I made the choice to take a break, re-examine my priorities, and begin taking care of myself. I still work hard, but I am a better teacher, friend, husband, and father because I don't let my work week become completely unmanageable.
- In your first year, commit to leaving work at school three days a week and on every other weekend. It will force you to plan ahead and not work constantly. Make to-do lists and good, easy sub plans for emergencies.
- Family, friends, and outside activities keep music teachers balanced, and their importance cannot be underestimated. I am watching friends retire from the profession and go through depression that seems fueled by the fact that their identity was anchored in their ensembles and their work.
- This is a career. Every year is different. My father, who was my band director, told me that I would have one bad year for every three good years. That pattern has held pretty true.
- Let the students help you. In addition to teaching music, we are teaching the students to be independent members of society. Not only will it give them ownership of the program but they will also learn organization skills!
- Be happy in the small things. Don't covet other programs, because not all programs are the same.
- Don't let the people who have no idea how to bring a performance to fruition get you down.

## **Remember your first love and close your door and teach like no one is watching—don't get overwhelmed with the things you can't control.**

- Make a Smiles Folder. Put positive responses from parents, notes from students, notices of awards, funny teaching tales, and general compliments in the folder. On days when you feel you've been steamrolled, get out your Smiles Folder and read through it.
- Most of the stress comes from ourselves. Look at what you do as a director and ask yourself if anyone else is requiring you to do it.
- It's important to remain focused on the fact that we are still learning every day of our life, until we cease to exist.
- Remember you are not your contest ratings. Trophies gather dust and are forgotten, but relationships last.
- Stay away from gossipers and grumblers, and avoid becoming one.
- Talk to successful teachers. Don't just complain to others in your same boat. There is a solution for everything. Instead of just disciplining harder, keep asking different people.
- Spend as much energy on your family as you do on your school kids. If you think you can't do that, ask yourself what situation you are creating that doesn't allow for that separation. Did you choose music that is too hard? Could you be more organized? Could you improve your time management?
- Take one element of your teaching and focus on making that better. Once you have accomplished that goal, find another element of your teaching that may cause you stress or anxiety and work on that.
- Work during your conference times. It is easy to take a break, but if you use that time for work, it will help you manage afterschool demands.
- Your students are not always an extension of you or a reflection of your ability. Know what you have taught and modeled and don't take it personally when they choose otherwise. Relish the process—not just the product.

### **There's Still More to Learn**

Over 86% of survey takers said they want to learn more about teachers who made significant changes in their lives and now have a better work-life balance. Given that, we plan to bring you more stories on this topic in future magazine issues.

To review even more details and comments offered by our teachers from this survey, go to [www.tmea.org/balanceresults](http://www.tmea.org/balanceresults).

Our thanks go to the music teachers who took time to offer us their valuable information. You are the ones with the answers, and we hope that your replies will help many others as they navigate their future in this profession.

