

What Motivates Teachers?

Katrina
Schwartz



Teachers: George Cronin, Dawn Digsby, Todd Beard, and Karen North. (Katrina Schwartz)

A recent Gallup poll of 170,000 Americans — 10,000 of whom were teachers — found that teaching is the second most satisfying profession (after medicine). Ironically, the same [Gallup poll found](#) that in contrast to their overall happiness with their jobs, teachers often rate last or close to the bottom for workplace engagement and happiness.

“Of all the professions we studied in the U.S., teachers are the least likely to say that their opinions count and the least likely to say that their supervisor creates an open and sharing environment,” said Brandon Busteded, executive director of [Gallup Education](#), at the [Next New World Conference](#).

This is a troubling trend at a time when schools need to continue to attract high quality educators. “If the perception in our country is that teaching is not a great profession to go into, we certainly aren’t going to be encouraging really talented young people to be thinking about the profession of teaching,” Busteded said in an interview with Stephen Smith on the [American RadioWorks](#) podcast.

That will be especially problematic as baby boomer teachers begin to retire. “What our research reveals is an important nuance that teachers rate their lives overall very highly; they love their lives,” Busteded said. “They love their work. They love what they do in terms of helping encourage young people.”

But they often dislike their bosses, the policies they must abide by, the tests that govern their lives and the low pay and lack of respect often shown by other adults. “It’s a big opportunity to try and get this right across school systems, but also a tragedy in that all these people who otherwise would be off the charts with their performance if we could just improve their workplace environment,” Busteded said.

MindShift readers discussed openly what motivates them to keep teaching, as well as what changes they'd make to the system.

"I'm motivated by the curiosity of my students," replied Lewis Marshall A. Elaine, in a Facebook call-out to teachers to weigh in. "Being able to collaborate with more teachers who possess these qualities would make my job better: professionalism, positivity, and competency."

Teacher Dana Smith wrote: "The students are my motivation: love those crazy middle-schoolers! A better salary and being able to teach without headaches and heartaches from mandatory testing, nonsensical paperwork/computer work, and crazed administrators would make my job perfect."

Vix Cee Kreidel wrote: "I am motivated to teach because I believe that every child deserves to have someone who believes in them. I love to watch the light bulb go off in a child as their eyes light up when they have an idea or 'get' something. Teaching would be easier if I got paid more to make up for all the things I buy for my classroom. Also if we were held accountable in other ways besides the test."

We talked to educators from across the country, some at the recent [ISTE conference](#), about what they love about their jobs and what they'd do to improve their work environment. Listen to their stories.

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