

TEACHER VOICES

*A Survey on Teacher
Recruitment and Retention*

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The Need to Find and Keep Good Teachers

This decade, American public schools will need to hire more than two million new teachers.¹ The United States Department of Education reports that “while there is no universal shortage of teachers nationwide...teachers are not always in the communities and fields where they are needed.”² Serious teacher shortages exist in communities with high poverty rates; in particular academic disciplines such as math, science, special education, bilingual education, and foreign languages; in many urban and rural areas; and in certain geographic pockets.³ Headlines from the nation’s newspapers bear this out.

“Lots of Students, Not Enough Teachers,”
Christian Science Monitor, 9/15/98

“Need Seen to Recruit Retired Teachers: Supporters Say Bill Offers Incentives”
Boston Globe, 6/25/00

“Pataki, Focusing on Social Programs, Asks for Teacher Incentives”
New York Times, 1/6/00

“Report Shows City Hurting for Teachers...”
Philadelphia Inquirer, 1/20/00

“Teacher drought may worsen...Officials are getting creative”
St. Petersburg Times, 5/7/00

Even as school districts mobilize to address these shortages and attract qualified teachers, teachers are leaving their positions in growing numbers. The nonprofit organization Recruiting New Teachers (RNT) reports that the United States will lose almost half of the teaching force due to the retirement of Baby Boom generation teachers over the next ten years.⁴ This expected wave of retirement will hit at a time when school enrollment numbers will be on the rise. And as an older generation of teachers retires, a younger generation is becoming increasingly less likely to remain in the teaching profession.

The Department of Education estimates that in the United States “one million beginning teachers [will leave the profession] in ten years.”⁵ In its recent analysis of state data, Education Week reported that “the brightest novice teachers, as measured by their college-entrance exams, were the most likely to leave the profession.”⁶ Regardless of the statistics one reviews, the need to attract and retain qualified teachers is critical. As the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future concluded in its report *What Matters Most for Teaching America’s Future*, “...recruiting, preparing and retaining good teachers is the central strategy for improving our schools.”⁷ If every generation of children is our most valuable natural resource, every generation of educators is a crucial social tool. In the absence of enough quality teachers, the potential of tens of millions of youngsters is unlikely to be realized.

More and more Americans are coming to recognize that the failure of children to perform well academically is not simply a personal problem for them and their families; it is a problem for our entire society, one with far-reaching economic, political, cultural, and moral consequences. The recruitment and retention of quality teachers, in other words, is everybody's business.

Teacher Voices

There is an increasingly intense national dialogue taking place over how to attract and keep good teachers. It is certainly positive that these issues are being given serious attention. Yet while politicians, education policymakers, school and district administrators, business leaders, and media pundits are all having their say, there is a rich source of insight within the educational sector that has not been drawn into the discussion. No one has asked the most respected teachers what they think about how America's schools can "have and hold" the teachers of today and tomorrow. It is ironic that those with unique expertise in the subject — educators who have been recognized and honored by their colleagues, supervisors, and communities for their professional excellence and exemplary dedication — have not been asked to comment on recruitment and retention issues and solutions.

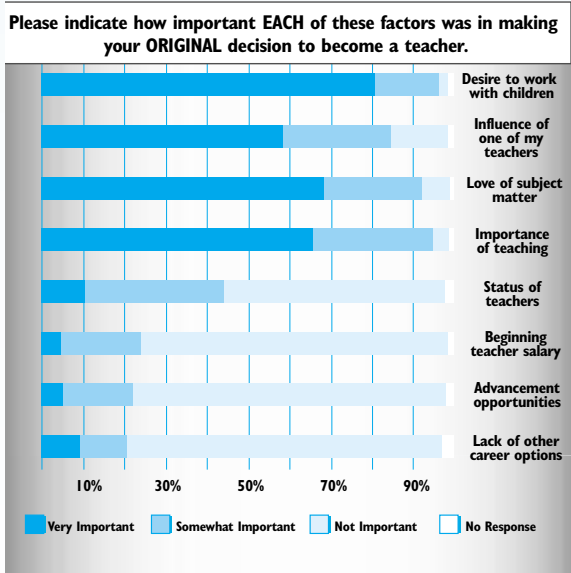
Scholastic Inc. is convinced that the observations, opinions, and recommendations of master teachers on the subject of recruitment and retention are of immeasurable value. To guarantee that the voices of these teachers are heard, the company commissioned a survey to which 400 National and State Teachers of the Year responded. The first-of-its-kind Teacher Voices 2000 Survey, the results of which are the subject of this report, was conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in spring 2000.

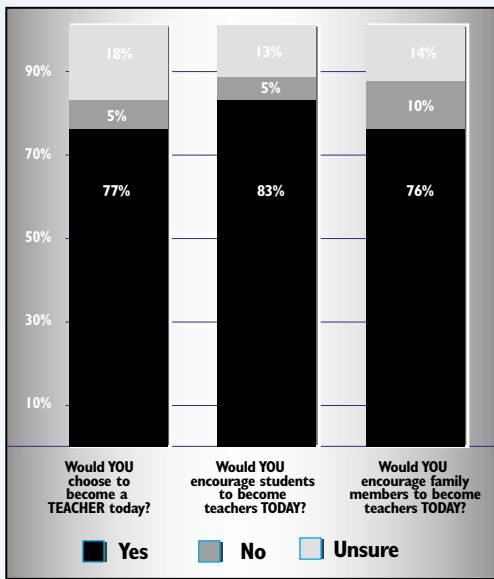
KEY FINDINGS

For the Love of Teaching: The Decision To Teach

The respondents share a lifelong, unwavering and enthusiastic commitment to teaching; most would make the same career decision again and would encourage family members and students to become teachers.

The single most important factor in the respondents' original decisions to become teachers was their desire to work with children. Eighty-one percent of the respondents reported that the desire to work with children was a very important factor in making their decision to embark on a teaching career. It is noteworthy that almost as great a majority (77%) reported that their decisions were not influenced by the lack of other options; a teaching career was a positive and desirable choice. A significant majority also identified other issues that did not factor heavily in their decisions to teach, including beginning teacher salary (74%), advancement opportunities (70%), and salary potential (70%). As one of the respondents wrote, "Teachers are professionals who have chosen education because of a passion or desire to teach young people."





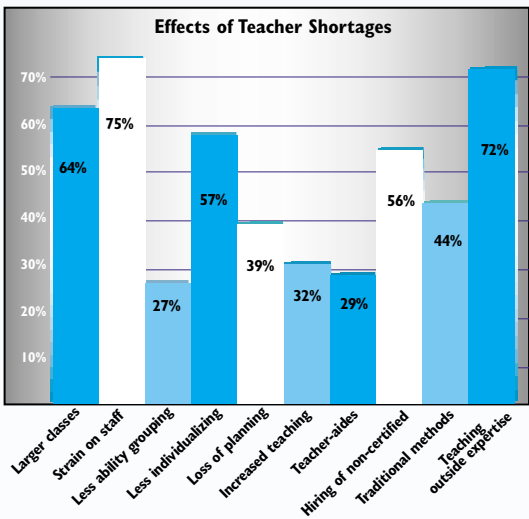
The respondents indicated that they observe a new generation making the decision to teach for similar reasons. The overwhelming majority (91%) of the respondents identified the desire to work with children as a very important factor today in making the decision to become a teacher. A clear majority also indicated that love of subject matter (73%) and the importance of teaching (71%) are very important. Nearly half of the respondents (47%) reported that salary potential is very important to today's teachers, and a smaller number indicated that beginning teaching salary (43%) and advancement opportunities (38%) are also very important factors.

The respondents' decisions to become teachers were made early in life. Sixty percent of the respondents decided to become teachers before they had graduated from high school, while 35% had made the decision while they were still in college.

A substantial majority (77%) of the respondents would choose to become teachers today, and a similar majority (76%) would encourage family members to become teachers. Even more (83%) would encourage their students to become teachers.

Finding Good Teachers and How We Can Keep Them: Observations and Recommendations

The debate over whether America is experiencing a shortage of qualified teachers ignores the realities being observed by the nation's top classroom educators. Teacher shortages exist and have negative consequences.

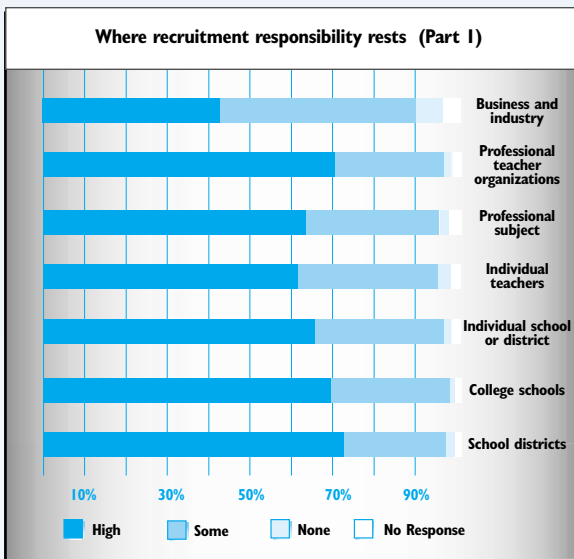


Teacher shortages exist. A majority of the respondents observed a shortage of teachers in their own schools or in neighboring districts and states. Eighty-four percent of the respondents reported a shortage of qualified teachers in other districts in their own state. A large number of the respondents also indicated that shortages exist in neighboring states (73%), neighboring school districts (72%), and in other schools in their own districts (61%). Forty-seven percent reported a shortage of qualified teachers in the schools where they themselves teach.

Both teachers and students are experiencing the negative effects of teacher shortages. Seventy-five percent of the respondents indicated that the absence of qualified teachers puts a strain on staff morale. Respondents also observed teachers teaching outside their area of expertise (72%) and larger class sizes (64%). Other ramifications reported were the hiring of non-certified teachers, reduced planning time for teachers and less individualized instruction for students. In written comments, a number of teachers noted that a dearth of teachers leads to “a diminished quality of learning experience for students.”

The recruitment of qualified teachers is the responsibility of our entire society.

A large majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the various sectors of the education profession have the highest responsibility for recruiting new teachers.

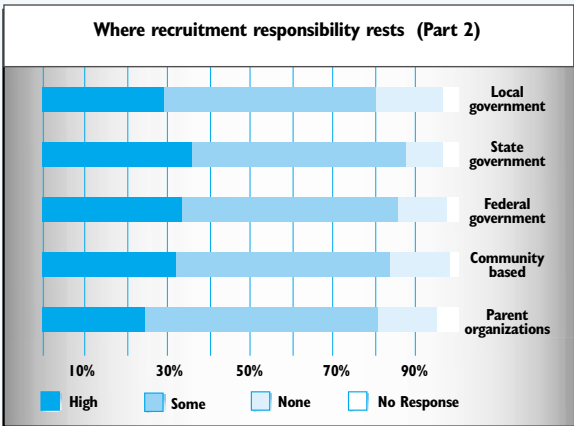


Seventy-three percent of the respondents assigned a high responsibility for recruitment to school districts, while somewhat smaller majorities cited that this level of responsibility lies also with professional teacher education organizations (71%); college schools or departments of education (69%); individual school or district administrators (66%); professional subject-matter organizations (63%); and individual teachers (62%).

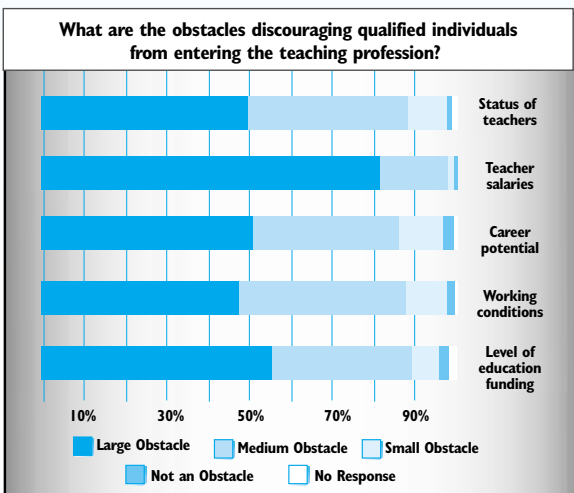
Yet the Teachers of the Year indicated that they also assign responsibility for teacher recruitment to the private sector, various levels of government, and the non-profit/volunteer sector. Ninety percent of the respondents, for example, believe that business and industry education support programs share at least some level of responsibility for teacher recruitment. And nearly as large majorities think that some level of responsibility belongs to state government programs (88%); federal government programs (85%); community-based programs (85%); parent organizations (81%); and local government programs (80%).

Financial incentives and efforts to improve the perceived status of teachers must be used to help solve recruitment problems.

Among the wide range of solutions being proposed and employed to attract prospective teachers, recruitment strategies based on financial incentives are likely to have a great effect in encouraging more qualified individuals to become teachers. Although a majority of respondents discounted the importance of financial considerations in their own decisions to become teachers, a significant number identified financial incentives as the most effective recruitment strategies for new teachers. Many cited higher beginning salaries for new teachers (83%); scholarship programs for education students (75%); student loan “forgiveness” programs (64%); and “signing” bonuses for both urban and rural teachers (60%) as the most effective strategies for recruiting quality teachers.



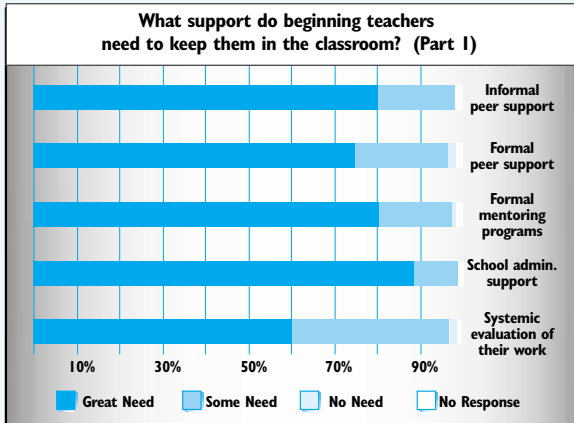
Teacher salaries do discourage qualified individuals from entering the teaching profession. A substantial majority (82%) of the respondents considered teacher salaries to be a large obstacle standing in the way of potential new teachers. One teacher commented, “We are not attracting bright, energetic [individuals] to the profession for few can manage on a beginning teacher[’s] pay.” Another wrote, “We need to make it economically feasible for individuals to choose teaching.” She illustrated her point with an anecdote: “I ran into a former student. He was a camp counselor chaperoning an exuberant group of kids. I asked him what he was up to. He told me he was in college, trying to decide what to do with the rest of his life. He wanted to work with people, make a difference. I suggested the obvious...teach. He told me had considered it but just could not afford it. We lost a [potentially] great teacher.”



Salary is not the only issue that prospective teachers face today. Approximately half of the respondents also identified the level of education funding (56%); career potential (51%); the status of teachers (49%); and working conditions (49%) as additional obstacles. One veteran observed, “Until society regards teachers as highly as it

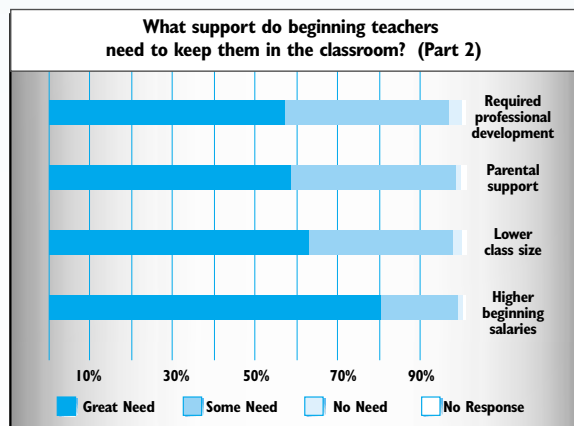
regards other professionals for example, lawyers, engineers, scientists, doctors...it will be difficult to attract qualified individuals into the teaching profession.” Some respondents linked the status of teaching to the level of pay teachers receive. Another respondent suggested: “Raise professional respect by paying teachers salaries comparable to salaries received by other professionals who have similar educational requirements and degrees.”

School administrator support, peer support, mentoring, and professional development programs will help retain beginning teachers.



Higher beginning pay is not enough to keep new teachers in the classroom. While 80% of the respondents cited that there is a great need for higher beginning salaries to help retain new teachers, an even greater percentage identified school administrator support as a great need of beginning teachers (89%). Eighty percent reported that informal peer support and formal mentoring programs are greatly needed. Wrote one teacher, “Although salaries are important, more money alone will not assure us of adequate numbers of prepared teachers. . . Support from administrators and fellow teachers is a must.”

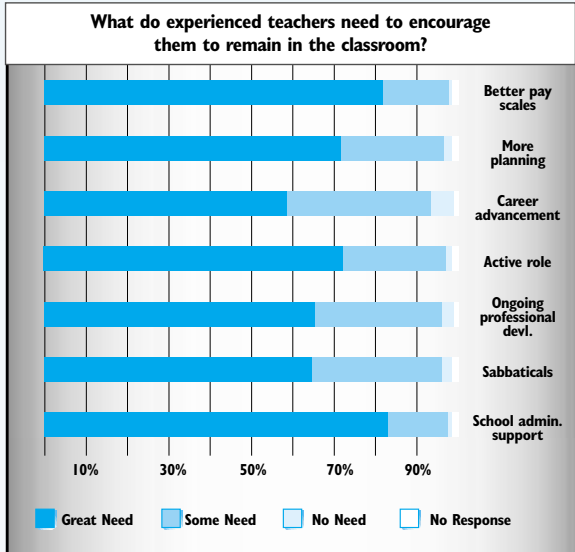
According to the teachers surveyed, new teachers will be more likely to remain in the profession if they are provided with lower class sizes (63%), systematic evaluation of their work (60%), and parental support (58%). In written comments, several teachers added that new teachers need reduced workloads and must be initially placed in “less challenging assignments” to allow time for them to develop their skills. One teacher observed, “The newest teachers must be given the best [classroom situations], not the worst. Too often the rookies get the most kids, the worst rooms and the crummiest schedule[s]. Talk about a recipe for disaster!” Another veteran teacher wrote: “I have contact with some young teachers in our school. Many of them say they will not continue as educators simply because too much is asked of them with little support from administrators, parents, or students who care.”



Nearly 57% of the respondents indicated that requiring professional development for beginning teachers would help to keep them in the classroom. Eighty-six percent of the respondents identified classroom management skills as the type of professional development most needed by new teachers. A majority reported that novice teachers also require professional development in the areas of teaching to multiple learning styles (74%); teaching special-needs students (70%); and instructional techniques (69%).

Veteran teachers are willing to mentor new teachers. The great majority (83%) of the respondents have served as mentors to new teachers. Yet only 41% reported that their districts support mentoring by providing mentors with training; 34% reported that mentor teachers receive additional pay, and even fewer (19%) indicated that mentors are given release time. Despite the lack of systematic support for mentoring programs, respondents overwhelming commented that “mentorships are a must.”

Veteran teachers need school administrator support, better pay, leadership responsibilities, and career growth opportunities.



A majority (83%) of the Teachers of the Year reported that school administrator support and better pay would encourage experienced teachers to continue teaching. Seventy-three percent cited a great need for having an active role in school decision-making. One teacher explained her viewpoint: “Enlightened administrators encourage teachers to find [their] voices, make decisions, and affect the quality of their schools.” Another commented, “Teachers who do not believe they are active participants in the decision-making process become frustrated, disillusioned, and ... tend to leave the profession. Reform cannot be successfully implemented through the ‘top down’ decision-making process typical of most school districts. Teachers must be partners in the process if we are to achieve meaningful change in public education.”

Teachers also reported that more planning time with peers (72%); the opportunity to go on sabbaticals for professional growth (64%); career advancement opportunities (57%); and ongoing professional development (65%) all motivate veteran teachers to remain in the profession. One respondent suggested: “Create a career track with meaningful transitions in curriculum development, teacher mentorship, action research, and other critical needs in schools.”

Experienced teachers need professional development in the area of technology. The large majority (82%) of respondents identified technology as an area of great need for the professional development of experienced teachers. Teachers also cited a great need for professional development in the areas of teaching to multiple learning styles (59%), and teaching special needs students (52%).

Although a majority of teachers indicated that professional development is important in terms of retention, they also pointed out problems with existing professional development programs; problems that make their peers feel that professional development can be “a waste of time.” According to the respondents, professional development programs suffer from: lack of follow through (94%); being one-shot in nature (93%); being somewhat random (86%); and a lack of systematic planning (89%). Commented one teacher, “...professional development opportunities are poorly presented or are presented by educational ‘gurus’ who have never been in a classroom, or haven’t been in a classroom for years!” Another stated, “Staff development is decided on by [the] central office – it should be decided with at least some input from teachers. . . We ‘buy’ into things more when we feel some sense of ‘ownership.’” A concurring observation was made by a teacher who recommended that districts “...survey teachers to determine what they believe they need.” This teacher went on to call for the provision of “more opportunities for rich, intensive, worthwhile, curriculum-related professional development with little or no financial outlay for the teacher.”

CONCLUSION

What do teachers want?

At first glance, there appears to be a contradiction in the responses of America's most respected educators. On one hand, respondents reported that they decided to enter the teaching profession and have remained teachers primarily because they find teaching intrinsically rewarding. Moreover, they describe themselves as typical of most teachers in this way: People who become teachers, they report, are motivated by the desire to teach much more than they are motivated by immediate or prospective extrinsic rewards such as money, status, or career potential. Yet the majority of our country's outstanding educators are of the opinion that financial incentives (such as higher beginning salaries, scholarship programs for education students, student loan "forgiveness" programs, and "signing" bonuses for both urban and rural teachers) are the most effective strategies for recruiting new teachers, and that monetary rewards (in the form of competitive salaries, for example) are necessary to retain experienced teachers.

If there is a contradiction in those responses, it is bound up in the complex meanings attached to money in our culture. Money gives people access to what they need and want for themselves and their families; like everyone else, teachers need money in order to live. But there is much more to money than the mechanics of getting and spending. Among other things, money is used to measure social value. One survey respondent put it this way: "Our culture doesn't value teachers. That's obvious from the way they're compensated for their work. [Society] pays the people we admire. It's a vicious cycle: The less we're paid, the less we're valued, the less we're paid."

As the master teachers who can be heard speaking through the survey noted over and over again, the social value of teaching is frequently ignored, both in public policy and in practice. Salary, being quantifiable, is only the most visible indicator of whether teachers and teaching are socially valued. The presence or absence of administrator support, formal mentoring programs, and professional development opportunities also reflects how much value society places on teaching and on the individuals who devote themselves to it professionally. The amount of support given to teachers (both financial and professional) says something about the place that education occupies in our system of values. According to America's most respected educators, it is not valued nearly enough.

Perhaps what our preeminent educators most clearly expressed in the survey is that respect is a precondition for addressing the challenges of recruitment and retention. If we create a social climate in which teachers and teaching are respected, the rest will follow: competitive salaries and other financial incentives to attract more of the best and the brightest into the teaching profession; adequate preparation, mentoring, peer, and administrator support to help beginning teachers through the early years; ongoing administrator support, professional development opportunities, and financial rewards that encourage experienced teachers to remain.

Our nation's most honored teachers have spoken out about what needs to be done to ensure that our children have the quality teachers they need to help shape their future. It is time for us to listen.

SURVEY SPONSORS

Scholastic Inc. and the Council of Chief State School Officers

Scholastic Inc., a global children's publishing and media company, has cultivated a working partnership with classroom teachers since it was founded 80 years ago. The Scholastic/CCSSO Teacher Voices 2000 Survey is a component of the Scholastic Teach Today and Tomorrow campaign. ■

Having listened closely to the voices of America's master teachers, Scholastic launched the campaign to move the recruitment and retention dialogue toward realistic solutions. Scholastic Teach Today and Tomorrow focuses on key recruitment and retention strategies raised by the Scholastic/CCSSO Teacher Voices 2000 Survey. The public awareness initiative aims to:

- 1) Elevate the status of the teaching profession by honoring outstanding educators through sponsorship of the National Teacher of the Year Program.
- 2) Give teachers professional development and mentoring opportunities through Scholastic's Teacher Fellows program and the Scholastic Teacher Forums that focus on teacher mentoring. The Scholastic Teacher Fellows program is a unique professional development opportunity that introduces State and National Teachers of the Year to the business sector and provides them with new ideas and experiences to bring back to the classroom. Scholastic Teacher Forums, conducted for State Teachers of the Year, give them the opportunity to enhance their understanding of the critical role of mentoring and to improve their own mentoring skills.
- 3) Provide a platform for the nation's teacher leaders to enter the dialogue on teacher recruitment and retention through vehicles such as the Scholastic/CCSSO Teacher Voices 2000 Survey.
- 4) Offer support for teachers in the "Teacher Resource" section of Scholastic.com. The website is a professional and personal resource for teachers that offers published and on-line materials and facilitates communication among peers.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nationwide, nonprofit organization. Its members are the public officials who lead the departments responsible for elementary and secondary education in the states, the five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity. Through its structure of standing and special committees, the Council responds to a broad range of concerns about education and provides leadership on major education issues.

CCSSO administers the "National Teacher of the Year Program", the nation's most prestigious award for teaching excellence, which began in 1952. Co-sponsored by Scholastic Inc., the program's mission is to

recognize and honor the contributions of American classroom teachers. Each year the states, territories, the District of Columbia, and Department of Defense schools name a “State” Teacher of the Year. Within the states, the selection processes vary, but each conducts a rigorous selection procedure to validate the State Teacher of the Year’s abilities in the classroom and in communicating the recipient’s message to a broad audience. The National Teacher is selected from this group.

ENDNOTES

1. United States Department of Education. “A Talented, Dedicated, and Well-Prepared Teacher in Every Classroom: Information Kit.” September 1999. <<http://www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/speakerskit.pdf>> July 17, 2000.
2. United States Department of Education, <<http://www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/speakerskit.pdf>>.
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4. Recruiting New Teachers. “Field Facts.” <<http://www.rnt.org/facts/index.html>> July 17, 2000.
5. United States Department of Education, <<http://www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/speakerskit.pdf>>.
6. Education Week. “Quality Counts 2000: Who Should Teach.” <<http://www.edweek.org/sreports/qc00/templates/article.cfm?slug=execsum.htm>> Executive Summary, July 18, 2000.
7. National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future. “What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future.” September 1996. <<http://www.tc.columbia.edu/teachcomm>> July 18, 2000.

THE SURVEY: PART I/METHODOLOGY

Instrument

The survey instrument, designed by Scholastic Inc. and CCSSO staff, contained 26 close-ended questions and three open-ended questions. The questionnaire covered the respondents’ backgrounds, asking them to indicate the number of years they had taught at the elementary and/or secondary level; the size of the schools where they had taught; and the type of communities in which their schools were located. It addressed the factors that had influenced their original decisions to become teachers; the challenges that they had faced in their first few years of teaching; and the challenges that they faced in their current or most recent positions as classroom teachers. Respondents were also asked for their observations and recommendations regarding teacher recruitment and retention issues.

Methodology

The survey was conducted in March and April, 2000. Six hundred and thirty questionnaires were mailed to the most honored educators in America: everyone chosen to be a National Teacher of the Year during the last 50 years, and State Teachers of the Year from the past decade. Of these, 47 were undeliverable. Four hundred (68.6%) of those who received questionnaires completed and returned them.

Respondents

At the time of the survey, all 400 respondents were or had been a State Teacher of the Year, and 40 of them had also been selected as a National Teacher of the Year. Together, these educators had 9,500 years of teaching experience at the elementary and/or secondary school level.

Seventy-eight percent of the respondents were women. Twenty-two percent were men. Eighty-six percent identified themselves as white. The remaining respondents identified themselves as black (6%), Hispanic (3%), or Asian/Pacific Islander (3%). Two percent identified themselves as “other.”

Just under two-thirds (63%) of the respondents were currently classroom teachers. Twenty-five percent continued to be employed in the field of education: of these, 8.5% were non-classroom teachers; 6.5% were school or district administrators; and 10% worked in other capacities. Nine percent were retired at the time of the survey. Less than one percent (0.5%) were employed in a non-education field. Two percent did not indicate their current position.

Just over half (52%) of the respondents had devoted all or most of their teaching lives to students at the elementary level (kindergarten through 8th grade), while nearly all the others (41%) had taught for most of their careers at the secondary level (grades 9-12). Only a very few respondents had divided their teaching careers more or less evenly between the two levels.

Nearly two-fifths (39%) of the respondents had spent the largest portion of their teaching years in suburban schools, while 32% had taught predominantly in rural areas. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents had gained most of their classroom experience in urban communities.

The majority (62%) of the respondents had taught in large schools with a population of more than 500 students. About one-third (34%) had taught primarily in mid-size schools with between 101 and 500 students. A handful (3%) of the respondents had spent most of their teaching careers in small schools with 100 or fewer students.