Lessons Learned: New Teachers Talk About Their Jobs, Challenges and Long-Range Plans

Issue No. 1

They're Not Little Kids Anymore: The Special Challenges of New Teachers in High Schools and Middle Schools

A Report from the **National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality** and **Public Agenda**

NATIONAL COMPREHENSIVE CENTER FOR TEACHER QUALITY

PUBLIC AGENDA

Questionnaire design and analysis in cooperation with **REL Midwest**

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in High Schools and Middle Schools

Based on research conducted and reported by Jonathan Rochkind, Amber Ott, John Immerwahr, John Doble and Jean Johnson

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Introduction

Secondary school teachers are more likely to say that their training put too much emphasis on theories of learning versus more practical classroom issues

It goes without saying that almost all parents love their children dearly, but nearly 9 in 10 admit that "kids become a lot more challenging when they hit the teen years."[1] So in a way, it shouldn't be surprising that first-year teachers who enter the nation's high schools and middle schools would have different experiences and concerns from those who come into elementary schools. The differences emerge strongly in a new survey of first-year teachers across the country conducted by the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) and Public Agenda, with consultation by REL Midwest on questionnaire design and analysis. The contrasts are striking and may have significant implications for efforts among policymakers to enhance teacher preparation, mentoring and support.

It's just different in high school

According to the survey, new high school and middle school teachers are:

- Less likely than elementary school teachers to say that teaching is exactly what they want to be doing;
- More likely to report frustrations with student motivation;
- More likely to be concerned about lack of administrative support in their schools;
- Less likely to believe that good teachers can lead all students to learn; and
- Less likely to say they regard teaching as a long-term career choice.

[1] "Easier Said than Done," Public Agenda, 2002.

Notably, the new high school and middle school teachers surveyed here are also more likely to question the preparation they received and more likely to say that their training put too much emphasis on theories of learning versus more practical classroom issues.

These findings are just a few of the highlights from the survey of 641 first-year teachers conducted in spring 2007. Designed to help leaders in education and government understand more about the quality of current teacher education and on-the-job support for new teachers, the survey included more than 100 items covering issues related to teacher training, recruitment, professional development and retention. The study explored why new teachers come into the profession, what their expectations are and what factors contribute to their desire to either stay in teaching or leave it. There are also important findings on how first-year teachers view policy issues such as merit pay and alternative certification.

The benefit of hindsight

In this report, we lay out what we have heard from first-year teachers across the country and take a look at the views of new teachers in different circumstances, such as those teaching in high-needs schools versus those teaching in more prosperous communities. But the contrasts between the first-year high school and middle school teachers and the first-year elementary school teachers are among the most significant and strongest emerging from this research.

NCCTQ and Public Agenda, working in consultation with REL Midwest on the questionnaire and data analysis, focused the research on first-year teachers because we believe their

The findings suggest that there are significant challenges in teaching today's adolescents that are not being adequately addressed in the current system

insights may be especially revealing for those working to enhance teacher preparation and training. Since our respondents were roughly six months into their first teaching jobs, their pre-service preparation was still fresh in their minds. This allowed us to ask detailed questions about their coursework and student teaching experiences and get crisp recollections. At the same time, the new teachers also had the perspective of having assumed the responsibilities of full-time public school teachers. Respondents were able to reflect on their experiences—both pre-service and on the job—and comment on the usefulness and applicability of their preparation.

Based on the survey results, the vast majority of the new teachers (96 percent) entered the profession through college or university-based schools of education—most had a B.A. in education (70 percent); 11 percent completed a fifth-year program to get a degree in education; and 15 percent had a master's degree in education. The remaining 4 percent reported that they had completed an alternative certification program. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics shows similar education levels and paths of entry into the profession.[2]

Coming soon

This survey also included a special oversample of new teachers entering the profession through three of the most prominent alternative certification programs: Teach for America, Troops to Teachers and the New Teachers Project. The results from this additional oversample are not included in this initial analysis, but will be released later in 2007. The comparison of the views of new "alt-cert" teachers with those entering the profession from college and university-based education programs will be presented at NCCTQ's annual conference, "Advancing Student Achievement Through Effective Teaching and Leadership," which will be hosted in Washington, D.C. November 5–7, 2007.

In the following pages, we present our key findings on the differences between new secondary and elementary school teachers and among new teachers in high-needs schools. Each finding is accompanied by charts reporting the responses in more detail.

In our view, the survey offers genuine food for thought concerning how the country attracts, trains, supports, rewards and manages teachers. The findings suggest that there are significant challenges in teaching and motivating today's adolescents that are not being adequately addressed in the current system. The findings also suggest that the broad policy debate on how to respond to teacher turnover and retention may need to focus more of its attention on the special concerns of secondary school teachers. All new teachers share many of the same aspirations and challenges, but the differences in concerns and challenges between new high school and middle school teachers and new grade school teachers are too significant to be ignored.

[2] See nces.ed.gov and teach-now.org for more demographic data on teachers.

About the study

Commissioned by the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, this nationally representative survey aimed to further understand the aspirations and experiences of new teachers, including those teaching in high-needs schools and coming to the profession through different paths. Public Agenda completed a random sample survey of 641 public school teachers during their first year in the classroom in spring 2007. NCCTQ, REL Midwest and Public Agenda developed the research design for this project working in close consultation, and teams from the three organizations cooperated to generate the lines of inquiry. The survey covered a wide variety of topics, including the new teachers' motivation for entering the profession; subject areas covered during training; experiences as student teachers; relationships with cooperating teachers; experiences as beginning teachers; degree of support and counsel from colleagues; degree of support from administration; expectations about their future in the profession; and reactions to different ideas about ways to improve teacher quality. Complete question wording and full responses for the findings reported here are included beginning on page 24. We have also included a more detailed methodology on page 21.

Public Agenda is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and engagement organization that has conducted dozens of opinion studies on public education, including surveys of teachers, parents, students, principals and superintendents. Public Agenda prepared this written report and takes full responsibility for its contents. Additional information about Public Agenda and its other work in education can be found at **publicagenda.org**.

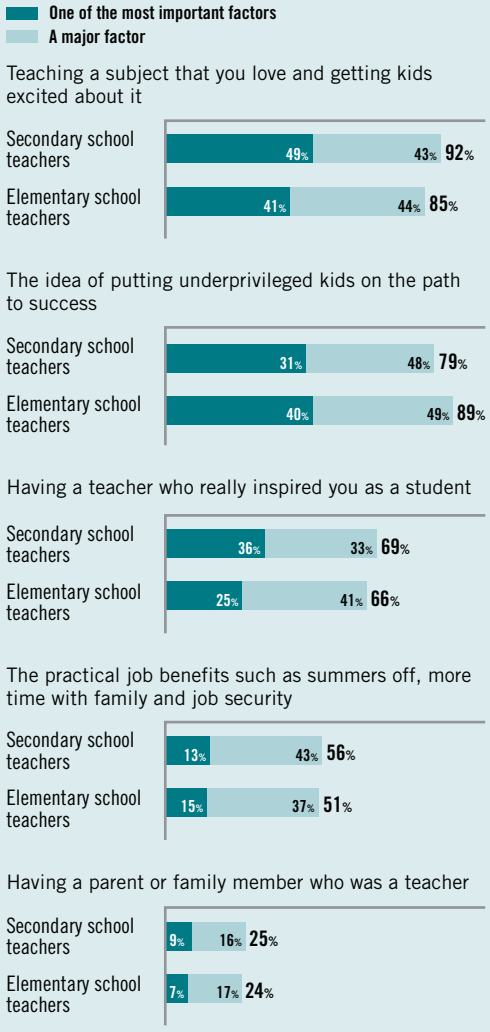
Finding One: Secondary School Teachers vs. Grade School Teachers—Why They Teach and How Long They'll Stay

According to the survey, a solid majority of all first-year teachers are inspired to teach and are dedicated to the profession. At least during their initial year, most say that they plan to teach for quite a while. But there are important differences between the views of new high school and middle school teachers and those of new grade school teachers. The new high school and middle school teachers are less likely to say that teaching is something they've wanted to do for a long time (52 percent for secondary school teachers versus 68 percent for elementary school teachers), and they are less likely to agree strongly that it's what they really want to be doing (47 percent versus 61 percent). All new teachers say that the idea of teaching subjects they love and helping underprivileged students are more important reasons for choosing the profession than practical advantages such as summers off and job security. But for the new high school and middle school teachers, teaching a subject they love is the somewhat more important factor. Some of the comments from teachers in follow-up e-mails suggest this distinction could affect their feelings about their jobs over time. One middle school teacher told us, for example, "My main reason [for entering the profession] was to teach students about science and interact with young people." Yet later, this same teacher said, "My utopian dream of having motivated students who are naturally interested in science has probably passed. I love interacting with the students and still want to teach them science, but [I] realize now that most won't appreciate it intrinsically."

Note: Question wording in charts may be slightly edited for space. Full question wording is available in the Selected Survey Results at the end of this report. Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to round or the omission of some answer categories.

1a. Most new teachers say teaching subjects they love and helping disadvantaged kids are the chief reasons they choose to teach

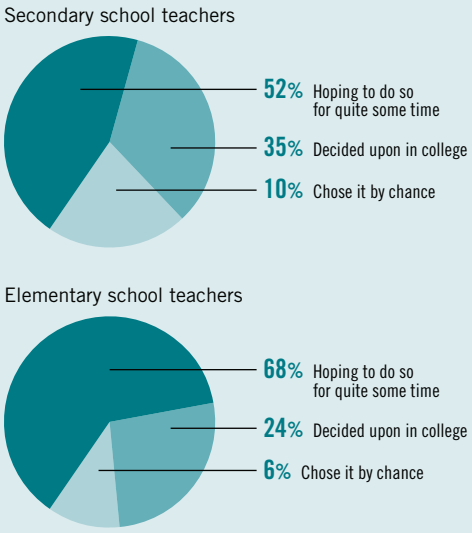
How important was each of the following factors to your decision to go into teaching? Would you say that this was one of the most important factors, a major factor, a minor factor or not a factor at all?



Note: See Selected Survey Results at the end of this report for total figures.

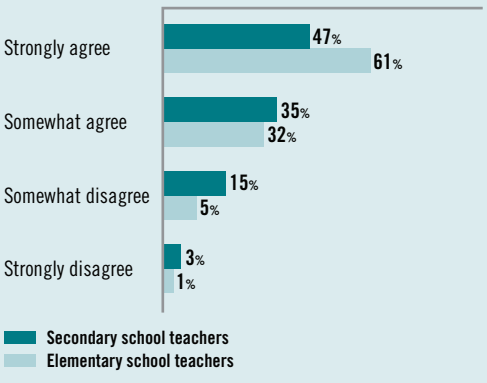
1b. But new secondary school teachers are less likely to say they have wanted to be teachers for a long time

Would you say that you ended up choosing your current profession by chance, was it something you decided upon in college, or was it something you had been hoping to do for quite some time?



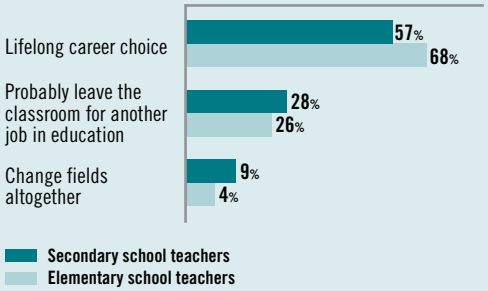
1c. New secondary school teachers are less likely to say teaching is exactly what they want to be doing

Do you agree that teaching is exactly what you wanted—there's nothing you would rather be doing?

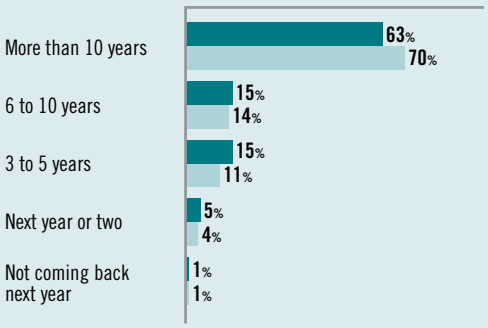


1d. New teachers in secondary schools are less likely to see teaching as a lifelong career choice

Do you think of teaching as a lifelong career choice, do you think you'll probably leave the classroom for another job in education, or will you change fields altogether?



What is your best estimate for how many years you think you'll be a classroom teacher?



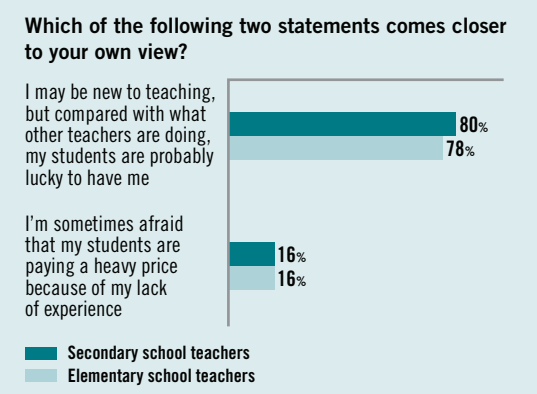
Finding Two: Secondary School Teachers vs. Elementary School Teachers: How Prepared Do They Feel?

Overall, the new teachers are confident that their students are learning, and most believe that even though they are new to teaching, their students are "lucky to have them." Most of the high school and middle school teachers say they either majored or minored in the subject they teach and feel confident teaching it in class. Moreover, the majority of the grade school teachers say that they are confident teaching reading, science and math.

Yet here again, there are important differences in the secondary school teachers' perspective. The new high school and middle school teachers are more likely to criticize their training for putting too much emphasis on theory compared with the practical demands of the classroom. More than half (53 percent) say their preparation was too theoretical, while just 4 in 10 elementary school teachers say this. Some of the teachers gave us specific examples of the practical challenges: "I was not prepared to handle the continuous testing of limits that is part of being an adolescent," one told us. "I had trouble being consistent and following through with consequences." Meanwhile, another talked about the gap between her preparation and what she encountered in the classroom: "Every day [I have to] fight for my students' attention. I was prepared to deal with the politics of the school and with the lesson planning and extra duties teachers have. I was completely taken aback by the lack of interest in the students in learning and even more surprised at their disrespect for teachers."

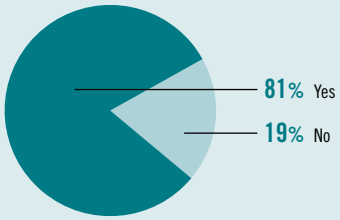
The new high school and middle school teachers are also noticeably less confident their students are learning. Only 38 percent of them "strongly agree" that their students are "learning and responding" to their teaching, compared with more than half (53 percent) of elementary school teachers who say this. Perhaps most haunting for those concerned about teachers' ability to reach out to students of all backgrounds, there is a striking difference among the secondary school teachers on whether severely disadvantaged students can learn in school. While the vast majority of elementary school teachers (80 percent) say that "good teachers can lead all students to learn, even those from poor families or who have uninvolved parents," significantly fewer new high school and middle school teachers (62 percent) say this.

2a. The vast majority of teachers say they are confident that their students are learning



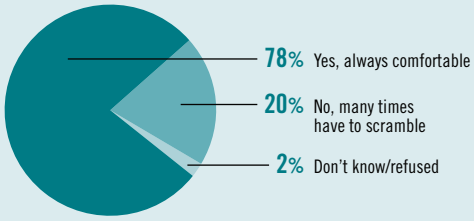
2b. Most new secondary school teachers say they feel well-prepared to teach their subject

In college, did you major or minor in the subject area in which you are teaching or not?*



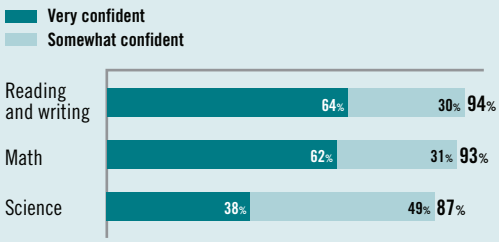
Most new secondary school teachers say they feel well prepared to teach it

Do you find that you are almost always comfortable with your knowledge of the subject area you are teaching, or are there too many times when you have to scramble to learn it yourself before you have to teach it?



2c. Most new elementary teachers say they feel confident in teaching reading, science and math

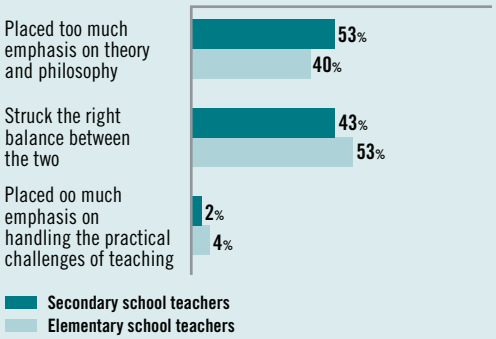
How confident and well prepared are you in the following subject area?*



* Asked only of new teachers in elementary schools

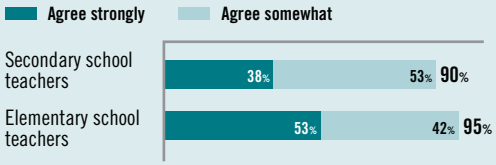
2d. However, new secondary school teachers are more likely to say that their training put too much emphasis on theory

Do you feel that your teacher training:

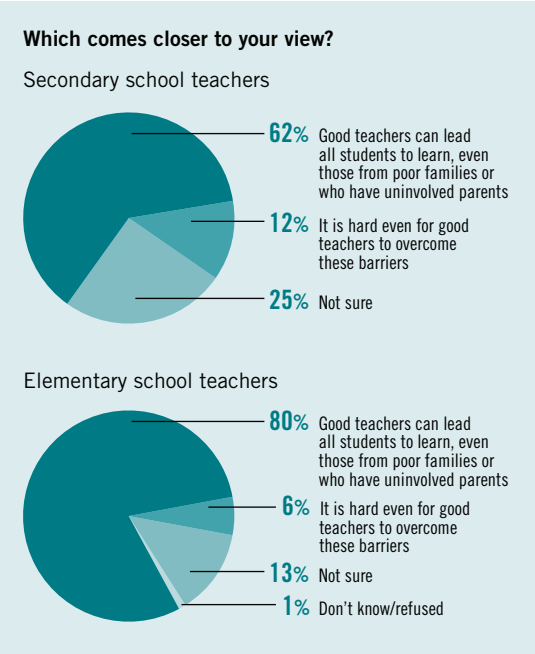


2e. New secondary school teachers are less likely to feel confident that their students are learning

Do you agree or disagree that most days you feel really confident that your students are learning and responding to your teaching?



2f. New secondary school teachers are also less likely to believe that good teachers can help all students learn



Finding Three: Secondary School Teachers vs. Elementary School Teachers—The Drawbacks of Teaching

Public Agenda studies of more experienced teachers suggest strong concerns about social and discipline issues at the secondary school level. For example, nearly 9 in 10 high school teachers (88 percent) say that the most pressing problems facing high schools come from "social problems and kids who misbehave" rather than academic issues. In another Public Agenda study, fewer than 1 in 5 high school teachers (18 percent) reported that their students were civil and respectful to one another. More than half (57 percent) also reported that their schools had serious problems with drug and alcohol abuse.[4]

These concerns about the social and discipline problems in high schools and middle schools also emerged in this study of new teachers. Although very few new teachers in either secondary or elementary school are concerned about their personal safety, 51 percent of new high school and middle school teachers say that "too many unmotivated students just going through the motions" is a major drawback of their job, compared with just 25 percent of new elementary school teachers. One middle school teacher said, for example: "There were a few serious incidents such as fighting, but the real problems were less serious, except that they were persistent: students talking, students up out of their seats without permission, students using cell phones and electronic gaming devices in class and becoming argumentative when confronted, students disregarding the dress code, some minor destruction of property, some minor bullying, tardiness, tacit refusal to complete assignments. All of these were on-going, constant and persistent problems." New high school and middle school teachers are also somewhat more likely than elementary school students (41 percent versus 33 percent) to consider "too many kids with discipline and behavior issues" a major drawback of teaching.

While majorities of all new teachers say they are generally satisfied with their administrators and fellow teachers, new high school and middle school teachers are significantly less content. The differences are especially notable in the new teachers' views about the advice they get from colleagues and mentors. Just a quarter of new high school and middle school teachers (26 percent) say they get excellent advice from fellow teachers on lesson plans and teaching techniques, compared with 39 percent of elementary school teachers. There is a similar 10-point spread on the advice they get about handling unmotivated or misbehaving students. While 31 percent of high school and middle school teachers say they get excellent advice on this from colleagues, 41 percent of the grade school teachers say this.

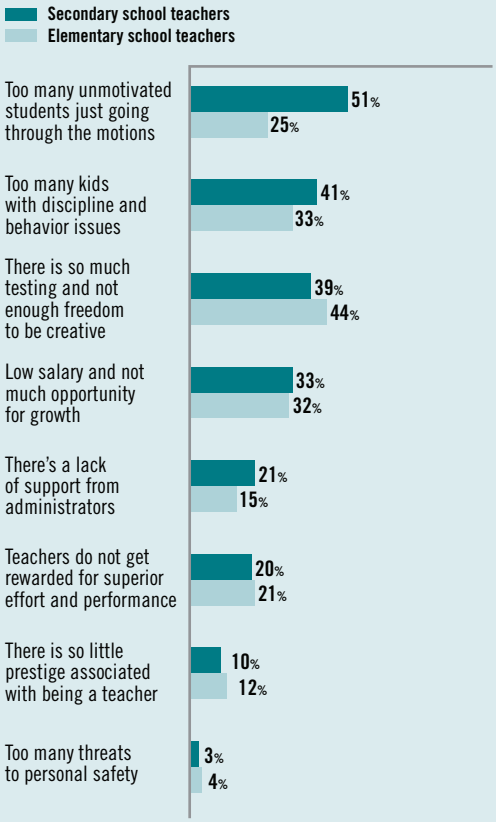
[3] Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda. (All of Public Agenda's reports are available at publicagenda.org.)

[4] "Sizing Things Up," Public Agenda 2002.

3a. New secondary school teachers are more likely to see unmotivated students and misbehaving students as major drawbacks of teaching*

Based on your personal experience, how much of a drawback would the following be for you?

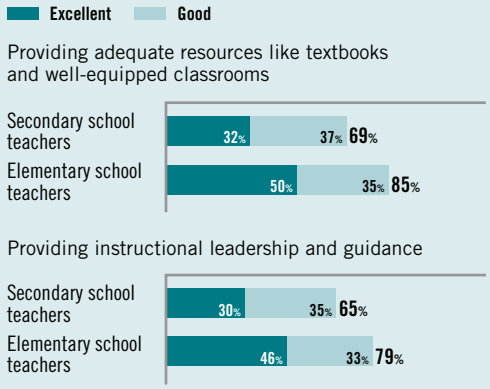
Percent who say major drawback:



*See Selected Survey Results for complete responses.

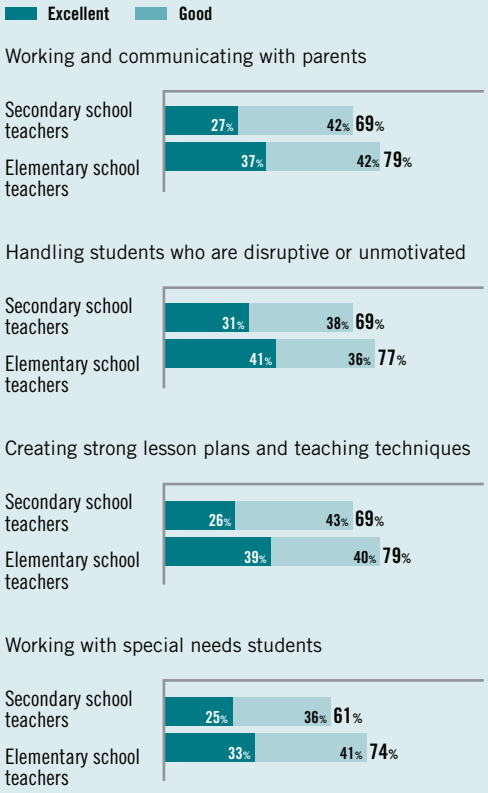
3b. New secondary school teachers are also less satisfied with the administrative support they get

How would you rate the administration at your school when it comes to the following?



3c. They are also less likely to say they are getting excellent advice from colleagues and mentors on creating strong lesson plans and handling problematic students

Now that you are in the classroom, please tell me how you would rate the support you feel you are getting from other teachers or mentors in the following areas:



Finding Four: The Special Challenges of Teaching in High-Needs Schools

In addition to comparing the experiences of secondary school teachers with those of elementary school teachers, this study explored the views of new teachers spending their first months in the classroom in a high-needs school, defined in this study as a school where more than half of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch.

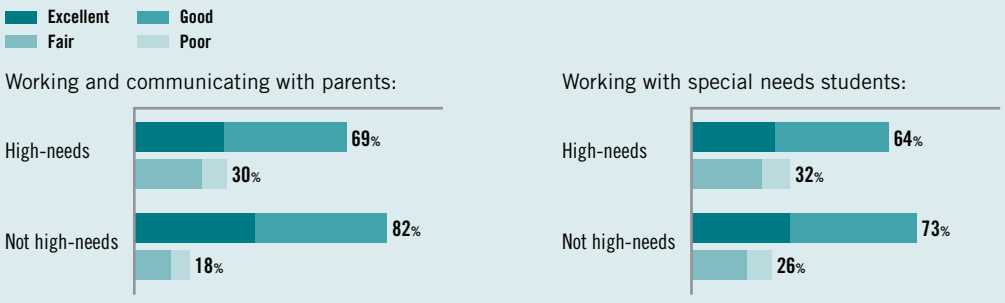
Although most new teachers in high needs schools say their colleagues and mentors are helpful in most areas, they are somewhat less upbeat than their counterparts teaching in more affluent schools. For example, fully 82 percent of all new teachers not in high-needs schools say they get good or excellent support when it comes to working and communicating with parents, while only 69 percent of teachers in high needs schools say this is true for them. There is a similar pattern in the new teachers' views about administrative support in other areas, such as such as handling discipline problems, having adequate resources and receiving instructional guidance.

There is one area where high-needs teachers are distinctly more troubled than other teachers, and it is an important one. The survey asked the new teachers whether, as new teachers, they believed they had been assigned the most difficult and "hardest to reach" students. While only a quarter (25 percent) of new teachers in more affluent situations had this complaint, 42 percent of the new teachers in high needs schools said this was the case for them.

[5] Although it would be informative to compare the views of new teachers in high-needs high schools with those of new teachers in other high schools, the sample size of this study is not large enough to make these comparisons.

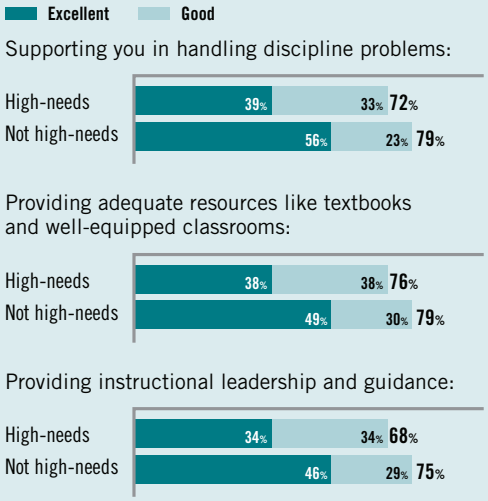
4a. Teachers in high-needs schools are a little less likely to say they get help on communicating with parents and working with special needs students

Now that you are in the classroom, please tell me how you would rate the support you feel you are getting from other teachers or mentors in the following areas.



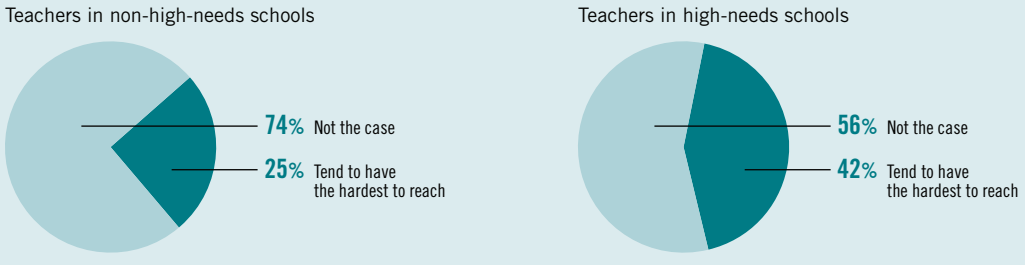
4b. Most new teachers are positive about their administrative support, but teachers in high-needs schools are slightly less satisfied in some areas

Percent who give the administration at their school an "excellent" or "good" rating when it comes to the following:



4c. Teachers in high-needs schools are significantly more likely to think that they have been assigned the toughest classes

Do you, as a first-year teacher, tend to have the hardest-to-reach students, or is this not the case for you in your school?



Finding Five: How New Teachers Would Improve the Profession

In addition to asking the new teachers about their goals, training and first-year experiences, the survey asked the respondents for their views on a range of ideas for improving the profession overall. For all new teachers, regardless of teaching level, two items topped their list of recommended improvements. First is reducing class size, and second is giving teachers better preparation to individualize teaching in a diverse classroom. Public Agenda's surveys of teachers overall show a similar pattern; that is, even teachers with more experience rank reducing class size as their top priority for improving education.

When the new teachers in this study were asked why they would prefer smaller classes, the most common explanation was that it allows them to personalize instruction and secondarily to give struggling students more help. Other strategies such as eliminating tenure, tying pay to performance or changing certification practices draw significantly lower levels of interest as ways to improve the profession overall.

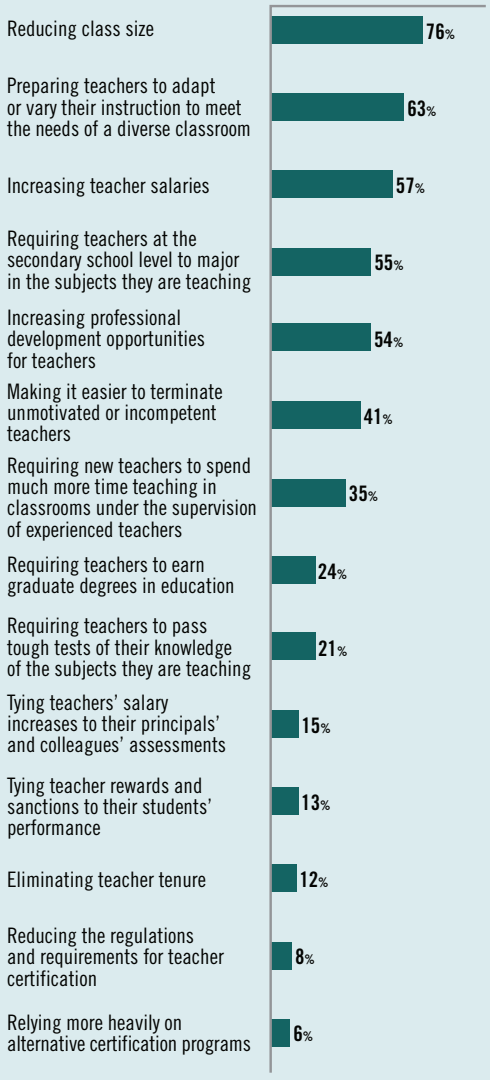
Although the new secondary school teachers and new elementary school teachers generally agree on which reforms are most likely to be effective and which would be less so, the high school and middle school teachers are somewhat less optimistic about the changes having an impact.

[6] "Stand by Me," Public Agenda, 2003.

5a. Most new teachers say that smaller classes and preparing teachers to teach in diverse classrooms would be most effective in improving teaching

How effective do you think each of the following proposals would be in terms of improving teacher quality?

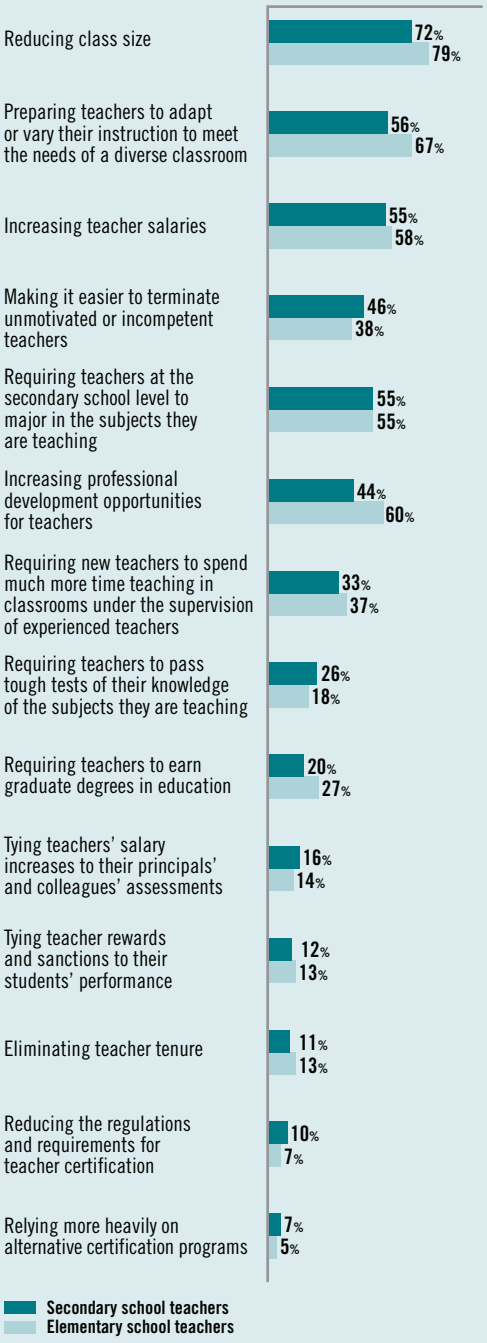
Percent who say "very effective":



5b. Secondary teachers are less optimistic about the effectiveness of many solutions

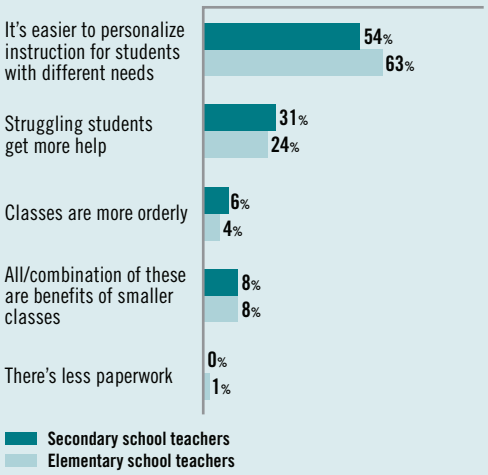
How effective do you think each of the following proposals would be in terms of improving teacher quality?

Percent who say "very effective":



5c. Most new teachers say smaller classes would enable them to individualize their lessons and give more help to struggling students

Which of the following is the biggest benefit of smaller classes, in your view?



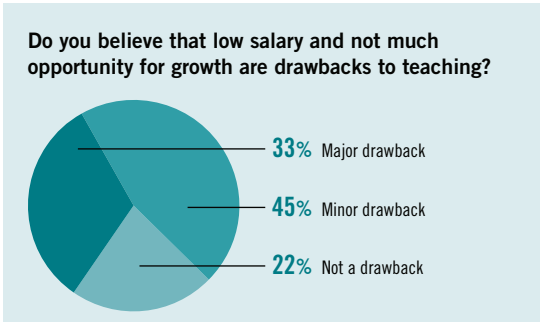
Finding Six: How Important Is Salary?

There is a broad discussion among policymakers and researchers about the role of teacher pay in the recruitment and retention of teachers and significant controversy about what forms of teacher pay are most likely to contribute to teacher effectiveness. To be sure, new teachers do voice concern about salary and lack of opportunity for growth, with a majority (78 percent) seeing it as either a major or a minor drawback of the profession. But only a third of new teachers say salary is a "major" drawback of their profession, and this concern ranks well below issues such as unmotivated students, testing and classroom discipline problems. In fact, more than two-thirds of new teachers say it is possible for a teacher to make a decent living, and new teachers overwhelmingly would choose better working conditions over higher salaries.

Findings about compensation among first-year teachers echo similar results from teachers in other Public Agenda research.[7] Although "pay for performance" or "merit pay" approaches are prominent parts of the national discussion on improving teacher effectiveness,[8] the approach was not a high priority for the new teachers surveyed here. Only 1 in 5 say the fact that teachers do not get rewarded for superior performance is a major drawback of the profession. Moreover, fewer than 1 in 6 believe that tying salary increases to principals' and colleagues' assessments (15 percent) or tying teacher rewards and sanctions to their students' performance (13 percent) would be "very effective" ways to improve teacher quality. Again, this echoes findings from other surveys of new teachers. In 2000, only 12 percent of teachers with five years or less of experience said that tying teacher rewards or sanctions to student performance would be a "very effective" way to improve teacher quality.[9]

Despite this, comments by some new teachers in the qualitative research suggest that low pay combined with a daunting and difficult job can clearly push some out of the profession. One middle school teacher told us: "I originally wanted to teach more than one year, but it doesn't seem worth it. … Teaching for me was a lot of work with very little pay off monetarily, emotionally or personally. I also feel like I am able to offer a lot more to the kids I am working with in a non-school setting."

6a. Only a third of new teachers see low salary and little opportunity for growth as a major drawback of the profession



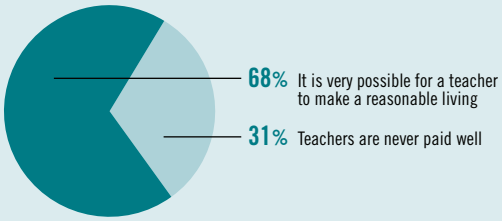
[7] In "Stand by Me" (Public Agenda, 2003), a plurality of teachers said that the best way to improve quality of teaching is to improve working conditions, as opposed to financially rewarding outstanding teachers or increasing pay for teachers overall.

[8] See "Long Reviled, Merit Pay Gains Among Teachers," *New York Times*, June 18, 2007, as an example.

[9] "A Sense of Calling," Public Agenda, 2000.

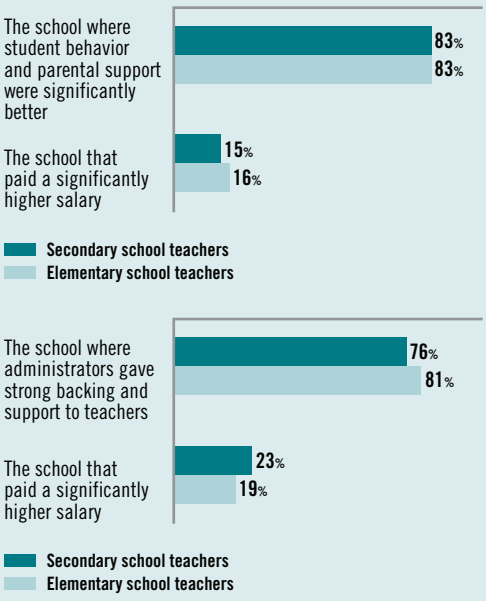
6b. Most new teachers say it is possible for teachers to make a reasonable living

Thinking about the profession of teaching, do you think that the nature of the job means teachers are never well paid, or do you think it is very possible for a teacher to make a reasonable living?



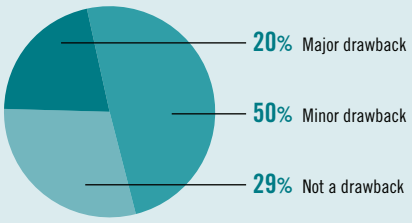
6c. Large majorities say they would choose schools with better student behavior and parental and administrative support over schools with a significantly higher salary

Given a choice between two schools in otherwise identical districts, which would you prefer to work in?

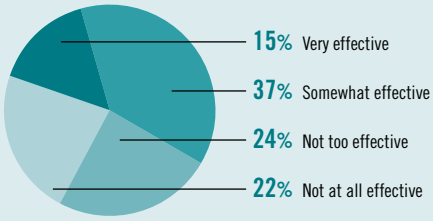


6d. Comparatively few new teachers say lack of merit pay is a major drawback to teaching, and few think it would be an effective way to improve the quality of teaching

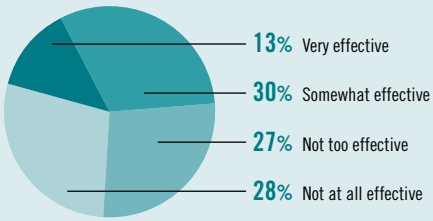
Is it a drawback to teaching that teachers do not get rewarded for superior effort and performance?



Would tying teachers' salary increases to their principals' and colleagues' assessments be effective at improving teacher quality?



Would tying teacher rewards and sanctions to their students' performance be effective at improving teacher quality?



Methodology

This survey includes interviews with a nationally representative sample of 641 first-year school teachers throughout the continental United States. We also conducted oversamples of teachers who participated in alternative teaching certification programs. Those interviews are not included in this analysis but will be included in subsequent reports on this data. Data were collected by telephone or online between March 12 and April 23, 2007. In designing the survey questions and sample, Public Agenda conducted interviews with leading experts from both university-based schools of education and alternative programs to discuss the sampling frame and the topics to explore in the survey. The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ), the Farkas Duffett Research Group and REL Midwest were consulted further regarding sampling, survey topics and questionnaire design.

The sample includes oversamples of teachers in both Midwest and high-needs schools. The final data were weighted to account for the disproportionate sample design. Final results based on the general sample are representative of all first-year teachers' continental U.S. public schools. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ±4 percent. The response rate for this survey was 29 percent, which is derived as the product of the contact rate (32 percent), the cooperation rate (89 percent) and the completion rate (99 percent). Respondents deemed ineligible because they were not first-year teachers or were no longer teachers were excluded from the survey. Further details on the design, execution and analysis of the survey are discussed on the NCCTQ website, **ncctq.org**.

Respondents were asked 111 items. These included screener questions to ensure our respondents were first-year teachers, demographic questions to describe the teachers who took part in our survey and closed-ended opinion questions. This questionnaire uses a blend of different kinds of questions, some of which tackle similar issues in different ways. Most questions ask the respondents to use a scale (either three or four points) to rate different aspects of their training or experiences teaching and to measure the strength of various beliefs they may have about teaching. The full questionnaire is available at **ncctq.com** and **publicagenda.org**.

Many of our four-point scales are Likert scales, where we ask the degree to which a respondent accepts a particular statement.[10] In the report, we often collapse the choices to the nominal level by combining the positive and negative responses.[11] Those interested in seeing the degree to which someone agreed or disagreed with the statement can consult either the charts in the report, which break out the strength of acceptance, or the full questionnaire and results at ncctq.com and publicagenda.org.

We also used questions in which respondents are asked to choose between two mutually exclusive and balanced statements involving tradeoffs. Analyzed in context with other results, these "forced choice" items shed light on

[10] Likert, R,. "A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes" *Archives of Psychology* 140 (1932): 55.

[11] Collapsing Likert scales into their nominal components (agree/disagree) is a commonly used technique in public opinion research. After transforming the data, it is subject to chi-square assessments.

respondents' priorities and avoid the central tendency bias inherent in Likert-style questions. The choices themselves may be artificial, but they typically echo natural language gleaned from qualitative research. This questionnaire reflects the language and expressions used by teachers during focus groups for this project and from previous research with teachers.

For example, one of the questions asked new teachers:

Which comes closer to your view?

1. *I may be new to teaching, but compared to what other teachers are doing, my students are probably lucky to have me [OR]*

2. *I'm sometimes afraid that my students are paying a heavy price because of my lack of experience*

This item is drawn directly from the qualitative research where a new teacher said in a focus group, "I'm a teacher to these kids. I'm not qualified at all. Yet I'm still possibly better than what could be there. It's absolutely ridiculous." Since the other teachers in the focus group agreed with this perspective, we decided to counter-balance the notion that students are lucky to have the new teacher with one that gives an equally reasonable, but very different response. In this instance, the presentation of the second viewpoint is intended to test and probe whether this response is strongly held even when positioned against a robust alternative.

In a few instances, the questionnaire contains compound questions combining two seemingly separate concepts. The decision to combine concepts within a single item mirrors the way teachers discuss and couple ideas in focus groups.

For example, one item in our series of questions about potential drawbacks to teaching is the following:

There is so much testing and not enough freedom to be creative

This items mirrors a comment by a new teacher in a focus group: "I think it's absolutely a matter of testing taking away too much time … You are very restricted in the amount of time that you have to try new, creative theories, because you have to get this, this and this in before."

Obviously, compound items could be asked separately, and other researchers may wish to tease them apart in future research.

Focus groups

Focus groups allow for an in-depth, qualitative exploration of the dynamics underlying the public's attitudes toward complex issues. Insights from participants in these focus groups were important to the survey design. All focus groups were moderated by Public Agenda senior staff.

Four focus groups were conducted. One was with participants in an alt-cert program in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania region. Two more were also conducted in Philadelphia, one with senior education majors and master's-plus students from an urban university and one with the same population from a suburban university. The last group was conducted in Chicago, Illinois, with first-year teachers in an urban alt-cert program and with urban master's-plus students.

Follow-up e-mails

To more fully examine new teachers' views on student behavior in the classroom and their teacher preparation, seven follow-up questions were sent to survey respondents who offered their e-mail addresses to researchers. Actual quotes were drawn from email responses to give voice to attitudes captured statistically through the surveys.

Questions were as follows:

1. *Thinking about your classes last year, how would you rate your students' overall behavior—excellent, good, fair or poor?*

2. *Can you give an example of some students' behavior last year that illustrates the rating you gave above?*

3. *Last year, what aspect of the job did you feel least prepared for?*

4. *Can you think of a particular classroom experience that you did not feel prepared for?*

5. *What was your MAIN reason for becoming a teacher?*

6. *Now that you have a year of teaching experience do you think this reason will motivate you to continue teaching? Why or why not?*

7. *Last year, did you teach in an elementary school, a middle or junior high school, or a high school?*

Selected Survey Results

1 Would you say that you ended up choosing your current profession by chance, was it something you decided upon in college, or was it something you had been hoping to do for quite some time?	Total (%)	Secondary school teachers (%)	Elementary school teachers (%)
Chose it by chance	8	10	6
Decided upon in college	28	35	24
Hoping to do for quite some time	62	52	68
Don't know	2	3	1

2 How important was each of the following factors to your decision to go into teaching?			
Having a teacher who really inspired you as a student			
One of the most important factors	29	36	25
A major factor	38	33	41
A minor factor	22	19	23
Not a factor at all	11	12	10
Don't know	*	–	*
Having a parent or family member who was a teacher			
One of the most important factors	7	9	7
A major factor	17	16	17
A minor factor	17	17	17
Not a factor at all	58	57	58
Don't know	1	1	*
The idea of putting underprivileged kids on the path to success			
One of the most important factors	37	31	40
A major factor	49	48	49
A minor factor	12	17	8
Not a factor at all	3	2	3
Don't know	*	1	–
The practical job benefits such as summers off, more time with family and job security			
One of the most important factors	14	13	15
A major factor	39	43	37
A minor factor	35	32	37
Not a factor at all	12	12	12
Don't know	*	–	*
Teaching a subject that you love and getting kids excited about it			
One of the most important factors	44	49	41
A major factor	44	34	43
A minor factor	9	7	11
Not a factor at all	3	1	3
Don't know	1	–	1

3 Here are some things that are often considered to be drawbacks to teaching. Based on your personal experience, please tell us whether each is a major drawback, a minor drawback, or not a drawback for you:

	Total (%)	Secondary school teachers (%)	Elementary school teachers (%)
Low salary and not much opportunity for growth			
Major drawback	33	33	32
Minor drawback	45	45	44
Not a drawback	22	21	23
Don't know	*	–	1
There is so little prestige associated with being a teacher			
Major drawback	12	10	12
Minor drawback	35	35	35
Not a drawback	53	55	52
Don't know	*	–	*
There's a lack of support from administrators			
Major drawback	17	21	15
Minor drawback	36	36	35
Not a drawback	47	42	49
Don't know	1	1	1
Teachers do not get rewarded for superior effort and performance			
Major drawback	20	20	21
Minor drawback	50	53	48
Not a drawback	29	27	30
Don't know	1	*	1
Too many threats to personal safety			
Major drawback	3	3	4
Minor drawback	29	32	27
Not a drawback	67	64	69
Don't know	*	1	–
There is so much testing and not enough freedom to be creative			
Major drawback	42	39	44
Minor drawback	44	45	44
Not a drawback	13	17	11
Don't know	*	–	1
Too many kids with discipline and behavior issues			
Major drawback	36	41	33
Minor drawback	45	42	46
Not a drawback	19	17	20
Don't know	*	–	*
Too many unmotivated students just going through the motions			
Major drawback	34	51	25
Minor drawback	45	42	47
Not a drawback	21	8	28
Don't know	*	–	*

		Total (%)	Secondary school teachers (%)	Elementary school teachers (%)
4	**What is your best estimate for how many years you think you'll be a classroom teacher?**			
	Next year or two	4	3	4
	3 to 5 years	12	15	11
	6 to 10 years	14	15	14
	More than 10 years	68	63	70
	Not coming back next year	1	1	1
	Don't know	1	1	1
5	**Do you think of teaching as a lifelong career choice, do you think you'll probably leave the classroom for another job in education, or will you change fields altogether?**			
	Lifelong career choice	64	57	68
	Probably leave the classroom for another job in education	27	28	26
	Change fields altogether	6	9	4
	Don't know	4	6	2
9	**Thinking about the profession of teaching, do you think that the nature of the job means teachers are never well paid or do you think it is very possible for a teacher to make a reasonable living?**			
	Teachers are never paid well	31	30	31
	It is very possible for a teacher to make a reasonable living	68	68	67
	Don't know	2	2	2
10	**Given a choice between two schools in otherwise identical districts, which would you prefer to work in?**			
	The school that paid a significantly higher salary	15	15	16
	The school where student behavior and parental support were significantly better	83	83	83
	Don't know	1	2	1
11	**Given a choice between two schools in otherwise identical districts, which would you prefer to work in …**			
	The school which paid a significantly higher salary	20	23	19
	The school where administrators gave strong backing and support to teachers	79	76	81
	Don't know	1	1	1
12	**In college, did you major or minor in the subject area in which you are teaching, or not?**			
	Yes	73	81	N/A
	No	26	19	N/A
	Don't know	–	–	N/A
13	**Do you find that you are almost always comfortable with your knowledge of the subject area you are teaching, or are there too many times when you have to scramble to learn it yourself before you have to teach it?**			
	Always comfortable	81	78	N/A
	Many times have to scramble	17	20	N/A
	Don't know	1	1	N/A

		Total (%)	Secondary school teachers (%)	Elementary school teachers (%)
14	**How confident and well-prepared are you in reading and writing?** (Base: Elementary school teachers)			
	Very confident and well-prepared	64	–	64
	Somewhat confident and well-prepared	30	–	30
	Not too confident and well-prepared	3	–	3
	Not at all confident and well-prepared	*	–	*
	Don't know	2	–	2
23	**Overall, looking back, would you say you were prepared or unprepared for this first year of teaching?**			
	Very prepared	44	39	37
	Somewhat prepared	38	39	38
	Somewhat unprepared	14	20	11
	Very unprepared	44	2	3
	Don't know	1	1	1
24	**Do you feel that your teacher training put too much emphasis on the theory and philosophy of education, *or* did it put too much emphasis on handling the practical challenges of teaching, or did it strike the right balance between the two?**			
	Too much emphasis on the theory and philosophy	45	53	40
	Too much emphasis on handling the practical challenges of teaching	3	2	4
	Struck the right balance between the two	50	43	53
	Don't know	*	1	*
25	**Now that you are in the classroom, please tell me how you would rate the support you feel you are getting from other teachers or mentors in the following areas:**			
	Creating strong lesson plans and teaching techniques			
	Excellent	34	26	39
	Good	41	43	40
	Fair	16	21	14
	Poor	8	10	7
	Don't know	–	1	–
	Handling students who are disruptive or unmotivated			
	Excellent	37	31	41
	Good	37	38	36
	Fair	19	22	17
	Poor	7	9	5
	Don't know	*	*	*
	Working and communicating with parents			
	Excellent	34	27	37
	Good	42	42	42
	Fair	17	21	15
	Poor	7	10	5
	Don't know	–	–	1
	Working with special needs students			
	Excellent	30	25	33
	Good	39	36	41
	Fair	20	24	18
	Poor	8	12	6
	Don't know	*	3	2

26 Please tell us the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Total (%)	Secondary school teachers (%)	Elementary school teachers (%)
Most days I feel really confident that my students are learning and responding to my teaching			
Strongly agree	48	38	53
Somewhat agree	46	53	42
Somewhat disagree	6	9	4
Strongly disagree	1	1	*
Don't know	*	–	*
Teaching is exactly what I wanted—there is nothing I'd rather be doing			
Strongly agree	56	47	61
Somewhat agree	33	35	32
Somewhat disagree	9	15	5
Strongly disagree	2	3	1
Don't know	*	–	*

27 Which of the following two statements comes closer to your own view?

I may be new to teaching, but compared to what other teachers are doing, my students are probably lucky to have me	79	80	78
I'm sometimes afraid that my students are paying a heavy price because of my lack of experience	16	16	16
Don't know	5	4	6

28 Which comes closer to your view?

Good teachers can lead all students to learn, even those from poor families or who have uninvolved parents	74	62	80
It is too hard even for good teachers to overcome these barriers	8	12	6
Not sure	17	25	13

31 How would you rate the administration at your school when it comes to the following?

Supporting you in handling discipline problems			
Excellent	47	41	51
Good	28	30	27
Fair	16	19	14
Poor	9	11	7
Don't know	–	–	–
Providing adequate resources like textbooks and well-equipped classrooms			
Excellent	43	32	50
Good	36	37	35
Fair	14	19	11
Poor	7	12	4
Don't know	*	–	*
Providing instructional leadership and guidance			
Excellent	40	30	46
Good	33	35	33
Fair	18	24	15
Poor	8	11	7
Don't know	–	–	–

33 How effective do you think each of the following proposals would be in terms of improving teacher quality?

	Total (%)	Secondary school teachers (%)	Elementary school teachers (%)
Requiring new teachers to spend much more time teaching in classrooms under the supervision of experienced teachers			
Very effective	35	33	37
Somewhat effective	41	42	40
Not too effective	16	17	15
Not at all effective	6	7	6
Don't know	1	1	2
Requiring teachers to earn graduate degrees in education			
Very effective	24	20	27
Somewhat effective	37	39	36
Not too effective	24	26	23
Not at all effective	13	14	12
Don't know	2	2	2
Requiring teachers at the secondary school level to major in the subjects they are teaching			
Very effective	55	55	55
Somewhat effective	32	31	33
Not too effective	7	9	6
Not at all effective	3	4	3
Don't know	2	1	2
Eliminating teacher tenure			
Very effective	12	11	13
Somewhat effective	31	31	31
Not too effective	27	27	27
Not at all effective	22	24	21
Don't know	8	6	9
Making it easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers			
Very effective	41	46	38
Somewhat effective	43	39	46
Not too effective	9	11	9
Not at all effective	3	3	4
Don't know	3	2	4
Requiring teachers to pass tough tests of their knowledge of the subjects they are teaching			
Very effective	21	26	18
Somewhat effective	43	43	43
Not too effective	22	20	23
Not at all effective	13	11	15
Don't know	1	1	1
Increasing teacher salaries			
Very effective	57	55	58
Somewhat effective	36	38	35
Not too effective	5	4	5
Not at all effective	2	1	2
Don't know	1	2	*

33 [continued] **How effective do you think each of the following proposals would be in terms of improving teacher quality?**

	Total (%)	Secondary school teachers (%)	Elementary school teachers (%)
Reducing the regulations and requirements for teacher certification			
Very effective	8	10	7
Somewhat effective	24	24	23
Not too effective	29	28	30
Not at all effective	36	34	37
Don't know	3	4	2
Relying more heavily on alternative certification programs			
Very effective	6	7	5
Somewhat effective	29	30	29
Not too effective	34	36	33
Not at all effective	20	18	22
Don't know	11	9	11
Tying teacher rewards and sanctions to their students' performance			
Very effective	13	12	13
Somewhat effective	30	27	33
Not too effective	27	29	25
Not at all effective	28	30	26
Don't know	2	2	3
Tying teachers' salary increases to their principals' and colleagues' assessments			
Very effective	15	16	14
Somewhat effective	37	35	38
Not too effective	24	26	23
Not at all effective	22	21	23
Don't know	2	2	3
Reducing class size			
Very effective	76	72	79
Somewhat effective	21	25	20
Not too effective	1	1	*
Not at all effective	1	1	*
Don't know	1	1	1
Increasing professional development opportunities for teachers			
Very effective	54	44	60
Somewhat effective	39	46	35
Not too effective	3	4	3
Not at all effective	2	4	1
Don't know	2	2	2
Preparing teachers to adapt or vary their instruction to meet the needs of a diverse classroom			
Very effective	63	56	67
Somewhat effective	31	37	28
Not too effective	3	3	2
Not at all effective	1	2	–
Don't know	2	3	2

34 Which of the following is the biggest benefit of smaller classes, in your view?

(Base: Those who think reducing class size would be very or somewhat effective at improving teacher quality)

	Total (%)	Secondary school teachers (%)	Elementary school teachers (%)
Classes are more orderly	5	6	4
It's easier to personalize instruction for students with different needs	60	54	63
Struggling students get more help	27	*	24
There's less paperwork	1	–	1
All/Combination of these are benefits of smaller classes (Vol.)	8	8	8
Other	*	*	–
Don't know	*	–	*

Characteristics of the sample

Are you teaching any subjects that do not match your current certification or area of study?	Total (%)
Yes	11
No	87
Don't know/Refused	2
Last school grade teachers completed:	
Less than a 4-year college degree	2
College graduate (B.S., B.A., or other 4-year degree)	59
Some post-graduate training or professional schooling after college (in Master's or Ph.D program, e.g.) but no degree	54
Masters, Ph.D or other higher degree	17
Teachers rank themselves in high school as:	
An excellent student	43
A good student	45
A fair student	9
A poor student	1
Don't know/Refused	1
Teachers who are of Hispanic or Latino background:	
Yes	7
No	91
Don't know/Refused	2
Race of teachers:	
White	84
Black/African-American	5
Asian	3
Other or mixed race	5
Don't know/Refused	3

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And Public Agenda president Ruth A. Wooden for her vision, insight and guidance.

About the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) is the premier national resource to which the regional comprehensive assistance centers, states and other education stakeholders turn for strengthening the quality of teaching—especially in high-poverty, low-performing, and hard-to-staff schools—and for finding guidance in addressing specific needs, thereby ensuring highly qualified teachers are serving students with special needs.

NCCTQ, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is a collaborative effort of the Education Commission of the States, ETS, Learning Point Associates and Vanderbilt University.

About REL Midwest

REL Midwest is part of a federally funded network of 10 regional educational laboratories, and it exists to bring the latest and best research and proven practices to school improvement efforts. Serving the seven states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin, REL Midwest provides policymakers and practitioners with resources based on the highest-quality evidence as defined by scientifically valid research principles.

REL Midwest's work includes short-term, fast-response applied research and development projects based on annual needs-sensing data as well as studies conducted over a five-year period using randomized controlled trials. A National Laboratory Network website is the primary dissemination vehicle for reports, briefs, and other materials issued from each of the 10 regional laboratories. In addition to disseminating resources and information through the national website, REL Midwest will use webcasts, e-mails and stakeholder meetings in its regional communications efforts.

About Public Agenda

Founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view and to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues. Our in-depth research on how citizens think about policy has won praise for its credibility and fairness from elected officials from both political parties and from experts and decision makers across the political spectrum. Our citizen education materials and award-winning website, **www.publicagenda.org**, offer unbiased information about the challenges the country faces. Twice nominated for the prestigious Webby award for best political site, Public Agenda Online provides comprehensive information on a wide range of policy issues.