

# Tools FOR SCHOOLS

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS AND LEADERS

## TUNE IN to what the new generation of teachers can do

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

*Three veteran teachers on the 7th-grade math team don't want the responsibility of leading their weekly team meetings. But Meredith — a recent college graduate who just began teaching — volunteers for the assignment.*

*The older teachers are mystified — and a bit put off by her eagerness. Meredith quickly steps into her new role and announces the agenda for the next meeting. "I'll create a web page for us to use, and I'll post the agenda there, too," she says, as she taps the task into her phone, which is also her PDA.*

*Moments after assuming this leadership role, however, Meredith's phone pings to indicate that she's gotten a text message. She quickly shifts her attention from the meeting to her phone, laughs a little and texts back a response.*

*Now the older teachers glance at each other and nod knowingly. Here we go again, another new teacher to train.*

### MetLife Foundation

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**T**his clash of the generations is being repeated in schools across the country every day as more and more Millennials — those born in 1978 and later — move into the teaching ranks.

Teachers beginning their careers in 2008 and for many years ahead will be strikingly different from the generations of Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, and even Gen Xers that preceded them.

These generational personality differences have implications for the way beginning teachers teach, how they want to learn about improving their teaching, and how they will impact the culture of the schools in which they work. They will reject some practices that were successful for earlier generations — but they will also embrace some that earlier generations scoffed at.

And the number of Millennials in the teaching ranks will also

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## Tune in to what the new generation of teachers can do

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increase rapidly as more and more Baby Boomers move into retirement. At the same time, however, Millennials threaten to be less committed than earlier generations to making a career out of teaching. This means that concerns about the loss of new teachers may become even more pronounced as Millennials become the primary source of new teachers.



### NAME THAT GENERATION

#### **Traditionalists**

Born before 1945

#### **Baby Boomers**

Born between 1946 and 1964

#### **Generation X**

Born between 1965 and 1977

#### **Millennial**

Born 1978 and later

As Millennials moved into school systems, leaders will want to know if schools are ready to meet their needs. Not all Millennials are the same, but generations in a society tend to share broad experiences and have their own generational personality.

Explore several statements that are likely to apply to

members of this generation and consider the implications for your induction and professional learning practices. Also, encourage your older staff members to learn about these generational tendencies to help reduce resentment at behaviors that may seem to be disrespectful, arrogant, or distracting.

#### **Millennials think they're pretty special.**

As a generation, Millennials were loved and nurtured by parents who tended to be very hands-on. "These are the children who received trophies for finishing in eighth place," said Suzette Lovely, deputy superintendent of Capistrano Unified School District in California and co-author of *Generations at School* (Corwin, 2007).

Jennifer Abrams, an educational consultant who specializes in generational issues, notes that this generation expects to be praised more consistently. "They were very loved at home and we differentiated for them at school. We told them how special they were — and they believed it," she said.

This can be problematic for professionals in schools because "we're not set up to provide consistent, constant praise. Many support systems for newer professionals working in schools

are not set up to provide the responsiveness and positiveness that they expect," Abrams said.

**What this means for schools:** Search for ways to acknowledge Millennials when they join your staff and to acknowledge their individual talents. Host a breakfast or a lunch at the beginning of the school year to introduce new teachers to everyone who works in your building. Publish brief bios and photos of them in your school newsletter and on your web site. Make informal visits to their classrooms and chat casually with them to learn more about the non-work side of their lives. Ensure that you greet them by name and make eye contact with them each time you encounter them in the hallway. Certificates that may not impress older teachers may be very appealing to Millennials.

#### **Millennials are comfortable with their parents' values and not as rebellious as earlier generations.**

Millennials are anxious to be mentored by older, experienced teachers. "In the past, if you had a mentor, that was considered a deficit model. Millennials really see mentoring as a form of coaching and they see that as a very positive thing. That is very different," Lovely said.

"When you pair a Millennial with a veteran teacher, they are very accepting of that. They were raised with a lot of intense structure and supervision so they value having someone older and wiser looking out for them," she said.

Abrams said Millennials want one-on-one coaching. But their demand for "a lot of immediate praise and feedback" may present challenges to systems that can only provide mentoring conversations once or twice a month. Given their comfort with technology, Abrams said online solutions may be the route for providing the support and feedback as frequently and quickly as Millennials may want.

**What this means for schools:** Link every new teacher with a mentor who can provide support for them that's related to their local context. If your state or major certificate-granting university doesn't already offer an e-mentoring program, explore options for creating one to serve

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## NSDC TOOL / You and your generation

1. Draw the following chart onto a sheet of chart paper and post it in the room for everyone to see.

<b>Traditionalists</b>	Born before 1945
<b>Baby Boomers</b>	Born between 1946 and 1964
<b>Generation X</b>	Born between 1965 and 1977
<b>Millennial</b>	Born 1978 and later

2. Using the chart as their guide, ask participants to organize themselves into the four groups according to the year of their birth.
3. When the teachers have been organized, create new groups by selecting one person from each group. The resulting small groups should have one person each who is a Traditionalist, Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial.
4. On a sheet of chart paper, write the following questions and ask each participant to individually respond to them:
  - What was your favorite movie when you were 16 years old?
  - Describe the most significant political event of your teenage and/or college years?
  - Describe the rules about women wearing pants?
  - Describe the music of your era.
  - Describe what would have happened when you were a child and had a conflict with a teacher.

There are no right answers to these questions. The facilitator can add his or her own questions. Time: 10 minutes

5. Invite each small group to discuss the answers to the questions. Time: 10 minutes
6. Invite the large group to form again. Initiate an open discussion about what they learned from their small group discussions.

**Option:** Use the New Technologies Survey published in the April 2008 issue of *The Learning System* as a conversation starter.

This issue of *Tools for Schools* is sponsored by MetLife Foundation. This issue and other NSDC newsletters in the spring of 2008 draw on findings from the annual *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*.

MetLife began the Survey series in 1984 to bring the views and voices of those closest to the classroom to the attention of education leaders and the public.

To read more about any of the MetLife Teacher Surveys and the MetLife Foundation visit [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).

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new teachers in your state. Investigate e-mentoring options made possible by nonprofit organizations, such as the National Science Teachers Association and the New Teacher Center, that may be able to complement your local mentoring efforts. Blend their comfort with technology with your coaching/mentoring model. Teach your mentors how to add technology, such as texting, into their mentoring portfolios.

### **Millennials have a high tolerance for change, innovation, and learning.**

Millennials don't expect to sign up for a 30-year relationship with an employer as their parents did. Because they expect to make numerous moves during their career, however, they place a high value on continuing to learn and on moving ahead quickly. "Millennials are poised to become our first true generation of lifetime learners," said Lynne Lancaster and David Still-

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## Tune in to what the new generation of teachers can do

**“They’ll be able to contribute and collaborate right from the get-go.”**

Lynne Lancaster and David Stillman, authors of *When Generations Collide*

**“If the dynamics are right, if they are brought in as equal partners, they will flourish.”**

Jennifer Abrams, educational consultant

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man in *When Generations Collide* (HarperBusiness, 2002, p. 281).

Lovely said Millennials are very anxious to retool themselves. “They don’t mind changing,” Lovely said.

Packaged with this is a higher level of assertiveness and confidence in their own abilities. Often, this means that they want to move ahead as quickly as possible. “Many of them think three or four years teaching is plenty of time for teaching and then might consider becoming a principal or moving into another job in the field,” Abrams said.

Millennials’ expectation that will not stay in one place or one field also means that tenure has much less value for them than for earlier generations, Abrams said. “They may be off and moving before they ever hit the tenure mark,” she said.

**What this means for schools:** Take advantage of Millennials’ interest in constant learning and their expectation that they will make several career moves. Make leadership opportunities available to beginning teachers as early as possible. Ensure that they understand that a variety of

career options beyond the principalship are open to them if they focus first on becoming excellent teachers. Help them connect their professional development with their career aspirations as well as the needs of their students. Give them opportunities to identify what and how they want to learn.

### **Millennials love being on teams.**

They were nurtured in environments that emphasized cooperative learning and team sports. And, at home, “Millennials have always been part of the day-to-day negotiation of their home lives. . . . They’ll be able to contribute and collaborate right from the get-go,” said Lancaster and Stillman (p. 31).

This means that grade-level and subject-area teams are very attractive to beginning teachers, Abrams said. “If the dynamics are right, if they are brought in as equal partners, they will flourish,” she said.

Lovely said Millennials also have a strong desire to develop friendships with colleagues at work. “Schools that provide for the social aspects of work as well as develop a team ap-

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### **Who will leave the profession?**

Teachers who are most likely to leave the profession in the next five years:

- Are not satisfied with teaching as a career;
- Feel as if supervisors do not value their work;
- Feel stress and anxiety related to reviews by their supervisor;
- Feel stress and anxiety related to personnel issues, union, low pay, teacher conflict, discipline, complaints, and incompetence;
- Feel stress and anxiety related to unrealistic demands, workload, and number of responsibilities;
- Have fewer years of experience teaching;
- Are minority teachers;
- Feel stress and anxiety related to safety;
- Feel stress and anxiety related to budget/lack of funding/financial constraints;
- Find making a contribution to society a source of greatest teaching satisfaction;
- Feel stress and anxiety related to lack of resources; and
- Find pay/salary a source of greatest teaching satisfaction.

**Source:** *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships* (2005). [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).

NSDC TOOL / **Meeting the needs of a mixed crowd**

PARTICIPANT	CLASS SETTING	STYLE OF PRESENTER	SUBSTANCE	WORRIES AND AVERSIONS
<b>Veteran</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional classroom environment</li> <li>• Stress-free; unhurried</li> <li>• Opportunity to practice skills privately</li> <li>• Adequate breaks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unemotional and logical</li> <li>• Credible experiences</li> <li>• Older, more mature presenters who speak the same language</li> <li>• Coaches in a tactful way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large print materials</li> <li>• Reader’s Digest facts and summaries</li> <li>• Actual examples</li> <li>• Minimal technobells and whistles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being called on and not knowing the answer</li> <li>• Stories that are too personal</li> <li>• Overly technical information</li> <li>• Coddling younger participants</li> <li>• Rudeness</li> </ul>
<b>Baby Boomer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organized for group interaction</li> <li>• Chance to network</li> <li>• Open-ended discussions</li> <li>• Participation in setting the agenda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes them for what they already know</li> <li>• Comes across as a friendly equal (never call them ma’am or sir)</li> <li>• Uses personal examples</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to scan</li> <li>• Well organized</li> <li>• Icebreakers, teambuilding exercises</li> <li>• Case studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking foolish in front of peers (nix the role play)</li> <li>• Content that doesn’t apply to their current assignment</li> <li>• All the work piling up back at school or the office</li> </ul>
<b>Generation X</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured so they can work at their own pace</li> <li>• Distance learning and independent study</li> <li>• On-the-job training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gets right to the point</li> <li>• Informal and fun loving</li> <li>• Earns their respect</li> <li>• Doesn’t hover over them</li> <li>• Gives lots of feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bulleted to highlight key points</li> <li>• Headlines and lists</li> <li>• Role-play (unfazed about looking clumsy)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reteaching them what they already know</li> <li>• Beating a topic to death</li> <li>• Using overheads</li> <li>• Boredom</li> </ul>
<b>Millennial</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Versatile</li> <li>• Combines teamwork with technology</li> <li>• Ability to get up and move around the room when tasks are finished</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive and upbeat</li> <li>• Makes purpose, process, and payoffs clear</li> <li>• Listens; validates ideas</li> <li>• Recognizes them as lifelong learners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retooling what they know to adapt to workplace changes</li> <li>• Music, art, and games</li> <li>• Ideas for dealing with difficult parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving too slowly</li> <li>• Lecturing</li> <li>• Out-of-date technology</li> <li>• Implying that they can’t do something</li> <li>• Criticism</li> </ul>

**Source:** *Generations at School: Building an Age-Friendly Learning Community*, by Suzette Lovely and Austin Buffum (Corwin Press, 2007), p. 64. Reprinted with permission.



## Tune in to what the new generation of teachers can do

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proach to learning, will find Millennials reluctant to leave them,” she said.

**What this means for schools:** Emphasize the importance of teams as you recruit Millennials. Use photographs of teachers working together in your printed and web presence. Involve teachers from the teams they will join in the interviewing and hiring process. Professional learning communities can be ideal structures for them, said Abrams and Lovely. But schools need to ensure that all participants in learning communities are grounded by a set of protocols. Millennials may feel as if protocols are slowing down the team process but protocols may be necessary to ensure that older teachers allow beginning teachers to participate fully in discussions.

### Millennials are expert multitaskers who don't want to miss out on opportunities and also expect a lot of themselves.

This generation grew up as the overscheduled children of the Baby Boomers. They learned how to juggle AP classes with before-school choir practice and after-school sports. They listened to music and watched television while they did homework. “Being able to multitask is both a blessing and a curse. They take on a lot. They tend to think that they’re somewhat invincible,” Lovely said.

Abrams said, at a much younger age than earlier generations, they feel that they have accomplished a lot — often because they have. “They want their experiences to be recognized. They don’t want to be patronized,” Abrams said.

**What this means for schools:** Help them slow down. Although they have years of experience juggling a lot as students, they are not yet experienced at balancing the demands of a professional life. Help guide them to focus on the important issues, not just the urgent issues of their new lives. Mentors can be a great support for beginning teachers struggling in this arena.

### Millennials are not afraid of accountability.

They were raised in a standards-based, high-stakes world. “This is a group that had to pass a high school exit exam to graduate from high school and a state test to get certified to be able

to teach. Accountability is what they expect,” Lovely said.

**What this means for schools:** New teachers are likely to feel very comfortable developing common assessments and sharing the results of those assessments with other teachers. If older teachers are resistant to this practice, consider finding ways to tap into the interest of newer teachers to introduce this practice.

### Millennials love technology!

This is the Facebook generation and technology is in their DNA. They are never unplugged.

“They are very savvy about picking up information off a web site. They do not want to get a lot of the bureaucratic information in a meeting. They want forms in their e-mails or on web sites,” Abrams said.

Part of that is because they are more tech savvy but it’s also because they prefer to handle such issues when they consider it most convenient for them to do so, Abrams said.

Millennials respond well to staff development that is experiential, especially if it allows them to come up with their own solutions, said Lancaster and Stillman (2002, p. 289).

**What this means for schools:** Consider just-in-time staff development that occurs online. Think YouTube-style videos that are short, easily accessible, and allow beginning teachers to access the information they want and need on their own schedule. Create web sites where schools and systems post administrative information. Encourage the use of blogs for reflections following staff development. Take advantage of technology to differentiate professional learning for different learning styles. Combine teamwork with technology.

Millennials’ experience with technology also means that principals and other supervisors have to be explicit about expectations related to technology. Is it, for example, appropriate for a teacher to communicate with students via Facebook? Is it appropriate to text message during a staff meeting? Acceptable use policies may have to be updated to include language about acceptable professional practices. ■

## RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MILLENNIALS

### Connecting Generations: The Sourcebook for a New Workplace

Claire Raines  
Menlo Park, CA: Crisp  
Publications, 2003

### When Generations Collide

Laura Lancaster and  
David Stillman  
New York:  
HarperBusiness,  
2002

### Generations at School

Suzette Lovely and  
Austin Buffum  
Thousand Oaks, CA:  
Corwin Press, 2007

### Generations at Work

Ron Zemke, Claire  
Raines, & Bob  
Filipczak  
New York: American  
Management Assn.,  
2000

## NSDC TOOL / Using MetLife surveys to learn more about new teachers

Several recent MetLife surveys provide more insight into the differing perspectives between new and veteran teachers. All of the MetLife survey documents include copies of the full survey instruments, which are expertly developed, field-tested questions with national data and breakdowns by various categories for comparison. Local schools and districts can develop their own surveys of teachers using specific questions from the MetLife surveys and then compare local results against the national results.

Here's a sampling of findings from recent surveys.

### TRANSITIONS AND THE ROLE OF SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

(2004-2005)

A major finding in this survey was the discovery that new teachers saw engaging and working with parents as their greatest challenge and the area they were least prepared to manage during their first year.

- Three in 10 (31%) believe that engaging and working with parents was their greatest challenge (p. 5).
- Only one quarter (25%) of new teachers describes relationships with students' parents as very satisfying and 20% describe is as very or somewhat unsatisfying (p. 5).
- During their first year of teaching, one quarter (24%) of new teachers felt least prepared to engage families in supporting their children's education (p. 5).

(See the April 2008 issue of *Teachers Teaching Teachers (T3)* for a closer look at this concern of new teachers.)

### EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

(2006)

This survey reveals that new teachers are coming into a profession that views itself more favorably than in the past.

- 56% of teachers reported they were very satisfied with teaching as a career, a 70% increase over findings reported 20 years earlier (p. 43).
- Four in 10 teachers (40%) said they feel they have inadequate ability to influence policies that affect them (p. 7).

### THE HOMEWORK EXPERIENCE

(2007) p. 24

This survey highlighted the ways in which teachers' levels of experience distinguish their views on homework's value and purpose, how they incorporate homework into their teaching, and how prepared they feel to create engaging and effective assignments.

Highly experienced teachers (21+ years of experience) are more likely than new teachers (5 years experience or less):

- To believe doing homework is important (87% vs. 74%) (p. 28);
- To believe strongly that doing homework helps students learn more in school (60% vs. 36%); (p. 34);
- To agree strongly that homework helps students reach their goals for after high school (60% vs. 48%) (p. 34);
- To frequently use homework to develop students' interests (57% vs. 41%) (p. 31);
- To feel extremely or very prepared to create engaging homework assignments (74% vs. 58%) (p. 117);
- To review completed homework assignments in class discussions most or all of the time (76% vs. 59%) (p. 115); and
- To speak at least once a week to their students' other teachers about how much homework they are assigning (41% vs. 21%) (p. 114).

Download any of the MetLife surveys at [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).

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**NSDC TOOL / Check your mindset**

Each year, two Beloit College professors create a Mindset List to describe the incoming class of freshmen. They draw from current events, music trends, politics, and technological developments to help demonstrate the mindset of students who are often a dozen or more years younger than the faculty who teach them.

You can download their lists and use them to kick off a discussion among your staff about the life experiences and expectations of younger colleagues.

Go to [www.beloit.edu](http://www.beloit.edu), and under the button “only@beloit,” click on Mindset List.

**If you want to explore this topic further, plan to attend Session F11 — *MetLife Study: Actions to Support and Retain Teachers at NSDC’s Summer Conference for Teacher Leaders and the Administrators Who Support Them in July.***

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