

# The MetLife Survey of *THE AMERICAN TEACHER*

**For immediate release**

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**NATIONAL METLIFE SURVEY SHOWS NEW TEACHERS FEEL THEIR  
BIGGEST CHALLENGE IS PARENT ENGAGEMENT**

**Washington, DC, June 14, 2005** – MetLife today released *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships*. The survey, the latest in MetLife’s annual series conducted by Harris Interactive® since 1984, examines the experiences of teachers, principals, and secondary school students upon entering a new school. John Geraci, Vice President of Youth and Education Research at Harris Interactive® presented the findings to an audience of education professionals, policymakers and high school students. A panel discussed the survey results, which raised such issues as the biggest challenges new teachers face and the areas in which they feel least prepared, with parent involvement topping both lists.

“New teachers tell us that working well with parents is a critical component of effective teaching, but also their greatest challenge,” said Geraci. “These 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.”

The survey focuses on the experiences of new teachers – those in their first five years of teaching – and students who have made the transition from elementary to secondary school, and some from junior to senior high. Principals were asked about their early work experiences and the support they provide to new teachers and students. The study examines relationships among members of the school community, the degree to which teachers have an impact on students’ lives, and teacher and student perceptions on parent involvement and school safety. The survey also assesses job satisfaction among teachers and principals, and provides a portrait of teachers likely to leave the profession.

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## **Key findings include:**

- New teachers are most likely to report the biggest challenge that they face as a teacher is communicating with and involving parents. Three in ten (31%) believe that this is the greatest challenge, compared to two in ten (22%) who say that it is getting sufficient resources and two in ten (20%) who say that maintaining order and discipline in the classroom is the greatest challenge.
- Secondary school students are less likely than elementary students to feel safe and say that their teachers care about them at their current school than at their previous school.
- 18% of new teachers and 20% of students were not given tours of their new schools.
- 31% of secondary school students did not receive information or guidance about what classes to take when they first started attending their current school.
- 75% of secondary school students describe their parents as “very” or “somewhat” involved. These students are more likely than their peers who describe their parents as “not very involved” to have other positive associations with school, including having very satisfying relationships with their parents (47% vs. 14%) and teachers (22% vs. 13%). They are also more likely to strongly agree that they are interested in their classes (32% vs. 24%).

“Any good organization – be it a school or a business – must be able to attract and keep good people,” said MetLife Chairman and CEO Bob Benmosche. “Schools must make ensuring the success of new teachers a top priority.”

“The degree to which teachers and students are supported upon their entry to a new school can have a great impact on their ability to achieve,” said Sibyl Jacobson, MetLife Foundation President and CEO. “This survey can alert schools and districts to the areas in which new teachers and students need more support and help guide them in addressing those needs.”

## **Perspectives of teachers, principals and students on parent involvement**

Principals and teachers overwhelmingly agree that parent engagement is key to students’ success. Eight in ten (81%) new teachers and nine in ten (90%) principals strongly agree that effective teachers need to be able to work well with students’ parents. In practice, many teachers have trouble achieving the cooperation they so

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value. Teachers rate their relationships with their students' parents as their least satisfying, and rate engaging parents the area in which they feel least prepared. One in five new teachers (20%) reports a somewhat or very unsatisfying relationship with parents of students at their school – a greater degree of dissatisfaction than with any of their other school relationships. Many educators also cite relationships with parents as their greatest source of stress or anxiety. Two in ten new teachers (20%) and 28% of principals mention parents as causing them the most stress in their jobs. And 73% of new teachers somewhat or strongly agree with the statement “Too many parents today treat their children’s school and teachers as adversaries.”

The study suggests a disconnect between how individuals and schools value parent engagement. While the vast majority of teachers and principals cite the importance of parent involvement, as noted above, 71% of principals and only 59% of teachers strongly agree that involving parents is a priority at their school. Six in ten principals (59%) strongly agree that they provide guidance to teachers on how to involve parents in their children’s education, yet 39% of new teachers strongly agree that their principal provides guidance in this area. This disconnect is reflected in the views of students. Nearly half (45%) say that their school does a good job of encouraging parental involvement in after-school activities. But this is almost twice as many as those who say that their school does a good job of encouraging parental involvement in the classroom (27%). And for every student who says that their school does a good job of encouraging parental involvement in the classroom, there is a student who says that their school does not give parents the opportunity for any meaningful roles (24%). The predominant opinion among secondary school students is that their school only contacts parents when there is a problem with their child (68%). These figures reflect the gap between elementary and secondary schools in the area of parent involvement – secondary school teachers (88%) and principals (94%) are less likely than their elementary school counterparts (73% of new teacher and 86% of principals) to strongly agree that effective teachers need to be able to work well with students’ parents.

## **Importance of Personal Connections**

Principals and new teachers place a high value on personal connections. This applies to their students’ education and to their own professional development. In the survey, nearly nine in ten principals (87%) and new teachers (85%) strongly agree that they can make a difference in their students’ lives, and 95% of students surveyed reported having had at least one teacher who made a difference in their life. Students who have had

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many of these quality connections with teachers have many other positive associations with school. Students who have had at least three teachers who have made a difference are more likely than other students:

- To be interested in their classes (36% strongly agree vs. 18% strongly agree)
- To feel safe at school (33% strongly agree vs. 23% strongly agree)
- To say that their teachers care about them (34% strongly agree vs. 16% strongly agree)
- To say that higher education is extremely important for their future (89% vs. 74%)
- To say that their opinion counts at school (20% strongly agree vs. 11% strongly agree)

The perception among educators of their impact on students diminishes as the age of their students increases. Principals (90%) and new teachers (91%) who work with secondary school students are less likely than elementary school principals (84%) and new teachers (80%) to strongly agree that they can make a difference in their students' lives. Yet even at the secondary school level, the majority of principals and new teachers believe in the importance of these connections.

Teachers, too, benefit from these personal connections. Dissatisfaction with school relationships is associated with new teachers' likelihood of leaving the profession. Teachers who say they will leave teaching are more likely than others to be unsatisfied with their relationships with parents (32% vs. 17%), their principal (23% vs. 8%), and with their students (13% vs. 1%). These teachers are also less likely to strongly agree that their principal creates an environment which helps them be an effective teacher (40% vs. 63%) or that there is cooperation among more experienced teachers and new teachers (40% vs. 57%).

## **Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction among principals and new teachers is high. Two-thirds (xx%) of new teachers and three-quarters (xx%) of principals are very satisfied with their careers. For many educators, their greatest source of satisfaction is their students (75% of new teachers and 77% of principals, and administrative responsibilities is their greatest source of stress or anxiety (34% of new teachers and 27% of principals).. However, two in ten (18%) new teachers report that they are likely to leave teaching in the next five years – just as they have begun to accumulate training and experience. Those who plan on leaving are more likely to be dissatisfied with their career (26% vs. 2%) and to mention stress and anxiety related to their relationship with their supervisor (9% vs. 1%). The survey provides a profile of “at-risk” teachers, those most likely to leave the profession in their first five years.

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## **About the Survey**

Harris Interactive® conducted the survey on behalf of MetLife between November 29, 2004 and January 12, 2005 in the United States with nationally representative samples of 841 public school principals of grades K-12, 800 public school teachers of grades K-12 with five years or less of teaching experience, and 1,073 public school students in grades 7-12. Teachers and principals were interviewed by telephone. Student interviews were conducted online. For the teacher and principal data, figures for school level, sex, region and size of place were weighted where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population. For the student data, figures for grade, sex, race, size of place, region and parent's education were weighted where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the principal results have a sampling error of +/- 4.3 percentage points, the teacher results have a sampling error of +/- 4.4 percentage points and the student results have a sampling error of +/- 4.1 percentage points. Sampling error for the various sub-sample results is higher and varies. The student online sample is not a probability sample.

*Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships* is the latest in a series of teacher surveys sponsored annually by MetLife. The surveys are designed to bring the voices of teachers and students to the attention of policymakers and the American public. Survey topics change each year to address key issues—from reform to violence—but the premise remains the same: to give voice to the closest to the classroom. Full survey reports can be downloaded from MetLife's Web site at [www.metlife.com/teachersurvey](http://www.metlife.com/teachersurvey) or obtained by writing to MetLife, ATT: Survey of the American Teacher, 27-01 Queens Plaza North, Long Island City, NY 11101.

MetLife, a subsidiary of MetLife, Inc. (NYSE: MET), is a leading provider of insurance and other financial services to individual and institutional customers. MetLife and MetLife Foundation support education initiatives that improve public education and increase opportunity for students nationwide. The Foundation works with nonprofit organizations around the country to develop a variety of programs, many of which address issues raised each year in *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*. For more information about MetLife, please visit the company's Web site at [www.metlife.com](http://www.metlife.com).

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