

The Truth About Teaching No One Is Talking About

If it were as simple as me sharing proven organization systems with you so that you could leave school prepared more often, you'd already be doing it. But there's a reason why you may find yourself in this never-ending cycle no matter if you're new to teaching or have been teaching for 20 years. Perhaps there are several other factors that contribute to teaching being all-consuming and it's important to examine them.

I'm all about keeping it real and before we begin, I have to take a moment to acknowledge something that often gets overlooked—the challenges you face as a teacher are real. They're not just complaints or things you should “get over” with more resilience or better time management. They are legitimate, heavy, and often overwhelming. You're not imagining the pressure, the exhaustion, or the weight of responsibilities that seem to grow by the day. You're carrying a load that, truthfully, was never meant to be carried by one person alone.

If you've ever felt like you're drowning under unrealistic expectations, like no matter how hard you work it's never enough, or like you're constantly being pulled in a thousand directions, you're not alone. I see that, and more importantly, I want *you* to recognize that those feelings don't come from weakness or lack of dedication. They come from a system that asks too much and gives too little in return. And yet, here you are, showing up every single day for your students, giving them your energy, your patience, and your heart. It says a lot about who you are as a human.

You deserve to feel supported. You deserve to leave school on time without carrying guilt home with you. And you deserve a career that allows you to thrive, not just survive. I want you to know that everything you're feeling is valid and this book isn't about brushing past those struggles with quick fixes. It's about facing those challenges head-on, recognizing what's within your control, and helping you build the

boundaries, systems, and mindset you need to protect your well-being. You are not the problem, the system is. But there are ways to reclaim your time, energy, and joy within that system. And that's what I'm here to help you do.

The challenges you're facing in the classroom aren't just personal struggles, they're widespread, systemic issues backed by research. If you feel like the demands of teaching have become more intense in recent years, you're not alone. Studies continue to show that teachers across the country are dealing with increasing stress, larger workloads, and declining job satisfaction. Let's look at the five unspoken roles that are facing educators like you and then look at what you can control. These rules aren't about helping you be a better teacher, they're about keeping a broken system running.



When you think about your school, are there unspoken rules that exist?

The unspoken rules built into school culture often mirror and strengthen the limiting beliefs teachers internalize. Together, they create an invisible framework that keep you stuck in old patterns that make it hard to leave school at school or why you're in your working in your classroom while it's dark outside, convinced there's always just one more thing to finish.

You know the ones that you follow because it's just how your school runs. Unspoken rules in education don't exist by accident. In fact, they've developed over time as a way to keep schools running despite systemic challenges. Schools are often underfunded, resources are stretched thin, and there simply aren't enough hours in the day for everything that needs to get done. In response, these unspoken expectations have formed, encouraging teachers like you to go above and beyond to fill in the gaps. While they may have been created with good intentions—helping students, maintaining a strong school culture, or fostering teamwork—they can quickly become unhealthy when they lead to burnout, overwhelm, and a sense that teachers must constantly give more to be seen as dedicated.

The tricky part is that these rules are woven into the culture of schools passed down by well-meaning colleagues and reinforced in subtle (and not-so-subtle) ways. They're rarely stated outright, making them difficult to recognize and even harder to challenge. You're not told that you have to stay late, but if you leave at your

contracted time, you might feel like you're not working hard enough or you may get glances from your coworkers, right? Or you may even be the one giving sideways glances when that one teacher always leaves at the bell. No one requires you to buy supplies for your classroom, but when something is missing, there's an unspoken expectation that you'll figure it out. You aren't forced to take on extra responsibilities, but when you decline, you might be met with comments like, "*We just really need a team player.*" These messages can make it feel like saying no is letting your students or your colleagues down, even when the expectations themselves are unrealistic.

The reality is, even the most organized and hardworking teachers can't do it all because the system wasn't designed for one person to carry this much alone and I truly want you to know that. A 2024 RAND Corporation study¹ found that teachers work, on average, nine hours more per week than professionals in other fields, yet they report higher levels of stress and lower job satisfaction. This makes sense according to the 2024 State of Schools Report,² which states that 39% of teachers experience burnout very often or always.



Does this number
seem accurate?

That doesn't mean administrators or district leaders are intentionally setting you up for burnout. Often, they're navigating their own pressures, making the best decisions they can within the constraints they're given. But if you're expected to take on more and more without the time, compensation, or resources to do it well, the system itself needs to be reexamined. I'm not here to place blame; I'm here to be real with you. The more you understand these unspoken rules and limiting beliefs you carry, the more you can make intentional choices about how you show up in your work. You get to decide what is sustainable for *you*. And that starts with recognizing that constantly going above and beyond shouldn't be the expectation, it should be the exception.

¹"Teachers Report Worse Pay and Well-Being Compared to Similar Working Population," <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2024/06/18.html>.

²<https://www.gallup.com/education/608843/state-of-schools-report-2024.aspx>.

The reality is, you can be an incredible teacher *and* set boundaries. You can care deeply about your students *and* protect your own time and energy. Let's break them down so you can start making choices that serve *you*, not just the system.

Unspoken Rule #1: “Good Teachers Stay Late and Bring Work Home.”

You've probably felt it—that pressure to keep working long after the school day ends. Maybe you've even told yourself that staying late or working through the weekend is just what *good* teachers do. If you've ever looked at your to-do list and thought, *There is no way I'm getting all of this done today*, you're not alone. The sheer volume of work expected of teachers is completely unrealistic. Teaching isn't just about delivering lessons—it's about planning, grading, managing behavior, tracking data, responding to emails, meeting with parents, attending professional development, differentiating instruction, filling out paperwork, supervising students, and somehow squeezing in time to eat and use the restroom. And that's *just* during the school day.

It's no surprise that many teachers end up taking work home every night or staying late just to catch up. I'll never forget what one of my amazing professors, Kathy Murphy at Cal State Fullerton, told our class during our credential program. She said, “The #1 reason teachers leave the profession within the first five years is because of all of the administrative paperwork” and that always stuck with me. A report by The American Federation of Teachers in 2022³ found that administrative burdens are one of the biggest contributors to teacher stress and burnout because teachers are increasingly required to handle extensive data collection and reporting tasks, which often interfere with their primary teaching responsibilities. The report emphasizes that such administrative demands can lead to significant stress and detract from instructional time. Things like excessive documentation, unrealistic lesson plan requirements, and constantly changing policies pull your focus away from what actually matters—teaching and

³“Here Today, Gone Tomorrow? What America Must Do to Attract and Retain the Educators and School Staff Our Students Need,” <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2022/taskforcereport0722.pdf>.

supporting students. Instead of giving you more time to plan or collaborate, schools often pile on more paperwork, more data tracking, and more tasks that don't actually improve student outcomes.

But here's the reality: working longer hours doesn't make you a better teacher. It just makes you more exhausted. The best teachers aren't the ones who sacrifice their entire lives for the job, they're the ones who show up refreshed, prepared, and able to give their best *because* they've set boundaries around their time.

There's a deeply ingrained idea that teaching is a job that never really ends and that if you truly care about your students, you'll spend as much time as necessary planning, grading, and preparing. While flexibility is important, this expectation often leads to burnout, with teachers feeling guilty for setting boundaries around their time. The reality is that great teaching isn't about how many hours you work, it's about how effectively you use your time, among many other things. I'm curious, can't not-so-good teachers stay late and bring work home as well? Schools that recognize this and build in realistic planning and collaboration time help teachers maintain both effectiveness and longevity in the profession. The amount of time you put into teaching doesn't determine how effective you are.

Unspoken Rule #2: "Good Teachers Say 'Yes' to Extra Responsibilities."

Whether it's joining a committee that you're volunteered to run, running an after-school program, or picking up extra duties, there's an expectation that teachers should always *do more*. And while being a team player is great, saying yes to everything just isn't sustainable.

I fell into the trap of saying yes to extra duties because I wanted to be liked, I wanted to be helpful, and I didn't want to burden my team. I didn't realize that by saying yes to everyone else, I was actually saying no to me. You don't have to prove your dedication by overloading yourself. Protect your time. Choose the things that energize you, not the ones that drain you. And remember: just because you *can* do something doesn't mean you *have to*. I always tell teachers



Do you ever do this?

that when making decisions, if it's not a heck yes, then it's a no. There's nothing worse than saying yes to something that you end up resenting or just don't have capacity for.

Unspoken Rule #3: "It's for the Kids."

This is the guilt trip that gets teachers every time. Anytime you hesitate to take on something extra, you hear it: *"It's for the kids."* And yes, we're all here for the kids. It's why you got into the profession in the first place. But that doesn't mean you have to give everything you have so that you have nothing left to give when you get home.

Let's be real—every year, it feels like more is added to your plate, but the support you actually need never seems to follow. Your classroom is more complex than ever, with diverse student needs, new curriculum demands, challenging behaviors, and technology that's supposed to make things easier. But instead of getting the time, training, and resources to actually implement these changes, you're often left to figure it out on your own. And when that support isn't there, what's meant to *help* you ends up just making your job harder.

According to the Pew Research Center,⁴ "the vast majority of teachers say there's not enough time in the workday to accomplish all that's expected of them." How often do you feel the same way? "Some 84% say they don't have enough time during their regular work hours to do tasks like grading, lesson planning, paperwork and answering emails." There's a lack of support across the board. You've probably spent thousands of dollars of your own money to purchase classroom supplies because your school's budget doesn't cover even the basics. Maybe you've sat through professional development that had *nothing* to do with what you actually need. Maybe you've asked for instructional support but were told, *"We just don't have the resources or funding."* Or maybe you've received amazing professional development based on the latest research and once you figure out how to take this back to your classroom, you find out that there's no funding to purchase the tools and materials you need to actually implement

⁴ <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/04/04/how-teachers-manage-their-workload/>.

these best practices. It's frustrating, because you *want* to do right by your students, but the system isn't giving you what you need to do your job *within* the very limited time you're given.

A system that depends on teachers overworking themselves *isn't actually putting kids first*—because burned-out teachers don't serve students well. Taking care of yourself isn't selfish. It's necessary. A helpful way to reframe this unspoken rule is to change it to, "It's for the kids and what I have capacity for."



How does this reframe feel?

You are a professional. You deserve a career that respects both your passion and your well-being. And the more we shift this mindset individually and collectively, the better chance we have of making teaching a profession where great educators *want* to stay.

Because a system that depends on teacher burnout isn't sustainable. But one that values teachers as whole people? That's the system our students *and* educators truly deserve.

Unspoken Rule #4: "We are Family."

You hear this phrase all the time in schools—"We're a family here." And while it sounds nice, it's often used to justify asking teachers to give more than they should. How many times have you taken on extra responsibilities because of this unspoken rule? A healthy workplace should have teamwork, collaboration, and support, but it should *not* expect you to work unpaid hours, say yes to everything, or blur the lines between your professional and personal life in the name of "family." And being guilted into extra work seems like manipulation, right? Families are built on unconditional love (in a perfect world) and workplaces are built on contracts and expectations. You can care about your colleagues and your students *without* being expected to sacrifice yourself, or your actual family, for the job.

Unspoken Rule #5: “Be Flexible and Don’t Push Back.”

Flexibility is an important part of teaching because things change, and you have to adapt and you most likely do it all day long! But in many schools, “*be flexible*” doesn’t just mean adjusting to changes, it means accepting whatever happens without question. There’s an unspoken expectation that teachers should go along with last-minute schedule shifts, new initiatives with no training, or added responsibilities *without pushing back*. If you question these changes or advocate for yourself, you might be labeled as “negative” or “not a team player.”

This unspoken rule is especially harmful because it discourages teachers from speaking up about real issues. You might hesitate to ask for clarity on a new policy, express concerns about an unrealistic expectation, or even just say, “*I can’t take on more right now.*” But constantly going along with every change without question doesn’t make you a better teacher; it just makes you more exhausted and maybe even a little resentful. Schools function best when teachers are empowered to provide feedback and advocate for what they need to do their jobs effectively. I know you want your voice to be heard and respected. Flexibility should be about collaboration and problem-solving, not about staying silent and accepting whatever is thrown your way.

If you’ve ever thought about leaving teaching or if you know colleagues who have, you’re not alone. The 2026 State of California’s Public Schools found that 40% of TK–12th grade teachers are considering leaving education in the next few years.⁵ These numbers aren’t just statistics; they represent real teachers who started their careers full of passion but found themselves burned out, disillusioned, or unable to sustain the workload. The teaching profession is facing a major crisis. It’s hard to retain qualified teachers as teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate. According to data

⁵California Teachers Association, *The State of California Public Schools*, 2026, <https://www.cta.org/document/the-state-of-ca-public-schools>.

from the Bureau of Labor Statistics,^{6,7} around 300,000 public school teachers and other related staff left the education field from February 2020–May 2022. This large exodus was approximately 3% of that workforce, reaching 10% nationally.

So why are so many teachers leaving? One of the biggest reasons is the increasing workload without additional support or compensation. Teachers today are not just educators, they're expected to be curriculum developers, intervention specialists, social-emotional coaches, tech support, and paperwork processors. While teachers have always worn multiple hats, the demands have only grown in recent years, especially with the rise of new policies, initiatives, and accountability measures. And yet, salaries have barely kept up with inflation, and support systems in schools are often lacking. Teachers are being asked to do more while being given less. Are you nodding your head “yes?”

Another major factor is the lack of respect and autonomy in the profession. Many teachers feel micromanaged by policies that don't take classroom realities into account. Curriculum mandates, standardized testing pressures, and rigid instructional requirements can make even experienced educators feel like they have little control over their own teaching. Instead of being trusted as professionals, teachers are often treated as if they need constant oversight and evaluation. When teachers don't feel respected or valued, it becomes harder to stay in a profession that constantly demands more without recognizing the expertise and dedication that educators bring to the table, right? And there's also the lack of respect from the community and the “brave” online keyboard warriors who haven't stepped inside a classroom to actually see what is truly going on. It can leave you feeling pretty defeated some days because you are doing your very best.

School culture also plays a huge role in whether teachers stay or leave. A supportive administration, strong colleague relationships, and a healthy work environment can make even a challenging job feel sustainable. But when teachers feel isolated, overworked, or unsupported, burnout happens fast. Many educators report that when they've expressed concerns about workload, student behavior, or the need for better resources, they're met with responses like, “*Just be flexible,*” or “*That's just the way it is.*”

⁶“School's Out for Summer and Many Teachers Are Calling It Quits,” *Wall Street Journal*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/schools-out-for-summer-and-many-teachers-are-calling-it-quits-11655732689>.

⁷RAND Survey, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA956-14.html.

This kind of dismissive culture pushes teachers out the door faster than almost anything else. I excelled when I taught at schools where I felt incredibly supported and my happiness suffered at schools that were toxic and harmful until I was able to transfer to a better environment.

And of course, mental health and work-life balance are major contributors to teacher turnover. The expectation that teachers will work beyond their contracted hours grading at night, planning on weekends, and answering emails at all hours makes it nearly impossible to maintain a personal life. Teachers often leave not because they don't love teaching, but because the job demands more than they can give while still having time for their families, health, and well-being.

If you've ever considered walking away from teaching, I want you to know that it doesn't mean you're not dedicated or strong enough. The system has been structured in a way that makes it difficult to stay long-term without sacrificing yourself. But the solution isn't just about your personal resilience, it's about setting boundaries, advocating for better working conditions, and creating a culture where teachers can thrive instead of just surviving. Because while some challenges are beyond our control, there *are* ways to make teaching sustainable. And you deserve to be in this profession *without* burning out in the process.

My hope is that after hearing these unspoken rules, some of which you may have experienced in your school, you begin to see that there are many factors that prevent you from leaving school on time more often that have nothing to do with what is happening in your actual classroom. I also want to acknowledge the challenges you face and so much that is out of your control and I know how very real that is for you. I experienced the same feelings and frustrations during the first seven years in the classroom until I created systems that made it possible to finally be prepared, calm, and excited to teach because I wasn't up late planning the night before or making copies five minutes before my math lesson. Here's the thing you need to know. The education system isn't changing anytime soon, but you can and that's pretty powerful.

The system wasn't designed to make this job manageable. But that doesn't mean you have to give in to the pressure to overwork yourself just to *prove* that you're a good teacher.

And yet, many teachers feel like they have no choice. Why? Because beyond the structural challenges, there's also a set of *deeply ingrained beliefs* that keep teachers

stuck in a cycle of overworking, overcommitting, and feeling like no matter what they do, it's never enough. These beliefs aren't always taught outright, but they show up in unspoken expectations, subtle pressures from colleagues and administrators, and even our own self-doubt. I struggled with them for many years.

You've probably felt it yourself, that moment when you see a colleague's car still in the parking lot long after school is over and wonder, *Should I be staying later too?* Or the guilt that creeps in when you leave on time, as if walking out the door means you're not as dedicated as the teachers who work into the evening. Or you may roll your eyes when the teacher down the hall leaves at dismissal again while you're still stuck trying to plan for the rest of the week. We've been conditioned to believe that being the last (or first) car in the parking lot *means something* about our worth as teachers. But here's the truth: it doesn't. *The amount of time you spend working doesn't define your teaching ability.* Please read that again!

What Actually Makes a Good Teacher? (Hint: It's Someone Who's Getting Their Needs Met)

We agree that a "good teacher" isn't the one who stays the latest, says yes to everything, never complains, and sacrifices their personal life for their students, right? While that version has been celebrated for years, times are changing because we know that it's just not sustainable, especially in today's education climate.

A good teacher is someone who's clear on their priorities and creates a classroom rooted in consistency, care, and high expectations. They build relationships, plan with purpose, and use their time intentionally. But just as importantly, a good teacher takes care of themselves. They set boundaries, protect their planning time, and recognize that their job is important, but so is their well-being. When teachers are rested, supported, and not running on empty, *that's* when their students benefit the most. You can't pour into your students if you're constantly running on fumes.

Inside The Organized Teacher Club, we talk a lot about this: a good teacher is someone who is getting their needs met. That might look different from teacher to teacher, but the bottom line is this: when you feel calm, confident, and in control of your time, you show up differently. You're more present and more patient. You're

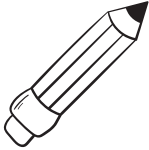
more *you*. Think of how you show up on the days you know you get to attend your favorite work out class or you have plans with family or friends after school. Or how you show up after a weekend of rest or going away on a trip. That version of you—the one who’s balanced, energized, and supported—is the one your students (and your family) need most. Not the burnt-out, overworked version that’s constantly being sold as “what a good teacher does.” You deserve better. And your students do, too. And so does your family.

A good teacher might look like the one who decides to stop grading every single assignment in detail and instead starts using quick checks for understanding, so she can spend her evenings having dinner with her family instead of glued to a stack of papers. Or the teacher who sets a timer for 45 minutes during her planning period, focuses on one task at a time, and actually walks out the door near contract time guilt-free. She’s not cutting corners, she’s cutting out the noise so she can focus on what matters most. That’s not laziness. That’s being intentional.

It might be the teacher who no longer volunteers for every school event or committee, even though she used to say yes to everything. Now, she asks herself, “*Is this aligned with my priorities and capacity right now?*” before responding. Maybe she’s decided not to run the after-school club this year (even though she’s done it for the last five) because she’s caring for an aging parent or trying to be more present at home with her newborn. That doesn’t make her less dedicated. That makes her wise. She knows that by saying no to some things, she’s protecting her ability to give her best to the things she’s already committed to.

Or it might be the teacher who shows up in the morning with a full cup of coffee and a clear plan, not because she stayed up until midnight prepping, but because she finally created a system that works so she’s planned ahead of time. She’s using the copy bin system, she’s batching her lesson plans weekly, and she’s using her planning time for actual planning, not random last-minute tasks. Her room might not be perfectly decorated or color-coded, but it runs smoothly, her students are engaged, and she leaves school most days without taking work home. And when she stays later, it’s because she wants to. That’s what it looks like to have your needs met and still do your job well.

These are the teachers who are redefining what it means to be “good.” Not the martyrs but the intentional, boundary-setting, joy-protecting professionals who are in this for the long haul. And you can be one of them. And now that you’ve made it this far, the next chapter is where we get into the heart of this book. I’ll show you exactly how to start by sharing practical steps that will help you leave school prepared more often by using The Organized Teacher System.



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Task: Which unspoken rule resonates with you the most and why?

