

# Stand by Me

*What Teachers Really Think about Unions, Merit Pay and Other Professional Matters*



**PUBLIC AGENDA**

Prepared by  
Public Agenda

*With support from*  
The Broad Foundation  
Thomas B. Fordham Foundation  
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*What Teachers Really Think  
about Unions, Merit Pay and  
Other Professional Matters*



**A report from Public Agenda**

by Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson  
and Ann Duffett  
with Leslie Moye and Jackie Vine

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The Sidney J. Weinberg, Jr. Foundation is a family foundation devoted principally to health, education and scientific research.

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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 Web site give people unbiased, in-depth information about the challenges the country faces. Recently recognized by *Library Journal* as one of the Web's best resources, [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org) provides comprehensive information on a wide range of policy issues.

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And Public Agenda's President, Deborah Wadsworth, whose dedication to the issues and remarkable insight guide our organization.

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# Introduction

When Florida’s Department of Education announced a program allowing teachers to apply for bonuses for exceptional classroom performance, just 4 out of Pasco County’s 3,600 teachers signed up to be considered.<sup>1</sup> One administrator called the response “abysmal,” and Pasco County wasn’t

Some readers will empathize with the fears and concerns teachers voice. Some will find their perspective balky and self-protective.

alone in getting a less-than-enthusiastic response. Although proponents saw the bonus plan as rewarding talented teachers and bringing pay-for-performance principles to education, opponents considered it as divisive and counterproductive, a measure that funneled scarce educational dollars into the hands of a lucky few.

Those who work in organizations where bonuses are routine may be somewhat surprised by the teachers’ response. And what happened in Florida may say more about that state’s particular formulation than about the concept itself. For example, some criticized Florida’s process of applying for bonuses as fairly cumbersome. But even an administrator who believes that Florida’s teachers will eventually warm to the plan acknowledges that the idea “is a big change to the existing culture.” Throughout the country, teachers are typically paid based on years of experience and level of education. Bonuses, merit pay and other pay-for-performance concepts are fairly unusual in American public schools.<sup>2</sup>

## Is Florida a Bellwether?

Whether teachers nationwide are as dubious about bonuses and merit pay as Florida’s teachers appear to be is just one question addressed in *Stand by Me: What Teachers Really Think about Unions, Merit Pay and Other Professional Matters*. Public Agenda’s report is based on a national mail survey of 1,345 public school teachers conducted in spring 2003. (See the methodology on page 40

for more details about the research.) As the title suggests, the survey asked teachers for their views on unions, tenure and merit pay, as well as teacher recruitment, evaluation, certification and professional development.

Public Agenda has conducted over half a dozen major national surveys of public school teachers over the last decade exploring topics ranging from curriculum to parents to standards and testing. In fact, we briefly revisit the standards and testing issue here to gauge teachers’ reactions to changes taking place under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which mandates annual testing for students and sets out explicit consequences for schools where students repeatedly fail. Exploring teachers’ views and getting their counsel on what would improve education and help them to better do their jobs is a matter of wide interest. After all, teachers are the ones doing the doing. Their views should be taken very seriously.

## Harsh Criticism for Tenure and the Unions

Even so, there are critics who believe that the way teachers enter the profession and think about their jobs is itself a problem. These critics ask whether traditional avenues of





teacher recruitment, education and certification really attract the best candidates. They question whether basing pay almost exclusively on length of

service just encourages some teachers to coast. They charge that tenure sometimes wrongly protects teachers who lack either the ability or the resolve to teach effectively. Some have particularly harsh criticism for the unions, seeing them as obstructionists blindly endorsing the status quo. For example, Terry Moe, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and one such critic, believes that “teachers’ unions have more influence on the public schools than any other groups in American society” and that their “interests can lead them to exercise power in ways that are not good for kids and schools.”<sup>3</sup>

Some particularly vocal critics come from business and other arenas outside education, but not all. In Public Agenda’s recent surveys of school principals and superintendents, virtually all say that making it easier to remove poor teachers—even those with tenure—would be an effective way to improve schools. Very large majorities of both groups say they want more freedom to reward good teachers and terminate ineffective ones.<sup>4</sup>

### Getting More than a Head Count

So what do teachers themselves think about these ideas? This is basically the subject of *Stand by Me*, but we have tried to do more than simply tally a thumbs-up thumbs-down vote. Using focus groups and a written questionnaire

containing almost 100 items, Public Agenda has tried to delve into the reasoning behind teachers’ views and capture their perspectives in something close to their own voices. Consequently, we have spent some time in *Stand by Me* reviewing what we know from previous research about teachers’ overall sense of the challenges they face on the job.

Public Agenda’s research on *Stand by Me* was funded by The Broad Foundation, the Thomas B. Fordham

Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Sidney J. Weinberg, Jr. Foundation, all of which have a substantial interest in educational issues and have focused on the profession of teaching to some degree. Public Agenda was given complete freedom to explore teachers’ thinking fully and without constraint or bias.

We thank these organizations for their support and applaud them for their commitment to an unfettered exploration of the truth and an open and honest exchange of ideas.

Readers will no doubt bring their own judgments to what teachers have to say in *Stand by Me*. Some will empathize with the fears and concerns teachers voice. Some will find their perspective balky and self-protective. Yet, whatever the reaction may be, we hope that readers share our sense that the morale and confidence, the drive and aspiration of the nation’s teachers, is a supremely important issue in education. We hope that *Stand by Me* sets the stage for a clearer and more fruitful discussion of it.

Public Agenda was given complete freedom to explore teachers’ thinking fully and without constraint or bias.





## FINDING ONE: On the Front Lines

**Teachers love their profession but often see themselves under siege.** For many, testing and accountability is the latest battleground.

When Public Agenda interviewed veteran teachers in St. Louis for *Stand by Me*, one reported that he had left and returned to teaching several times during his career. “It isn’t the teaching,” he explained, “That has never been the problem.” Instead, he talked about “the atmosphere in a particular school,” “students in violent situations,” “administrative problems” and “unrealistic expectations.” But teaching itself, he asserted, “...is like a virus. It gets in your blood, and you have to come back to it.”

### Passion and Pessimism

Repeatedly leaving and returning to teaching may be somewhat unusual, but the love-hate dichotomy this St. Louis teacher voices is common. Most public school teachers surveyed by Public Agenda have a fierce loyalty to their profession. Yet side by side with teachers’ enthusiasm for their jobs is a sense that society expects far too much of them and seems to undermine them at every turn.

Standards, testing and accountability is the latest venue where, according to teachers, outsized expectations combine with precious little in the way of support. Teachers say they believe in higher standards and agree that testing can be helpful, but many are unnerved and angered by the incarnation playing out in public schools today. What started as a good idea, many teachers say, is now shifting into “let’s blame the teacher” mode.

### A Career of Choice

Whatever dissatisfaction teachers feel, the great majority are strongly committed to their calling. Seventy-four percent consider teaching a lifelong career; just 7% say they are likely to leave the field. And this is not the first time Public Agenda has picked up a high level of professional devotion. In a survey of new teachers conducted three years ago, 96% told us that teaching is work they love. Just 12% said that they had fallen into teaching by chance.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this commitment, however, a large swath of the nation’s teachers is less than jubilant about what they

### Where Working Conditions are Worse

The working conditions at my school are very good when it comes to having an orderly, safe and respectful school atmosphere:

Urban Teachers

41%

Suburban and Rural Teachers

61%

High School Teachers

47%

Elementary School Teachers

62%

Teachers of mostly minority students

35%

Teachers of few minority students

68%

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

see day to day. On the surface, teachers seem relatively comfortable; 56% give their own school high ratings for having “an orderly, safe and respectful school atmosphere”; slightly over a third (35%) say their situation is manageable. But these numbers mask huge gaps between some teachers, depending on the demographic characteristics of their school. For example, just 35% of teachers in schools with mostly African American or Hispanic pupils say school atmosphere is very good compared with 68% of teachers in schools with few minority pupils. Similarly, teachers in urban schools (41%) are considerably less likely to describe their school’s environment as very good compared with those in suburban or rural areas (61%

for both). The same is true for high school teachers (47%) compared to elementary (62%).

## AWOL Parents

And regardless of where they teach, most teachers say that they do not get the parental and administrative backing they need to do a good job. In one Public Agenda study, for example, more than 8 in 10 teachers said their own school had serious problems with parents who fail to hold kids accountable and parents who fail to set limits at home.<sup>6</sup>

Virtually all of the teachers in the focus groups for *Stand by Me* had a story to tell about being undermined by a parent, whether it's one who doesn't turn off the TV, one who allows extracurricular activities to take priority over academic work or one who is outright disrespectful. Many described their interactions with some parents in a "can you believe this" tone of voice.

## "Am I Lying to You Here?"

A St. Louis veteran teacher provided some colorful examples. "You call a parent [about a problem with their child] and they say, 'Well, when I get my child's view of it, I'll let you know.' I'm thinking, 'Am I lying to you here?' Lack of respect. Parents want to be their children's friends instead of being their parent." She

Seventy-six percent of those surveyed believe teachers have become "the scapegoats for all the problems facing education."

went on to say: "In my district, it's not that education is not important, but it's been shoved over to the corner...A parent called me one day wanting to know if I could move my test because the child had a basketball game."

Teachers also sometimes feel that they have to take on basic

child-rearing tasks that parents should be handling at home. A first-grade teacher interviewed for *Stand by Me* voiced a common complaint: "I'm the one [who] has to teach them manners, respect, how to tie their shoes, what their last name is, what their phone number is. These kids come in first grade not knowing that...we have to teach them all that, and how to read and how to write and how to do math." When the moderator asked whether she taught in a poor area, she quickly corrected him, "No, middle class."

Perhaps it's not surprising that in other Public Agenda research virtually all teachers (91%) agree with the statement, "Teachers are doing as good a job as they can given the lack of parental

involvement."<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the overwhelming majority (81%) also says that "without involved parents, it is very hard for a student to succeed in school."<sup>8</sup>

## Are Teachers the Scapegoats?

Parents aren't the only ones who let them down. For example two-thirds (67%) of new teachers have reported that their own school often or sometimes puts obstacles in the way of accomplishing their goals.<sup>9</sup> And while about half (51%) of teachers say working conditions in their school are manageable in terms of class size and workload, only about 3 in 10 (31%) say they are very good. Teachers in city schools or in schools with mostly minority students are even less likely to say things are very good (24% of urban teachers vs. 30% of suburban and 39% of rural; 21% of teachers in schools with mostly African American and Hispanic students vs. 37% in schools with few minority students).

Given this dispiriting mix of concerns, it is hardly surprising that 76% of those surveyed believe teachers have become "the scapegoats for all the problems facing education" rather than being seen as "safeguarding and protecting education quality" (15%). And the national drive for higher standards and greater accountability has run headlong into teachers' sense that they lack support.

## No Passing Fad

There is little doubt that the standards movement is in full sway in school districts across the country. Among teachers surveyed for *Stand by Me*, almost 9 in 10 (88%) say their district is paying more attention to standardized tests over the past several years; just 9% say attention is about the same. Most teachers (65%) also think the push for standards, testing and accountability is here to stay. Twenty-two percent believe it is a fad that will go away.

Repeated findings from Public Agenda show that teachers do not oppose the central tenets of the movement, nor are they sitting around longing for the good old days. Eight in 10 teachers (80%) say having guidelines for what students should learn helps improve academic performance; 87% say students should pass a standardized test to be promoted and those who fail should go to summer school or repeat the grade.<sup>10</sup> Most notable of all perhaps, just 1% want their district to return to the policies of the past. In fact, most teachers (53%) say they want local standards initiatives to proceed as planned.<sup>11</sup> Still, more than any other group Public Agenda has looked at—including parents, students, school leaders and the public at large—classroom teachers seem

## Support for Standards, but Educators Should Set Them

% of teachers who say:

Educational professionals, not local or state elected officials, should set the academic standards for schools, teachers and students	93%
Students should pass a standardized test to be promoted and those who fail should go to summer school or repeat the grade*	87%
Having guidelines for what students should learn helps improve academic performance*	80%

\*Where We Are Now 2003

anxious. Are the calls for testing and accountability going too far? Is it really reasonable to place so much of the burden on teachers?

### Who Should Set the Standards?

A significant number of teachers (42%), for example, have said adjustments are needed in the drive to raise standards,<sup>12</sup> and teachers in focus groups often questioned whether higher academic standards always reflect achievable educational goals. Almost all teachers (93%) say education professionals, not elected officials, should be setting them.

But much of teachers' criticism focuses not on the standards themselves, but on testing. Teachers have repeatedly acknowledged that tests have benefits: They prompt students to work harder (75%) and identify those who need tutoring or summer school (62%).<sup>13</sup> But most teachers (53%) also say that standardized tests are a "seriously flawed" measure of student learning. Another 24% say tests are important, but there are serious problems with how their district uses them. Less than 1 in 5 (18%) says tests are meaningful and their district uses them well.

A majority of teachers (79%) also believe that testing invariably leads to "teaching to the test," although most (73%) say they do not resort to this themselves.<sup>14</sup> For a majority (61%), teaching to the test "inevitably stifles real teaching and learning." About a third (34%) say it is fine as long as the test measures the right things.

### "We're Supposed to Perform Miracles"

But the most troubling element seems to be the prospect of tying teacher pay to how well students perform on standard-

ized tests, a topic we take up in greater detail in Finding Five. Previous Public Agenda research has shown that just 22% of teachers think this is a good idea, and just 12% of new teachers think it is a very effective way to improve teacher quality.<sup>15</sup>

A St. Louis teacher complained: "You're given this raw material to work with and in many cases we'll have students who will come into the high school with an inability to read—[they] can't add or subtract—and we're supposed to perform miracles and bring them up to speed and make high performers out of them. If we don't, then we're held accountable."

An Arizona teacher made a similar point: "I cannot make these kids show up. I can't go to their house, get them out of bed and help them when they have dirty laundry. I can only do so much...I've got kids [who are absent]...I'll call their parents: 'Why aren't they here today?' 'Oh, because they're sick.' The kid will come back the next day [and say,] 'I got out partying last night. I was too hung over to come to school.'"

Another Arizona teacher emphasized what he saw as the basic unfairness of the concept. "We're the only ones that are being asked to be [held] accountable, but our product doesn't have to be accountable. You can hold me accountable as a salesperson...Well, you better give me a good product to do that. [Teachers] have no way to hold our product accountable. What are you going to do, fail them? Do you fail them and fail them until they're sixteen?"

### Testing: the Necessary Evil?

According to teachers:

Standardized tests are a necessary evil—schools need some kind of standardized assessment	62%
"Teaching to the test" inevitably stifles real teaching and learning	61%
Standardized tests are a seriously flawed measure of true student achievement	53%

### Prepared to Live with It

Still, most teachers seem prepared to live with testing despite their complaints about the ways it is used—and could be used in the future. Most (62%) see it as "a necessary evil," agreeing that "ultimately, the schools need some kind of standardized assessment." Almost 1 in 5 teachers (18%) say "standardized tests do much more harm than good—the schools would be better off if they were completely abandoned."



## FINDING TWO:

# You Can't Draw Blood from a Stone

Teachers have confidence in their own skills, but they doubt whether teachers, by themselves, really can make sure that all children learn.

To some, America's public school teachers seem to be a defensive and out-of-touch lot—a group of entrenched professionals who shy away from being held accountable for fear of coming up short. Critics point out that teachers' unions resist pay-for-performance plans and using student standardized test scores to measure teachers' effectiveness.<sup>16</sup> In the 2002 *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*, 4 in 10 members of the public also say they oppose the idea of removing teachers whose students don't meet state standards.

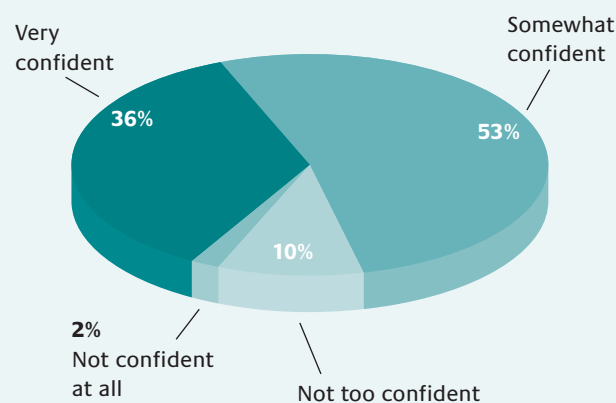
### Should Normal Business Practices Apply?

For their part, teachers often say children are not widgets, and unlike factories, schools should focus on what really helps children learn and thrive, not on some theoretical or statistical bottom line. As one teacher from New Jersey quipped, "We're not talking about can openers here."

So what's really going on? Are teachers simply afraid to be judged the way other workers are? Do they really believe that education is so different from other professional enterprises that commonplace methods of evaluation and accountability should not apply?

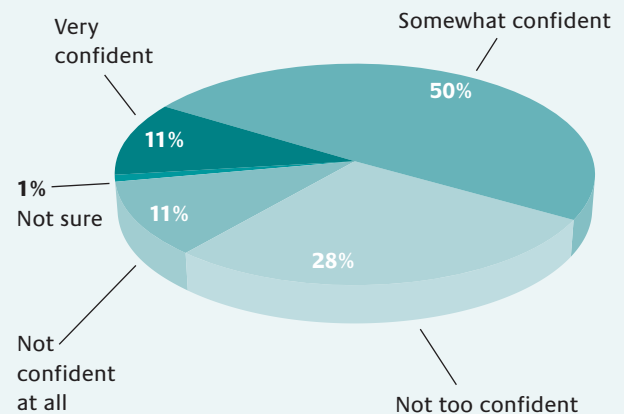
### Confidence in Teaching Skills

How confident are you that most of your students will learn the skills and knowledge they were supposed to by the end of the year?



### Falling Through the Cracks

How confident are you that you can turn around your hardest-to-reach students by the end of the year?



The survey findings in *Stand by Me* reveal an important and distinctive line of thinking underlying most teachers' views in this area. Teachers are convinced they make a difference in children's lives, and they acknowledge that, in ideal circumstances, they should be able to ensure that no child is left behind. But circumstances, teachers say, are not ideal, and teachers can't do it alone. Other factors need to be in place for them to effectively do their jobs.

### Professional Confidence

Teachers' deep loyalty to their profession and strong enthusiasm for the work they do are matched by the confidence they have in their teaching skills. The overwhelming majority (89%) says they are confident that, by the end of the school year, most of their students will learn the skills and knowledge they are expected to, with 36% saying they are very confident. But this strength of conviction tends to wane as children move into later grades—elementary school teachers are significantly more likely than high school teachers to feel very confident about getting through to the bulk of their students (42% vs. 27%).

Public Agenda surveys consistently pick up this sense of assurance among teachers. For example, in a nationwide survey

of teachers conducted in 2001, 7 in 10 said all or most of their students are able to meet the state guidelines for what children should learn and know.<sup>17</sup> In a 1999 poll, 92% reported that the teachers in their own school do an excellent or good job, and more than 6 in 10 said they typically have effective advice for parents who ask for guidance in helping a struggling child.<sup>18</sup> Both principals<sup>19</sup> and parents<sup>20</sup> corroborate this optimism, consistently giving teachers in their own schools largely positive performance ratings.

### The Difference between “Most” and “All”

Still, a 100% success rate is unusual in any occupation, and teachers readily acknowledge that there are some children they may not get through to. Only 11% of teachers say they are very confident about achieving success by the end of the year with the “hardest-to-reach” kids in their own classroom; another 50% are somewhat confident they can do so. “Most children, yes,” said one teacher in a focus group for *Stand by Me*, because “as a teacher I will not give up. But every child? There’s a big difference between saying ‘most’ and ‘all.’”

Previous Public Agenda research substantiates this sense among teachers that not every child has the ability and/or the parental support and structure needed to perform in school. Only 15% of teachers say there is “a lot of truth” in the statement, “When I get kids who are seriously behind in my classroom, I can usually get them caught up.”<sup>21</sup>

Asked to react to a hypothetical situation where many students in their district scored poorly on a standardized test, teachers do not necessarily see the problem as the school’s fault. Only about a third said it would be because the schools failed to adequately prepare the students; similar proportions said it would be either because the students simply lack the ability to do well or because the test was flawed.<sup>22</sup>

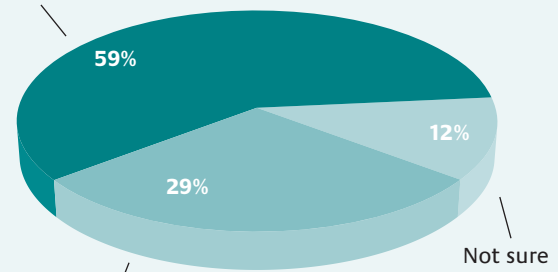
### Due to Circumstances Beyond Their Control

Essentially, teachers believe other factors need to be in place for them to be able to teach effectively. According to most, it’s unfair to hold teachers accountable when so many things that affect student learning are beyond their control (59%). As we saw in the previous finding, teachers need parents who place a premium on school and learning and who hold children accountable for their effort and behavior. Many also wish for smaller classes and more supportive administrators.

But more than anything else, when teachers are broached about their effectiveness in the classroom and the feasibility of leaving no child behind, they point to a fairly daunting series of hurdles. They talk about the one or two disruptive

### Is Student Motivation a Given?

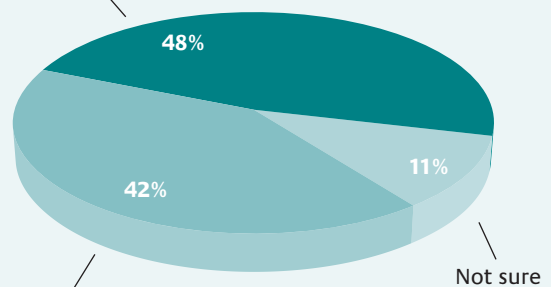
It’s not fair to hold teachers accountable when so many things that affect student learning are beyond their control



Teachers can and do make a difference in what kids learn and they should be financially rewarded when they succeed

The effort students make in the classroom is mainly determined by:

What teachers do to motivate them



The motivation students bring

students who make it a daily struggle to maintain order. Or the extra time and attention they invest dealing with special-needs kids or youngsters whose English is less than optimal. What about the youngsters who arrive midyear or whose attendance is spotty? What about the Herculean efforts they must make to reach students who are alienated or habitually disorganized or who are simply unwilling to learn? It’s just not possible, teachers say, to single-handedly overcome all of the hurdles that invariably seep into their classroom. Together, they sap a teacher’s ability to bring all children to high standards of learning.

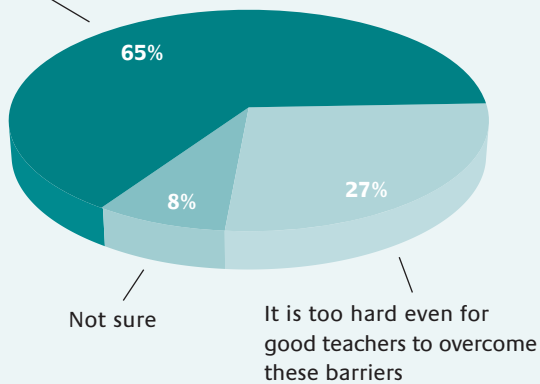
### It Doesn’t Get Better in High School

“You can’t draw blood from a stone” is an old Irish saying that could be the motto for many teachers across the country when it comes to describing student effort. A majority of teachers say most students in their school do only enough to get by,<sup>23</sup> and almost 7 in 10 consider lack of student effort to be a serious problem in their own classroom.<sup>24</sup>

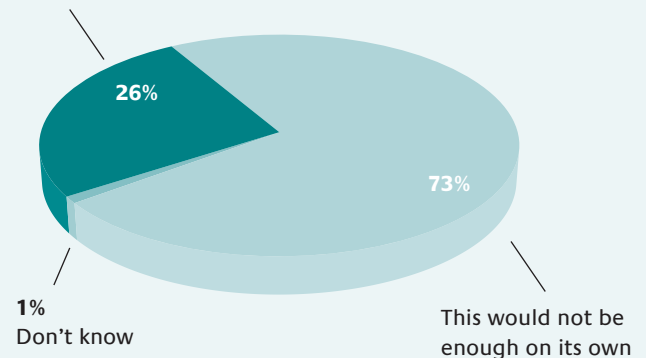
## Can Teachers Turn Things Around? Depends...

% of teachers who say:

Good teachers lead even students who are poor and have uninvolved parents to learn what they are supposed to



Bringing in exceptionally talented teachers could turn things around at a school with low student achievement and parents who are not involved\*



\*A Sense of Calling 2000

Teachers are virtually split as to whether students arrive at school with a pre-set level of motivation and eagerness to learn (42%) or whether student effort is mainly determined by what teachers do to motivate students once they get into the classroom (48%). But this distinction becomes pronounced as students get older. High school teachers are almost half

**“...I’ve never had to fail anyone [who] turned everything in. It’s basically getting a kid who has no desire to do what we’re doing as a class to do even the minimum amount of work.”**

—St. Louis teacher

as likely as elementary school teachers to think it’s what teachers do that counts (30% vs. 58%). When asked to pick the most difficult thing about teaching, high school teachers are almost four times more likely to choose “lack of effort from students” (34% vs. 9%).

A relatively new high school teacher in St. Louis explained what it’s like for him: “If you asked every one of them ‘Do you want to pass?’ they would say, ‘Yes’...But then if...[you

ask] ‘Are you willing to do what’s necessary to pass?’ If they would honestly answer you, they’d say ‘probably not’...I’ve never had to fail anyone [who] turned everything in. It’s basically getting a kid who has no desire to do what we’re doing as a class to do even the minimum amount of work.”

### “The Kids Have No Respect for You”

In previous surveys of public school teachers, almost half reported that unnecessary interruptions throughout their

day regularly detract from teaching and learning.<sup>25</sup> And more than 4 in 10 agreed that teachers in their school “spend more time trying to keep order in the classroom than teaching students.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, an overwhelming majority of high school teachers reported that things could be better in their school when it comes to students treating each other with civility and respect.<sup>27</sup>

We picked up this concern about unruly students in the focus groups for *Stand by Me* as well. “The kids have no respect for you,” one New Jersey high school teacher told us. “They’ll just walk around through the halls, in your class, and curse and do whatever they want. I remember when I was in school you didn’t dream of cursing anywhere, in the hallway or anything. You just didn’t do it. It’s just how they are; they don’t care about you at all.”

### Even Exceptional Teachers

Despite the myriad of obstacles teachers come up against, almost 2 in 3 (65%) say they believe that truly good teachers can overcome societal barriers such as poverty or uninvolved parents and still get their students to learn what they are supposed to. But while gifted teachers may be able to make a difference for individual students in a given classroom, even the most extraordinary teachers cannot be expected to carry the burden of rescuing an entire school that is failing. In Public Agenda’s 2000 survey of new teachers, only 26% said a group of exceptionally talented teachers could turn things around in a school with low student achievement and uninvolved parents—the overwhelming majority (73%) said this would not be enough on its own.<sup>28</sup>



## FINDING THREE:

# A Thin Line of Protection

**Teachers often feel vulnerable to a wide range of dangers**—unfair charges from parents and students, bureaucratic machinations and favoritism, simpleminded educational “solutions” and cost-cutting. Their union is their ally, one they can count on.

Have an honest talk with teachers, and they will inevitably say they are treated with a lack of respect as professionals. Talk to many education reformers, and you hear that the profession must shift its focus away from the nuts and bolts of traditional trade unionism—pay, time and work rules—to setting professional standards and enhancing the standing of the craft. Meanwhile, union representatives interviewed for this project said their organizations had already evolved, increasing their focus upon professionalism and education reform. So what kind of unions do teachers really want? Are they looking for change, and if so, why?

### “All They Have to Do Is Whisper”

Today’s rank-and-file teachers feel acutely vulnerable. They believe that they work in highly politicized school districts where any administrator, school board member, parent or student could endanger their livelihood with a careless whisper, an unfair evaluation or a personal grudge. Under these conditions, teachers view the union as an ally ready with protection, a comforting and necessary insurance policy.

A teacher in a St. Louis suburb said, “We live in a world that all they have to do is whisper that we hit them, and we’re gone. I already had this year a kid accuse me of hitting him. A lot of the kids know they can go over your head...you have to be ready for that.” More than 3 in 4 (77%) say that without the union, “teachers facing unfair charges from parents or students would have nowhere to turn.”

Nor do teachers trust their administrators to always do the right thing. More than 8 in 10 (81%) agree that without the union, “teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power,” and 52% strongly agree. This strong sentiment is especially prevalent among teachers in the Northeast (66%) and Midwest (58%), compared with less than half of those in the West (46%) and South (44%).

### If You Go Away...

% of teachers who “strongly” or “somewhat” agree that:

Without the union, teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power

81%

Without collective bargaining, the working conditions and salaries of teachers would be much worse

81%

Without the union, teachers facing unfair charges from parents or students would have nowhere to turn

77%

A teacher in New Jersey traced how a small group of disgruntled parents could trigger an avalanche of political pressures on a well-intentioned teacher. “One parent calls another parent and suddenly ten parents are calling the principal to say this teacher is too demanding. But this teacher is very good, she’s offering extra help, she’s set up a study skills group during lunch. She’s working her butt off to help these kids meet the standards. If the principal doesn’t respond, the parents then call the superintendent. The superintendent puts pressure on the principal. The principal doesn’t want to deal with all this pressure. Let’s just get rid of the teacher and get someone else that gives less homework and all A’s.”

### Bread and Butter

While some may argue that old-style trade unionism needs to be replaced by a focus on professionalism, it is bread-and-butter issues—securing money and benefits—that have a lot to do with why unions enjoy teacher loyalty. Teachers simply believe their unions protect their interests.

Fully 81% believe that “the working conditions and salaries of teachers would be much worse” without collective bargaining. A New Jersey teacher said, “I know it protects me and if I have

a problem, I know who to go to, to get the help that I need. They make that very clear that they're there to support you."

When asked which of five services are most valuable to them, nearly half (47%) say it's when the union "negotiates pay and benefits." In contrast, only 5% say giving teachers "political clout in the state and national arena" is the most valuable. "Even though we might not be actively involved NEA members, they're the people who go out there and negotiate for our salaries and calendars," said one teacher. The sense among the teachers in a Texas focus group—from a district without a union—was that they may be losing out. "It would be nice to be unionized where you had people that look out for you, that actually lobbied in Austin, that went ahead and lobbied for the school district," said one.

### Members Only

% of teachers who say:

They are union members	83%
They aren't involved or engaged with their local union, other than receiving mailings and notices*	66%
That most union decisions are made by a small group of deeply engaged veteran teachers and staff	51%
They think of teachers' unions as absolutely essential	46%

\*Base: union members (n=1,049)

### We've Never Seen the NEA

Given all of the above, it is surprising that teachers' sentiments about their union appear to be less than passionate. A relatively small 46% think of their union as "absolutely essential." Almost 4 in 10 (38%) describe the union as "important but not essential"; another 12% think of it as dispensable—something they "could do without."

Moreover, teachers appear to have a limited level of engagement with their unions. Most (66%) union members say that other than receiving mailings and notices, they aren't involved with their local union. "I'm in the NEA and basically just paying to it for the insurance thing," said one teacher. "I teach out in a pretty small district... We've never seen an NEA person in there as far as doing anything. I haven't had to use them for anything." About half (51%) report that most union decisions are made by a small group of deeply engaged veteran teachers—31% say a large number of teachers are typically involved. Perhaps reflecting the limited engagement of teachers with

their unions, over half (56%) believe the union charges higher dues than are warranted.

### Out of Step?

Some experts think the positions teachers' unions take on political and social issues can leave them out of touch with their constituency. It's clear from the survey that the policies of union leadership sometimes diverge from the views of teachers. Only 19% say that at the national level their union's policies "almost always" reflect their values and preferences, while 47% say this is sometimes the case. Local union chapters seem to be doing better: 36% of teachers say their policies "almost always" reflect their values while 47% say this is sometimes the case. Interestingly, the older teachers are, the more apt they are to say their local union "almost always" reflects their views (23% of teachers in their twenties vs. 45% of teachers 50 or older).

### Open—to a Point

Teachers are open to the possibility of their union addressing broader challenges such as academic standards or teacher quality. For example, nearly 6 in 10 (57%) say they'd "be open to hearing more about it" if their union wanted to "put more focus on academic issues and student achievement during collective bargaining with [their] district," and 19% would welcome it; 11% say this would be the wrong direction to take. And if the union put more focus on evaluating teacher quality during collective bargaining, 57% say they'd "be open to hearing more about it," and 21% would welcome it; 10% would think it wrong.

But teachers appear to draw back when concrete protections are at stake: a 60% to 23% majority rejects the view that "sometimes everyone would be better off if the union stepped aside and let the administration fire incompetent teachers," saying instead that "the union has an obligation to represent the rights of any teacher." This attitude persists despite the fact that in focus groups teachers routinely grumble about colleagues—admittedly few in number—who aren't trying. Nearly half (47%) say their union sometimes fights to protect teachers who really should be out of the classroom.

Perhaps the strongest reason for the persistence of teachers' unions is that teachers are working in an environment that fosters a sense of uncertainty and vulnerability.



## The Times They Are a Changin'

Those who feel that unions stand in the way of educational improvement may be nursing hopes of their demise, heartened by changing times. After all, the percentage of the nation's workers who are union members has fallen steadily, down to 13.2% in 2002 from a high of 20.1% in 1983.<sup>29</sup> Still another hope—explored more fully in the final finding of this study—is that newer teachers come into the profession with less attachment and deference to teachers' unions.

But teachers' unions do not appear to be an endangered species. For one thing, teachers work in the public sector where membership in organized labor is still strong. The vast majority (83%) of teachers in this study say they are union members. In the Northeast (94%) and Midwest (93%) virtually all teachers are unionized, compared with smaller majorities in

### An Obstacle to Excellence?

% of teachers who agree that:

The union sometimes fights to protect teachers who really should be out of the classroom	47%
Sometimes everyone would be better off if the union stepped aside and let the administration fire incompetent teachers	23%

the West (80%) and South (74%). Perhaps the strongest reason for the persistence of teachers' unions is that teachers are working in an environment that fosters a sense of uncertainty and vulnerability. As long as that holds, it is perhaps only natural that they will seek out a protector—even if not all of its policies enthrall them.



## FINDING FOUR: Tenure

**Teachers freely acknowledge that some teachers shouldn't be teaching, but they believe tenure is needed to protect good teachers against unfair treatment.**

School superintendents and principals say that teacher tenure stands in the way of their efforts to improve education, according to a recent Public Agenda study. In fact, when asked about a variety of ways to improve educational leadership, most school leaders (73% of superintendents, 69% of principals) rallied behind a proposal that would make it “much easier for principals to remove bad teachers—even those who have tenure.”<sup>30</sup> Even more attention grabbing is that teachers themselves—by a 53% majority—have reported that “the tenure system should be changed to make it far easier to remove bad teachers.”<sup>31</sup>

One might think that this sort of indictment means that the tenure system is on shaky ground. But a closer examination of teachers' attitudes belies the notion that support for tenure is shallow or that the system is somehow ready to crumble.

### Bad Apples—with Staying Power

Chances are that most teachers know someone who should not be teaching—indeed, chances are that they're working with them right now. Only 19% say there are no teachers in their building who “fail to do a good job and are simply

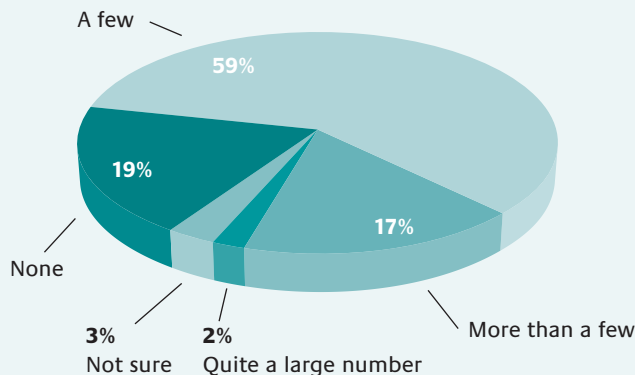
going through the motions.” Nearly 6 in 10 (59%) say there are a few such teachers; 19% say their building has more than that. High school teachers are substantially more likely than elementary teachers to say their school has “more than a few” or “quite a large number” of inadequate teachers (29% vs. 14%).

Still, one could argue that every profession has its share of bad apples, and teachers seem convinced that the number of colleagues in this category is limited. Perhaps more troubling is the prevailing sense that truly bad teachers are difficult to fire—some say next to impossible—if they have tenure. Most teachers believe that their own district often fails to remove teachers who do not measure up. A little over a third (36%) say that “between tenure and the documentation requirements, it's too hard for administrators to remove any but the very worst teachers.” Nearly a third (32%) say there's a fair process in place for doing so but that administrators fail “to exercise their responsibility properly.” Relatively few (14%) are convinced that there's “rarely a problem weeding out bad teachers.”

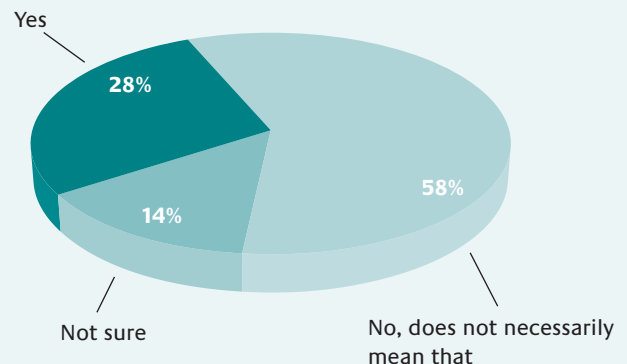
### A Few Bad Eggs

% of teachers who say:

About how many teachers in your building fail to do a good job and are simply going through the motions?



In your district, does tenure mean that a teacher has worked hard and proved themselves to be very good at what they do?

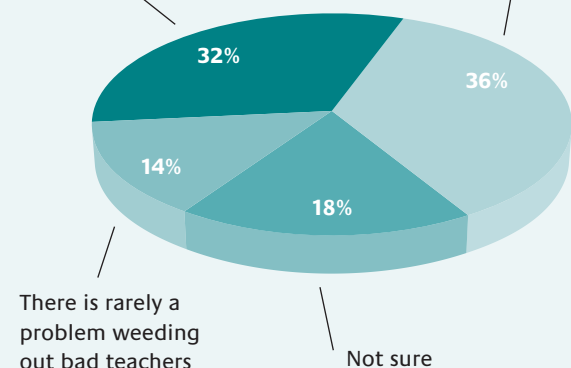


## Just How Hard Is It to Get Rid of Bad Teachers?

Which comes closest to describing your district?

There's a fair process for removing bad teachers, but administrators fail to exercise their responsibility properly

Between tenure and the documentation requirements, it's too hard for administrators to remove any but the very worst teachers



What's more, teachers say they pay a price for the prolonged existence of the truly ineffective. In the words of a New Jersey teacher, "It gives the profession a bad name. It creates arguments and in the end it hurts our children." One teacher in St. Louis was cheering for management: "I've watched our principal now for the last three years take an awful lot of heat. We have gotten rid of two totally incompetent, very divisive teachers and are dealing now with another. He's really stuck between the proverbial rock and a hard place. I'm sympathetic, because I'm one of the many that's affected by the poor job that's being done there."

### "Teachers Who Shouldn't Even Be Pumping Gas"

As the above finding suggests, one recurring theme in the focus groups was whether the difficulty of removing tenured teachers was a result of incompetent, uncaring administrators or a process that is unduly onerous. One teacher put the blame squarely on the shoulders of administrators: "The only thing tenure guarantees you is due process...The only problem with getting rid of teachers who are ineffective is if you have lazy administrators. A good administrator can weed [out] poor teachers in their building...It's only if they don't want to do the work...."

But some of the most striking comments about removing tenured teachers were made by union representatives who spoke bluntly about some of the teachers they've had to defend. "I've gone in and defended teachers who shouldn't even be pumping gas," said one New Jersey union rep. Another in Los Angeles said point-blank: "If I'm representing

them, it's impossible to get them out. It's impossible. Unless they commit a lewd act. Not that I want them on the job as a private citizen, but as an advocate...I will give it my absolute best defense, and I will save the job." Like a criminal defense attorney, the union rep defends a seemingly indefensible client because he or she believes in the process.

### How Did They Get There in the First Place?

How is it that poor teachers slip through the cracks and gain positions and tenure despite obvious signals they shouldn't? It would appear that while some administrators know how to protect the quality of their building's teaching force by moving the problems out, that teacher does not necessarily leave the district much less the profession. A Los Angeles teacher recounted this example: "A couple of years ago, I had a terrible partner, but I had a very good principal who wrote everything down so they were able to ship her off to a different school. But that was terrible, because she went in and ruined the life of another school. It was also terrible because this particular school had a very weak principal, who let this woman walk all over her. She managed to get tenure." Another teacher in Los Angeles had a simpler explanation—lack of quality workers: "They don't have enough competent teachers who want to be there. They have to put up with mediocrity."

### A Pernicious Perk?

Time on the job not only makes tenure possible, it also gives teachers more say over where and who they teach. According to teachers, the result is that those with experience often end up working with kids who are easier to reach, while the newcomers are sometimes thrown into working with the most challenging students. Only 20% of teachers say this is reasonable because veteran teachers have earned this benefit by putting in their time; 61% say "this is wrong because it leaves inexperienced teachers with the hardest-to-reach students."

**"[Allowing ineffective teachers to remain in schools] gives the profession a bad name. It creates arguments and in the end it hurts our children."**

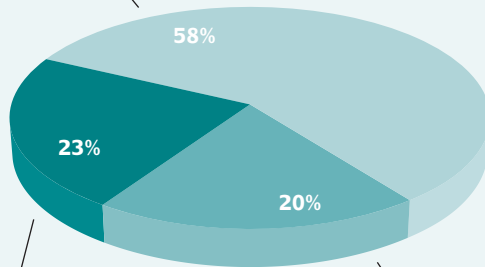
**— New Jersey teacher**

A veteran St. Louis teacher was outraged at how newcomers were treated: less support, tougher kids, carts instead of their own classrooms. "We give them multiple preps, we give them the lowest level classes. I'm teaching the advanced classes, they're teaching Level One, the flunky classes. We

## Favoritism and Cost-Cutting

Which comes closer to your view about tenure?

Tenure protects teachers from district politics, favoritism and the threat of losing their jobs to newcomers who could work for less



Good teachers don't have to worry about tenure, and it's hard to justify it when virtually no one else has their job guaranteed these days

don't give them a room, and we give them all these graduate courses they're supposed to be taking. I'm not amazed that 40% of teachers leave education, I'm amazed that 60% stay. I'm amazed."

## He Can Fire Me and Hire Two Replacements

But despite their horror stories, teachers still react protectively to the tenure system because it addresses their sense of vulnerability. Just as with their loyalty to their union, the overhanging fear of personal grudges, district politics or cost-cutting tells teachers they need guarantees.

Well over half (58%) say "tenure protects teachers from district politics, favoritism and the threat of losing their jobs to newcomers who could work for less." Only 23% think that "good teachers don't have to worry about tenure." Older teachers—who are perhaps most vulnerable to such threats—are more likely than their younger counterparts to see tenure as a protection (62% of teachers 50 or older vs. 42% in their twenties). One teacher said, "It all comes down to money. You're my principal and you're over budget this year. I earn \$52,000 next year. You could fire me and hire two people to replace me. What are you going to do? You've got to make your books balance."

"I don't trust my principal," another frankly said. "The problem is you can't expect one man or one woman to know what a good shop teacher is or a good math teacher. I do not trust the capricious one person." A teacher in St. Louis said, "You

have the teacher who is dedicated, working hard, and you find an administrator who decides they don't like that person, and it becomes a matter of personality."

## The Price Is Right

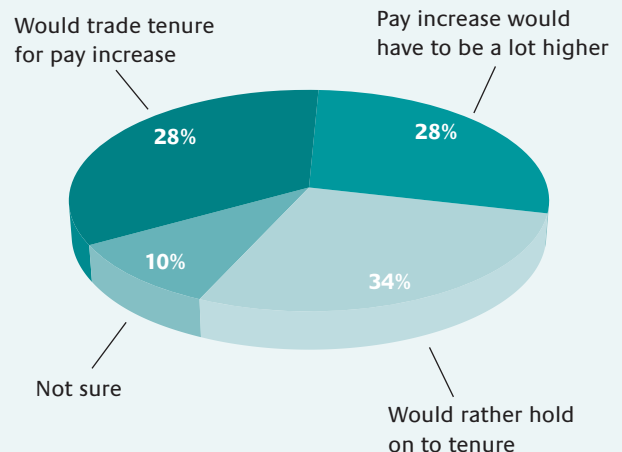
One proposal to address some complaints about tenure might be to give the system more time to identify those teachers who do not deserve tenure. But this is not a widely popular measure among teachers, 53% of whom say the number of years to gain tenure should stay the same, not be increased (14%) or decreased (4%). It is interesting, however, that an unusually high number of teachers (29%) took the "don't know" response choice, perhaps a signal of some ambivalence in this area.

Some might argue that it's unrealistic to expect teachers to give up tenure for nothing, especially when they believe so strongly that it is justified by legitimate concerns. How would teachers react if they were offered another benefit—say, a pay increase—to offset the loss of tenure? To gauge this scenario, the survey asked teachers: "If you had the choice, would you personally be willing to trade tenure for a pay increase (e.g., \$5,000 per year), or would the pay increase have to be a lot higher, or would you rather hold on to tenure?" Not surprisingly, those with tenure are much more likely to say they would rather hold on to it (34% vs. 16%). But sizeable numbers of teachers who have tenure would trade it for a \$5,000 pay increase (28%), and another 28% would consider it if the pay raise was a lot higher.

## Trading Tenure for More Pay

If you had the choice, would you personally be willing to trade tenure for a pay increase (e.g., \$5,000 per year), or would the pay increase have to be a lot higher, or would you rather hold on to tenure?

% of tenured teachers who say:



One veteran teacher in Los Angeles first rejected trading tenure for even a \$10,000 pay increase because, “I couldn’t sleep with myself. I’d be giving up my principles.” But he then jokingly went along with the auction: “Make it a little more and you can buy me.”

To hear K-12 teachers tell it, attaining tenure in the public schools does not appear to be particularly difficult in terms of effort, time on the job or performance.

In southern states, larger numbers of teachers would be willing to trade tenure for a \$5,000 raise (41% of teachers in the South compared with 21% in the Northeast, 28% in the Midwest and 29% in the West).

### Is This Teacher Excellent?

To those familiar with how tenure works in higher education, the comparison with tenure in the K-12 system could not be

starker. If nothing else, the “publish or perish” ethic, the intense competition and the sheer scarcity of tenure track positions guarantee that candidates in the college system will work hard, struggle—and often fail. By contrast, to hear K-12 teachers tell it, attaining tenure in the public schools does not appear to be particularly difficult in terms of effort, time on the job or performance. The vast majority (73%) of teachers work in districts that make tenure available relatively quickly—after either three or four years. And most teachers (58%) say that when a teacher gains tenure in their district, this is no guarantee that he or she has worked hard and proved him or herself.

In a recent Public Agenda focus group with superintendents, many vowed that this was no longer tenable in the era of standards and accountability. One said, “I ask my principals now: ‘Is this teacher excellent? Is this teacher worth the investment of over a million dollars?’ Good enough is no longer good enough.”



## FINDING FIVE:

# Paying More for Better Performance

Teachers are receptive to giving extra pay to those who work harder or who work in the most challenging schools. But they balk at paying more to teachers based on test scores or the subject they teach.

Some who believe that the teaching profession needs to be energized are reaching for a classic free market mechanism: to introduce pay incentives and tie them to teacher performance. They think that if public education starts to systematically recognize and monetarily reward the better teachers—i.e., those who routinely get their students to learn more—teachers will work harder, and the system will have an easier time attracting motivated and ambitious candidates.

### The Truly Great Teachers

% of teachers who say:

In [my] building, it is easy to spot who the truly great teachers are	78%
Most teachers in [my] building could pretty much agree on who the truly great teachers are	72%

### Spotting the Winners

Paying people according to their performance assumes at least two things: that some will simply be better at their jobs and that it will be easy to identify them. There is little doubt among teachers that these things are true for their profession—78% say it’s easy to spot who the truly great teachers are; only 16% say it’s too hard to tell. Nor do teachers think that there would be many arguments about the identity of the star performers: 72% say most teachers in their building could pretty much agree on who they are.

### Let Them Shine

The desire to reward stellar teachers is certainly there among school administrators: Only 24% of superintendents and 32% of principals say they have enough autonomy to reward outstanding teachers and staff.<sup>32</sup> And teachers seem to agree, with a majority saying administrators need either a lot more (39%) or a little more (17%) freedom and autonomy to reward exceptional teachers.

One Los Angeles teacher pointed to the upside of rewarding teachers, saying, “If you have a teacher that is dynamite in a given field, that teacher should be encouraged. That teacher should receive all the support necessary to shine in that area and to make the whole school shine.” A New Jersey teacher talked about the demoralizing effect of getting the same regardless of effort. “We think about the teacher who does the same thing over and over getting no results. We think, ‘They’re getting the same pay as me or more and that just can’t be right.’ There’s got to be something else.”

There is, therefore, a class of pay-for-performance proposals that gains substantial support from teachers. The common thread is that they reward extra effort and sacrifice. For example, 2 in 3 (67%) teachers favor paying more to those “who consistently work harder, putting in more time and effort.”

### “There Would Be No Resentment”

Most teachers also think that colleagues who put themselves on the line and agree to teach in tough conditions deserve “combat pay.” More than 6

in 10 (63%) favor giving financial incentives to “teachers who teach difficult classes with hard-to-reach students.”

One teacher was explicit: “A person like me, I don’t want it. Let her have that extra \$10,000. I’ll take the easy

class. But you’d have plenty of people like her that want the extra money and are willing to take a hard class.” Seven in 10 (70%) also favor giving financial incentives to “teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low performing schools.” Teachers who teach a predominantly African American and Hispanic student body are more likely than teachers who do not to support merit pay for those who teach the more challenging students (72% vs. 58%) and for those in low performing schools (79% vs. 65%).

There is a class of pay-for-performance proposals that gains substantial support from teachers.

## Rewards

% of teachers who “strongly” or “somewhat” favor giving financial incentives to:

Teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low performing schools  
**70%**

Teachers who consistently work harder, putting in more time and effort than other teachers  
**67%**

Teachers who teach difficult classes with hard-to-reach students  
**63%**

Teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals  
**62%**

Teachers who receive accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards  
**57%**

Teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics  
**42%**

Teachers whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests  
**38%**

Teachers know that some schools, classes and students are a challenge and require greater sacrifice. Most teachers are willing to acknowledge—in the form of more money—those teachers who volunteer to take on the tougher jobs. “There would be no resentment,” said one.

## Recognition

The comfort level with rewarding effort perhaps explains why 57% of teachers favor financial incentives for those “who receive accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.” The National Board requires a substantial degree of extra work—including testing of teachers’ content knowledge—in return for an additional level of certification.<sup>33</sup>

It’s also interesting to note that despite their fears that politicized administrators would tend to give extra money to kowtowing teachers, 62% favor giving financial rewards to “teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals.”

## How Can You Pull It Off?

But although they are open to certain versions of merit pay, teachers believe that tying incentives to their students’ academic achievement is fraught with danger. How do you measure a teacher’s contributions to student achievement as opposed to a student’s effort? Who would do the measuring? Is achievement measurable at all through standardized testing? These questions immediately provoked heated discussion in teacher focus groups. “I think the idea sounds wonderful. I just don’t know how you can pull it off,” said a St. Louis teacher. In the survey, resistance is triggered even by a broad question about whether districts should be able to use criteria other than years in district or graduate credits to financially reward teachers: 41% support the notion, but 50% say this would “open up a can of worms.”

In this study—and other Public Agenda studies—teachers point out that their students’ successes and failures are often driven by forces beyond their control. Their litany is a familiar one: student effort, parental support, poverty and social problems, the effectiveness of last year’s teachers. Much of their effectiveness, they believe, will also be determined by year-to-year variation in the quality of their students.

“The big thing for me is if the student doesn’t take it seriously, there is nothing you can do,” said one teacher. “I cannot control a child who just writes junk because he knows it doesn’t count for anything, and the child just blows it off. My scores sink to the bottom.” No wonder 59% say it is “not fair to hold teachers accountable when so many things that affect student learning are beyond their control.” Only 29% say “teachers can and do make a difference in what kids learn and they should be financially rewarded when they succeed.”

## Resistance to Using Test Scores

The proposal that provokes the most visceral resistance among teachers is that incentives would be decided based on standardized test scores. The merit pay proposal garnering the least support is the one that would reward teachers “whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests”—only 38% favor it. For many teachers, the very thought of using tests this way is enough to put the proposal in the untouchable category.

For one thing, teachers harbor serious doubts about the usefulness of standardized tests. As discussed in Finding One, fully 53% believe that in their district standardized tests are a seriously flawed measure of true student achievement, with another 24% saying they’re important but come with serious

problems. Only 18% say the tests are important and used well in their district.

More nuanced proposals evaluating teachers based on tests provoke slightly less resistance. For example, some advocate a value-added approach, i.e., assessing students' knowledge when they first come to a teacher, measuring it again when students leave and attributing whatever progress was made to the teacher. Here, teachers overall are split: 48% favor it and 46% oppose it. But a majority (56%) of those in schools with mostly minority students see the value-added approach as an idea with promise, compared with just 39% in schools with few minority students. Teachers are also split 47% to 45% over a merit pay proposal that would skirt the issue of high-stakes testing by looking at a combination of improved reading levels, teacher evaluations and classroom tests. Again, teachers in schools with mostly minority students are more likely to favor this approach (58% vs. 44%).

### Working the System

Despite their openness to a number of forms of merit pay, there was little outright enthusiasm, and a fair amount of worry. By a 52% to 23% margin, teachers say if some form of merit pay were implemented at their school, “principals would play favorites and reward teachers who are loyal to them or who don’t rock the boat,” not create “a way to reward the teachers who really help kids learn” (25% are not sure). “It would be a popularity contest,” said a Los Angeles teacher. “If the principal really likes you, gives you this wonderful class, and you’re shining away. He awards you the money instead of the poor fool next-door who just walked in and has all the bad kids.”

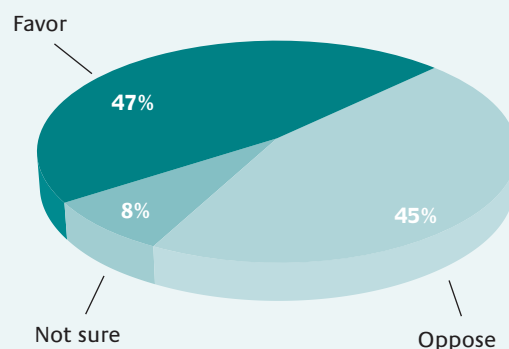
It’s the kids, not the teacher, explained another teacher whose performance magically improved once he figured out how to work the system to get the better classes. “I was just starting out,” he recalled. “So, my first year there, when I got all the bad kids, all the bad classes, I was a bad teacher. By about my third and fourth year there, when I got to know the system, I got to know the kids—all of a sudden, I was this great teacher. I hadn’t improved in three years, I just had better classes.”

### Unintended Consequences

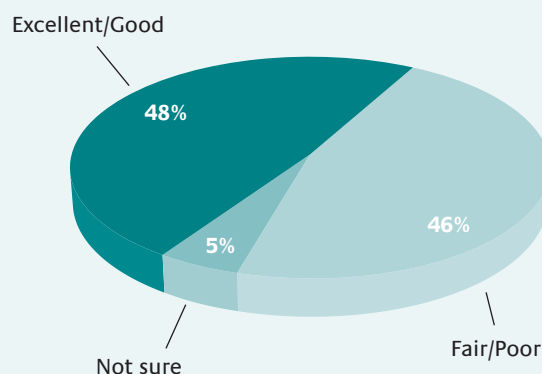
In the focus groups, few, if any, of the teachers appeared to relish the prospect of outshining or out-earning the teacher next-door. Indeed, school culture appears to prize cooperation and egalitarianism rather than competition and the excitement of the race. In focus groups, teachers

### Rating Progress

How much would you favor or oppose financially rewarding those teachers in your district whose students make more academic progress—in terms of improved reading levels, teacher evaluations and classroom tests—when compared to similar students taught by other teachers?



The best way to measure teacher effectiveness is to assess students' skills and knowledge when they first come to a teacher and to measure them again when students leave to see what progress was made. How would you rate this as a way of measuring teacher effectiveness?



spontaneously talked about the destructive impact merit pay might have on the collegial culture and cooperative spirit in their building—something that worried them. By a 63% to 22% margin, teachers believe that merit pay would foster “unhealthy competition and jealousy” among colleagues, rather than motivating them to work harder and find ways to be more effective. “I think you might have less sharing. In my building, the fourth grade team that I work with, we lesson plan together. You might be a little more competitive. Then you’re like, ‘I’m not giving her this idea because I want this to make me look better.’”

This same belief in egalitarianism seems to spark opposition to the idea of paying more to teachers who specialize in



hard-to-fill subjects such as science or math—only 42% favor this measure. Teachers are not managing the system, so they are not thinking in terms of making supply meet demand through differential pricing. “If you don’t have any foreign language teachers I don’t think the solution is to pay them more,” said a St. Louis teacher. “I think the solution is to make it easier for foreign language teachers to teach. If you have a degree in Spanish they should make that easier. Not that somebody with a degree in Spanish can teach in a classroom, but at least a provisional certificate...Changing the education system, the requirements, I think that’s the solution, not paying them more.” Teachers seem to be thinking: Why should anybody make more money teaching the same kids, in the same building, just because they’re teaching a different subject?

### Southern Hospitality?

In earlier findings, we pointed out that teachers in the South are less wedded to some of the traditional ways that public schools operate—specifically, teachers’ unions and tenure. Thus it seems safe to assume that pay-for-performance reforms might receive a warmer reception in the southern states. On virtually every proposal for rewarding teachers differentially, southern teachers are more open compared with teachers in other regions throughout the country. Even when it comes to using students’ standardized test scores to determine teachers’ pay—the proposal that was least popular among teachers overall—half (50%) of southern teachers

favor it, compared with 36% in the Midwest, 34% in the West and just 26% in the Northeast.

### But I’m Not Here for the Money

Although rewarding extra effort and sacrifice resonates with teachers, the bottom line is that other merit pay proposals are greeted with a distinctive lack of enthusiasm—and even hostility. Some may see this as surprising because teachers often complain about low pay and lack of respect for the hard work they do. Does this reflect a sense of total inefficacy, a refusal to be evaluated or just plain whining?

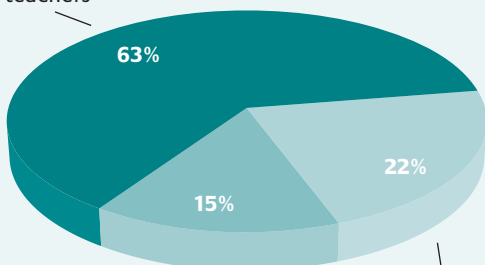
Teachers know that some of their colleagues are great and some are bad. They also believe that teachers can and do make a difference—with most kids. It’s the exceptions that loom large in their minds, and they see the exceptions every year: the child with the learning disability, the child with the behavior problem, the child with the careless parent. This is why the phrase “no child left behind” invariably triggered a degree of sarcasm among teachers when it came up in the focus groups—they see that, despite their efforts, there is virtually always someone who falls behind.

Arguably, there’s a way to create a system of accountability and pay for performance that can avoid all of the complications, reservations and fears that teachers think about. But in direct contradiction of merit pay proponents, teachers don’t think such measures will ultimately alter the quality or performance

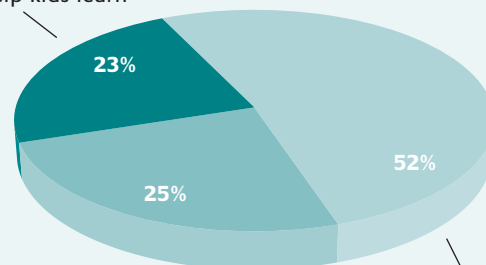
### Fostering Competition?

Which do you think would be more likely to happen if some form of merit pay was implemented at your school?

There would be unhealthy competition and jealousy among teachers



It would give principals a way to reward the teachers who really help kids learn



Teachers would be motivated to work harder and find ways to be more effective

Not sure

Principals would play favorites and reward teachers who are loyal to them or who don’t rock the boat

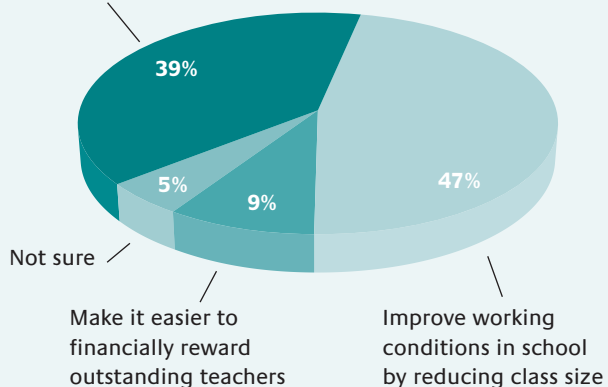
of their workforce. Only 27% think that merit pay would “make the teaching profession more appealing to the best and the brightest”—53% don’t.

Asked which of three reforms holds the best promise for improving the quality of teaching, only 9% point to districts financially rewarding outstanding teachers; 47% say it would be reducing class size, and another 39% say it would be to increase the pay of all teachers. Many teachers seem to be thinking what this St. Louis teacher said: “I don’t like it at all. If you’re getting into teaching for big money, it’s not there. A couple hundred dollars based on individual kids in your class? It’s not what it’s all about, really.”

### Working Conditions vs. Higher Pay

According to teachers, the better way to improve the quality of teaching is to:

Expand the pool of qualified applicants by increasing pay for all teachers





## FINDING SIX: Grooming New Teachers

**Teachers believe new teachers need help**—particularly in the areas of discipline and classroom management—and they are surprisingly open to the idea of alternative certification. The findings are encouraging about mentoring but mixed about professional development.

Long before No Child Left Behind, teacher quality was a topic of conversation among educators, law makers and others with a stake in the public schools. But NCLB has brought the issue into even sharper focus. In its emphasis on having a “highly qualified” teacher in every core-subject classroom by the end of the 2005–2006 school year, the law forces districts across the country to pay attention not only to the qualifications of prospective hires, but also to the qualifications of the current teaching force.

*Stand by Me* probes the views of teachers on training, certifying and mentoring their own. According to teachers, there are some glaring holes in the system for cultivating quality teachers—for example, schools of education that prepare teachers for idealized theoretical classrooms rather than arming them with skills to deal with genuine kids who have real problems. On the positive side, teachers seem optimistic about the support and mentoring that their own school offers new teachers. But they are split on whether they consider their professional development experiences useful.

### Newbies Need Help

Teachers report that many newer colleagues are significantly behind the curve when it comes to classroom management and discipline. More than 4 in 10 say “quite a large number” of the new teachers they come across need a lot more training in effective ways to help struggling students (42%) and to handle discipline problems (45%). In contrast, only 1 in 10 teachers overall say that quite a large number of the new teachers they see need a lot more knowledge in their subject area (10%) or exposure to pedagogy and theory (9%).

In focus groups, teachers mainly lay the blame for these deficiencies at the door of teacher education schools. “I have a student teacher right now and she’s in a state of shock because not one education course that she has taken applies to the classroom,” said an experienced teacher in St. Louis.

### Where New Teachers Need Help

% of teachers who say “quite a large number” of the new teachers they see need:

A lot more training on effective ways to handle students who are discipline problems

45%

A lot more training on effective ways to reach struggling students

42%

A lot more content knowledge of the subjects they teach

10%

A lot more exposure to pedagogy and theories of education

9%

Another teacher, this one with only a few years under his belt, commented, “Classroom management, discipline—that was never an issue in college. They never discussed it.”

### Just Make Your Classes More Interesting

The absence of classroom management skills is hardly accidental, according to a survey of professors of education conducted by Public Agenda in 1997. Most freely acknowledged that, to them, topics like enforcing student discipline are low priorities. Sixty-one percent agreed with the statement, “When teachers face a disruptive class, it probably means they have failed to make lessons engaging enough,” and only 30% reported that they place a lot of emphasis on teaching prospective teachers how to manage a rowdy classroom.<sup>34</sup> The results of this were evident in the teacher focus groups. “In my district it’s an unspoken thought, but every young teacher thinks that if they are having a discipline problem their lesson is not exciting,” explained a master teacher.

“You’re going to have discipline problems; I don’t care what you’re doing. The young one on my team who is dynamite will say, ‘What did I do wrong?’ [But] the lesson was absolutely perfect. That’s the tone.”

“...To me it’s insulting to hear people in the business world say, ‘I can always teach’... They may understand how to work a computer...but do you understand how to get under a kid?”  
—Texas teacher

### Hooking Up with Mentors

In many cases, teachers themselves appear to be addressing the gaps, either through organized mentoring programs or through more informal, one-to-one arrangements. Many of the newer teachers in the focus groups spoke about the good fortune they had to hook up with a mentor teacher to help them navigate the treacherous early years. A second-year teacher in Texas spoke appreciatively

about her mentor: “I student taught for a year and did research in the same classroom...Not with just any teacher who wanted a student teacher to help get stuff done, but a teacher who wanted to help me learn and become a good teacher.”

Forty-three percent of those surveyed say that new teachers at their school get a lot of mentoring and support from experienced teachers, and another 44% say they get some. Only 12% suggest there is none at all. Elementary teachers are far more likely than high school teachers to say new teachers get a lot of mentoring (48% vs. 34%). Public Agenda’s earlier survey of new teachers corroborates this finding—almost 8 in 10 said that teaching provides the kind of supervision and support they need.<sup>35</sup>

### “Victims of the Cookie Cutter”

By contrast, professional development tends to get less enthusiastic marks. Teachers are equally split on whether their recent experiences with professional development actually made them better teachers or made little difference (50% vs. 50%). And while a slim majority (55%) says it was immediately useful in the classroom, 38% say it was not. In Texas, a teacher told us: “For me, if I’m excited or interested in it then it will benefit me and my children. But giving a smorgasbord of things I’m not even interested in, I look at that and go ‘ugh.’” Elementary school teachers are far more likely than their high school counterparts to say their recent professional

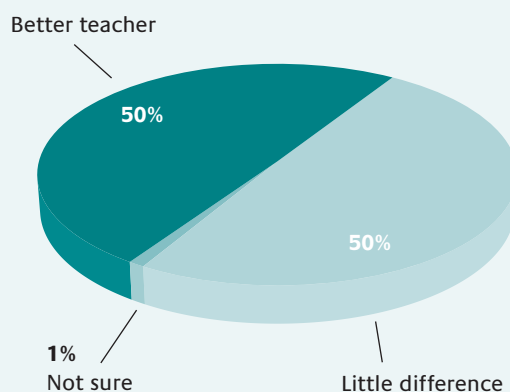
development helped make them better teachers (57% vs. 34%) and was immediately useful (64% vs. 41%).

It seemed clear in the focus groups that, for many teachers, the best kind of professional development is the kind you pick for yourself. “The best staff development I’ve ever had is the one I chose...[when] I get to choose what I think my weaknesses are, what to learn about,” said a St. Louis teacher. Many complained about a one-size-fits-all approach. “We’ve been victims of the cookie cutter for several years now,” explained a veteran. “...Virtually every Monday we have meetings from 2:30 until 4:00, and most of it is the same old material over and over.”

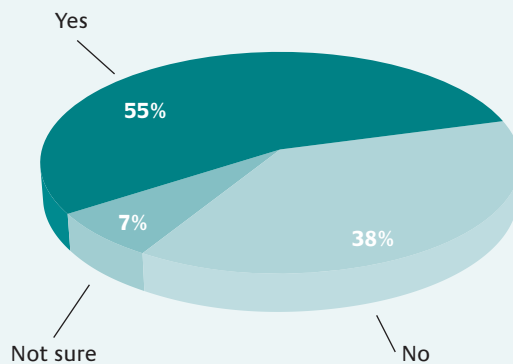
The plurality of teachers (42%) would choose “new teaching techniques” as the one topic for additional professional development they would want for themselves—by far the most popular topic compared to classroom management, a focus on specific subjects or information on state and district policies.

### Mixed Reviews for Professional Development

Thinking about the professional development that you’ve had in the recent past, did it actually make you a better teacher, or did it make little difference?



And was it immediately useful to you in the classroom, or not?



## Alternative Certification: Boon or Bane?

Complying with NCLB's "highly qualified" teacher requirement will be a major challenge, regardless of what kinds of mentoring or professional development options become available. Perhaps for this reason the law explicitly seeks to broaden the search for qualified teachers, allowing for a variety of routes to entering the profession. Simply put, the law gives interested people entry into the profession even if they have not completed a university-affiliated teacher training program or accrued a set number of teacher education credits. As long as they can demonstrate competency in their subject matter, they can apply to become teachers.

Proponents see the alternative approach to certification as a win-win: Not only does it remove unnecessary barriers to a profession constantly threatened with shortage, but it also provides a surefire way to get talented people into the field. For critics, however, circumventing traditional teacher certification vastly underestimates the serious learning most teachers gain from it and devalues an already underappreciated profession.

### A Low Priority

As might be expected, professional resistance to alternative certification is substantial. But survey findings do suggest that sizeable numbers of teachers are at least somewhat open to the idea. In *Stand by Me*, 50% of teachers say it makes sense to provide many routes into the profession, compared to 32% who say "there should be only one recognized way to become a teacher." Evidently, the many-routes approach is more appealing to high school teachers, 62% of whom see it as a good idea compared to 45% of elementary teachers.

Other research suggests that this openness is hardly a blank check for reformers, nor a signal that alternative certification is a top priority among teachers. Research from *Reality Check 2000* shows that, while teachers may be open to different ways to enter the profession, they are hardly renouncing the need for formal study. Just 35% of teachers said it's a good idea to open the profession to qualified people who have a desire to teach but who have not had formal training; 63% said it's a bad idea. In *A Sense of Calling*, new teachers placed alternative certification at the bottom of a list of suggestions for improving teacher quality, far below such things as reducing class size, increasing professional development and upping salaries.<sup>36</sup>

### "As Long As..."

"I would welcome the infusion of new blood and people that are excited about their field of knowledge," a St. Louis

## For New Teachers, Other Measures Help More

% of new teachers who say this is a "very effective" way to improve teacher quality: \*

Reduce class size

86%

Require high school teachers to major in their subject

59%

Increase professional development

57%

Increase teacher salaries

52%

Require new teachers to spend more time under supervision in the classroom

51%

Require graduate degree in education

20%

Require teachers to pass subject-area tests

16%

Eliminate teacher tenure

12%

Tie teacher rewards or sanctions to student performance

12%

Rely on alternative certification

8%

Reduce requirements for teacher certification

7%

\* *A Sense of Calling 2000*

teacher said, "as long as there was that recognition that they are entering a new field and that new field has skills and talents and expectations, too." On the other hand, a veteran teacher in Texas held a wholly different view: "I can tell you for a fact, walking into that classroom, I don't care how much college you have...walking in there and looking at those smiling faces...To me it's insulting to hear people in the business world say, 'I can always teach.'...They may understand how to work a computer...but do you understand how to get under a kid?"

## She's the New Teacher of the Year

Nevertheless, some may wonder why teachers would be at all open to alternative certification, since they find attacks on

traditional teacher education so insulting. First, most teachers don't put all that much stock in the traditional certification process in their own state. Almost half (46%) acknowledge that being fully certified guarantees only a minimum of skills, and another 15% say it ensures even less than that. Only a relatively small 30% say being fully certified guarantees that the typical teacher really has what it takes to do the job.

### Is Traditional Certification Worth Saving?

% of teachers who say:

Being fully certified guarantees a typical teacher has what it takes to be a good teacher	30%
The overall quality of teachers who have alternative certification is excellent or good*	65%

\*Base: Those who know teachers who have alternative certification (n=534)

More convincing is that many teachers have concrete evidence that alternative routes can produce successful teachers. More than 4 in 10 (41%) know of colleagues who pursued an unconventional path into the profession, and a large majority (65%) says the quality of these teachers is excellent or good. A master teacher in Texas told us: "I have a [woman] that worked in my room last year [who] was going through alternative certification...She's now been nominated 'New Teacher of the Year' at her elementary. I knew by watching her interaction with the children that she was meant to teach."

The data suggest that alternative routes into teaching may be more common among high school teachers and among teachers in the South. For example, about half (49%) of high school teachers say they know alternatively certified teachers compared to just over 1 in 3 (35%) elementary teachers. Similarly, more than half (57%) of teachers in the South know such colleagues compared to 37% in the Northeast, 36% in the West and 24% in the Midwest.

### Feeling Skittish

But despite their open-minded stance, many teachers are wary of departing from the traditional route, fearing that kids and schools will lose if professional teaching standards

are revamped. They point to studies suggesting that students learn more from certified teachers.<sup>37</sup> Many warn that certification shortcuts will invariably lead to teachers with fewer qualifications being sent to the poorest or most troubled schools. Indeed, the findings here show that teachers in predominantly minority schools are significantly more likely to know alternatively certified teachers (57%, compared with 28% of teachers in schools with relatively few minority students).

### Keeping Control

The survey posed three policies that districts could implement to ensure quality in an alternative certification process. Almost 3 out of 4 teachers (74%) would consider it absolutely essential to have a temporary hiring policy in place until prospective teachers could demonstrate their effectiveness in the classroom. Almost 6 in 10 (59%) would consider it absolutely essential to require them to go through a training that mirrors the traditional route—and the younger a teacher is, the more likely he or she is to feel this way. A relatively small 39% of teachers think it would be absolutely essential to insist that alternatively certified teachers pass a tough test in their subject matter.

Perhaps surprisingly, school principals and superintendents appear to be less accepting than teachers of the idea of bringing people from other arenas into education—at least when it comes to filling their own positions. In a recent Public Agenda survey, only 3% of superintendents and 1% of principals thought that "recruiting many more administrators from non-education sectors such as business or the military" would be a very effective solution to the school leadership problem. Large majorities considered it a bad idea (59% and 70%, respectively), and virtually all (91% of both groups) said districts are better off hiring experienced educators rather than leaders from other industries.<sup>38</sup>

Yet when it comes to broadening the talent pool for teachers, large numbers of administrators say that career changers, Teach for America and Troops to Schools are indeed top quality sources.<sup>39</sup>



## FINDING SEVEN:

# Are Newer Teachers Different?

**There are substantial differences between the views of veteran teachers and new ones.** New teachers are more likely to support proposals for merit pay; unions are much less significant to them.

Some reformers hope that a new generation of teachers will come to the profession freed from attachment to the old ways of doing things. They'll be flexible and open to new ideas—alternative certification, accountability, merit pay—and will be less apt to look for job protections and work rules. Indeed, one recent study has found that, unlike teachers of yesteryear, newer teachers tend to enter the profession with a “let’s see how this goes” mind-set.<sup>40</sup>

In this finding we take a closer look at the differences between more and less experienced teachers\* on two of the more controversial topics in education today—merit pay and teachers’ unions.

For the most part, newer teachers seem open to change, while veterans—perhaps with good reason—appear to be more attached to protections provided by the status quo. One important question, however, cannot be resolved through this research: Are the views of today’s new teachers fundamentally different from those of previous generations, or will today’s new teachers assume the outlook of the veterans as time and experience take their toll?

### Pay for Performance

As things stand now, newcomers are notably more optimistic about merit pay. They may be more entrepreneurial in their view about work, or perhaps they are just on the lookout for ways to raise their own pay without waiting for the years to add up. Whatever the basis, a majority of new teachers (55%) think districts should be able to use other criteria—besides years of experience and education—to financially reward good teachers (compared with 33% of veterans). They also are more likely to think merit pay could be effectively used as a carrot for recruiting “the best and the brightest” into the

\*“Newcomers” are defined as having less than 5 years of teaching experience; “veteran” teachers are defined as having more than 20 years. Age and years of experience tend to overlap. For example, 81% of newcomers are in their twenties or thirties, and 79% of veterans are 50 years old or older.

### Fewer Worries about Merit Pay

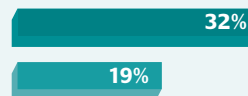
Which would be more likely to happen if merit pay were implemented at your school:

Principals would play favorites and reward teachers who are loyal to them or who don’t rock the boat



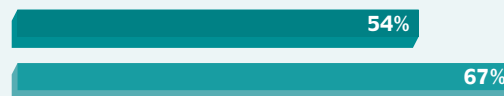
OR

It would give principals a way to reward the teachers who really help kids learn



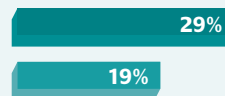
■ NEW TEACHERS ■ VETERAN TEACHERS

Instead of cooperation, there would be unhealthy competition and jealousy among teachers



OR

Teachers would be motivated to work harder and find ways to be more effective



■ NEW TEACHERS ■ VETERAN TEACHERS

profession (39% vs. 23%). Asked what they think would be more likely to happen if merit pay were actually implemented at their own school, beginners seem less concerned than veterans about potential downsides, such as the possibility of a decline in teacher camaraderie (54% vs. 67%) or principals playing favorites (41% vs. 55%).

## Rewards

% of teachers who “strongly” or “somewhat” favor giving financial incentives to:

Teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low performing schools



Teachers who consistently work harder, putting in more time and effort than other teachers



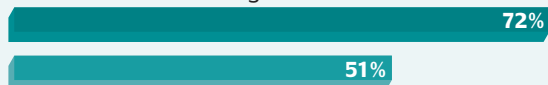
Teachers who teach difficult classes with hard-to-reach students



Teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals



Teachers who receive accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards



Teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics



Teachers whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests



■ NEW TEACHERS ■ VETERAN TEACHERS

## “Don’t I Deserve Something More?”

Majorities of newer teachers also favor financially rewarding teachers for extra effort, superior ability or working in schools in tough neighborhoods or with hard-to-reach students. One young teacher was specific: “You look around your building and all the work you do and you think, ‘I’ve really put a lot of effort into this unit, the kids are learning and look at what we produced.’ Then you look down the hall and it’s like, okay, page 33 through 35. So you’re thinking,

‘Don’t I deserve something more because I really put more effort into it?’”

Strikingly, newcomers are more likely than more experienced teachers to favor all proposals that employ incentives—except when it comes to using standardized tests. There, majorities of both newcomers (57%) and veterans (56%) oppose financially rewarding teachers “whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests.”

## The Unions

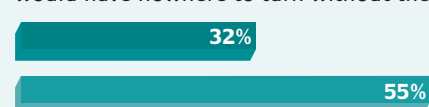
While more than 8 in 10 teachers in both groups are union members, veteran teachers are far more likely to be attached to their union. By large margins, veteran teachers are more likely to consider the union to be absolutely essential (57% vs. 30%) and to be actively engaged in union activities (46% vs. 20%). Again, the reasons why are not transparent. Perhaps newer teachers have a different political experience and outlook than veterans, or perhaps they are less alert to problems they could eventually face on the job—problems that might make union protection attractive.

On the other hand, the attitudes among newer teachers may stem from the stands that teachers’ unions take. According to teachers in this survey, union policies seemed to speak the language of veterans. Teachers with more than 20 years under their belt are more prone to say their union “almost always”

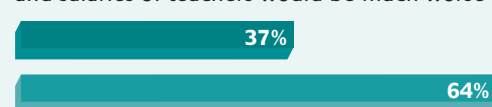
## Union Differences

% of teachers who strongly agree that:

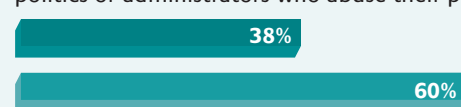
Teachers facing unfair charges from parents or students would have nowhere to turn without the union



Without collective bargaining, the working conditions and salaries of teachers would be much worse



Without a union, teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power



■ NEW TEACHERS ■ VETERAN TEACHERS



represents their own values and preferences (47% vs. 23% at the district level and 24% vs. 14% at the national level). “I just don’t see, other than their own political drive, what they’re necessarily doing for me that I couldn’t do for myself,” said one new teacher. Interestingly, majorities of both veteran and new teachers agree that “new teachers tend to place less value on the union” (62% and 61%, respectively).

### Veteran Loyalty

In Finding Three, we wrote about the vulnerability teachers often feel in today’s public schools, and it may be that a sense of vulnerability is an acquired characteristic: The longer a teacher teaches, the more likely he or she is to encounter problems with a principal’s playing favorites or a parent’s unfounded charges. Perhaps veterans are more inclined toward unions because they can visualize the consequences in a world where unions did not exist. Majorities of the most experienced teachers, for example, strongly agree that if it weren’t for unions, working conditions and salaries would be much worse, abusive administrators would have more power and teachers falsely accused of wrongdoing would be left with nowhere to turn. In contrast, only about a third of newcomers agree strongly with these things.

### Bread, Butter and Substance, Too

It’s not just bread-and-butter issues—veteran teachers also are more likely to view the union in a positive light when it comes to substantive concerns about teaching and learning. Almost 3 out of 4 (74%) say the union usually fights for, rather than resists, things that would improve education in their district, compared with 57% of newcomers. And a majority of experienced teachers agree that the union provides opportunities for teachers to improve their skills (55% vs. 43%).

### Tenured Faculty

While the most important and interesting differences between new and experienced teachers center on merit pay and unions, there were other intriguing differences as well. As we saw in Finding Four, teachers across the board recognize the price the profession pays when tenure provides cover to the truly ineffective among them. Relatively few in either group believe that tenure means a teacher has worked hard and proved herself or himself, although experienced teachers are somewhat more likely to have such faith (33% vs. 23%). Experienced

teachers are considerably more likely to blame administrators for allowing inadequate teachers into the ranks of the tenured. More than 4 in 10 (41%) say there is a fair process in place for removing bad teachers but that administrators fail to implement it, compared with just 16% of new teachers.

### New Teachers More Open to Change

% of teachers who:

Would be interested in working at a charter school run by teachers



Think alternative certification is generally a good idea



Consider it absolutely essential for alternatively certified teachers to get a strong dose of the same training that traditionally certified teachers go through



■ NEW TEACHERS ■ VETERAN TEACHERS

For their part, new teachers appear more open to innovations such as charter schools and alternative certification. Almost 2 in 3 new teachers (65%) say they would be interested in working in a charter school that was run and managed by teachers, compared with half of veteran teachers (50%), who may, after all, be planning on completing their careers at their current school.

Most new teachers (56%) think alternative certification is a good idea, compared with 45% of veteran teachers. Yet despite their openness, new teachers are even more likely than veterans to say it is absolutely essential for alternatively certified teachers to get “a strong dose of the same training that traditionally certified teachers go through” (70% to 57%).

# Afterword by Deborah Wadsworth

“...It comes back to the love of the job. I enjoy the interaction with the kids. I enjoy seeing their faces light up when they finally get whatever it is they’re doing...It’s an awesome feeling.”

Such refrains were commonplace in the focus groups conducted for this study, as were statements about professional commitment, egalitarianism and loyalty.

At the same time, *Stand by Me* is replete with expressions of vulnerability and frustration. “No miracle worker, I,” say large numbers of teachers in this study, particularly in the face of parents who are missing in action; students who have yet to learn the importance of respect and effort; and administrators preoccupied with endless bureaucratic demands.

Where does reality reside? Is it possible to reconcile these starkly different perspectives? Readers of this study are likely to concur with one vision or the other and respond accordingly.

If you change the rules of the system, teachers are not at all persuaded that quality will be rewarded.

For those preoccupied by the almost daily litany of cynical, corrupt and self-aggrandizing behavior by leaders of major institutions in society, the idealism, devotion to profession and commitment to egalitarianism—not to mention public school teachers’ willingness to

place other values above money—will evoke loud bravos for this cadre of professionals.

## Just More Excuses?

Alternatively, there will be others who turn the last page of this study with a sense of impatience and frustration over what appears to them as ongoing defensiveness, endless excuses and, ultimately, evidence of too many teachers who are simply not up to the challenge.

Whatever one’s point of view, there is one belief that appears to be universal—the importance of teachers in making schools work. Public Agenda’s education research over the past decade and that of others has repeatedly revealed that parents identify teachers as having a preeminent role in the success or failure of their children. Such sentiment has been squarely addressed in one of the mandates of No Child Left

Behind—the requirement of a highly qualified teacher in every classroom.

How this will play out in classroom after classroom has already evoked strong feelings and contending convictions within communities and state legislatures and among national interest groups devoted to education reform. *Stand by Me* pulled no punches, exploring teachers’ responses to such contentious issues as tenure, differentiated compensation schemes, the role of teachers’ unions, academic standards and accountability measures, among others. And, our findings will surely give pause to those who believe teachers are impervious to change.

Some reformers are convinced that if one could only eliminate tenure and introduce pay for performance, with new routes to certification, the quality of the profession would improve. Such reforms, the rationale goes, would create a fairer, more accountable system that would bring fresh blood into the profession and squeeze out those who are underperforming.

## A Heavy Dose of Mistrust

Teachers in this study acknowledge that the tenure system is flawed and that it can indeed result in incompetent people remaining on the job. A majority of teachers in an earlier Public Agenda study said that “the tenure system should be changed to make it far easier to remove bad teachers.” Moreover, most teachers are even willing to consider many forms of merit pay. But, unlike those who see the above agenda as a set of straightforward reforms, teachers bring to the discussion a strong dose of skepticism and a heavy measure of distrust.

Yes, they say, tenure can be a problem, and many teachers in this study believe their own district finds it difficult to remove teachers who fail to measure up. But this is what they must tolerate if they are to protect themselves. For them, unions, tenure and collective bargaining make up the thin blue line standing between them and district politics, favoritism and cost-cutting. Teachers fear expedient decisions on the part of administrators and school boards scampering to save money

and quell controversy. They dread the out-of-the-blue complaint from a parent or student that could derail or even terminate a career. If you change the rules of the system, teachers are not at all persuaded that quality will be rewarded.

### A Poor Distribution of Talent

As a group, teachers understand the consequences of seniority, which, in their view, leads to a distribution of talent that is flawed and inequitable. It is indisputable that the present system lures the most able and experienced teachers to the most supportive and resource-rich environments—and why not? With no countervailing incentives in place, teachers who have put in their time and performed well would understandably choose environments with better pay, more accomplishment and less day-to-day frustration.

The result is that young and inexperienced teachers are often left to deal with the most difficult and hard-to-reach youngsters, thereby reinforcing the sense that “teachers are the problem.” Those who have dedicated themselves to improving education for poor and disadvantaged children see this as a recipe for disaster, and, I might add, one that can’t help but give teachers a bum rap.

### Rewards for the Right Reasons?

But teachers do have a solution to offer. When they talk about merit pay, what appeals to them most are differential compensation schemes that reward those willing to give their talents to this cause. This, teachers say, is quite different from targeting money to math and science teachers or rewarding teachers based on annual standardized test results.

In earlier Public Agenda work, and here again, we tap into broad support for a very particular kind of merit pay. The sense of wanting equal treatment for all teachers is tempered

by the respect teachers express for those doing a good job in the most difficult and trying of circumstances. Teachers, for the most part, believe that those individuals should receive a financial reward, a kind of “combat pay” for extraordinary effort and sacrifice.

The gap between what teachers learn in education school and what they face when they step into the classroom appears to be as wide and troubling as ever.

### The Persistence of Sink or Swim

And finally, there is something else that teachers in *Stand by Me* call for. It is a kind of help that seems to fall on deaf ears in the increasingly ideological debates that historically overpower attempts to reform public education. Teachers—and principals and superintendents—consistently point to the failure of the nation’s schools of education to arm their young teachers for the challenges they will face in the most difficult public schools across the nation. Over and over, teachers give voice to deep concern that man-

aging a classroom, dealing with discipline and other realities of today’s public school environments are still not addressed in the preparation of those who want to join this profession.

As an outsider, one might even say that the way new teachers are trained often turns out to be the instrument of their undoing. It’s hard to think of another profession that devotes serious attention to theory and methodology and then throws its apprentices in to sink or swim. Aspiring lawyers and carpenters, physicians and artists, all undergo rigorous apprenticeships under the watchful eyes of experienced practitioners. While good mentoring does exist for novices in public education, it appears to be teachers themselves who take up the cause. The gap between what teachers learn in education school and what they face when they step into the classroom appears to be as wide and troubling as ever.



# Endnotes

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# Methodology

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*Stand by Me: What Teachers Really Think about Unions, Merit Pay and Other Professional Matters* is based on a national random sample of 1,345 K-12 public school teachers conducted in spring 2003. The survey was preceded by six focus groups conducted in sites across the country as well as 20 in-depth interviews with experts in the field of education, including academics, policy analysts, leaders of alternative schooling initiatives, union representatives and other educators.

## The Mail Survey

The first mailing, which included a questionnaire and a cover letter explaining the survey, was mailed on March 17, 2003, to a random sample of 5,000 K-12 public school teachers in the United States. A reminder postcard was sent on March 25, and a follow-up mailing, which included a questionnaire and a cover letter with instructions to those who had not yet participated, was sent on March 31. Each mailing of the questionnaire also included a prepaid business reply envelope. All responses received through April 21, 2003, were included in the final tabulated results.

The process netted 1,345 completed surveys from teachers, for an overall response rate of 27%. The margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. When comparing percentages across subgroups, such as new teachers versus veteran teachers, the margin of error is somewhat higher.

The sample was randomly drawn from a comprehensive national database of current K-12 public school teachers supplied by Market Data Retrieval (MDR) of Shelton, Connecticut. The surveys were fielded and tabulated by Robinson and Meunster Associates, Inc., of Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

## The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed by Public Agenda, and all interpretation of the data reflected in this report was done by Public Agenda. As in all surveys, question order effects and other non-sampling sources of error can sometimes affect results. Steps were taken to minimize these, including extensively pre-testing the survey instrument.

## The Focus Groups

Focus groups allow for an in-depth, qualitative exploration of the dynamics underlying attitudes toward complex issues. Insights from these groups were important to the survey design, and quotes were drawn from them to give voice to attitudes captured statistically through the survey interviews. Quotes were also drawn from respondents' comments written directly on the mail surveys.

A total of six focus groups were conducted with K-12 public school teachers in January and February 2003 in the following cities: Old Bridge, New Jersey; St. Louis, Missouri (one group with new teachers and one group with veteran teachers); Frisco, Texas; Los Angeles, California; and Scottsdale, Arizona (charter school teachers). Participants were recruited to Public Agenda's specifications and all focus groups were moderated by Public Agenda senior staff.

Prior to conducting the focus groups and mail survey, Public Agenda interviewed 20 education experts and practitioners to obtain grounding in the current substantive issues concerning the teaching profession.

# Complete Survey Results

## Stand by Me:

### What Teachers Really Think about Unions, Merit Pay and Other Professional Matters

This study is based on a national random sample of 1,345 K-12 public school teachers. The survey was conducted by mail March 17-April 21, 2003. The margin of error for total teachers (n=1,345) is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For newcomers (n=211) it is plus or minus 7 percentage points; and for veterans (n=484) it is plus or minus 4 percentage points.

Results of less than .5 are signified by an asterisk. Results of zero are signified by a dash. Responses may not always total 100% due to rounding. Combining answer categories may produce slight discrepancies between the numbers in these survey results and numbers in the report.

	TOTAL TEACHERS n=1,345 %	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS) n=211 %	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS) n=484 %
<b>Q1 For you personally, would you say that:</b>			
Teaching is a lifelong career choice	74	49	92
You will probably leave the classroom for another job in education	12	22	4
You will probably leave the classroom and change fields altogether	7	12	2
Not sure	7	17	2
<b>Q2 Which statement comes closer to your view about teachers today:</b>			
They are often made the scapegoats for all the problems facing education	76	68	80
<b>OR</b>			
They are usually seen as safeguarding and protecting education quality	15	21	13
Not sure	9	12	7
<b>Q3 If you had to pick from this list, which would be the most difficult thing about being a teacher:</b>			
Lack of support from administrators	7	6	5
Lack of support from parents	21	20	20
Lack of effort from students	19	23	18
Low pay and lack of opportunity for advancement	16	15	16
Unreasonable pressure to raise student achievement	36	34	39
Not sure	2	2	2
<b>Q4 How confident are you that most of your students will learn the skills and knowledge they were supposed to by the end of the year?</b>			
NET CONFIDENT	89	89	88
Very confident	36	32	36
Somewhat confident	53	57	52
NET NOT CONFIDENT	11	11	12
Not too confident	10	11	9
Not confident at all	2	1	2
Not sure	*	-	*

	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
	n=1,345	n=211	n=484
	%	%	%

**Q5 And how confident are you that you can turn around your hardest-to-reach students by the end of the year?**

NET CONFIDENT	61	65	60
Very confident	11	10	12
Somewhat confident	50	55	48
NET NOT CONFIDENT	38	33	39
Not too confident	28	26	27
Not confident at all	11	7	13
Not sure	1	2	1

**Q6 When it comes to having an orderly, safe and respectful school atmosphere, are the working conditions at your school:**

Very good	56	61	60
Manageable	35	27	33
A serious problem	9	12	7
Not sure	*	1	-

**Q7 And when it comes to class size and teaching load, are the working conditions at your school:**

Very good	31	30	38
Manageable	51	53	44
A serious problem	17	16	18
Not sure	1	1	*

**Q8 Among these three reforms, which do you think would be a better way to improve the quality of teaching:**

Expand the pool of qualified applicants by increasing pay for all teachers	39	37	43
Improve working conditions in school by reducing class size	47	47	43
Make it easier for districts to financially reward outstanding teachers	9	12	8
Not sure	5	4	6

**Q9 Which comes closer to your view:**

Good teachers lead even students who are poor and have uninvolved parents to learn what they are supposed to	65	67	62
<b>OR</b>			
It is too hard even for good teachers to overcome these barriers	27	25	31
Not sure	8	8	8

**Q10 Is the effort students make mainly determined by the level of motivation they bring to the classroom, or is it mainly determined by what teachers do to motivate them once they get there?**

Mainly determined by the motivation students bring	42	36	42
Mainly determined by what teachers do	48	54	47
Not sure	11	10	11



	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
	<i>n</i> =1,345	<i>n</i> =211	<i>n</i> =484
	%	%	%

**Q11 Speaking from your experience, about how many of the new teachers you see need:**

**a. A lot more content knowledge of the subjects they teach**

None	13	17	12
A few teachers	53	54	51
More than a few	20	19	22
Quite a large number	10	4	11
Not sure	4	6	4

**b. A lot more exposure to pedagogy and theories of education**

None	25	25	27
A few teachers	46	49	41
More than a few	15	14	18
Quite a large number	9	4	8
Not sure	6	8	6

**c. A lot more training on effective ways to handle students who are discipline problems**

None	2	2	2
A few teachers	21	27	21
More than a few	31	29	30
Quite a large number	45	40	46
Not sure	1	2	1

**d. A lot more training on effective ways to reach struggling students**

None	2	2	1
A few teachers	21	20	23
More than a few	33	37	31
Quite a large number	42	39	43
Not sure	2	2	3

**Q12 When new teachers come to your school, how much support and mentoring from experienced teachers or supervisors do they get?**

Very little, if any	12	17	7
Some	44	40	42
A lot	43	42	50
Not sure	1	1	1

**Q13 Thinking about the professional development that you've had in the recent past, did it actually make you a better teacher, or did it make little difference?**

Better teacher	50	58	45
Little difference	50	41	54
Not sure	1	1	1

	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
	<i>n</i> =1,345	<i>n</i> =211	<i>n</i> =484
	%	%	%
<b>Q14 And was it immediately useful to you in the classroom, or not?</b>			
Yes	55	66	50
No	38	29	42
Not sure	7	6	8
<b>Q15 If you had to pick just one topic for additional professional development for yourself, would it be:</b>			
Classroom management	14	21	14
Content of the subjects you teach	17	20	14
New teaching techniques	42	40	38
Understanding state and district policies	7	9	7
Something else (e.g. technology/computers, parental involvement, motivating students, special education, new mandates/NCLB)	13	6	17
Not sure	7	4	9
<b>Q16 Are you currently a tenured teacher, or not?</b>			
Yes	75	22	94
No	22	74	4
Not sure	4	4	2
<b>Q17 How many years are teachers required to be working in your district before they are eligible for tenure?</b>			
1 year	1	1	*
2 years	11	9	10
3 years	60	56	63
4+ years	29	34	28
<b>Q18 In your view, would education in your district be better if the number of years for tenure:</b>			
Increased	14	10	15
Decreased	4	8	3
Or should it stay the same?	53	45	60
Not sure	29	37	23
<b>Q19 This year, about how many teachers in your building do you think fail to do a good job and are simply going through the motions?</b>			
None	19	14	23
A few	59	58	61
More than a few	17	23	11
Quite a large number	2	1	2
Not sure	3	4	3

	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
	<i>n</i> =1,345	<i>n</i> =211	<i>n</i> =484
	%	%	%

**Q20 In your district, does tenure mean that a teacher has worked hard and proved themselves to be very good at what they do, or does it not necessarily mean that?**

Means a teacher has worked hard and proved themselves	28	23	33
Does not mean that	58	61	58
Not sure	14	16	9

**Q21 Which comes closest to describing your district:**

There is rarely a problem weeding out bad teachers	14	14	17
<b>OR</b>			
There's a fair process for removing bad teachers, but administrators fail to exercise their responsibility properly	32	16	41
<b>OR</b>			
Between tenure and the documentation requirements, it's too hard for administrators to remove any but the very worst teachers	36	41	30
Not sure	18	29	12

**Q22 Which comes closer to your view about tenure:**

Good teachers don't have to worry about tenure, and it's hard to justify it when virtually no one else has their job guaranteed these days	23	22	20
<b>OR</b>			
Tenure protects teachers from district politics, favoritism and the threat of losing their jobs to newcomers who could work for less	58	52	62
Not sure	20	26	18

**Q23 Sometimes, teachers with seniority have more say over where they teach and they end up working with kids who are easier to reach.**

**Do you think that:**

This is reasonable because veteran teachers have earned this benefit by putting in their time	20	16	24
<b>OR</b>			
This is wrong because it leaves inexperienced teachers with the hardest-to-reach students	61	69	55
Not sure	19	15	22

**Q24 If you had the choice, would you personally be willing to trade tenure for a pay increase (e.g. \$5,000 per year), or would the pay increase have to be a lot higher, or would you rather hold on to tenure?**

Would trade tenure for pay increase	31	39	26
Pay increase would have to be a lot higher	26	22	26
Would rather hold on to tenure	29	19	37
Not sure	14	19	11

	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
	n=1,345	n=211	n=484
	%	%	%

**Q25 Are you currently a member of a teachers' union or association, or not?**

Yes	83	82	86
No	17	18	14
Not sure	-	-	-

**Q26 Do you think of teachers' unions as:**

Absolutely essential	46	30	57
Important but not essential	38	49	30
Something you could do without	12	13	11
Not sure	4	8	2

**Q27 Other than receiving mailings and notices, how involved and engaged are you in the local union?**

Base: Union member (n=1,049)

NET INVOLVED	34	20	46
Very involved	9	2	15
Somewhat involved	25	18	31
NET NOT INVOLVED	66	80	54
Not too involved	40	43	37
Not at all involved	25	37	17
Not sure	-	-	-

**Q28 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

**a. The union charges far higher dues than are warranted by what it does for teachers**

NET AGREE	56	56	54
Strongly agree	23	22	21
Somewhat agree	33	34	32
NET DISAGREE	35	26	42
Somewhat disagree	16	16	15
Strongly disagree	19	10	27
Not sure	9	18	5

**b. The union regularly provides information and opportunities to help me be a better teacher**

NET AGREE	50	43	55
Strongly agree	12	9	15
Somewhat agree	38	34	40
NET DISAGREE	44	50	41
Somewhat disagree	25	30	22
Strongly disagree	19	19	19
Not sure	6	7	4

	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
	<i>n</i> =1,345	<i>n</i> =211	<i>n</i> =484
	%	%	%

**c. The union sometimes fights to protect teachers who really should be out of the classroom**

NET AGREE	47	30	55
Strongly agree	11	8	12
Somewhat agree	37	22	43
NET DISAGREE	29	29	33
Somewhat disagree	17	20	18
Strongly disagree	12	8	14
Not sure	24	42	13

**d. Teachers facing unfair charges from parents or students would have nowhere to turn without the union**

NET AGREE	77	70	83
Strongly agree	45	32	55
Somewhat agree	33	38	28
NET DISAGREE	16	18	13
Somewhat disagree	11	13	9
Strongly disagree	5	5	4
Not sure	7	12	4

**e. New teachers tend to place less value on the union**

NET AGREE	59	61	62
Strongly agree	20	17	24
Somewhat agree	38	45	38
NET DISAGREE	17	17	16
Somewhat disagree	12	10	12
Strongly disagree	5	7	4
Not sure	24	22	22

**f. Without collective bargaining, the working conditions and salaries of teachers would be much worse**

NET AGREE	81	73	87
Strongly agree	54	37	64
Somewhat agree	27	37	23
NET DISAGREE	10	9	9
Somewhat disagree	6	6	5
Strongly disagree	4	3	4
Not sure	10	18	5

	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
	<i>n</i> =1,345	<i>n</i> =211	<i>n</i> =484
	%	%	%

**g. Without a union, teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power**

NET AGREE	81	76	87
Strongly agree	52	38	60
Somewhat agree	29	39	27
NET DISAGREE	11	11	9
Somewhat disagree	8	9	6
Strongly disagree	4	2	3
Not sure	7	13	4

**Q29 Do you think that the union:**

Sometimes resists doing things that would improve education in your district 16 14 15

**OR**

Usually fights for things that would improve education in your district 65 57 74  
Not sure 19 29 11

**Q30 And as far as you know, do you think that:**

Most decisions by the union are made by a small group of deeply engaged veteran teachers and staff 51 48 49

**OR**

There's a large number of teachers who are involved in most union decisions 31 25 39  
Not sure 18 27 13

**Q31 At the national level, how often do the policy stands of the union reflect your values and preferences as a teacher?**

Almost always 19 14 24  
Sometimes 47 44 51  
Rarely 18 11 17  
Not sure 15 31 8

**Q32 And at the district level, how often do the policy stands of the union reflect your values and preferences as a teacher?**

Almost always 36 23 47  
Sometimes 47 50 42  
Rarely 9 9 7  
Not sure 8 19 4

	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
	<i>n</i> =1,345	<i>n</i> =211	<i>n</i> =484
	%	%	%

**Q33 If the union put more focus on academic issues and student achievement during collective bargaining with your district would you:**

Welcome this	19	18	19
Be open to hearing more about it	57	63	57
Think they were off in the wrong direction	11	3	13
Not sure	13	16	11

**Q34 And if the union put more focus on setting standards for evaluating teacher quality during collective bargaining with your district would you:**

Welcome this	21	19	22
Be open to hearing more about it	57	58	58
Think they were off in the wrong direction	10	7	11
Not sure	12	16	9

**Q35 Which comes closer to your view:**

Sometimes everyone would be better off if the union stepped aside and let the administration fire incompetent teachers	23	24	19
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**OR**

The union has an obligation to represent the rights of any teacher who the administration is trying to fire—that's its job	60	49	67
Not sure	17	27	14

**Q36a Here are five services unions provide their members. Which is most valuable to you?**

Negotiates pay and benefits	47	40	52
Supplies liability insurance	13	14	12
Protects against unfair treatment	20	19	19
Gives teachers a unified voice in the district	9	12	7
Gives teachers political clout in the state and national arena	5	6	5
Not sure	6	9	5

**Q36b Here are five services unions provide their members. Which is least valuable to you?**

Negotiates pay and benefits	3	1	2
Supplies liability insurance	21	20	25
Protects against unfair treatment	4	2	3
Gives teachers a unified voice in the district	9	11	7
Gives teachers political clout in the state and national arena	49	46	51
Not sure	14	20	12

	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
	n=1,345	n=211	n=484
	%	%	%

**Q37 In your state, does being fully certified guarantee that the typical teacher has what it takes to be a good teacher, does it only guarantee a minimum of skills, or does it guarantee very little?**

Guarantees teacher has what it takes	30	34	30
Guarantees only a minimum of skills	46	46	43
Guarantees very little	15	13	16
Not sure	9	8	11

**Q38 Which comes closer to your view about alternative certification:**

It's generally a good idea to give people many different routes to enter the profession

	50	56	45
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**OR**

It's generally a bad idea—there should be only one recognized way to become a teacher

	32	30	35
Not sure	19	14	21

**Q39 When it comes to alternative certification for public school teachers, how important is each of the following:**

**a. A policy of hiring them temporarily until they demonstrate their effectiveness in the classroom**

Absolutely essential	74	68	77
Important but not essential	18	27	15
Not important	3	3	2
Not sure	5	3	6

**b. A requirement they pass tough tests in the subject matter they teach**

Absolutely essential	39	40	39
Important but not essential	45	41	47
Not important	12	16	9
Not sure	4	3	5

**c. A strong dose of the same training that traditionally certified teachers go through**

Absolutely essential	59	70	57
Important but not essential	29	22	30
Not important	8	4	8
Not sure	5	4	5

**Q40 Do you personally know any teachers who have entered the teaching profession through an alternative certification process or through such programs as Teach for America, or not?**

Yes	41	47	35
No	52	46	58
Not sure	7	7	7



	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
	<i>n</i> =1,345	<i>n</i> =211	<i>n</i> =484
	%	%	%

**Q41 And overall do you find that the quality of those teachers turns out to be:**

*Base: Know teachers who have alternative certification (n=534)*

NET EXCELLENT/GOOD	65	74	66
Excellent	23	34	17
Good	42	40	49
NET FAIR/POOR	30	20	32
Fair	23	14	25
Poor	7	5	7
Not sure	4	6	2

**Q42 Which do you consider to be a more important mark of success when it comes to your own students:**

When they master the skills and knowledge they should learn	53	42	56
OR			
When they try hard and feel good about their work	45	55	43
Not sure	2	4	1

**Q43 Do you think that the push for standards, testing and accountability in your state is a fad that in time will go away, or is this something that is here to stay?**

A fad that will go away	22	20	22
Here to stay	65	70	65
Not sure	13	11	13

**Q44 Do you think it's appropriate for local and state elected officials to set academic standards for schools, teachers and students, or is this an area that is best left to the education professionals?**

It's appropriate for elected officials	4	4	4
It's an area best left to education professionals	93	94	94
Not sure	3	2	3

**Q45 Which of these comes closest to your view about standardized tests in your district:**

They are important and my district is using them well	18	13	21
OR			
They are important but there are serious problems in how they are currently used in my district	24	25	23
OR			
They are a seriously flawed measure of true student achievement—my district uses them because there's no choice	53	58	52
Not sure	5	4	5

	TOTAL TEACHERS <i>n</i> =1,345 %	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS) <i>n</i> =211 %	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS) <i>n</i> =484 %
<b>Q46 Which comes closest to your view:</b>			
Standardized tests do much more harm than good—the schools would be better off if they were completely abandoned	18	22	17
<b>OR</b>			
Standardized tests are a necessary evil—ultimately, the schools need some kind of standardized assessment	62	63	61
<b>OR</b>			
Standardized tests are necessary and valuable—they are a reliable yardstick for measuring student performance	14	12	16
Not sure	6	4	6
<b>Q47 Over the past several years, have you found that the amount of attention your school pays to the results of standardized tests has:</b>			
Increased	88	84	88
Decreased	1	-	1
Stayed about the same	9	9	10
Not sure	2	7	*
<b>Q48 Which comes closer to your view on “teaching to the test”:</b>			
It is fine as long as the test measures the right things	34	29	36
<b>OR</b>			
It inevitably stifles real teaching and learning	61	64	59
Not sure	5	7	6
<b>Q49 How interested are you personally in having more influence and getting more involved in decisions over curriculum and instruction at your school?</b>			
<b>NET INTERESTED</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>86</b>
Very interested	47	41	50
Somewhat interested	41	48	36
<b>NET NOT INTERESTED</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>
Not too interested	9	8	9
Not at all interested	2	1	2
Not sure	2	2	2
<b>Q50 Thinking about when you first applied for a teaching position in your current district, how much competition did you face?</b>			
Stiff competition	33	26	34
Some competition	41	44	38
Hardly any competition	23	25	25
Not sure	3	6	3

	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
	<i>n</i> =1,345	<i>n</i> =211	<i>n</i> =484
	%	%	%

**Q51 In your building, is it easy for you to spot who the truly great teachers are, or is it too hard to tell?**

Easy to spot	78	77	78
Too hard to tell	16	15	15
Not sure	7	8	7

**Q52 And do you think that most teachers in your building could pretty much agree on who the truly great teachers are, or would there be lots of disagreement?**

Most teachers could pretty much agree	72	75	73
There would be lots of disagreement	20	15	21
Not sure	8	11	6

**Q53 Some suggest that the best way to measure teacher effectiveness is to assess students' skills and knowledge when they first come to a teacher and to measure them again when students leave to see what progress was made. How would you rate this as a way of measuring teacher effectiveness?**

<b>NET EXCELLENT/GOOD</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>44</b>
Excellent	13	14	12
Good	36	36	32
<b>NET FAIR/POOR</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>50</b>
Fair	29	31	30
Poor	18	15	20
Not sure	5	4	6

**Q54 Which of the following is generally the better way to determine the salaries of teachers:**

Their education and formal qualifications	18	22	17
Their years of experience	34	30	38
How well they do their work	34	35	31
Not sure	15	13	14

**Q55 Typically, the two ways teachers increase their pay is to put in more time in their district or go back to school for graduate work. Do you think districts should be able to use other criteria to financially reward teachers, or does that open up a can of worms?**

Districts should be able to use other criteria	41	55	33
This opens up a can of worms	50	34	59
Not sure	9	11	8

	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
	<i>n</i> =1,345	<i>n</i> =211	<i>n</i> =484
	%	%	%

**Q56 When it comes to having the capacity to reward outstanding teachers, would you say that administrators in your district:**

Have enough freedom and autonomy	18	15	22
Need a little more	17	25	13
Need a lot more	39	38	39
Not sure	25	22	26

**Q57 How much would you favor or oppose giving financial incentives to:**

**a. Teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals**

NET FAVOR	62	78	53
Strongly favor	28	40	24
Somewhat favor	34	38	29
NET OPPOSE	33	18	41
Somewhat oppose	13	11	14
Strongly oppose	20	7	27
Not sure	6	4	6

**b. Teachers who consistently work harder, putting in more time and effort than other teachers**

NET FAVOR	67	73	64
Strongly favor	31	38	27
Somewhat favor	36	35	38
NET OPPOSE	29	22	32
Somewhat oppose	14	16	13
Strongly oppose	15	7	19
Not sure	4	4	4

**c. Teachers whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests**

NET FAVOR	38	37	39
Strongly favor	12	15	13
Somewhat favor	27	22	26
NET OPPOSE	56	57	56
Somewhat oppose	24	28	21
Strongly oppose	32	29	35
Not sure	6	6	6

	TOTAL TEACHERS	NEWCOMERS (LESS THAN 5 YRS)	VETERANS (MORE THAN 20 YRS)
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	%	%	%

**d. Teachers who receive accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**

NET FAVOR	57	72	51
Strongly favor	23	36	18
Somewhat favor	33	36	32
NET OPPOSE	34	18	42
Somewhat oppose	16	13	18
Strongly oppose	18	5	23
Not sure	10	11	8

**e. Teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics**

NET FAVOR	42	50	40
Strongly favor	14	16	12
Somewhat favor	28	34	27
NET OPPOSE	52	41	54
Somewhat oppose	22	20	22
Strongly oppose	30	21	32
Not sure	6	9	6

**f. Teachers who teach difficult classes with hard-to-reach students**

NET FAVOR	63	66	62
Strongly favor	26	31	26
Somewhat favor	37	35	36
NET OPPOSE	32	29	34
Somewhat oppose	16	17	16
Strongly oppose	17	12	19
Not sure	5	5	4

**g. Teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low performing schools**

NET FAVOR	70	75	67
Strongly favor	29	36	27
Somewhat favor	41	39	41
NET OPPOSE	25	21	28
Somewhat oppose	12	12	13
Strongly oppose	13	9	16
Not sure	5	4	5

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	%	%	%

**Q58 Suppose that in your district the students of some teachers make more academic progress—in terms of improved reading levels, teacher evaluations and classroom tests—when compared to similar students taught by other teachers. How much would you favor or oppose financially rewarding those teachers?**

NET FAVOR	47	53	45
Strongly favor	12	16	10
Somewhat favor	36	37	35
NET OPPOSE	45	36	49
Somewhat oppose	20	21	21
Strongly oppose	25	15	29
Not sure	8	11	5

**Q59 If a new system for evaluating teachers was instituted in your district, who would you trust most to put it into practice?**

District level administrators	2	2	3
Administrators in the school building	13	14	12
A committee of teachers at the school	33	36	31
Union representatives at the district level	3	2	3
Parents of students at the school	*	-	*
A team of all of the above	41	42	42
Not sure	7	4	8

**Q60 Which comes closer to your view:**

Teachers can and do make a difference in what kids learn and they should be financially rewarded when they succeed	29	32	28
<b>OR</b>			
It's not fair to hold teachers accountable when so many things that affect student learning are beyond their control	59	53	63
Not sure	12	16	9

**Q61 If some form of merit pay for teachers was implemented at your school, which do you think would be more likely to happen:**

It would give principals a way to reward the teachers who really help kids learn	23	32	19
<b>OR</b>			
Principals would play favorites and reward teachers who are loyal to them or who don't rock the boat	52	41	55
Not sure	25	27	27

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**Q62 If some form of merit pay for teachers was implemented at your school, which do you think would be more likely to happen:**

Instead of cooperation, there would be unhealthy competition and jealousy among teachers

63 54 67

**OR**

Teachers would be motivated to work harder and find ways to be more effective

22 29 19

Not sure

15 18 14

**Q63 Do you think that implementing merit pay would make the teaching profession more appealing to the best and the brightest, or would it not have that effect?**

Would make it more appealing

27 39 23

Would not have that effect

53 41 58

Not sure

20 20 19

**Q64 How interested would you be in working at a charter school that was run and managed by teachers themselves?**

**NET INTERESTED** 58 65 50

Very interested 22 21 19

Somewhat interested 36 44 31

**NET NOT INTERESTED** 36 25 44

Not too interested 16 14 17

Not at all interested 19 11 27

Not sure 7 10 7

**Q65 From what you know, would you describe the teaching force in the nation's large urban public school districts as:**

Particularly strong 10 12 9

Particularly weak 22 25 21

Basically the same as districts across the nation 33 28 37

Not sure 35 34 33

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	%	%	%

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Q66 Are you:

Male	22	19	25
Female	78	81	75

### Q67 How many years have you been a teacher in the public schools?

Less than 5 years	16	100	-
5-10 years	21	-	-
11-15 years	14	-	-
16-20 years	14	-	-
More than 20 years	36	-	100

### Q68 Are you a fully certified teacher in your state, or not?

Yes	98	88	100
No	2	12	-

### Q69 Is teaching your first career, or did you work full time in another field beforehand?

First career	76	69	90
Worked full time in another field beforehand	24	31	10

### Q70 Do you teach at a(n):

Elementary school	55	58	52
Middle or junior high school	19	21	18
High school	23	19	27
Something else	3	3	3

### Q71 About how many students attend your school?

Less than 500	34	37	35
500-999	41	42	40
1,000-1,499	15	14	13
1,500 or more	11	8	12

### Q72 Which best describes the location of your school?

Urban	25	34	25
Suburban	44	39	44
Rural	31	27	31



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	%	%	%

**Q73 What state do you teach in?**

**Q74 How many of your school's students are African American or Hispanic?**

Virtually all	11	13	9
Most	16	24	14
Some	43	32	47
A few or none	30	30	31

**Q75 Approximately what percentage of students at your school are eligible for the free or reduced lunch program?**

Under 25%	28	23	33
25%-49%	32	30	32
50%-74%	19	23	17
75% or more	21	25	18

**Q76 How old are you?**

20-29	12	58	-
30-39	20	22	-
40-49	27	16	22
50+	42	4	79

**Region**

Northeast	18	13	19
Midwest	26	29	30
South	36	38	35
West	20	20	16

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