

Education Matters

September 2010

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation

You Speak Out

Most teachers would agree that today's education landscape is vastly different than just a decade ago. The AAE member survey reflects that teachers' attitudes have changed as well.

**AAE
2010
Member
Survey**

Teachers support reform efforts **when** reform efforts are fair

teachers largely have been pushed aside as education reformers determine how to help America's students catch up with the rest of the world. Yet teachers have valuable input to add to the debate, and AAE is listening.

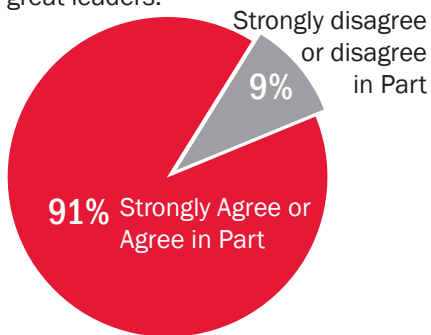
In its most recent survey, AAE found its members encouraging reform efforts under certain conditions. Educators do not want to be left out of the debate, and they want reformers to understand the challenges they face each day in the classroom. AAE members are not afraid to be held accountable for what occurs in their classrooms, but the accountability must be fair and balanced, taking into consideration outside factors that affect student learning.

Great Teachers, Great Leaders

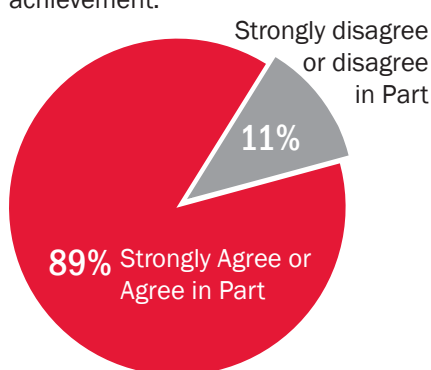
Two factors that respondents agree affect student learning are great teachers and great leaders. Nearly as many (89 percent) believe that in an academic setting effective teachers and principals are the two most important variables to help students improve performance. More than 90 percent of AAE members agree strongly or in part that recruiting and retaining great teachers and great leaders is the best way to transform public education and help close the achievement gap. Most teachers believe that developing excellent teachers, principals, and administrators is

EVALUATING EDUCATION

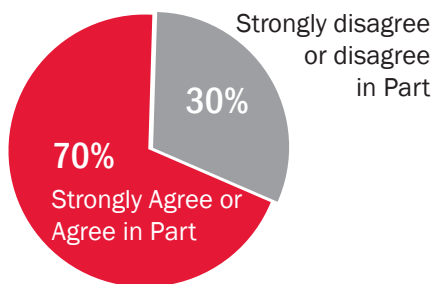
“The best way to close the achievement gap and transform public education is through recruiting and retaining great teachers and great leaders.”



“In an academic setting, an effective teacher and an effective principal are the two most important variables in improving student academic achievement.”

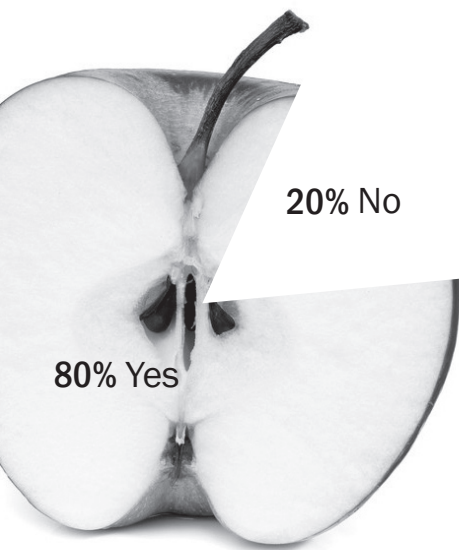


“Better assessment tools are needed to provide more accurate measures of student academic growth so that education professionals can respond to student academic needs more readily.”

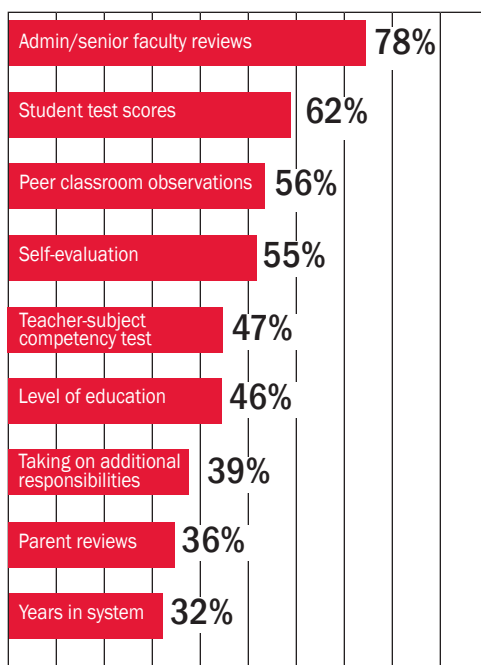


TEACHER EVALUATION

“Would you support a value-added model into student achievement assessment if student test scores were part of your evaluation as an effective teacher?”



“Which of the following do you think should be used in evaluating teacher effectiveness?” (Respondents could select more than one answer.)



absolutely essential to reform education, but the question of how to evaluate excellence remains.

Evaluations

Opposition against teacher evaluation based solely on student test scores is strong. However, the perception that educators do not want to be evaluated by test scores is a sweeping generalization that leaves many caveats unaddressed. AAE’s survey dug deeper into the question of evaluation by test scores, and here’s what teachers had to say:

Eighty percent of teachers surveyed support a value-added model of student assessment when student test scores are used as a part of teacher evaluation. Value-added models take into account important student characteristics such as eligibility for special education services, free and reduced lunch status, school attendance, and other factors beyond a teacher’s control, thus evaluating educators who teach similar students. Value-added models also ensure that teachers and schools not only get credit for leading their students to achieve high absolute levels of academic success but also ensuring that students continue to make positive academic gains each year. This is despite the fact those students may not be proficient at a specific grade level.

Forty percent of teachers surveyed believed 50 percent or more of their personal evaluation should be determined by student test scores with the use of a value-added model. Seventy percent of teachers believed that 25 percent or more of their personal evaluation should be determined by student test scores with the use of a value-added model.

When asked what type of evaluation should be included in evaluating teacher effectiveness, 62 percent believed that student test scores should be part of the criteria. Student test scores were second only to administrator/senior faculty reviews, which 78 percent believed should be part of the criteria. Student test scores were included as a part of evaluation criteria more frequently than peer classroom observation (56 percent), self-evaluation (55 percent), teacher-subject competency test (47 percent), level of education (46 percent), taking on additional responsibilities (39 percent), or parent reviews (36 percent). Coming in dead last for criteria to evaluate teacher effectiveness was



“years in the system,” not a surprising result when considering teacher responses as they weighed in on tenure issues.

Tenure

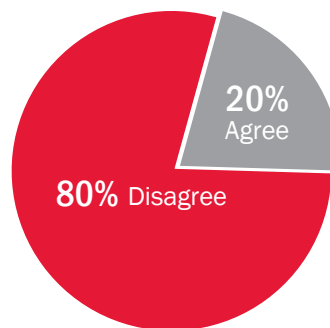
Teachers unions promote tenure as a crucial means of protection for teachers to be able to perform their jobs, but our survey showed classroom teachers have a different opinion. Eighty-one percent of those surveyed responded that tenure is not necessary for an educator to properly perform his or her job effectively, and a vast majority of respondents (80 percent) asserted that achieving tenure does not indicate that a teacher is effective.

Accountability

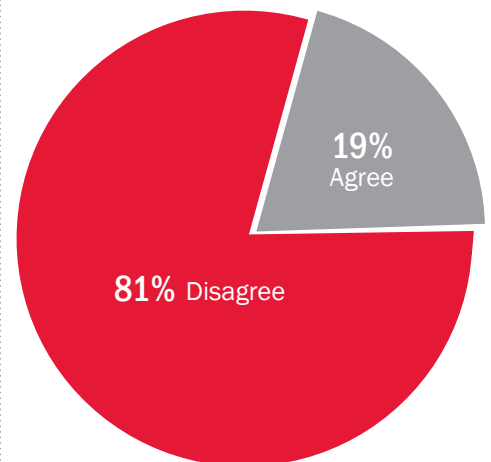
Also debunked in the AAE survey is the myth that all teachers believe they should have a job for life. Sixty-one percent of members surveyed agreed with a Delaware policy that teachers must be removed from the classroom if they have an ineffective rating for more than two years. Further, 73 percent agreed with a Colorado policy that teachers can lose tenure if they are deemed ineffective for two consecutive years.

TEACHER TENURE

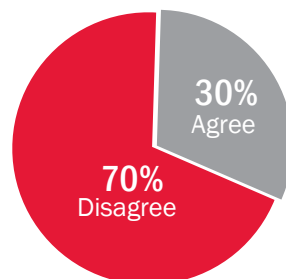
“Achieving tenure indicates an effective teacher.”



“Tenure is necessary for an educator to properly perform his or her job effectively.”

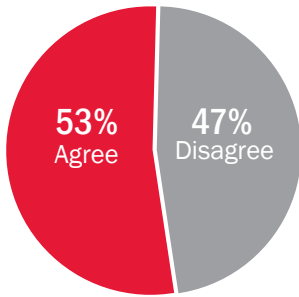


Do you agree with the policy “Last hired, first fired?”

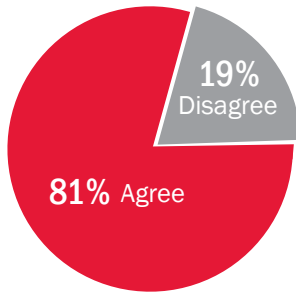


TEACHER COMPENSATION

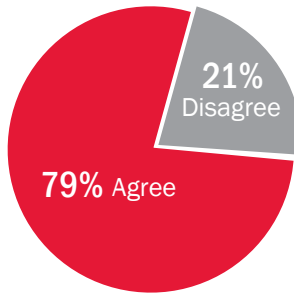
“Would you support educators being paid more for raising student academic achievement as measured by test scores?”



“Would you support educators being paid more for taking additional roles and responsibilities in their schools?”

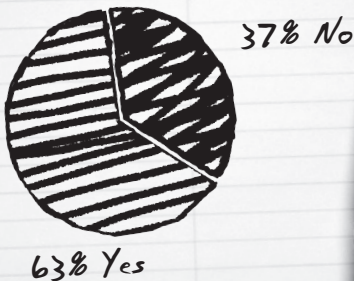


“Would you support educators being paid more for teaching in high-need schools, (e.g., inner city schools)?”



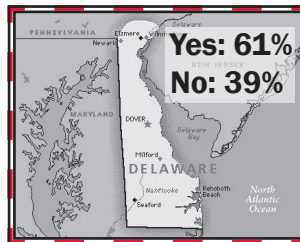
NATIONAL STANDARDS

“Do you support some form of national standards?”

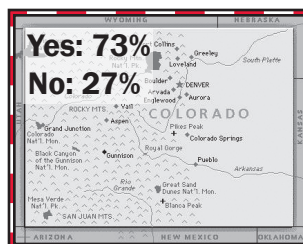


ACCOUNTABILITY

“DELAWARE teachers can now be removed from the classroom if they are rated ineffective for more than two years, even if they have tenure. Do you agree with this policy?”



“In COLORADO, nonprobationary teachers earning two consecutive years of ineffective ratings will return to probationary status rather than being dismissed. Do you agree with this policy?”



Coming in dead last for criteria to evaluate teacher effectiveness was “years in the system,” not a surprising result when considering teacher responses as they weighed in on tenure issues.

Compensation

Despite union efforts to keep educators on predetermined salary schedules, with criteria such as length of time in the system and level of education, teachers support certain types of differentiated pay and disagree strongly with the saying, “Last hired, first fired.” More than 80 percent of respondents to the survey supported educators being paid more for taking on additional roles and responsibilities in their schools, and 79 percent supported educators being paid more to teach in high-need schools such as inner city or rural schools.

National Standards

While 63 percent supported some form of national standards, how the standards should be set was mixed. Only 31 percent believed that the federal government should mandate standards, while 64 percent supported the states making the final determination about the standards. Of that 64 percent, nearly 27 percent felt that only state-designed state-specific standards approved at the federal level best described the national standards that should be implemented. Supporting the notion that teachers want to be held accountable, 64 percent support the notion that national standards should “provide a uniform evaluation and comparison of local schools and schools in other states.”

Most teachers would agree that today’s education landscape is vastly different than just a decade ago. The AAE member survey reflects that teachers’ attitudes have changed as well. What hasn’t changed, however, is that teachers want to see their students excel and succeed. As this survey is shared with policymakers and education reformers, we hope as they move forward they will include teachers as part of the team. ■



Member survey results, July 2010

5 Ways to Make Facebook Work for Teachers



As Facebook celebrates hitting the 500 million member mark (that's right, 500 million!), educators should start using the social networking mega-site for more than just "friending" old classmates. Facebook can be a tool to assist teachers and improve the educational experience of America's students. Facebook poses an interesting conundrum for

educators: to have or not to have a Facebook profile? First and foremost, educators must follow the regulations and guidelines of their specific school district. For some educators, Facebook will be strictly off limits, but for those whose districts permit teachers to use Facebook, here are a few easy tips to make the social networking site work for you:

1 Join education pages and groups on Facebook. Doing this will help bring education trends, topics, and news to you without you having to hunt for them. Your professional association, school, and curricula may have pages or groups on Facebook that provide tips, information, news, and discussion groups for educators. Pages like your own "Association of American Educators" keep you up to date on the latest education policies and news stories, while providing you with a community of educators and support in your profession.

2 Share education information via your status posts. If you read an article or find a group that might interest some of your friends, post it as the status on your wall. Your status is a great way to quickly share useful information with all of your friends. Caution: Do not post things you wouldn't want your boss or your students to see. (See recent AAE blog post for 10 tips for safely using social networking sites.)

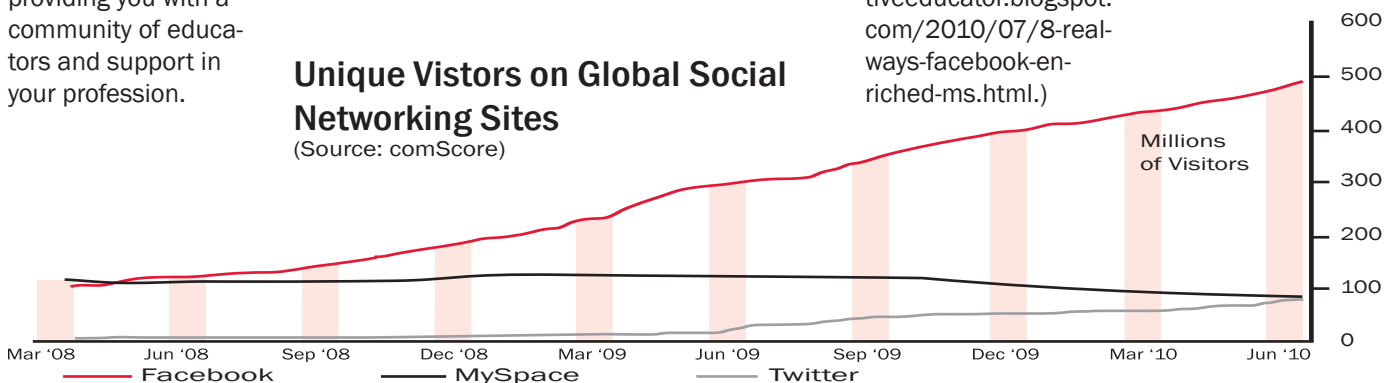
3 Connect with your colleagues. If your school's policy permits it, Facebook can be a venue, just like email, to communicate and collaborate with your colleagues and peers. Use Facebook to share lesson plans, brainstorm classroom activities, and promote a positive work environment. But NEVER post derogatory comments about students or coworkers on Facebook. Use the medium to communicate in a beneficial way with your colleagues.

4 Connect with parents. If your school's policy permits it, use Facebook to share pertinent classroom information with the parents of your students. You can create a parents' group for your class and share information only with those parents. Share field trip details, school closings, classroom parties, or even pictures of student projects. Parents loved one first-grade teacher's use of Facebook to communicate with them. (Read story at <http://theinnovativeeducator.blogspot.com/2010/07/8-real-ways-facebook-enriched-ms.html>.)

5 Adjust your privacy settings appropriately. Take some time to review the "Privacy Settings" (found under "Account" on the top right) to mark most of your profile features "Friends Only" so that your students won't easily find pictures, posts, or status updates from their teacher. As role models, teachers should take advantage of the advanced privacy settings Facebook offers. ■

Unique Vistors on Global Social Networking Sites

(Source: comScore)



Class Size Explosion

The Myth and the Math



By Mike Antonucci

In their unprecedented effort to pass the \$10 billion “edu-jobs” bill, the National Education Association (NEA) and its allies in Congress made some dire claims about class size.

As an example, the NEA ran an ad with adorable waifs asserting that “classrooms are more crowded than ever.” Congressmen David Obey and George Miller wrote to the *Washington Post*, “As many as 300,000 school employees are in danger of losing their jobs. If that happens, class sizes will explode and educational opportunities will decline drastically for millions of children.”

Yet, in the NEA research report entitled “Rankings & Estimates of School Statistics 2009,” the NEA states, “The average number of students per teacher declined from 15.3 in 2007-08 to 15.2 in 2008-09.”

But this argument is not about current class size. It’s about class sizes exploding due to threatened teacher layoffs. Let’s take a look at those numbers.

Is this their idea of new math?

We’ll start with round numbers for ease of computation and use the worst case scenario. We have roughly 49 million K-12 students being taught by 3.2 million classroom teachers. But let’s assume that special education is untouchable. There are 6.6 million special education students being taught by 473,000 special education teachers. Subtract them out, and you have 42.4 million students and 2,727,000 teachers. That’s a student/teacher ratio of 15.5. Using the NEA’s own estimates from their report, let’s add 9.5 students for an average class size of 25.

Now we’ll factor in the effect of not passing the edujobs bill. The worst case number is 300,000 education jobs lost, but let’s err on the side of hyperbole and assume that all 300,000 jobs lost are those of regular K-12 classroom teachers. And we’ll assume that enrollment of the regular student population climbs by its recent average—1.0 percent or 42,400. We’ll have 42,442,400 students but only 2,427,000 teachers. That’s a student/teacher ratio of 17.5. That gives us an average class size of 27.

So if we take the most extreme claims and add to them, we can still generate no larger an effect than two students per class—with special ed untouched. Some explosion. The last time we had such an horrendously large student/teacher ratio was... 1996.

No one wants to return to those days, but I don’t recall NEA,

\$10 billion buys a lot of votes!

You know it’s an election year when the Democratic Speaker of the House recalled comrades from summer break to Washington for an emergency vote to bail out the nation’s schools. This action might have been wrapped in the garb of “economic stimulus” but its true intention was to stimulate the party’s base—the teachers unions—whose enthusiasm was sorely needed if catastrophic losses are to be avoided in November. Gadfly understands that the \$10 billion edujobs fund—to be offset, so they claim, by future cuts in food stamps(!)—will have the beneficial effect of keeping some very good—and young—teachers from getting pink slips. Hooray for that, but it will also further kick down the road the inevitable belt-tightening that awaits our bloated education system—starting with the removal of America’s ineffective teachers, a step that Eric Hanushek says will actually improve student achievement. For almost two years, President Obama has been calling for an “Era of Responsibility.” This is more evidence that such an epoch has not yet arrived.

—The Thomas B. Fordham Institute’s *Education Gadfly*.

Obey, or Miller painting it at the time as the nadir of American public education.

But wait, there's more. After 30 months of recession, local government education employment (the category where most teachers and support employees reside) has yet to approach a 1 percent decline.

Of the thirty-five states for which we have data, thirteen lost jobs in the education sector from spring 2009 to spring 2010. Mississippi was unchanged. The other twenty-one states had education employment increases—including New Jersey, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania.

Wards of the government

It is highly likely that many of the teachers who were laid off this year—whose jobs the new money is intended to save—were only hired because of last year's stimulus money. They are essentially wards of the federal government. If this is the road to economic recovery, then we should simply hire, as teachers, all of the nation's unemployed.

After such a huge victory, you might think that teachers unions would be content to get out with the \$10 billion, but they're already raising the specter of perpetual bailouts. Richard Lannuzzi, president of New York State United Teachers, said the additional money only allows districts to delay the inevitable for a year because revenues are not suddenly going to rebound anytime soon.

The federal government is now firmly in the business of hiring and paying your local school teachers according to the flawed and self-interested projections of district administrators and teachers unions. It won't be so easy to go back.

What's a measly \$10 billion out of nearly \$700 billion in annual spending on public education anyway? Well, it's the notion that the people who are drowning in the ocean are bailing out the people in the lifeboats. ■



Source—Mike Antonucci, *Communiqué*, a publication of Education Intelligence Agency, www.eiaonline.com.

iLearning

Electronic textbooks might not benefit students or schools

By Geraldine "Tincy" Miller, Texas State Board of Education District 12

Policymakers recently discussed plans to replace printed textbooks with electronic ones in Texas public schools. Although some state leaders prefer moving in this direction, I would urge that it not be a top-down approach or a cost-shifting strategy for the state. And, most important, I would insist that the quality of the materials be the central focus of any change. Educators should lead any such transition, not the state.

Various studies have shown that when college students have the option of choosing between e-books and printed textbooks, they overwhelmingly choose the printed textbook because it is easier to read and reference. Therefore, parents, educators, local textbook committees, and school boards should have some say over the format as well.

Higher costs

Moving to an entirely electronic format is a major change for schools. Each district will have to figure out the total cost of: (1) buying the devices; (2) training teachers; (3) setting up the devices; (4) making sure they work for blind students; (5) maintaining, insuring, and protecting them from theft and/or damage; and (6) providing uninterrupted Internet connectivity with Internet filters. These are all new costs that must be addressed at a time when school districts are facing financial crises and laying off teachers.

Obviously, hardware becomes outdated much more quickly than textbooks. Is your laptop six or ten years old? By law, instructional materials must last at least six years—and often will be in classrooms as long as ten years.

Shifting costs

This scenario leads me to my second point: The state should not use this move to shift costs to the local level. If

the state is just buying digital materials because they cost less, but districts still want printed materials or are not yet equipped to go digital, that would shift tremendous costs to our local schools and taxpayers. Will the state make districts choose between spending money on content or devices?

The Legislature has not properly funded the Technology Allotment, which was created to provide funding for technological equipment, and last session it passed legislation that allows districts to use state textbook funds for equipment. Our textbook fund was established to provide students with access to quality learning materials at no cost to local districts.

Because of this new legislation, children might not have materials to bring home. The equipment is simply the means to access the content, and we must always remember that it is the content on the devices that is most crucial to our students.

While electronic content can provide some richer experiences, it does not necessarily translate to every subject area. Furthermore, some argue that free Internet options are available to answer the question of cost. However, free materials certainly do not necessarily live up to standards in which we would like our teachers to operate. Accountability is a primary issue here. Make no mistake about it, if we don't have quality content, the devices will simply be empty boxes.

Whether in print or electronic format, the State Board of Education certifies the accuracy and alignment of this content to the curriculum, and that is the key to ensuring our students a quality education.

Any further erosion of this system, any mingling of state textbook funds for hardware, and any further shifting of costs from the state to the local level will endanger our students' education and overburden our schools and taxpayers. ■



Tincy Miller has been a Texas State Board member since 1984 and served as Chair from 2003-2007. Contact her at <http://tincymiller.com>.



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