

Survey Says New Teachers View Parent Involvement as Greatest Challenge

In the latest of MetLife's series of surveys of U.S. teachers, 31% of new teachers said that parental involvement was their biggest challenge and the area in which they felt least prepared, compared with 22% who responded that obtaining sufficient resources and 20% who cited maintaining order and discipline in their classroom as their greatest challenge.

The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships examines the experience of teachers, principals, and secondary school students upon entering a new school. The national sample of new teachers surveyed consisted of 800 K-12 public school teachers who had no more than five years of experience. Conducted by Harris Interactive® from November 2004 to January 2005, the survey also assessed job satisfaction among teachers and principals and provides a snapshot of teachers who are likely to leave the profession.

Most of the teachers and principals surveyed (81% and 90%, respectively) strongly agreed that effective teachers need to be able to work well with students' parents. But

one in five new teachers (20%) reported a somewhat or very unsatisfying relationship with their students' parents - a greater degree of dissatisfaction than with any of their other school relationships - and 20% of the new teachers and 28% of principals commented that parents cause them the most stress in their jobs.

While most teachers and principals said they valued parental involvement, only 71% of principals and only 59% of teachers strongly agreed that it was a priority at their school. Though 59% of principals said they provide guidance to teachers about parental involvement issues, only 39% of the teachers strongly agreed that they receive such guidance from principals. One-quarter of first-year teachers surveyed believe they were unprepared to engage families in supporting their children's education.

New teachers "rely on the principal and more experienced teachers at their school for guidance on how to meet this challenge and the others they face during their first years in the classroom," said John Geraci, vice president of youth and education research at Harris Interactive.

According to the survey, new teachers and principals value personal connections, both in their relationships with students and in their professional development. Dissatisfaction with school relationships correlates with new teachers' likelihood of leaving the field. Teachers planning to resign are more

likely than others to be unsatisfied with their relationships with parents (32% versus 17%), their principal (23% versus 8%), and with their students (13% versus 1%). These teachers also are less likely to strongly agree that their principal creates an environment that helps them succeed (40% versus 63%) or that more experienced teachers cooperate with new teachers (40% versus 57%).

The study found that 18 percent of new teachers surveyed were very or fairly likely to leave the profession within the next five years, and this group emphasized that their dissatisfaction with school relationships played a major role in their decision.

When students were asked for their thoughts on parental involvement, nearly half (45%) responded that their school succeeds in encouraging their parents to get involved in after-school activities. But only 27% praised their school's effort in involving their parents in the classroom. Most of the secondary school students surveyed (68%) noted that their school only contacts parents when students are having problems.

To read this survey online or print a free copy, refer to www.metlife.com/teachersurvey. Obtain a print copy, while supplies last, by writing to MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 27-01 Queens Plaza North, Long Island City, NY 11101.