

The MetLife Survey of *THE AMERICAN TEACHER*

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MetLife Survey of the American Teacher Finds Decreased Teacher Satisfaction, Increased Parent Engagement Amid Economic Uncertainty

WASHINGTON — March 7, 2012 — Teachers are less satisfied with their jobs than they have been in decades, but parent engagement with schools has increased, according to the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Teachers, Parents and the Economy*, the 28th in an annual series commissioned by MetLife and conducted by Harris Interactive. The report, based on a survey of public school teachers, parents and students during the current school year¹, is the first large-scale national survey to fully reflect the effects of the economy on the teaching profession.

Teacher job satisfaction has fallen by 15 percentage points since 2009, the last time the MetLife survey queried teachers on this topic, from 59 percent to 44 percent responding they are very satisfied. This rapid decline in job satisfaction is coupled with a large increase in the number of teachers reporting that they are likely to leave teaching for another occupation (17 percent in 2009 vs. 29 percent today). Teachers are also more than four times as likely now than they were five years ago to say that they do not feel their job is secure (34 percent today vs. 8 percent in 2006, the last time this question was asked). In addition, 53 percent of parents and 65 percent of teachers today say that teachers' salaries are not fair for the work they do.

“The survey’s findings underscore that education is a shared responsibility, particularly in the face of financial challenges,” said Dennis White, vice president of corporate contributions for MetLife. “Economic prosperity will depend on a new generation well-prepared to learn for a lifetime in order to compete and collaborate in a global economy. MetLife is proud to add the valuable data in this report to the pool of information policymakers and education leaders can draw upon as they make their decisions.”

The ripple effects from the economic downturn may be a factor in this declining satisfaction and increasing insecurity. Layoffs of teachers, staff and parent/community liaisons occurred last year in the schools of two-thirds (66 percent) of teachers and three-quarters (76 percent) of teachers have experienced budget cuts in their schools in the last 12 months.

Teachers say there have been cuts to school budgets, programs, and services, while at the same time reporting that students and their families are demonstrating increased needs. Nearly three in ten (28 percent) teachers indicate that there have been reductions or eliminations of health or social service programs in their schools in the past year. In addition, 64 percent of teachers report an increase in the

¹ The survey was conducted by telephone among 1,001 public school teachers, and online among 1,086 parents and 947 students in October and November, 2011

number of students and families requiring health and social support services and 35 percent say the number of students coming to school hungry has increased.

Other education basics have also been affected:

A significant majority of teachers (63 percent) report that the average class size in their school has increased in the past year and one-third of teachers (34 percent) indicate that educational technology and materials have not been kept up to date to meet student needs at their schools. More than one third (36 percent) of teachers experienced reductions or eliminations of programs in arts or music, foreign language, or physical education in the past year. Reports of these conditions are more likely from teachers in schools that have also experienced layoffs of classroom teachers in the past year.

School budget cuts appear to have generated an additional negative effect:

Teachers and parents of students in schools where budgets have decreased in the last 12 months are more likely to be pessimistic (46 percent of teachers; 52 percent of parents) that student achievement will be better in five years than are teachers and parents of students in schools where budgets have remained the same or increased (35 percent of teachers; 28 percent of parents).

The good news — teachers are supported by their communities:

Amid the disquieting findings in this year's survey, data indicates strong support for the teaching profession. Overall, the survey found that a majority of both teachers (77 percent) and parents (71 percent) agree that teachers are treated as professionals by the community, and that teachers' health insurance (67 percent of teachers; 63 percent of parents) and retirement (61 percent of teachers; 60 percent of parents) benefits are fair for the work they do.

There are also data points for policymakers and education leaders to note as they work to turn negative trends into positive ones. For example, the survey found that teachers with higher job satisfaction are more likely to have experienced adequate opportunities for professional development, time to collaborate with other teachers and more preparation and support for engaging parents effectively. They are also likelier to report greater involvement of parents and their schools in coming together to improve the learning and success of students.

Parents report that teachers in schools with high parent engagement also perform better on a range of measures, including collaboration, responsiveness, sharing information, contacting parents about learning issues, providing guidance on helping students succeed, and being flexible to meet with parents at different times of the day.

And levels of parent engagement have increased:

Levels of engagement between parents and schools have seen marked improvement over past surveys. Two-thirds of students (64 percent) report that they talk about things that happen at school with their parents every day, compared to 40 percent who reported speaking with their parents this frequently in 1988, the first time the survey asked this question. There was also a threefold increase in the number of students who report that their parents visit their school at least once a month – up from 16 percent in 1988 to 46 percent today.

These numbers echo what parents report. Fewer parents now than 25 years ago believe that there is widespread parental disengagement with their children's school and education in general. Since the first time the survey series addressed this issue in 1987, there were significant declines in the proportion of teachers and parents reporting that most or many parents take too little interest in their children's education, fail to motivate their children so they want to learn, or leave their children alone too much after school.

Virtually all teachers (91 percent) and eight in ten parents (80 percent) believe that their schools help all parents understand what they can do at home to support student success, and 83 percent of students agree that their teachers and parents work together to help them succeed. The survey also found that teachers with high job satisfaction are more likely than those with lower job satisfaction to agree that their schools help parents better understand what they can do to help children learn (95 percent vs. 87 percent).

Other findings in the survey include:

Teacher job satisfaction:

- Teachers with high job satisfaction are more likely than those with lower job satisfaction to have experienced adequate opportunities for professional development (86 percent vs. 72 percent).
- Teachers with high job satisfaction are less likely than those with lower job satisfaction to have experienced decreased time to collaborate with other teachers (27 percent vs. 44 percent).
- Teachers with high job satisfaction are more likely than those with lower job satisfaction to rate the following people as excellent or good in preparing and supporting them to engage parents effectively: the principal at their school (90 percent vs. 72 percent); other teachers at their school (91 percent vs. 85 percent); and parents at their school (73 percent vs. 55 percent).

Budget and other school-related cuts:

- Teachers in schools that have experienced layoffs of classroom teachers in the past year are more likely than those in schools without teacher layoffs to also report that in the past year, average class sizes have increased (77 percent vs. 50 percent), educational technology and learning materials have not been kept up to date to meet student needs (43 percent vs. 27 percent), school facilities have not been kept in clean or good condition (31 percent vs. 13 percent), and that their school has experienced reductions or eliminations of programs in arts or music (34 percent vs. 14 percent), foreign language (25 percent vs. 11 percent), or physical education (21 percent vs. 4 percent).

Parent and community engagement:

- Since the survey first examined this issue in 1987, teachers and parents report a decrease in the belief that most or many parents take too little interest in their children's education (teachers: 35 percent vs. 48 percent; parents: 47 percent vs. 52 percent) fail to motivate their children to learn in school (teachers: 35 percent vs. 53 percent; parents: 42 percent vs. 52 percent) or leave their children alone too much after school (teachers: 42 percent vs. 62 percent; parents: 44 percent vs. 59 percent).
- Parents of students in schools with high parent engagement are more likely than those with low engagement to rate their child's teachers as 'excellent' or 'good' on a range of measures, including: being responsive to their requests for information (98 percent vs. 57 percent), contacting them if their child is having academic or social problems (97 percent vs. 50 percent), providing guidance on what they can do to help their child succeed (96 percent vs. 41 percent), and being flexible to meet with them at different times of day or different locations (91 percent vs. 47 percent).

About the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Teachers, Parents and the Economy

The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Teachers, Parents and the Economy was conducted by Harris Interactive and is the twenty-eighth in a series sponsored annually by MetLife since 1984 to give voice to those closest to the classroom. This MetLife survey examines the views of teachers, parents and students about the teaching profession, parent and community engagement, and effects of the current economy on families and schools. The results are based on a survey conducted among 1,001 U.S. public school teachers of grades K through 12 by telephone, online among 1,086 U.S. parents/guardians of public school students in grades K through 12 and 947 U.S. public school students in grades 3 through 12 between October 14 and November 10, 2011. The data were weighted to key demographic variables to align with the national population of the respective groups. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. Full methodology is included in the report and available online at www.metlife.com/teachersurvey.

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