

Students', Teachers', and Administrators' Attitudes Towards High School and School Reform

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I. Students' Attitudes

- **A large percentage of college students feel that high school did not prepare them sufficiently for college level work.**
 - Thirty-nine percent of college students say that there are gaps in how high school prepared them for the expectations of college (Achieve, 2005).
 - Over half (56%) of all college students say that high school left them unprepared for the work and study habits expected in college (Achieve, 2005).
 - A large percentage of students that go on to higher education say that high school teachers and classes should have done more to prepare them for college. (51% of African American young adults, 48% of Hispanic young adults, 44% of Asian American young adults, and 39% of White young adults agreed that their preparation was lacking). (Public Agenda, 2005)

- **The types of classes that college students take during high school is strongly associated with how prepared they feel for college-level work.**
 - College students who took Algebra Two or higher level math courses in high school are more than twice as likely to feel prepared for the math they are expected to do in college (60% feel well prepared) than students who did not take Algebra Two (26%). (Achieve, 2005)
 - College students who were expected to write a great deal in high school, feel much more prepared for the quality of writing expected of them in college (79% feel well prepared) than do students who faced lower expectations for their quantity of writing (51%). (Achieve, 2005)

- **A large percentage of high school students do not face high academic expectations in high school.**
 - One-quarter (24%) of all high school graduates, including 26% of all current college students and 20% of non-college students, say that they faced high academic expectations and that they were significantly challenged in high school. (Achieve, 2005)
 - More than half (56%) of all high school graduates faced moderate expectations, whereas one in five (20%) found that expectations were low and that it was easy to slide by. (Achieve, 2005)

- About half of students (47% of students with postgraduate degrees and 54% of students without degrees) said their high school teachers made it easy to do just enough to get by. (Public Agenda, 2005)
- A large majority of students (62% of students with postgraduate degrees and 78% of students without degrees) say they could have paid a lot more attention and worked harder in high school (Public Agenda, 2005).
- Slightly more than half (56%) of current high school students indicate that they put forth a great deal of effort in their school work. (HSSE, 2004)
- **Most high school students are not excited by what they are learning in school.**
 - Less than one third (29%) of high school students report that they are excited about their classes. (HSSE, 2004)
 - Less than half of high school students report that their school work makes them curious to learn about other things. (HSSE, 2004)
- **A large majority of high school students understand the importance of postsecondary education.**
 - More than four fifths of current high school students (81%) intend to enroll in some form of postsecondary education. (HSSE, 2004)
 - Most young adults understand that they will make more money if they attend college. (84% of African American, 90% of Hispanic, 92% Asian American, and 88% of White young adults responded that college graduates earn more money). (Public Agenda, 2005)
 - Most young adults also feel that college helps prepare students for the real world. (78% of African American, 76% of Hispanic, 76% Asian American, and 73% of White young adults responded that college graduates earn more money). (Public Agenda, 2005)
- **A large majority of high school students report having a strong, positive relationship with an adult in their high school.**
 - Two thirds (66%) of current high school students say that at least one adult in their school cared about them and knew them well. (HSSE, 2004)
 - More than three fifths of current high school students (63%) say they are supported and respected by teachers. (HSSE, 2004)
 - Large majorities of young adults say that in high school they had a teacher or coach who really inspired them (79% of African American, 70% of Hispanic, 69% of Asian American, and 76% of white young adults reported an inspirational relationship). (Public Agenda, 2005)
 - Almost all (95%) of secondary school students have had a teacher who has made a positive difference in their lives. (MetLife, 2005)

II. Teachers' and Administrators' Attitudes

Attitudes Towards the Work Environment

- **Two in ten (18%) new teachers are very or fairly likely to leave the profession.** (MetLife, 2005).
- **Teachers' greatest sources of dissatisfaction include administrative duties and lack of planning time.**
 - New teachers most commonly report administrative, classroom management and testing responsibilities as their greatest source of stress. About one third (34%) of new teachers indicated these areas as their greatest source of stress or anxiety. (MetLife, 2005).
 - Among teachers who leave the profession, the five most commonly reported sources of dissatisfaction were a lack of planning time (60 percent), too heavy a workload (51 percent), too many students in a classroom (50 percent), too low a salary (48 percent), and problematic student behavior (44 percent). (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005)
 - The five most commonly reported sources of dissatisfaction among teachers who transferred to another school were a lack of planning time (65 percent), too heavy a workload (60 percent), too low a salary (54 percent), problematic student behavior (53 percent), and a lack of influence over school policy (52 percent). (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005)
 - Compared to other aspects of their working conditions, North Carolina public school teachers are least positive about the time available to them for planning and collaboration. Only about half (51 percent) of teachers agree that they have adequate time for collaboration with colleagues and less than half (46 percent) believe that new teachers are provided enough time to work with a mentor within and outside of the classroom. (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004)
- **New teachers who plan to transfer schools or leave the profession report a variety of other sources of dissatisfaction with their jobs.**
 - Compared to those who plan to continue teaching, fewer new teachers who are likely to leave the profession are very satisfied with their relationships with students (48% vs. 72%), other teachers (38% vs. 61%), and their principal (34% vs. 57%). (MetLife, 2005)
 - New teachers who are likely to leave the profession are less likely to strongly agree that their principal creates an environment which helps them be an effective teacher (40% vs. 63%). (MetLife, 2005)
- **Teachers consider working with parents to be one of the most challenging aspects of their job.**
 - One third (31%) of new teachers believe communicating with and involving parents is their greatest challenge. (MetLife, 2005)
 - Only one quarter of new teachers describes the relationship with the students' parents as very satisfying. (MetLife, 2005)

- More than half (60%) of high school teachers say their school has a serious problem with insufficient parental involvement. (Sizing Things Up, 2002 in Public Agenda, 2003)
- **Principals' most common source of stress is parents.**
 - About one quarter (28%) of principals report parents as a source of stress. Other sources of stress for principals include testing, administrative and management duties (27%), government, bureaucracy and politics (15%), and student issues (15%). (MetLife, 2005)
- **Teachers working in urban schools and schools with a high percentage of minority students are less satisfied with their jobs than other teachers.**
 - Fifty-six percent of new teachers in urban schools compared to 70% of new teachers in suburban or rural areas report being very satisfied with their jobs. 57% of new teachers working in schools where half or more of the student body are minority students vs. 71% of all other new teachers are very satisfied with teaching. (MetLife, 2005)
 - Public school teachers in North Carolina that work in hard-to-staff schools are less satisfied than their peers with every aspect of their school environment. (Hard to staff schools include those located in poor urban and rural areas or those designated as "low performing" by the state). (ECS, 2004)
- **Principals report higher levels of job satisfaction than teachers.**
 - Three quarters (76%) of principals are very satisfied with their job as principal in a public school compared to 66% of new teachers who are very satisfied with teaching as a career. (MetLife, 2005)
 - North Carolina public school teachers are less satisfied with their working conditions than principals, particularly in the categories of time and empowerment. (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004)
- **Principals and new teachers agree that the most important sources of training for new teachers include providing mentors and ensuring that new teachers have an internship or other practical training.**
 - Forty-four percent of principals and 38% of new teachers say that being assigned a skilled, experienced teacher as a mentor would be most helpful training for first-time teachers. (MetLife, 2005, 2005)
 - About a third (34%) of new teachers and 43% of principals feel that year-long internships or other practical training would also be very helpful for training new teachers. (MetLife, 2005)
- **Most new teachers have access to support and guidance during their transition to the classroom.**
 - Eighty-one percent of new teachers were assigned a more experienced teacher as a mentor when they began teaching. (MetLife, 2005)

- Eighty-eight percent of new teachers have someone to go to for advice and guidance about teaching the curriculum and 91% can obtain advice about classroom management and administrative responsibilities. (MetLife, 2005)

Attitudes towards Education Reform and Standards

- **Polling data presents a mixed picture of teachers' beliefs and expectations about the capacity of students to meet high standards.**
 - One quarter (26%) of high school teachers feel that all students, teachers, and schools should be held to the same performance standard, regardless of the socioeconomic background of the students. (ETS, 2005)
 - Sixty-four percent of teachers agree that inner-city kids should be expected to achieve to the same standards as their wealthier peers. (Reality Check, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - Eighty percent of teachers and 89% of principals, “strongly” agree that all children can learn. (The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2001 in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - Only 21% of teachers think students should be expected to pass an even more challenging test in order to receive their high school diploma (Reality Check, 2002 in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - Eighty-nine percent of teachers say they are confident that most of their students will learn the skills and knowledge they were supposed to by the end of the year. (Stand by Me, 2003 in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - Thirty-eight percent doubt they can get through to their hardest-to-reach students by the end of the year. (Stand by Me, 2003 in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - A sizeable number of new teachers (42%) say student achievement is mostly determined by parental involvement and socioeconomic status, compared to 54% who say teacher quality is just as important. (A Sense of Calling, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)
- **While few high school teachers feel that a great deal has been accomplished in reforming K-8 schools, most feel unfavorably towards NCLB reforms.**
 - Only 18% of high school teachers think that a great deal has been accomplished in making the reforms necessary to improve K-8 schools. (ETS, 2005)
 - Three quarters (75%) of high school teachers feel unfavorably towards NCLB reforms. (ETS, 2005)
- **Most high school teachers and administrators do not believe that major reforms of high schools are needed.**
 - One third (31%) of high school teachers and 20% of administrators feel that major changes or a complete overhaul of high schools is needed. (ETS, 2005)

- Slightly over a third (35%) of administrators feel that schools are “coming up short/falling behind” in providing the skills and training necessary for the work force and only one quarter (25%) think they are not adequately preparing students for college. (ETS, 2005)

Attitudes Towards Workplace Reforms

- **Teachers and administrators agree that increasing teachers’ salaries and providing financial incentives would be a very effective means of improving teacher quality.**
 - Large majorities of principals (67%) and superintendents (70%) agree that higher salaries for teachers would be the most effective way to improve teacher quality. (A Sense of Calling, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - Eighty-nine percent of teachers and 62% of parents favor increased pay for all teachers as a solution to attract and retain good public school teachers. (Fulfilling the Promise of No Child Left Behind, 2003 [d] in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - Eighty-five percent of teachers—and 72% of principals—say that providing financial incentives would “help a lot” when it comes to attracting and retaining good teachers. (The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2001 in Public Agenda, 2003)
- **Teachers support pay for performance policies that are based on working conditions and performance evaluations, but not policies based on increasing students’ test scores.**
 - Teachers favor giving financial incentives to teachers who:
 - Work in tough neighborhoods with low performing schools (70%)
 - Consistently work harder, putting in more time and effort than other teachers (67%)
 - Teach difficult classes with hard-to-reach students (63%)
 - Consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals (62%)
 - Receive accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (57%).
(Stand by Me, 2003 in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - Only 38% favor financial incentives for teachers whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests. (Stand by Me, 2003 in Public Agenda, 2003)
- **While administrators strongly support changes to tenure policies, teachers are less supportive of changes and view tenure as an important source of job protection.**
 - Large majorities of principals (73%) and superintendents (83%) say that eliminating teacher tenure would be an effective way to improve the quality of teachers. (A Sense of Calling, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)

- Slightly more than half of teachers (53%) agree that the tenure system should be changed to make it far easier to remove bad teachers. (Reality Check, 2002 in Public Agenda, 2003)
- Just 23% of teachers think good teachers don't have to worry about tenure. In contrast, the majority of teachers (58%) view tenure as something that protects them from "district politics, favoritism and the threat of losing their jobs to newcomers who could work for less." (Stand by Me, 2003 in Public Agenda, 2003)
- **While many administrators feel that unions present barriers to reform efforts, teachers have mixed views of the value of unions.**
 - In a recent survey of superintendents of the nation's largest school districts, almost half (47%) indicate that rigid union contracts that prevent the implementation of some reforms are a challenge to district leadership. (An Impossible Job? 2003 in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - Only very small proportions of principals (15%) and superintendents (17%) say that their local teachers' union helps to remove bad teachers. In fact, eight out of ten say the union fights to protect all teachers, regardless of whether they deserve to be there or not (80% and 79%, respectively). (A Sense of Calling, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - A plurality of teachers (46%) view unions as "absolutely essential," and another 38% say they are "important but not essential." Only 12% of teachers say unions are something they "could do without." (Stand by Me, 2003 in Public Agenda, 2003)

Attitudes Towards Teacher Preparation

- **Teachers and Administrators agree that teacher preparation programs do not adequately prepare new teachers for the classroom, but their concerns focus on new teachers' classroom management and teaching skills, not on their subject matter knowledge.**
 - Most new teachers themselves say that teacher training programs do a "fair" or "poor" job making sure teachers are able to deal with the pressure and stress of teaching (63%) and making sure teachers know how to maintain student discipline (57%). (A Sense of Calling, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - Nearly six in ten new teachers (59%) say that upon entering the profession, they were often at a loss when trying to help students who were doing poorly. (A Sense of Calling, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - Large majorities of administrators fault teacher training programs with doing only a "fair" or "poor" job making sure teachers are able to deal with the pressure and stress of teaching (71% of principals and 78% of superintendents). (A Sense of Calling, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)
 - Large majorities of administrators also say that teacher training programs do only a "fair" or "poor" job making sure teachers know how to maintain

student discipline (70% of principals and 65% of superintendents). (A Sense of Calling, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)

- Approximately half of principals (49%) and superintendents (53%) say that too many new teachers fall short when it comes to having a talent for really motivating kids. (A Sense of Calling, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)
- According to majorities of principals (78%) and superintendents (80%), most new teachers are very knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. (A Sense of Calling, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)

- **Most teachers support teacher certification policies and many support alternative routes to certification as well.**

- According to most new teachers (74%), reducing the regulations and requirements for teacher certification would not be an effective way to improve teacher quality. (A Sense of Calling, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)
- Fifty percent of teachers think it's generally a good idea to give people many different routes to enter the profession, compared to about a third (32%) who thinks it's a bad idea and 19% who are unsure. (Stand by Me, 2003 in Public Agenda, 2003)

- **However, both teachers and administrators question the efficacy of current state certification policies.**

- Only 13% of principals and 7% of superintendents believe that certification in their state guarantees that the typical teacher "has what it takes" to be effective in the classroom. The remainder say it "only guarantees a minimum of skills" or "guarantees very little." (A Sense of Calling, 2000 in Public Agenda, 2003)
- Teachers are somewhat more positive about state certification: 30% say it guarantees that the typical teacher "has what it takes," 46% that it "guarantees only a minimum of skills" and 15% "very little." (Stand by Me, 2003 in Public Agenda, 2003)

References

1. Glennie, E., Coble, C., and Allen, M. (November 2004). Teacher Perceptions of the Work Environment in Hard-to-Staff Schools. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.
<http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/55/87/5587.doc>

In May 2003, an Education Commission of the States (ECS) report titled Where They Are Needed Most: Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Teachers in North Carolina's Hard-to-Staff and Low-Performing Schools identified 272 "hard-to-staff" schools and evaluated the impact of various education policies on teachers in these schools. This analysis incorporates data from state and federal sources to show whether school characteristics and teacher perceptions of the work environment in hard-to-staff schools differ from those in schools not considered ("nondesignated") as hard to staff.

2. Hart, P.D. and Winston, D. (June 2005). Ready For The Real World? Americans Speak On High School Reform, Executive Summary. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
<http://ftp.ets.org/pub/corp/2005execsum.pdf>

From April 5 to 17, 2005, Peter D. Hart Research Associates and The Winston Group conducted a national survey among 2,250 adults, including a national sample of 1,009 adults. Additional groups were oversampled to provide statistically significant results, specifically, an additional 180 parents of K-12 students to bring the total to 666 parents of K-12 students, an additional 150 parents of high school students to bring the total to 371 parents of high school students, 300 adults in California for a total of 439, 302 adults from New Jersey for a total of 319, and 309 adults in Ohio for a total of 393. In addition, telephone surveys among 300 high school administrators (superintendents, school board members, principals and vice principals) and 300 high school teachers were conducted.

3. High School Survey of Student Engagement, HSSE 2004 Overview. (2005)
Bloomington, IN: Indiana University School of Education.
http://www.iub.edu/~nsse/hssse/pdf/hssse_2004_overview.pdf

In April 2004, HSSSE was completed voluntarily by 90,530 students, representing 70% of all students enrolled in the 103 participating high schools. The HSSSE respondents closely resemble the national profile of high school students based on U.S. Department of Education statistics. This overview highlights some of the interesting findings from the 2004 administration. Subsequent reports will provide additional analyses and explore implications of the HSSSE data in more detail. The students who participated in HSSSE 2004 were from 26 states. HSSSE schools ranged in size from 64 to 3939 students. The average high school size was 1261 students.

4. Hirsch, E. (2004). No Child Left Behind: A Status Report from Southeastern Schools Teacher Working Conditions are Student Learning Conditions A Report to Governor Mike Easley on the 2004 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Chapel Hill, NC: The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality.
http://www.teachingquality.org/resources/pdfs/TWC_FullReport.pdf

Governor Easley's Teacher Working Conditions Initiative began with a teacher working conditions survey originally developed and piloted by the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission in 2001. The survey was conducted for a second time from April-May 2004. More than 34,000 educators responded to the 2004 survey, representing more than 90

percent of the state's schools and every school district. Using the survey, along with several other data sources, SECTQ conducted the analysis described in this report.

5. Johnson, J., Duffet, A., with Ott, A. (2005). *Life After High School, Young People Talk About their Hopes and Prospects*. New York, NY: Public Agenda.

http://www.publicagenda.org/research/research_reports_details.cfm?list=31

The findings are based on telephone interviews with a national random sample of 1000 young adults aged 18 through 25, plus oversamples to ensure totals of 200 African American, Hispanic and Asian American young adults aged 18 through 25, plus oversamples to ensure totals of 200 African American, Hispanic and Asian American young adults. Interviews were conducted between August 14 and September 4, 2004. The survey was preceded by five focus groups and in-depth interviews with a variety of experts in the field.

6. Johnson, J., Duffet, A., with Vine, J. and Syat, B. (August 2003). *An Assessment of Survey Data on Attitudes About Teaching, Including the Views of Parents, Administrators, Teachers and the General Public*. New York, NY: Public Agenda.

http://www.publicagenda.org/research/pdfs/attitudes_about_teaching.pdf

For this report, Public Agenda has reviewed and analyzed a robust body of opinion research on teachers and teaching stretching back over the last decade. During this time, Public Agenda itself has conducted well over 20 major national opinion studies on public education, including over half a dozen measuring teachers' views.

7. Markow, D. and Martin, S. (2005). *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships, 2004-05*. New York, NY: Harris Interactive, Inc. for MetLife, Inc.

http://www.metlife.com/WPSAssets/34996838801118758796V1FATS_2004.pdf

The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships was conducted by Harris Interactive Inc®. This report is the twenty-second in the series of surveys sponsored annually by MetLife since 1984. This year's report examines the essential aspects in student and educator transitions including the supporting relationships. The current study incorporates the perspectives of key stakeholders in exploring this issue: new public school teachers in grades K-12, public school principals in grades K-12, and secondary public school students in grades 7-12. A nationally representative sample of 800 public school teachers of grades K-12, who were teaching for no more than five years, were interviewed on the telephone between December 7, 2004 and January 12, 2005. A nationally representative sample of 841 public school principals of grades K-12 were interviewed on the telephone between November 29, 2004 and December 17, 2004. Finally, a nationally representative sample of 1073 public school students in grades 7-12 were interviewed online between December 29, 2004 and January 11, 2005.

8. Provasnik, S. and Dorfman, S. (2005). *The Condition of Education 2005: Mobility in the Teacher Workforce*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

During the 1999-2000 school year, a total of about 3,450,000 teachers worked in public and private elementary and secondary schools in the United States. This paper describes the nature of the teacher workforce, examines who left the workforce in 1999-2000 and compares these transitions with those in 1987-88, 1990-91 and 1993-94. Table six – on page 19 – examines the

sources of dissatisfaction for K-12 teachers who did not teach at the same school in 2000-01 as in 1999-2000 and reported being strongly or somewhat dissatisfied with a particular feature of the school they left.

9. Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work? (February 2005). Washington, DC: Conducted for Achieve, Inc., Peter D Hart Research Associates, Inc./Public Opinion Strategies.

[http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/pollreport/\\$file/pollreport.pdf](http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/pollreport/$file/pollreport.pdf)

From December 4 to 21, 2004, Peter D. Hart Research Associates and Public Opinion Strategies interviewed 1,487 public high school graduates from the classes of 2002, 2003, and 2004. The total sample comprised 861 students currently enrolled in two- and four-year colleges and 626 high school graduates not currently enrolled in college, including 267 who had been enrolled in college but have withdrawn. The total sample includes oversamples for a total of 303 African Americans, 287 Hispanics, and 353 current college students who have taken a remedial course.