

EDUCATION WEEK TEACHER

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Survey: Teacher Job Satisfaction Hits a Low Point

By [Liana Heitin](#)

Teacher job satisfaction is at the lowest it's been in more than two decades, likely as a consequence—at least in part—of the economic downturn and resulting cuts to education budgets, according to a national survey.

The 28th annual [MetLife Survey of the American Teacher](#), released today, finds that 44 percent of teachers are "very satisfied" with their jobs, down from 59 percent in 2009. The last time job satisfaction dipped as low was in 1989.

The report is based on telephone interviews of 1,001 U.S. public school teachers conducted last fall by Harris Interactive on behalf of MetLife Inc. (The MetLife Foundation provides funding to *Education Week Teacher* to support its capacity to engage teachers interactively in professional community.)

In another indication of declining morale, according to the report, 29 percent of teachers say they are likely to leave the teaching profession within the next five years—up from 17 percent in 2009.

Regis Shields, director of Education Resource Strategies in Watertown, Mass., called that finding one of the most intriguing in the report. "What we need more information on is who the 29 percent of teachers likely to leave the teaching profession are," she said. "If these aren't effective teachers and this increases the effectiveness of the teaching force, that's great. If they're high-quality teachers, then we have some concerns."

The survey also suggests that teachers are increasingly anxious about holding onto their jobs. In 2006, just 8 percent of teachers said they did not feel their job was secure. That figure has more than quadrupled, according to the report—with 34 percent now saying they feel a lack of job security.

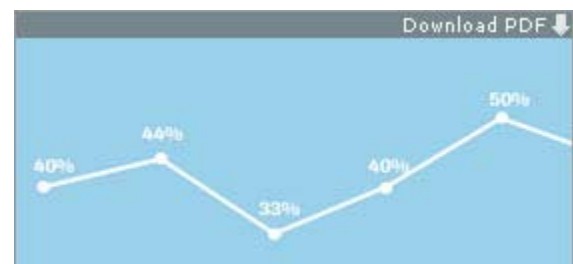
"Teaching is generally a pretty secure job [but] we have certainly seen some places really hard hit," commented Sandi Jacobs, vice president of the Washington-based National Council on

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Charting Teacher Job Satisfaction

This chart shows the percentage of teachers who said they were "very satisfied" with teaching as a career in selected years since 1984. The mark for 2011 is the lowest in two decades.



SOURCE: The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher

Teacher Quality. "In other places, maybe they didn't actually have to lay off as many teachers as they feared, but it certainly created a stressful environment."

Teachers with low job satisfaction, the MetLife data show, are more likely than those with high job satisfaction to say they feel a lack of job security

The report highlights a variety of other factors associated with low job satisfaction as well. For instance, teachers with low job satisfaction are less likely than those with high job satisfaction to say they receive adequate professional development from their school or district. Less satisfied teachers are also more likely to say their schools have experienced layoffs, reductions in programs such as art or music, reductions in health or social services for students, and increases in class sizes.

The "correlation between job satisfaction and these factors suggests that the current economic climate may be contributing to the decrease in professional satisfaction," the report states.

Only 35 percent of the teachers surveyed say their salary is fair for the work they do—a figure that has remained relatively stable over the years, according to Dana Markow, vice president of Youth & Education Research for Harris Interactive.

The Role of 'Teacher Bashing'

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said that both budget cuts and the "demonization" of teachers—or so-called "teacher bashing"—by politicians and media figures have been major contributors to growing teacher dissatisfaction. "Some elected officials don't know what to do, so they demonize teachers as a rational for why they're cutting budgets," she said.

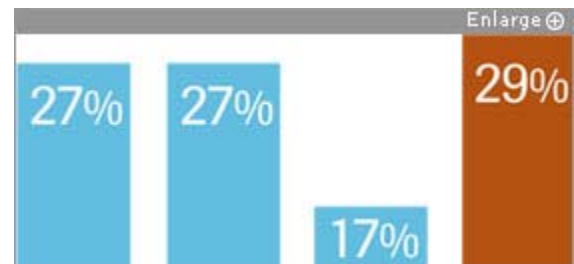
Even so, the report states that a majority of teachers—77 percent—indicate that they are treated as professionals by the community. According to Ms. Weingarten, "there's a disconnect between the demagoguery we see from some elected officials and what communities really feel about teachers. But teachers read the newspaper all the time."

Ms. Shields noted that, for her, the "most disturbing finding" in the report is one showing that 43 percent of teachers are pessimistic that the level of student achievement will increase in the next five years. "That really requires us to rethink the teaching profession if that many people are unhappy and don't think they can have any impact," she said.

The finding on pessimism about student achievement is particularly significant, said Ms. Markow, because "people's perceptions of how things are have actual implications in the classroom. It's the Pygmalion Effect—teachers with high expectations, there's evidence their students perform better."

Planning for Departure

This chart shows the percentage of teachers, in selected years, who said they were very or fairly likely to leave the profession within the next five years.



SOURCE: The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher

Parent Engagement Up

On a more positive note, the report indicates that parent engagement has increased over the last 25 years. Fewer teachers and parents today than in 1987 say that parents take too little interest in their children's education and fail to motivate their children to learn—a finding Ms. Weingarten called "fantastic."

"We've talked for years about wanting parents to be more our partners," she said. "We're seeing that parents see how important education is and want to have more of a role."

There is also a strong correlation between parent engagement and teacher satisfaction, according to the survey. Fifty-seven percent of teachers in schools that have high parent engagement say they are very satisfied with their job, whereas only 25 percent in schools with low parent engagement indicate the same.

One area that the survey does not touch on but that undoubtedly has had some impact on how teachers are feeling is the push to restructure teacher-employment policies. High-profile efforts to tie teacher evaluations to student test scores, for example, have been met warily by many teachers.

"Unfortunately a lot of teachers are looking at the changes in teacher-evaluation systems very negatively," said Ms. Jacobs of NCTQ. "I think a lot of teachers perceive these efforts to improve teacher-evaluation systems as real punitive efforts to label all teachers ineffective, which I don't think they are."

Teachers do want to be evaluated, contended Ms. Weingarten, but they "want an evaluation system that's fair and meaningful and comprehensive. ...They want it to be about support not about simply assessment. There's a lot of consternation about the fixation on testing."

Overall, the study is a "wake-up call from teachers," said Ms. Weingarten. "They don't like what's going on with budget cuts, they don't like what's going on with test fixation, [and] with a lack of support for them to do their jobs. And we're seeing this cut across all age groups and all generations."

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