

THE LEARNING System

EVERY EDUCATOR ENGAGES IN EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVERY DAY SO EVERY STUDENT ACHIEVES

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Spring 2012

Vol. 7, No. 3

Community schools boost teacher and principal satisfaction

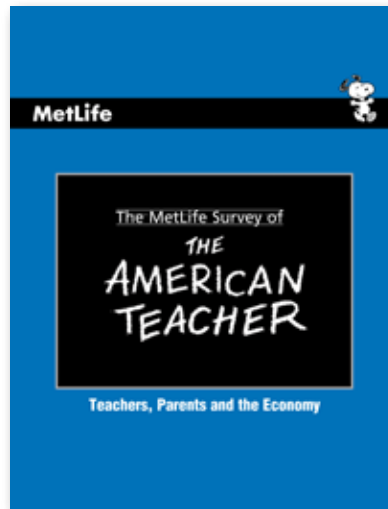
By Anthony Armstrong

Teacher satisfaction has reached its lowest point in 22 years, according to the new *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Teachers, Parents and the Economy*.

Teachers, Parents and the Economy.

During the last two years, the number of teachers who are very satisfied with their job has dropped 15%, which is the biggest decline the survey has seen in teacher satisfaction since the survey began tracking it in 1984, and the lowest point in teacher satisfaction since 1989. At the same time, the survey also saw an increase in the number of teachers who are thinking of leaving the profession (MetLife, 2011).

Meanwhile, the community school model is continuing to grow in popularity, thanks in part to its high rate of student success and teacher satisfaction. “We have evaluation data going back to the earliest years of this work, and it gets confirmed in every other evaluation, that teachers really like being part of a community school,” said Jane Quinn, vice president for community schools at the Children’s Aid Society in New York City, and director of its National Center for Community Schools, which has facilitated the development of over 15,000 community schools



nationally and internationally.

According to the Coalition for Community Schools’ website, community schools are centers for integrated social, health, and learning support. “A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities” (Coalition, 2012).

While the focus of community schools is on students and their communities, a close examination of the

Children’s Aid Society’s model reveals three key elements that offer opportunities to contribute to teacher and principal satisfaction while aligning with principles of high-quality professional learning.

ALIGN LEARNING SUPPORT

“We bring supports and services for students into each school and link them with the core instructional program, which the teachers are primarily responsible for,” said Quinn. “We have a parent resource center with a full-time

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Develop a community constituency for professional learning

Professional learning is essential, but vulnerable. Not enough educators and members of the public understand and value it. Many school boards and the people who elect them have only a tenuous commitment, if that, to professional learning. Even educators have conflicting attitudes about professional learning, depending on how they have experienced it during their careers.

We are unlikely ever to see educators carrying protest signs that read, “I demand new learning!” or “My students depend on my professional learning.”



Understanding the value of professional learning will not change until school system leaders take intentional, thoughtful actions to build constituencies for increasing the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices of all stakeholders, including educators,

administrators, school board members, etc. That process has to occur within both school systems and their communities. In school systems, it begins with leaders significantly improving professional learning and its effects. If education leaders don't value professional learning enough to make it a transformative process resulting in more effective practice, why should front-line educators support it? They won't do so unless school system and school leaders ensure that educators experience professional learning as responsive and beneficial.

Developing a communitywide constituency is more difficult. If citizens think of professional learning at all, they regard it as an inside game, just one more arcane feature of public education. They believe the only time it affects their lives is when professional learning schedules cause students to be out of school while their parents are working. Most families aren't aware of the direct relationship between the quality and amount of professional learning for teachers and the quality of educational experiences for students. Communities can't support what they don't understand.

It is, therefore, the responsibility of school system leaders to engage their communities in understanding and supporting professional learning. Here are examples of steps they can take:

Use focus groups to understand citizens' perceptions of professional learning. Most school systems don't try to learn what citizens know and don't know about increasing the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices of current educators. By conducting focus groups composed of representatives of diverse communities, school systems can gain insights into factors that impede community support for professional learning. What a school system learns should prompt sober reflection and result in improvements that respond to community concerns.

Personalize the impact of effective professional learning. In most school systems, there are teachers, principals, or school counselors who

can enthusiastically describe how they have improved their instruction, leadership, or family engagement because of professional learning. A school system can arrange for them to make presentations to civic clubs and parent-teacher organizations, and encourage local news media to report on their learning experiences. In all such cases, the emphasis should be on how the new learning has benefited students.

Invite community leaders to observe professional learning in action. The old adage that “seeing is believing” may be trite, but it is still true. Most citizens have never seen effective professional learning. School systems can remedy this by periodically providing opportunities for selected community leaders to observe venues where educators are actively engaged in authentic new learning. But not just any professional learning will suffice. Community observers will quickly discern if teachers are just going through the motions or are experiencing the professional learning as poorly organized and irrelevant to their needs.

Whatever approaches school systems take, the goal should be to cultivate communities as allies for professional learning. Without such affirmative efforts, communities will be fertile ground for those who want to oppose the policies and resources and practices effective professional learning requires.

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Maryland emphasizes the value of family and community involvement

As told to Valerie von Frank

As educators, we have to always bear in mind that we are building partnerships — with families, community members, all stakeholders. The state’s role in helping reach out to stakeholders is to set the tone and lead the way.

We began the Maryland Parent Advisory Council in late fall 2003 to support a statewide goal of involving families more. We put together a group of parents and others and asked, “What should we as a state and as districts be doing to assist parents?”

Once the council finished its work, we wanted continued input from community stakeholders on educational matters, so we created a Superintendent’s Family Engagement Council of 12 members, 10 of whom are parents and two who are external partners who meet two to three times a year.

In addition, each school system submits a Bridge to Excellence plan annually through legislative mandate, and we added a question there for districts to specify how they are providing professional development for instructional and noninstructional staff around family and community partnerships.

Another outgrowth of the council was a second full-time position at the state department for a specialist in family involvement. Both staff members work continuously at the district and school levels to provide staff development that helps educators in the field better connect with parents and community members as valu-

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able resources in supporting student achievement.

We are a small state of 24 school districts and so we are able to do a lot of capacity building within the systems. We get many questions from districts and schools about how to work with parents who may not speak the language or understand the American education system. We have created the Maryland English Language Learner Family Involvement Network that sponsors regular networking opportunities, professional development, and an annual conference around solutions to parent involvement concerns. Joyce Epstein’s National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University has recognized the network as an example of best practices in family and community involvement.

We work hard to provide opportunities for stakeholders across the state to share strategies. We have the Maryland Alliance for Family Involvement in Education, which brings educators together for professional development twice a year around specific topics. The alliance is a partnership with the state department, the state PTA, the MidAtlantic Equity Consortium — which was our former Parental Information and Resource Center — and other stakeholders.

Maryland is the only state in the country that has a Parent Involvement Matters Award, similar to Teacher of the Year. We recognize a parent from each of the 24 districts. We have a detailed process for determining who those honorees are. We choose five finalists and interview them before selecting the winner. We have had great feedback about how important that is. That’s something that could be easily overlooked, but it strengthens the perspective on parent involvement — and it empowers parents. One of our award winners is on that school board now.



The state department makes sure that an internal team meets monthly across programs to share informally and to look for opportunities for coordination. That group includes program staff from Title 1, Title 3, special education, public libraries, after school programs, student services, early childhood, and correctional institutions.

Our job at the state level is to emphasize with educators the value of family and community involvement. It’s one of those things educators understand cognitively, but we must make it make sense not just in their heads, but in their hearts.

•
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parent coordinator, an after school program, and a summer enrichment camp that is not summer school, but a camp that is designed to expand learning opportunities.”

While the exact services may vary, some schools go beyond their initial work with students and families and offer adult education courses for parents and other relatives, such as English as a second language, GED classes, and job training. These types of outreach activities help engage parents and align them with supporting student learning (Coalition, 2009). Such approaches are one part of building educator satisfaction. Teachers in schools with high parent engagement are “more than twice as likely as those in schools with low parent engagement to say they are very satisfied with their job” (MetLife, 2011, p.9).

Because research shows that student success requires good physical and mental health, many of the Society’s community schools have a wellness center that provides medical, dental, and mental health services (Children’s Aid Society, 2011). Teachers praise such services because they allow them more time to focus on teaching. “Teachers are free from being distracted by the child who can’t see the blackboard or the child who just arrived in the states and is depressed because they feel like an outsider,” explained Quinn. “There are other professionals in the building to whom teachers can refer students when they need a vision screening or they have a toothache.”

To make sure the teachers and staff are familiar with

OTHER MODELS OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

• **City Connects**

Boston, Mass.
www.bc.edu/schools/lsoe/cityconnects

• **Communities In Schools**

Alexandria, Va.
www.communitiesinschools.org

• **Center for Mental Health in Schools: An Enabling Component to Address Barriers to Learning**

Los Angeles, Calif.
smhp.psych.ucla.edu

• **University Assisted Community Schools**

Philadelphia, Pa.
www.upenn.edu/ccp/programs/university-assisted-community-schools.html

• **Schools of the 21st Century**

New Haven, Conn.
www.yale.edu/21C/index2.html

the services offered and to best align their activities, the Children’s Aid Society’s community schools start each school year with an orientation for teachers and staff. The orientation provides an opportunity to learn about the partnership and to learn how everyone can help students access the services brought into the school.

Teachers and principals may request additional professional learning activities throughout the year, such as family engagement or child and adolescent development. These can be coordinated with regular professional development time.

PROVIDE COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Acting as more than just someone to whom students are referred, many of the health and wellness professionals on site are available to enter the classroom and work with teachers at the teacher’s request, or contribute to staff

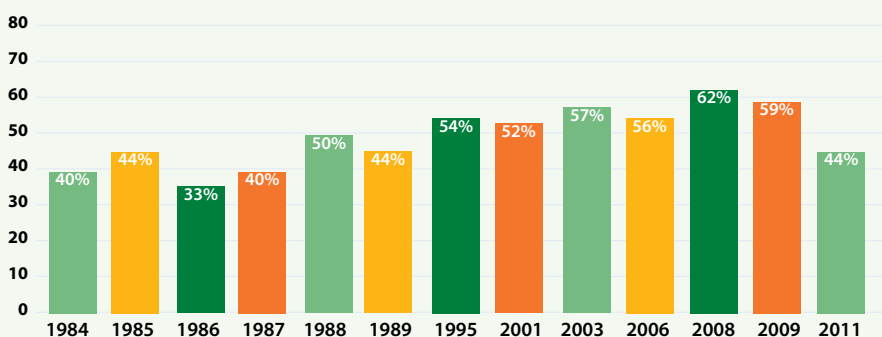
professional learning in collaborative team environments.

Mental health specialists are frequently a popular contributor to just-in-time staff learning, assisting with classroom observations and feedback, which often naturally transitions into a coaching role. “Teachers may want the mental health staff to help them with a particular child and his or her behavior, or teachers may want some guidance on classroom management if they’re having some behavior issues in their class,” said Quinn. “We often hear from teachers and principals that child and adolescent development was not something they learned about in preservice, and they want to get grounded in the basics, such as what is normal behavior, what are the developmental stages, or what are the developmental needs and tasks of a 6th grader versus a 3rd grader or a 9th grader.”

Site coordinators in the Society’s model also embed themselves into the professional teams throughout the schools. “We’re in the building all day every day,” said Quinn. “We are part of the school leadership team, the school safety committee, and what they call in New York the pupil personnel team. Most schools have a table at which the needs of individual children are discussed and teachers

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TEACHER JOB SATISFACTION THROUGH THE YEARS (% VERY SATISFIED)



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might go to that organized table to talk about a child that needs help. We are a part of the organizational structure.” In addition to more effective teaching and learning, this type of collaboration and shared leadership has been associated with higher levels of trust and job satisfaction, career satisfaction, improvements in school climate, and retention of qualified teachers and administrators (MetLife, 2009, p. 9).

ENSURE SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP IS PRESENT

According to Quinn, a mantra for the Society’s community schools is that there’s no substitute for a willing principal.

“Principal leadership is essential in all of this work,” said Quinn. “As far as we’re concerned, the principal, as the instructional leader, can make or break a community school.”

Learning Forward BELIEF

Remarkable professional learning begins with ambitious goals for students.


Citing a seven-year study of Chicago schools, published as *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). Quinn shared elements of the Society’s community schools for


success. “The first one, not surprisingly, is that the principal is the driver of change and has an inclusive leadership style. The second ingredient related to the first one was that the schools that were improving had significant family and community engagement. What they found was that the principal knew how to use community resources like the Children’s Aid Society and also knew how to work with parents as partners so that everybody was working in the same direction to promote student success. Principal leadership is essential in all of this work.”


According to Quinn, participating principal satisfaction is high as well. “We have a lot of principals who will tell you this — it makes their job a whole lot easier because we as a partner are able to take a lot of things off their plates. But we have a waiting list of principals who want to work with us, so I have no question that it is something that principals want.”

Community support

The need for community support comes at a time when a number of districts are cutting health and social services and experiencing a growing trend of large budget cuts. Within the last year:

 **28%** of teachers have seen reductions or eliminations of health or social services.

 **64%** of teachers reported an increase in students and families needing health and social support services.

 **76%** of teachers reported that their school’s budget has decreased.

Source: MetLife, 2011.

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All reports in the MetLife teacher survey series are available at www.metlife.com/teachersurvey.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

In 1994, the Children’s Aid Society founded the National Center for Community Schools in response to increased demand for information and advice about community schools implementation. Since then, the center has facilitated the development of more than 15,000 community school adaptations nationally and internationally. It shares the lessons from its work in *Building Community Schools: A Guide for Action* (2011), available for download from its website: www.childrensaidsociety.org/community-schools.

Evaluate district partnerships using the Standards for Professional Learning

While partnerships exist for a variety of purposes (implementing community schools, establishing mentors, developing communications, etc.), the most valuable ones serve multiple purposes, including advancing professional learning for all educators.

Use this tool to see if you are getting everything you want and need from current or future district partnerships.



LEARNING COMMUNITIES

- How does the partnership help advance the expertise of the educators?
- Does the partner benefit from and contribute to the learning team?
- Does the partner share responsibility for the success of the students in the school or team?
- Are the partner objectives and purposes aligned to that of the district and/or schools?

LEADERSHIP

- Does the partnership offer opportunities to develop leaders at classroom, school, and system level?
- How do the leaders of the partnership efforts create a culture of trust based on the norms of high expectations, shared responsibility, mutual respect, and relational trust?
- How do the partnership leaders advocate for professional learning and demonstrate its link to student learning?
- Where do the partnership leaders actively establish organizational systems and structures that support effective professional learning?

RESOURCES

- What kinds of resources are demanded by the partnership?
- What resources are provided?
- Does the partnership offer time, funding, or expertise to support the professional learning priorities of the system, school, team, or individual?

DATA

- Does the partnership provide data that is useful for defining individual, team, school, and system goals for learning?
- Does the partnership provide data to monitor and assess progress against established benchmarks?
- Does the data from the partnership allow you to monitor implementation of professional learning and its effect on educator practice and student learning?

LEARNING DESIGNS

- Is your partnership based on underlying frameworks and assumptions that are supported by research?
- Does the selection process for the partnership start with student needs, move to the subsequent intended outcomes, and then include how to determine the best method for selecting a solution?
- Does the partnership promote active engagement and collaboration of learners to achieve change in educator practice and student learning?

IMPLEMENTATION

- Does the partnership offer ongoing and extended professional learning to support implementation?
- Is that support based on research about frameworks for supporting and sustaining implementation for long-term change?
- Is the partnership's learning and implementation process supported with formative assessment that assesses practice, establishes expectations, and adjusts practice to align to those expectations?

OUTCOMES

- Is the partnership based on established standards that guide preparation, assessment, practice, and evaluation?
- Are the partner's outcomes based on student learning outcomes?
- Is the partnership part of a coherent and seamless system that builds on previous knowledge, includes more advanced knowledge at a later point, and becomes part of a learning continuum that aligns with expectations for effectiveness?

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Exploring the link between teacher satisfaction and professional learning

The recent *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Teachers, Parents and the Economy* provides insight into the role professional learning plays in teacher satisfaction.

During the past 12 months:

 **33%** of teachers with low job satisfaction (vs. 20% with high job satisfaction) reported that there has been a decrease in professional development opportunities.

 **44%** of teachers with low job satisfaction (vs. 27% with high job satisfaction) reported that time to collaborate with other teachers has decreased.

 **72%** of teachers with low job satisfaction (vs. 86% with high job satisfaction) reported that their school or district provides adequate opportunities for professional development.

Source: MetLife. (2011). *The MetLife survey of the American teacher: Teachers, parents and the economy.* New York: Author. Available at www.metlife.com/teachersurvey.

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