

# The MetLife Survey of *THE AMERICAN TEACHER*

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*Note to media: To listen to a discussion of the survey findings, a teleconference with Q&A has been arranged: 800-771-6883, taking place between the hours of 12:00 p.m. to 2 p.m. EST on Wednesday, February 25.*

## **25th Annual MetLife Teacher Survey Looks Back on More Than Two Decades of Education Reform Today's teachers are more satisfied and better prepared, but significant challenges remain**

**Washington, DC – February 25, 2009** – Have 25 years of reform improved American education? According to the newly-released *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Past, Present, and Future*, there's encouraging news: today's teachers feel more satisfied in their careers, more respected, and better prepared than teachers in the past. They also view academic standards and curriculum as stronger, and students as better prepared. The survey reveals that a majority of today's teachers (62%) are very satisfied with their careers, compared to 40% in 1984. Two-thirds (67%) of teachers think that the training and preparation teachers receive does a good job of preparing them for the classroom, compared to 46% in 1984.

Not all of the news is good, however. The comparison to the past also reveals that some longstanding challenges have increased, including a lack of student facility in English, the mixture of student learning abilities in the classroom, and poverty. Today, half (49%) of teachers say that poverty hinders learning for at least a quarter of their students, compared to 41% in 1992. More teachers (43%) agree that their classes have become so mixed in terms of students' learning abilities that they can't teach effectively, compared to 39% in 1988. And, nearly twice as many teachers today, as compared to 1992, say that a lack of facility in English hinders learning for at least one fourth of their students (22% vs. 11%) with the problem even greater in urban schools (30%). Urban schools generally showed less progress in many areas when compared to rural and suburban schools.

The survey is the 25th in an annual series commissioned by MetLife and conducted by Harris Interactive®. It examines the views of teachers, principals, and students to document current attitudes, identify trends, and consider the future. The opinions voiced cover a wide array of topics, including teacher satisfaction with careers, academic standards and curriculum, student success, professional communication, school conditions, parent and community relations, and challenges beyond the classroom. Significantly, this year's survey also provides a unique opportunity to compare changes in teacher attitudes over the past two and a half decades.

“These days, students are challenged as never before to succeed in school,” said MetLife Chairman and CEO C. Robert Henrikson. “These past 25 years, the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher has helped share the voices of those closest to the classroom, stimulating discussions in homes, schools, and communities across the nation. This survey helps ensure that

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the perspectives of teachers, as well as principals and students, are documented, shared, and heard.”

The MetLife Survey has offered perspective on many changes since 1984. One significant shift in education reform has been from an emphasis on the teacher alone to a broader responsibility for student achievement shared among teachers, principals, parents, communities and students themselves. Significantly, the current survey finds that parent and community support for schools has increased since the initial survey was taken. Over the years of the survey series, education policy has also increased its emphasis on standardized testing. Today, less than half (48%) of teachers favor use of standardized tests to measure student achievement, compared to 61% of teachers who favored testing in 1984 as a tool for having their performance measured. In addition, the introduction of new technologies has been a major change in education since 1984; however, current findings show that educators are not yet utilizing the full potential of available technology.

“Strengthening education is a collaborative venture,” said Sibyl Jacobson of MetLife and MetLife Foundation. “We can learn much from listening to those closest to the classroom about how far we have come and what remains to be done.”

## **Key findings reveal that after 25 years of reform:**

### **1. Teachers are more satisfied with their careers and better prepared.**

- A majority of teachers (62%) are very satisfied with their careers, compared to 40% in 1984.
- More teachers (66%) feel respected in society today, compared to 47% in 1984.
- Nearly twice as many teachers in 2008 agree that their jobs allow them the opportunity to earn a decent salary (66%), compared to 1984 (37%).
- Two-thirds (67%) of teachers agree that the training and preparation teachers receive today does a good job of preparing them for the classroom, compared to 46% of teachers in 1984.
- Far more teachers today (75%) report that they would advise a young person to pursue a career in teaching compared to 1984 (45%).
- More principals (51%) report that the quality of new teachers entering the profession is stronger than it was in 1986 (44%).

### **2. Academic standards and curriculum are stronger, and views on standardized testing more divergent.**

- The number of teachers who rate academic standards in their schools as excellent has doubled from 26% in 1984 to 53% today.
- However, today’s teacher places less value in standardized testing. In 1984, three in five teachers (61%) were in favor of standardized tests to measure student achievement, as part of evaluating teacher effectiveness but today less than half (48%) of teachers agree that standardized tests are effective in helping them to track student performance.
- In contrast, 79% of today’s principals agree that standardized tests help teachers in their schools in tracking student performance.

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### **3. Teacher relationships with students and parents have improved.**

- When asked in the current survey, principals (70%) and teachers (63%) agreed that relations between parents and schools have improved in recent years.
- More teachers today (67%) than in 1984 (54%) rate parental and community support for their school as good or excellent.
- More students today compared to 1988 feel they get personal attention from their teacher most or all of the time (42% vs. 25%), and fewer students today than in 1988 report hardly ever receiving attention (7% vs. 20%).
- Half of teachers (50%) report that lack of parental support or help is a serious hindrance to learning for at least a quarter of their students, down from 65% in 1992.

### **Today's challenges include:**

#### **1. Urban schools have made less progress.**

- Teachers in urban schools are less likely than those in rural or suburban schools to rate academic standards in their schools as excellent (45% vs. 52% vs. 60%).
- Teachers in urban schools are less likely than those in suburban schools to rate the availability of teaching materials as excellent (33% vs. 54%).
- Urban principals are far more likely than rural or suburban principals to report that more than a quarter of their students arrive not fully prepared to learn at their grade levels (67% vs. 31% vs. 23%).
- Teachers in urban schools are more likely than their suburban counterparts to say that dropout rates are a problem in their districts (63% vs. 32%).

#### **2. Today's educators still have a ways to go to harness technology's potential.**

- Nine in ten teachers (90%) say that technology enhances their ability to teach, and six in ten (62%) teachers use the Internet as a teaching resource on a weekly basis.
- However, students rate teachers lower in their abilities to teach about computers and the Internet than almost all other subject and skill categories: 26% of students rate teachers as fair or poor.
- 43% of teachers never communicate on-line (e.g., e-mail, instant messaging, blog) with other teachers outside their district.
- 72% of teachers have never read or written a blog about teaching.
- 60% of teachers have never taken an online course for degree credit or professional credit.
- The value teachers place on technology varies by generation: 66% of those in Generation Y (30 years old or younger) strongly agree that technology enhances their ability to teach, compared to 58% of those in Generation X (31-43) and 49% of Baby Boomers (44-62 year olds).
- Principals generally use technology and digital communication more frequently than teachers.

The results of the survey will be released today at a forum hosted by the Committee for Economic Development, which will be held at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. Humphrey Taylor, Chairman of *The Harris Poll*<sup>®</sup>, Harris Interactive, will present survey findings to an audience of educational professionals, policymakers and high school students. Charles Kolb, president of the Committee for Economic Development, will serve as moderator of a panel discussion that includes Dr.

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Mary Brabeck, Dean, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at New York University; Lee Allen, teacher, Stuart Hobson Middle School in the District of Columbia; and Kheaton Scott, student, School of Education, Howard University. The panel will discuss the significance of the survey findings from their distinctive perspectives, and issues with implications for the future.

## **About the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Past, Present, and Future***

The *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Past, Present, and Future* was conducted among a national sample of 1,000 public school teachers of grades K through 12 and 502 principals in schools with grades K through 12 by telephone, and 902 public school students in grades 3 through 12 online between May 23 and June 28, 2008. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. The survey with full notes on methodology can be downloaded from MetLife's web site at [www.metlife.com/teachersurvey](http://www.metlife.com/teachersurvey) or obtained by writing to MetLife, ATTN: *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*, 1095 Avenue of the Americas, 40th Floor, New York, NY 10036.

MetLife is pleased to announce that the entire 25-year series of the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher is now available online at the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) website: <http://eric.ed.gov>.

## **About MetLife**

MetLife is a leading provider of insurance and financial services with operations throughout the United States and the Latin America, Europe and Asia Pacific regions. It has demonstrated its belief in education and contributes to its improvement in part through the sponsorship of the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* series since 1984 to give voice to those closest to the classroom. MetLife Foundation places strong emphasis on education and draws on the findings of the Survey to inform its grantmaking. For more information about MetLife, please visit the company's Web site at [www.metlife.com](http://www.metlife.com). Additional information about the Foundation is available at [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).

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