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WAITING TO BE WON OVER:

Teachers Speak on the Profession, Unions, and Reform

By Ann Duffett, Steve Farkas, Andrew J. Rotherham, and Elena Silva

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	1
Systemic Problems	2
Considering Change.....	4
Unions as Protectors and Reformers.....	8
Newcomers and Veterans.....	12
Conclusion	16
Appendix A: Methodology	17
Appendix B: Survey.....	18

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ABOUT EDUCATION SECTOR

Education Sector is an independent think tank that challenges conventional thinking in education policy. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to achieving real, measurable impact in education, both by improving existing reform initiatives and by developing new, innovative solutions to our nation's most pressing education problems.

American public education is in the midst of intense change, and teachers, in particular, are facing pressure to produce better outcomes for students. As policymakers, teachers unions, and other stakeholders react to changing demands on the nation’s public education system, there remains considerable debate about what teachers think and what they want. Too often assumptions define the conversation rather than actual evidence of teachers’ views. Teachers unions and associations often claim to represent the voice of all teachers. But, while these groups serve an important role, they cannot possibly be expected to represent the diverse viewpoints of a profession with 3.2 million practitioners.¹ As such, independent public opinion research that investigates what teachers think about various issues is a necessary contribution to the national conversation on education policy and reform.

In an effort to facilitate and inform this conversation, Education Sector and the FDR Group surveyed 1,010 K–12 public school teachers about their views on the teaching profession, teachers unions, and a host of reforms aimed at improving teacher quality.² The survey asks specific questions about the work teachers do and about reform proposals that are currently being debated. It also examines the views of new teachers and veterans. And, when possible, the survey discerns trends by asking some identical questions from a 2003 national survey of K–12 public school teachers and comparing the responses.³ In order to probe themes and develop the survey instrument, Education Sector and the FDR Group conducted six focus groups in five cities with approximately 60 current public school teachers. (See appendices for a full discussion of methods and the questionnaire.)

The survey revealed that it is hard to place teachers definitively in any one camp even though advocates on all

sides of various issues do just that. As a whole, teachers today are what political analysts might describe as “in play” and waiting to be won over by one side or another. Despite frustrations with schools, school districts, their unions, and a number of aspects of the job in general, teachers are not sold on any one reform agenda. They want change but are a skeptical audience. For instance, nearly half of teachers surveyed say that they personally know a teacher who is ineffective and should not be in the classroom. But, although teachers want something done about low-performing colleagues, they are leery of proposals to substantially change how teachers can be dismissed.

Today’s teachers have different expectations than teachers in the past, and they expect different things from their professional lives. Yet, they recognize the problems that undermine their profession, including job lock, weak evaluation and reward structures, and too much bureaucracy. With reformers pushing hard for change and teachers unions holding tight to tradition, teachers are caught in the middle, unsure of how their profession should change but very aware that it needs to.

Teachers see problems with their unions as well. For example, many say that the union sometimes fights to protect teachers who really should be out of the

¹ Digest of Educational Statistics, 2007.

² The term “union” is used throughout this report to refer to unions and associations. The survey referenced both.

³ Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, and Ann Duffett, *Stand By Me: What Teachers Really Think About Unions, Merit Pay and Other Professional Matters*, (New York: Public Agenda, 2003).

classroom. But teachers still see the union as essential, and they value the union’s traditional role in safeguarding their jobs. New teachers are more likely today than they were in 2003 to call unions “absolutely essential.” And many teachers would like to see their unions explore some new activities, especially some of the ideas associated with the “new unionism” agenda, and take the greater role in reform, but not if that comes at the expense of the union’s core mission.

The fluid environment presents both challenges and opportunities for education leaders and policymakers. Teachers unions may claim a deep loyalty from their members but the relationship seems to be based mostly on the practical benefits that the union provides. Likewise, school districts face high hurdles to convince teachers that they have their best interests in mind and deserve their trust. And in an environment of distrust, reformers face real challenges to earn the support of teachers and turn today’s most popular reform ideas aimed at improving teaching and learning into public policy.

This report is organized into four sections. The first highlights key findings about the challenges that teachers see in their profession, including weak evaluation processes and a rigid tenure and pay system. The second section describes how teachers feel about a range of reforms aimed at improving their profession, from new evaluation approaches to differential pay proposals. The third section focuses on teachers’ opinions about their union and what they feel the union role should be in improving teacher quality. The final section examines some key points of comparison between new teachers, who have been on the job fewer than five years, and veteran teachers, who have been teaching for more than 20 years.

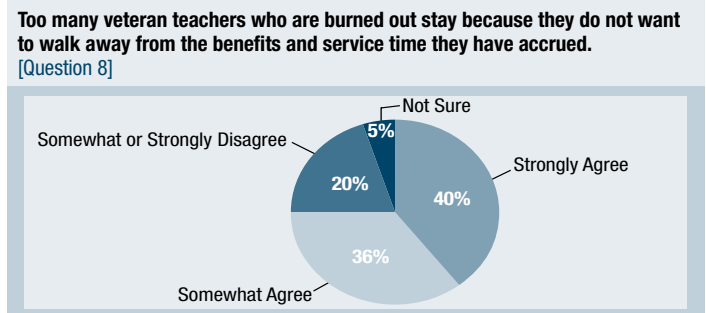
SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS

In order for teacher quality to improve, there are some systemic problems in the profession that must be changed. Teachers, for instance, say the benefits structure works against teacher quality by locking in people who would rather move on or retire, and laws and contractual rules hinder quality by making it difficult to remove persistently ineffective teachers. Teachers also point to weak evaluation procedures and bureaucracy as serious problems that hold back the profession.

Locked In

Three in four public school teachers (76 percent) agree that, “Too many veteran teachers who are burned out stay because they do not want to walk away from the benefits and service time they have accrued.” And this view resonates with majorities of teachers whether they are newcomers to the profession (80 percent) or veterans (68 percent). [Fig. 1–1]

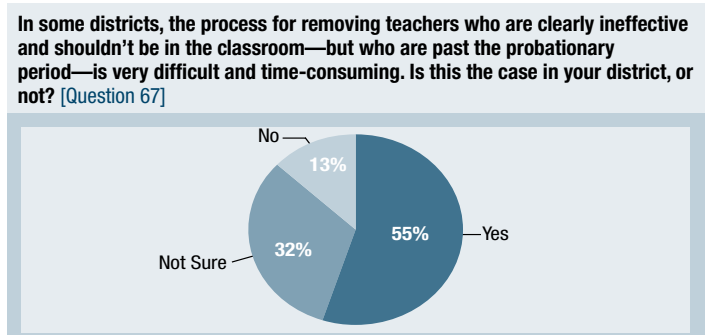
Figure 1–1.* Trapped by Benefits



*Percentages in figures may not equal 100 percent due to rounding or omission of answer categories. Question wording may be edited for space. Full question wording is available in Appendix B. Small discrepancies between percentages in the text and figures are due to rounding.

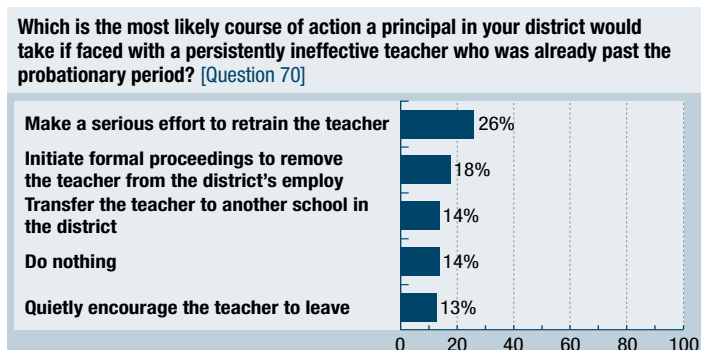
According to teachers, not only do the system’s incentives lock in teachers who’d rather leave; its rules make it hard to push colleagues out when they really should not be teaching. Well over half of the teachers surveyed (55 percent) say that in their district it is very difficult and time-consuming to remove clearly ineffective teachers who shouldn’t be in the classroom but who are past their probationary period. Only 13 percent say this is not the case. And almost half of teachers (46 percent) say they know a teacher in their own building who is past the probationary period but who is clearly ineffective and shouldn’t be in the classroom (42 percent say they do not know such a teacher). [Fig. 1–2]

Figure 1–2. Breaking Up Is Hard to Do



At the same time, teachers can't point to a single, preferred strategy that principals use to deal with teachers who clearly should not be in the classroom. One in four teachers (26 percent) says a principal in their district, if faced with a persistently ineffective teacher, would "make a serious effort to retrain the teacher." And 18 percent say a principal in their district would most likely "initiate formal proceedings to remove the teacher." But some think that their district's principals would be most likely to do nothing (14 percent); or that they would "transfer the teacher to another school" (14 percent). Another 13 percent say the principals would "quietly encourage the teacher to leave." [Fig. 1-3]

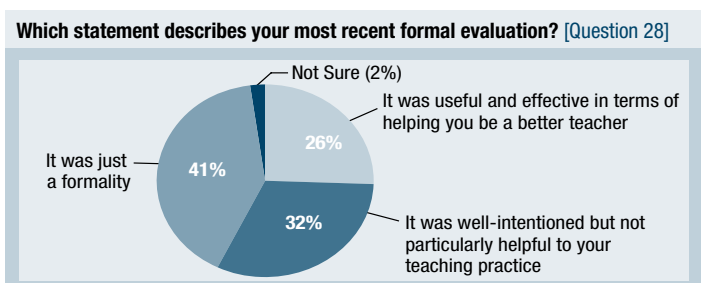
Figure 1-3. No Clear Solution to Ineffectual Teachers



Weak Evaluations

Teachers indicate that the most obvious technique used to assess teacher quality—the formal observation and evaluation—is not doing the job. In fact, only 26 percent of teachers report that their own most recent formal evaluation was "useful and effective." The plurality—41 percent—say it was "just a formality," while another 32 percent say at best it was "well-intentioned but not particularly helpful" to their teaching practice. Almost seven in 10 teachers (69 percent) say that when they hear a teacher at their school has been awarded tenure, they think that it's "just a formality—it has very little to do with whether a teacher is good or not." [Fig. 1-4]

Figure 1-4. Evaluations: Just a Formality



Voices From the Field ...

On Benefits:

An experienced teacher in Chicago described the calculations going through her mind as she approaches retirement: "They will take 5 percent of your pension away from you for every year that you quit before the age of 60. If you're at 30 years, and you're burned out, you better go the 34, or they're going to take 20 percent of your pension from you. That is the really bad thing about it because it almost makes these teachers be there whether they want to be or not."

Newcomers talked about being forewarned about the pitfalls of the benefit structure: "I've been around four years, and I've heard people say, 'If you want to get out of the system, get out of it now before you're locked in,'" explained a relatively novice Milwaukee teacher.

On Ineffective Peers:

Teachers acknowledged the existence of ineffective peers and how hard it is to remove them from the classroom. "I have children in school right now, and there certainly are some teachers that I will not let my children go into their classrooms," said a teacher working in the suburbs of Milwaukee.

A teacher from the Milwaukee public schools described her school's effort to remove a problematic colleague: "They have to go through a lot of hoops. ... We had blatant documentation, parent complaints, calls to a school board, all sorts of things, but the principal's hands were tied on every single situation."

And a teacher from a Milwaukee suburb said: "In our district there's a male teacher. ... He is struggling very, very much and is still probationary, but they renewed his contract. Our entire department is shocked."

Few Rewards

Outstanding teachers are unlikely to be recognized in any formal way, if at all. Half of teachers (49 percent) say school and district officials "do not reward outstanding teachers; the reward is solely intrinsic." Twenty-nine percent say outstanding teachers receive "official recognition (for example, formal commendation or note to file)," 16 percent say they receive some form of "informal recognition (for example, better treatment or perks)," and 10 percent say they get a "token gift."

Only 5 percent say that teachers receive a "financial bonus" for outstanding work. Ninety-seven percent of teachers say salary increases in their district are determined "according to a strictly defined schedule mostly driven by their years of service and the credits they attain."

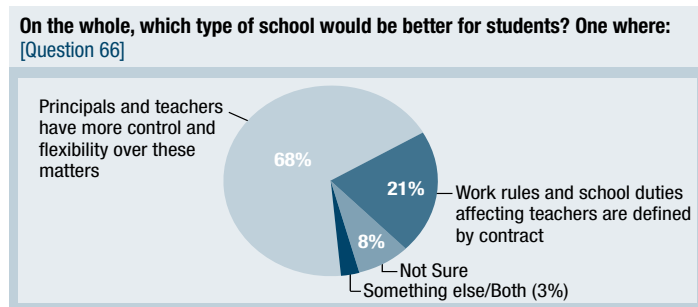
A Lot of Rules

Teachers describe schools that are tied up by bureaucracy, governed by a clutter of rules, legal stipulations, and contractual obligations that force good teaching and learning to take a back seat. The vast majority of teachers (86 percent) agree that, “Teachers are required to do too much paperwork and documentation about what goes on in their classrooms.”

They acknowledge that principals also work under difficult conditions, strapped for time and bogged down by the restrictions of a heavily bureaucratic system. Almost six in 10 (59 percent) agree that, “All the paperwork and legal and contractual restrictions make it difficult for principals to get things done”; only 28 percent disagree. In the end, when things go wrong, teachers are somewhat more likely to blame the system than to blame principals. More than half (55 percent) *reject* the view that, “When individual schools fail, it’s usually because they have ineffective principals at the helm,” although 40 percent agree with that statement.

Most teachers, by a 68 percent to 21 percent margin, say schools would be better for students if principals and teachers had more control and flexibility about work rules and school duties. [Fig. 1–5]

Figure 1–5. More Flexible Schools



Summary and Analysis

Public school teachers in this national survey depict a system that seems to be stuck when it comes to fine-tuning its workforce and making the most of its professionals’ talents. Teachers who would rather move on are often trapped by benefits, and teachers who *should* move on are often unduly protected. “We do have people in the profession that get there and are entrenched, burned out. I remember there was one teacher who wanted to laminate her lesson plans. There are those people, and that’s a negative stigma against our profession,” said a Phoenix teacher.

Yet, even when teachers are identified as not being effective, the system does not make it easy to get rid of them, primarily because the most common technique used to assess teacher quality and award tenure—the formal observation and evaluation—is not doing the job. When evaluations are a mere formality, as many teachers say they are, not only do teachers lose out on the chance to improve their craft, but ineffective teachers slip through and gain tenure.

According to these findings, teachers see themselves, and the principals who lead them, as overly constrained by work rules that define what they can do, how they should do it, and when it can be done. As a result, they feel treated as less than professional. “It’s demoralizing,” said one New York City teacher about having to punch a timecard each day. “I have a master’s degree plus 30 credits, but I have a timecard with my name on it. ... It’s ridiculous.”

The findings suggest support among teachers for a system that has more flexible work rules, more trust in teachers’ judgment and professionalism, and where decisions about teacher quality are not dependent on rigid rules, weak evaluations, and faulty tenure systems.

CONSIDERING CHANGE

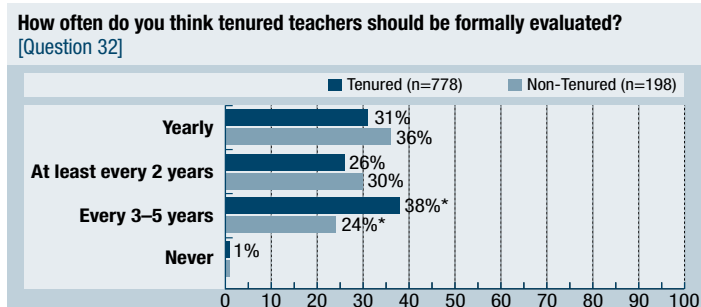
In order to change and eliminate systemic problems, school systems will need the support of teachers. Many public school teachers are open to some new ways of evaluating, rewarding, and paying teachers as well as ideas for attracting and retaining high-quality teachers. But some proposals do not gain wide support. For instance, teachers are resistant to using student test scores as a way of measuring teacher effectiveness in the classroom, and most oppose the idea of offering higher starting salaries in exchange for smaller pensions.

Stronger Evaluations

Concerned that the current evaluation process is weak and often no more than a formality, teachers express a willingness to reform the tenure system. Almost eight in 10 teachers (79 percent) support strengthening the formal evaluation of *probationary* teachers so that they will get tenure only after they’ve proven to be very good at what they do. Tenured teachers are more likely to support this proposal than their non-tenured colleagues (83 percent vs.

66 percent). What's more, most teachers think that even *tenured* teachers should be formally evaluated on a regular basis. Evaluations should occur each year according to 31 percent of tenured and 36 percent of non-tenured teachers, and at least every two years according to 26 percent of tenured and 30 percent of non-tenured teachers. [Fig. 2-1]

Figure 2-1. Regular Evaluations for Tenured Teachers



*Statistically significant difference.

Putting Pay on the Table

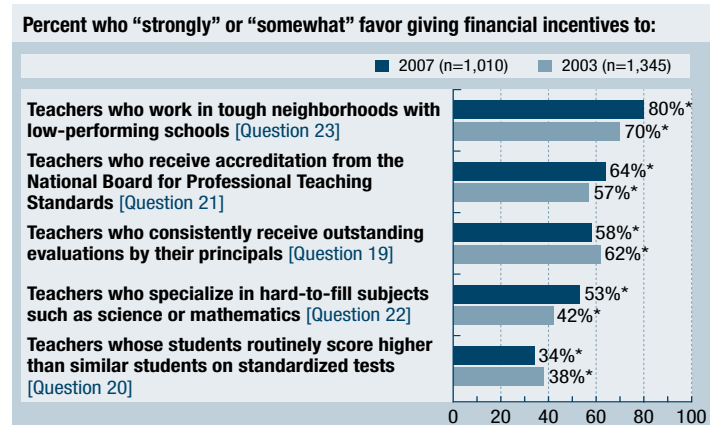
Teachers show support for some pay proposals, especially those that reward demanding assignments or additional work.

Eighty percent of public school teachers favor giving financial incentives to “teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools,” an increase of 10 percentage points from the 70 percent of teachers who favored an identical proposal in 2003. A large majority of teachers (64 percent) also favor giving financial incentives to “teachers who have pursued and achieved accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards,” an increase of 7 percentage points since the question was asked in 2003.

More than half of teachers (53 percent) favor giving financial incentives to “teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics,” an increase of 11 percentage points from 2003. And a solid majority (58 percent) favors giving financial incentives to “teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals.” [Fig. 2-2]

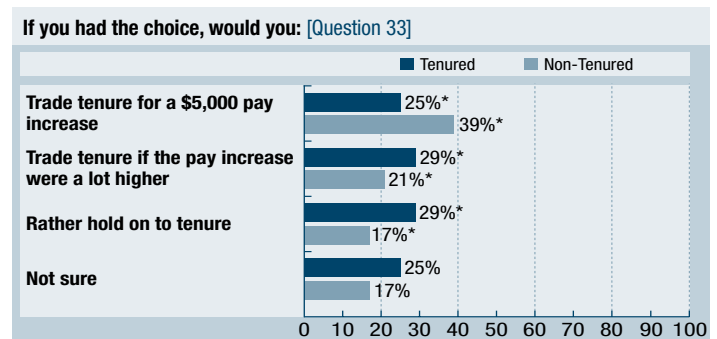
Even a proposal to trade tenure or job protection for higher pay garners some support—although it is hardly overwhelming. One in four tenured teachers (25 percent) would trade their tenure for a pay increase of \$5,000 per year, while an additional 29 percent would consider the trade if the pay increase was “a lot higher.” About three in 10 (29 percent) reject the idea outright. [Fig. 2-3]

Figure 2-2. What Merits More Pay?



*Statistically significant difference.

Figure 2-3. Swapping Tenure



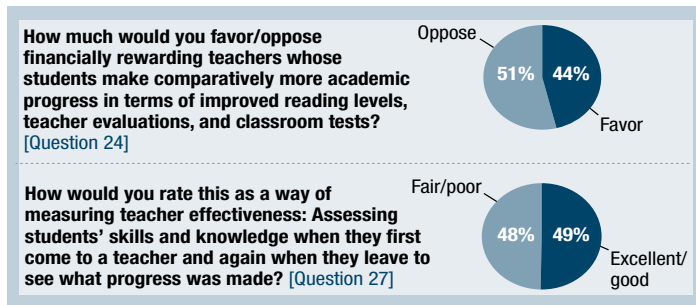
*Statistically significant difference.

Still Uneasy About Test Scores

Teachers are resistant to using test scores as a measurement of their performance and pay. As shown in Figure 2-2, one in three teachers (34 percent) favors giving financial incentives to teachers “whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests.” Most teachers today (64 percent) oppose the idea, up 8 percentage points from the 56 percent who opposed it in 2003.

Almost half of the public school teachers surveyed (49 percent) say it's an excellent (15 percent) or good (34 percent) idea to measure teacher effectiveness based on student growth, or “to assess students’ skills and knowledge when they first come to a teacher and to measure them again when students leave.” But almost half (48 percent) say it is a poor or fair idea. Similarly, the percent of public school teachers who favor (44 percent) or oppose (51 percent) financially rewarding teachers whose students make comparatively more academic progress in terms of “improved reading levels, teacher evaluations, and classroom tests” hovers around the halfway mark. [Fig. 2-4]

Figure 2–4. Adding Value



Attracting and Retaining Teachers

Teachers show strong support for recruitment strategies that improve the conditions and flexibility of their work. The majority of teachers (85 percent) agree that it is an excellent or good idea to “give teachers more time during the school day for class preparation and planning” as a way to attract and retain high-quality teachers. Almost eight in 10 (78 percent) say it is either an excellent or good idea to “make it far easier to leave and return to teaching without losing retirement benefits.” And seven in 10 (70 percent) think positively of a proposal that would “make it easier to earn and take sabbatical leave for teachers working in really challenging schools.”

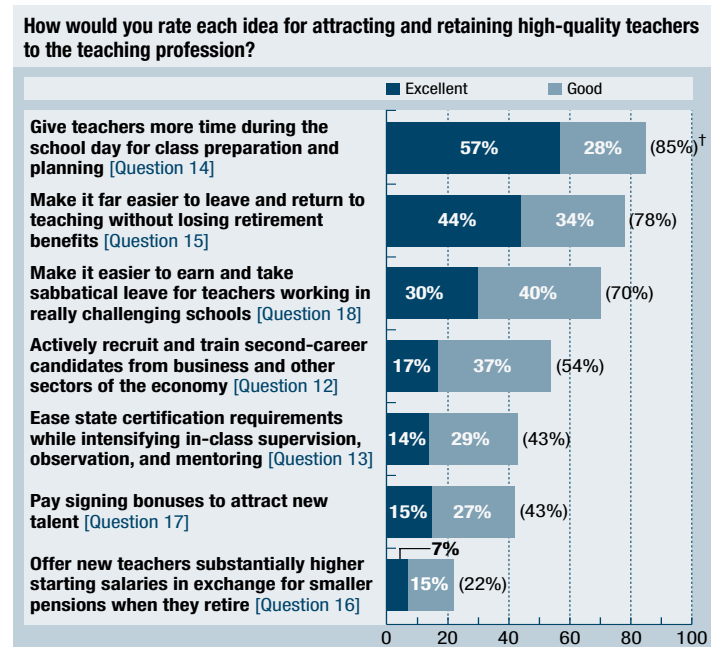
Support among public school teachers is also apparent for recruiting teachers from other industries and easing state certification requirements. Fifty-four percent say they would be open to “actively recruiting and training second-career candidates from business and other sectors of the economy.” High school teachers are more likely than elementary school teachers to support this idea (62 percent vs. 49 percent). However, only 43 percent of teachers think it is an excellent or good idea “to ease state certification requirements while intensifying in-class supervision, observation, and mentoring.”

Teachers are less supportive about using financial incentives to attract teachers. Less than half (43 percent) of teachers say it is an excellent or good idea to “pay signing bonuses to attract new talent.” Non-union members are more likely than union members to be supportive of this proposal (52 percent vs. 39 percent). And minority teachers (self-identified as African-American, Hispanic, or Asian) are more likely to support this idea than white teachers (63 percent vs. 41 percent).

Only 22 percent of public school teachers think it’s an excellent or good idea to offer new teachers “substantially

higher starting salaries in exchange for smaller pensions when they retire.” A large majority (71 percent) view it as either a poor or fair idea. Large majorities of both union members and non-members view this proposal negatively (72 percent of members and 69 percent of non-members). [Fig. 2–5]

Figure 2–5. Attracting the Best and Brightest



[†]Figures in parentheses represent totals.

Summary and Analysis

This national survey highlights public school teachers’ willingness to explore new ideas for assessing and rewarding performance and for attracting new candidates to the profession. And while teachers overall are far from convinced that differences in teacher impact can be measured fairly or measured at all, there does seem to be room for negotiation around pay initiatives, an insight that is often masked in the highly charged debates about pay for performance proposals. Still, some teachers may be insulted by the very idea that they would respond to financial incentives or that public schools would benefit from the management techniques used in the private sector.

A series of survey questions on differentiated pay approaches demonstrates there are situations where teachers agree that paying colleagues differently is justified. Teachers know that working in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools is a difficult

assignment and may feel that it's only fair to reward those willing to put forth the extra effort. Teachers also feel positively about paying more money to colleagues who have pursued and achieved National Board certification. Many know that it takes a lot of work to get such accreditation and may feel that this extra effort deserves reward. Most likely, teachers favor bonus pay for tough assignments and National Board certification because they are familiar with these ideas and know colleagues who have benefited from them. Teachers may also be amenable to these ideas because they see them as "objective" and not susceptible to favoritism. There has been growing support among teachers for some of these proposals; three of the five proposals about financial incentives that we tested have gained support in the past four years.

Paying teachers based on student test scores, however, remains controversial. Teachers' suspicion of standardized tests as a fair and objective measure drives some of this resistance. "To reward teachers for great test scores is absurd," commented one teacher. "There is such a range of external issues that work in a classroom; there is no way to accurately assess how great a job [a teacher] is doing based on test scores! And if it is based on test scores, who ultimately decides? How can favoritism, cronyism, and all other matters of human subjectiveness not come into play?"

Teachers also appear to be split over the use of growth or "value-added" measures of teacher performance, which assess teacher effectiveness based on student progress over time. Despite increased attention to these ideas in education policy, teachers are no more likely today to support them than they were in 2003.

Even though teachers show openness to some changes, it's hard to ignore the misgivings they revealed (across different types of questions) about using student achievement to measure, evaluate, and compensate them. And in focus groups, teachers bristled at even the suggestion that they should be solely responsible for a child's academic achievement when so many others—parents, administrators, even the students themselves—are not doing their part. In Milwaukee, a city school teacher told us, "I would love to be rewarded for the merits that I do make, but I would not like to be penalized for things that are out of my control."

Voices From the Field ...

On Merit Pay:

A Chicago teacher's experience illustrates the mixed feelings teachers may have on value-added measures, especially when used to determine pay bonuses: "*Prior to this year, I would say that merit-based pay ... it's an insult. Like I'm going to work harder? I work as hard as I can, and I'm not going to work harder for more money. That's an insult to me. My school ... got a very large federal grant starting next year for this merit-based pay, so the way that it's worked out, I really like it. ... It's based on the value-added of what I do. ... My kids started at 10. ... So if I take that from a 10 to a 25, are they at grade level? No. Did I do a really good job? Did I bring them up significantly? Yes. ... We'll see. It's not been implemented yet. In theory, I like it.*"

To teachers, one of the critical downsides of differentiating teacher pay—whatever the approach—is that it will breed unhealthy competition and wreak havoc on the collaborative spirit that they see as essential to effective teaching and student learning. One teacher wrote, "*I still feel that teaching is one of the most valuable and fulfilling professions in the world. I am afraid that by tying teacher compensation to effectiveness, there will be less willingness for teachers to work together. Teaching will become a competition for getting the most money.*"

A New York teacher said, "*Merit pay would make us all like cave people fighting for a bone.*"

Educators and policymakers frequently discuss ways to attract and retain high-quality teachers. One idea getting attention these days is to swap some of the benefits teachers enjoy later in their careers for more money in the early years. The survey finds teachers are protective of their pensions, and the vast majority of teachers overall do not like the idea of raising starting salaries in exchange for fewer retirement benefits. But many teachers are open to other new ways of attracting and keeping good teachers. Generally speaking, teachers appear to be considerably more interested in recruitment and retention strategies that would improve the flexibility and conditions of their work. For example, most support making it easier to leave and return to the profession without losing benefits. A suburban teacher from California wrote, "As a mom of two kids under five, I'd like to see it more feasible to take a few years off and be able to go back without retirement being so negatively affected." And an overwhelming majority supports giving teachers more time for class planning and preparation. While this measure would come with a large price tag for public schools, it is notable that the measure teachers are most likely to favor does not come with any monetary gain for individual teachers.

UNIONS AS PROTECTORS AND REFORMERS

Teachers unions play a powerful role in influencing the direction and success of district reforms aimed at improving teacher quality. Public school teachers expect unions to continue playing their traditional role: to bargain for benefits, safeguard jobs, and protect teachers from political machinations in their districts. But teachers also are open to their local union playing a role in improving teacher quality. While relatively few see the union in their own district as active in doing so, large numbers would support union efforts to mentor and train teachers, to negotiate new ways to evaluate teachers, and even to engage in high-stakes reform efforts such as guiding ineffective teachers out of the profession.

Unions Matter

Most teachers see the teachers union as vital to their profession. When asked how they think of teachers unions or associations, 54 percent of teachers responded that they are “absolutely essential.” This is an increase of 8 percentage points from 46 percent in 2003. Another 31 percent see unions as “important but not essential,” and just 11 percent as “something [they] could do without.” Among union members, almost 2 out of 3 (65 percent) view them as absolutely essential. [Fig. 3–1]

Figure 3–1. Still Critical

Do you think of teachers unions or associations as: [Question 36]		
	Total 2003 (n=1,345)	Total 2007 (n=1,010)
Absolutely essential	46*	54*
Important but not essential	38*	31*
Something you could do without	12	11

*Statistically significant difference.

And most teachers strongly value the traditional protections that unions offer. Approximately three in four teachers (74 percent) agree that, “Without collective bargaining, the working conditions and salaries of teachers would be much worse.” This has declined by 7 percentage points, from 81 percent who agreed in 2003. Not surprisingly, union members are far more likely than non-members to feel this way (87 percent vs. 50 percent).

Seventy-four percent agree that, “Teachers facing unfair charges from parents or students would have nowhere to turn without the union.” Union members are more than twice as likely as their non-union colleagues to feel this way (85 percent vs. 39 percent).

Almost eight in 10 teachers (78 percent) agree that, “Without a union, teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power.” Again, union members are twice as likely to feel this way compared with non-members (91 percent vs. 45 percent).

Finally, most teachers do not think that union presence hinders the reputation of the profession. Just 21 percent of teachers agree that, “Teachers would have more prestige if collective bargaining and lifetime tenure were eliminated.” Sixty percent of teachers overall *disagree* with this statement, as do 68 percent of union members and a smaller 44 percent of non-members.

On the Union Agenda

Public school teachers rely on their unions mainly for traditional functions. More than three quarters of teachers say that their local union “protects teachers through due process and grievance procedures,” “regularly informs teachers about their benefits, rights, and responsibilities,” and “effectively negotiates contracts, salary, and benefits on behalf of teachers.” And of those teachers who report that their local union performs such traditional functions, most say it is doing an excellent or good job (approximately seven out of 10). While only 8 percent of teachers said they had filed a grievance against their district, the majority (73 percent) of these teachers reported that their only or most recent grievance ended in their favor. And 70 percent of these same teachers said the union did a good job representing them, while only 27 percent felt the union could have worked a lot harder.

Some unions, however, are moving outside of the traditional role and engaging in activities typically associated with a more vigorous school reform agenda. Fifty-five percent of teachers overall say the union in their district “negotiates to keep class size down in the district.” Nearly half of teachers (46 percent) say that the local union “provides support and mentoring to new teachers.” Forty-one percent say it “negotiates new ways to more meaningfully and effectively evaluate teachers” and that it “keeps teachers updated on new instructional methods and curriculum.” Almost four in 10 (38 percent)

say their district’s union “provides teachers with high-quality training and professional development,” and one in three (33 percent) that it “expands the career ladder for teachers by negotiating new and differentiated roles and responsibilities.”

Still, according to these survey results, most unions do not appear to be engaged in efforts to deal with ineffective teachers. Only 17 percent of teachers say that the union in their district “leads efforts to identify ineffective teachers and retrain them.” Fifteen percent (for both) say that the union “guides ineffective teachers out of the profession” or “screens teachers who are new or transferring to ensure a good fit with the schools they’re going to.” [Fig. 3–2] Half of teachers (49 percent) agree that their union “sometimes fights to protect teachers who really should be out of the classroom.” And nearly half (46 percent) say they “personally know a teacher in their building who is past the probationary period but who is clearly ineffective and shouldn’t be in the classroom.”

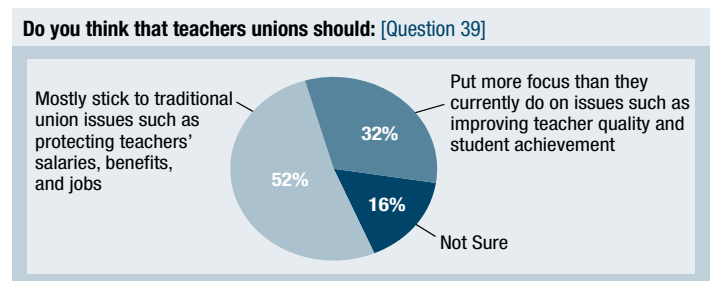
Figure 3–2. The Unions and Teacher Quality

Percent who say the union in their district currently does each item:	
	Total (n=1,010)
Provide support and mentoring to new teachers [Question 58]	46
Negotiate new ways to more meaningfully and effectively evaluate teachers [Question 64]	41
Keep teachers updated on new instructional methods and curriculum [Question 55]	41
Provide teachers with high-quality training and professional development [Question 59]	38
Expand the career ladder for teachers by negotiating new and differentiated roles and responsibilities [Question 61]	33
Lead efforts to identify ineffective teachers and retrain them [Question 63]	17
Guide ineffective teachers out of the profession [Question 62]	15
Screen teachers who are new or transferring to ensure a good fit with the schools they’re going to [Question 65]	15

Room to Grow

While teachers value unions for their traditional protections, sizeable numbers also seem open to the union as a player in reform. When forced to choose, more than half of teachers (52 percent) prefer that their union stick to traditional issues such as protecting teachers’ salaries, benefits, and jobs. But nearly a third (32 percent) say that unions should increase their focus on things like teacher quality and student achievement (16 percent are unsure). [Fig. 3–3]

Figure 3–3. Remember Bread and Butter



Among the teachers who say that the union or association in their district currently *does not* perform certain functions typically associated with a more vigorous school reform agenda, sizeable numbers would strongly favor their local union taking on such activities. For example, while 38 percent of teachers report that their local union doesn’t provide support and mentoring to new teachers, the majority of these teachers indicate that the union *should* take on this responsibility (66 percent would favor the union doing so). And, while 39 percent of teachers report that their union currently doesn’t negotiate new ways to more meaningfully and effectively evaluate teachers, the majority (72 percent) of these teachers would favor the union doing so.

The same pattern continues across other reforms. Among those who say the union in their district does not currently do so, approximately two out of three would favor their local union playing a role in guiding ineffective teachers out of the profession (66 percent), in expanding the career ladder for teachers (65 percent), and in identifying and retraining ineffective teachers (65 percent). Six in 10 support the union getting more involved in providing guidance on instructional and curriculum matters (61 percent) and also providing professional development opportunities (61 percent).

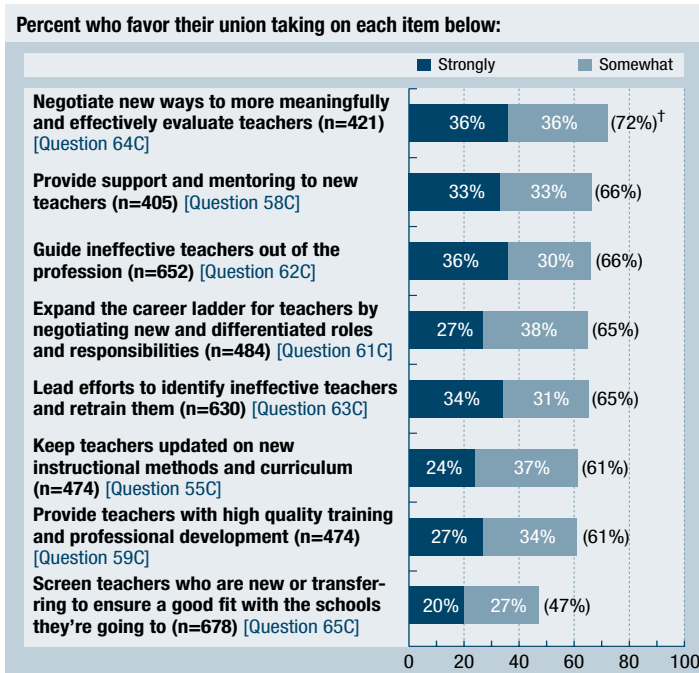
The one exception where there is less than a majority in favor is for the union to take a more active role in ensuring a good fit between teachers and schools; for this item, just under half (47 percent) say they are in favor. [Fig. 3–4]

Permission to Lead

Sizeable numbers of public school teachers indicate strong support for teachers unions to take the initiative on what many would consider to be controversial reforms.

More than six in 10 (63 percent) teachers in the overall sample say they would support the union or association

Figure 3–4. How Unions Can Improve Teaching

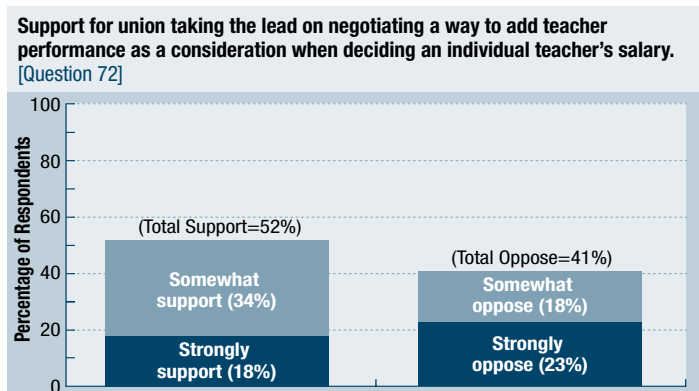


[†]Figures in parentheses represent totals.
Base: Teachers who say union currently does not do each item.

in their district taking the lead on ways to simplify the process for removing teachers who are past the probationary period and who are clearly ineffective and shouldn't be in the classroom. Just 16 percent would oppose it. Majorities of both union members (65 percent) and non-members (58 percent) are in favor of this idea.

Also, more than half of teachers overall (52 percent) say they would support the local union or association taking the lead on negotiating a way to add teacher performance as a consideration when deciding an individual teacher's salary; 40 percent would oppose it. [Fig. 3–5]

Figure 3–5. The Unions and Pay for Performance



Voices From the Field ...

On Unions as Protectors:
"I would never give up my continuing contract rights," a 31-year veteran wrote. "I have seen too many parents and administrators make unfounded accusations that could ruin a career."

"Without our union, teachers are quite powerless," wrote a teacher from Hawaii.

"One of the reasons that I belong to the union, as ineffective as it may be ... I belong because of the liability policy. If you're going to be a teacher, you need to have that liability. There are so many situations I couldn't even begin to name. If you coach, do an activity, or something in the classroom, I just believe that they have lawyers that are specially trained for the educational system, not just somebody who went to law school and can interpret law, but somebody that really knows educational law," said a Phoenix teacher.

"I have to say I just don't know what it would be like if we didn't have a union," said one New York City teacher. "I'm losing faith in the union more and more all the time, but I don't know. ... What would it be, if we didn't have one?"

On Unions as Reformers:
 Through the focus groups, it became evident that teachers fear losing the services and protections they have come to expect from unions if the unions were to take on more responsibilities. A Milwaukee area teacher was explicit: *"I would worry [that] my union couldn't handle taking on anything else. ... Get me a contract. We haven't had a contract in 10 years. Then think about something else."*

Many teachers felt that it would be acceptable for their union to take on new things as long as old things keep getting done. *"I just think that there are other things that are more true to my feelings or my concerns. ... If they were involved with [teacher quality/student achievement], I mean honestly, I would still probably have my focus or my concerns with my salary, the work day, those kinds of things,"* said a Phoenix teacher.

Cooperation and Conflict

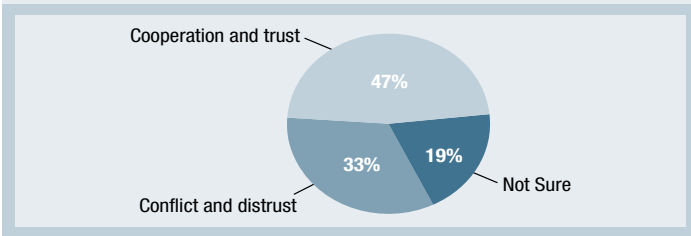
A third (33 percent) of the union members surveyed for this study say the relationship between district leadership and the teachers union is mostly about "conflict and distrust." But the plurality (47 percent) characterizes the relationship as one of "cooperation and trust." [Fig. 3–6]

Summary and Analysis

The majority of public school teachers continue to view teachers unions as vital, and based on the survey results, membership continues to be strong, although participation levels vary. (See sidebar, The Union Way,

Figure 3–6. Conflict or Cooperation

Today in your district, how would you describe the relationship between the teachers union or association and the district leadership? Is it mostly about: [Question 40]



Base: Union member (n=671)

Page 11.) But loyalty to the union seems borne more of immediate practical concerns than a broader sense of unionism. “They’re the policemen [sic] who just keep an eye on the laws and regulations,” explained one teacher. And to a large extent, this may be how most teachers generally experience their union or association—as a necessary protector of their rights in an environment that often seems disconnected from, if not hostile to, their daily work lives.

As such, teachers tend to rely on their unions mainly for traditional bread-and-butter issues—securing money, benefits, and legal representation—and teachers report considerable satisfaction with their unions on these matters. Similar to other professionals, teachers worry about the increasing costs of health and dental insurance, about retirement—and they’re counting on the union to protect those benefits. Teachers often talk about feeling extremely vulnerable to the powers that be—parents, principals, legislators. Partly for these reasons, and despite what teachers sometimes see as the unions’ shortcomings, teachers continue to be tethered to the traditional role of unions.

Teachers do not appear to automatically associate their unions with efforts to improve teacher quality. In a New York City focus group, for example, teachers mentioned many recent instructional improvements such as smaller learning academies and curriculum compacting—but, rightly or wrongly, they did not attribute them to union initiatives. When asked specifically where the teachers union fit in, several teachers in the group identified as union-initiated a program that provides teacher coaching and a union-designed violence prevention workshop. But they did not intrinsically associate their unions with substantive initiatives until the moderator probed in this direction. As one New York City teacher said, “I never

The Union Way

Based on these survey results, the vast majority of public school teachers continue to value union membership, although most union members do not participate actively in their unions. In 2003, 83 percent of teachers reported that they were members of a teachers union or association; in 2007, the number remains virtually unchanged at 82 percent. But large majorities—approximately two out of three members—say they are not involved or engaged with the local union other than to receive mailings and notices (66 percent in 2003 and 69 percent in 2007).

There are disparities among union members on how well teachers unions reflect the views of most teachers—and how effective teachers unions are in general. Slightly more than half (51 percent) of the union members surveyed are of the opinion that when their union negotiates with district leadership, it “virtually always works for the best interests of its members and reflects their preferences,” compared with just 18 percent that say the union “sometimes takes positions that are not in the best interests of its members or not aligned with what members want.” Another 16 percent say it does both equally, and 14 percent are not sure. On three out of five initiatives regarding differentiated pay for teachers, union members are substantially less optimistic than their non-union counterparts.

While majorities of union members view the various levels of the union—building, district, state, national—as effective, a larger percentage points to the *district* level as effective compared with the others. Eighty-five percent of union members say the teachers union or association at the district level is effective. This is followed by 78 percent who say the union in their building is effective; 68 percent the state level; and 57 percent the national level.

Merit Pay by Union Membership

	Percent who “strongly” or “somewhat” favor giving financial incentives to:	
	Union Member (n=671)	Non-Member (n=165)
Teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools [Question 23]	79	79
Teachers who receive accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [Question 21]	63	67
Teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals [Question 19]	52*	71*
Teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics [Question 22]	49*	61*
Teachers whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests [Question 20]	28*	47*

*Statistically significant difference.

looked to the union for professional development. If I did [look to the union] it was a contractual question or something like that.” Teachers also revealed confusion about the role unions should play in supporting innovation such as charter schools. (See sidebar, Charter Confusion, Page 12.)

Charter Confusion

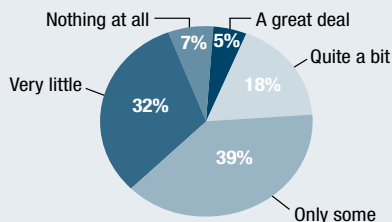
Public school teachers are about as likely to favor (42 percent) as they are to oppose (45 percent) the fundamental idea behind charter schools—schools that “operate under a charter or contract that frees them from many of the state regulations imposed on public schools and permits them to operate independently.” In comparison, the public at large is somewhat more likely to favor charters, according to a recent survey that found 53 percent in favor and 34 percent in opposition.*

Despite the more than 4,000 charter schools that operate nationally and the intense debate that surrounds them, public school teachers appear to know little about charter schools.† Only 22 percent of teachers say they know “a great deal” or “quite a bit.” Nearly four in 10 (39 percent) know either “very little” or “nothing at all.” This is only slightly better than the public’s knowledge level. A recent survey shows that 12 percent of registered voters, for example, know a lot about charter schools.‡

Teachers’ unfamiliarity with charter schools is surprising given the footprint that charters now have in many communities. Findings from both the focus groups and the survey revealed confusion about charter schools and the role unions might play in managing or sponsoring them. The survey found that public school teachers are somewhat more likely to support (34 percent) than oppose (26 percent) having teachers unions themselves sponsor and manage charter schools, but the plurality (40 percent) are not sure—an unusually high percentage that indicates unsettled views. In New York City, where the teachers union is championing several charter school initiatives, only one teacher in the focus group seemed to have heard about it at all and announced that “the jury is still out.” In Milwaukee, where charter schools are relatively prevalent, many teachers appeared to be uninformed and uninterested in the topic. As union leaders think about organizing charter schools or sponsoring schools of their own, they have considerable work to do to educate their membership.

Don’t Know Much About Charter Schools?

How much do you know about charter schools? [Question 82]



*38th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, 2006.

†According to the Center for Education Reform, the exact number is 4,147 as of 2007 (http://www.edreform.com/_upload/CER_charter_numbers.pdf).

‡Glover Park Group, 2005.

According to teachers, unions do not appear to be particularly active on the teacher quality front, although many teachers indicate support for this type of union activity. Thus, teachers unions have a lot of room to expand the role they play in improving teacher quality. Initiatives such as mentoring new teachers or serving as a resource on curriculum and teaching methods are low-hanging fruit—fairly easy to implement and relatively non-controversial.

Overall, teachers are fairly receptive to expanding the union role in reform, especially when it comes to improving the state of their craft. The findings strongly suggest teachers would back the union in their district if it were to take on such things as high-quality professional training or if it tried to expand the career ladder for teachers. And teachers seem willing to go even further. They’d want to see their union working toward new ways to effectively evaluate teachers—and even to guide ineffective colleagues out.

Still, this is not a tame agenda for unions, and they do not pursue it without some risk. For the unions to take on all of these things at the same time might be overwhelming and may raise questions about their ability to deliver on the traditional issues that teachers say matter most. Moreover, it’s one thing for teachers to voice support for an initiative or idea in a survey, quite another to do so in real life when there are high stakes attached.

NEWCOMERS AND VETERANS

Teachers with fewer than five years of experience (newcomers) and those with more than 20 years (veterans) agree on many issues. They both, for instance, value unions and the more traditional services they provide. But newer teachers and veteran teachers have substantially different attitudes toward differentiated pay as well as other aspects of their profession. Teachers also differ in opinions according to the regions in which they live—South, Northeast, West, Midwest. (See sidebar, Southern Comfort, Page 13.)

Shared Values

Both veteran teachers and newcomers value unions, especially their role in safeguarding teachers’ jobs. Veterans are more likely than newcomers to say the

Southern Comfort

The survey findings strongly suggest that public school teachers in the South are more willing to push for reform than their peers in the Northeast, where union tradition remains stronger. For example, teachers working in southern states are more likely to favor pay for performance measured by student standardized test scores (44 percent, compared with 21 percent Northeast, 30 percent West, and 30 percent Midwest).

Also, there is a clear pattern of stronger support for the value-added approach for measuring teacher effectiveness among those in the South (55 percent, compared with 44 percent Northeast, 50 percent West, and 44 percent Midwest).

These regional differences may be more a function of union penetration than anything else, as teachers are far more likely

to be union members in the Northeast and far less likely in the South. On virtually all of the questions in the survey pertaining to union activities, teachers in the Northeast are more likely than those in the South to say the union in their district currently takes part, that it is doing a good job, or that they would favor the union taking on that responsibility. In a nutshell, pro-union sentiment is prevalent among teachers in the Northeast, lacking among teachers in the South, and tends to fall somewhere in between for teachers in the West and Midwest.

Merit Pay by Region

Percent who “strongly” or “somewhat” favor giving financial incentives to:

	Northeast (n=163)	South (n=342)	West (n=200)	Midwest (n=266)
Teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools [Question 23]	75*	80	86*	78
Teachers who receive accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [Question 21]	59*	69*	65	61
Teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals [Question 19]	48*	65*	56	54
Teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics [Question 22]	42*	60*	57	49
Teachers whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests [Question 20]	21*	44*	30	30

*Statistically significant difference.

What Unions Do for Me

Percent of teachers who:

	Northeast (n=163)	South (n=342)	West (n=200)	Midwest (n=266)
Agree that without a union, teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power [Question 49]	93	65*	83	82
Agree that without collective bargaining, the working conditions and salaries of teachers would be much worse [Question 48]	88	60*	80	81
Agree that the union regularly provides information and opportunities to help them be a better teacher [Question 44]	52*	37	38	41
Say that being a union member provides feelings of pride and solidarity, in addition to the practical benefits [Question 77]	44*	25	29	29
Believe that the type of school that would be better for children is one where work rules and school duties affecting teachers are defined by contract [Question 66]	35*	15	21	21

*Statistically significant difference.

teachers union is “absolutely essential” (60 percent compared with 51 percent). And, notably, newer teachers are considerably more likely to say the union is absolutely essential than they were four years ago (51 percent in 2007 compared to 30 percent in 2003). [Fig. 4–1]

Figure 4–1. The Continued Importance of Unions

Do you think of teachers unions or associations as: [Question 36]

	Newcomer		Veteran	
	2003 (n=211)	2007 (n=110)	2003 (n=484)	2007 (n=363)
Absolutely essential	30*	51*	57	60
Important but not essential	49*	32*	30	27
Something you could do without	13	11	11	11

*Statistically significant difference.

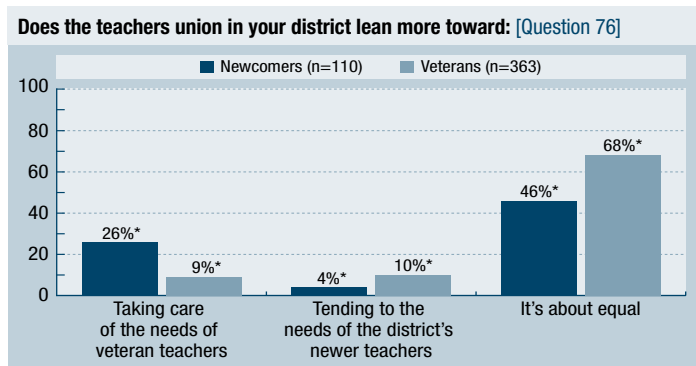
Note: Newcomer=less than five years; Veteran=more than 20 years.

Although a quarter of newcomers think unions lean toward tending to the needs of veteran teachers (26 percent), large numbers of both groups see no patterns of favoritism. Forty-six percent of newer teachers and 68 percent of veteran teachers believe that the union in their district focuses about equally on both groups. Few think the needs of new teachers get most of the attention (4 percent of newcomers and 10 percent of veterans). Fully one in four (25 percent) newer teachers is not sure, compared with 13 percent of veterans. [Fig. 4–2]

More Positive About Union Protections

It is not surprising that teachers with more than 20 years of experience would be more active in the teachers union or to perceive the union as acting in its members’ best

Figure 4–2. Favoritism?

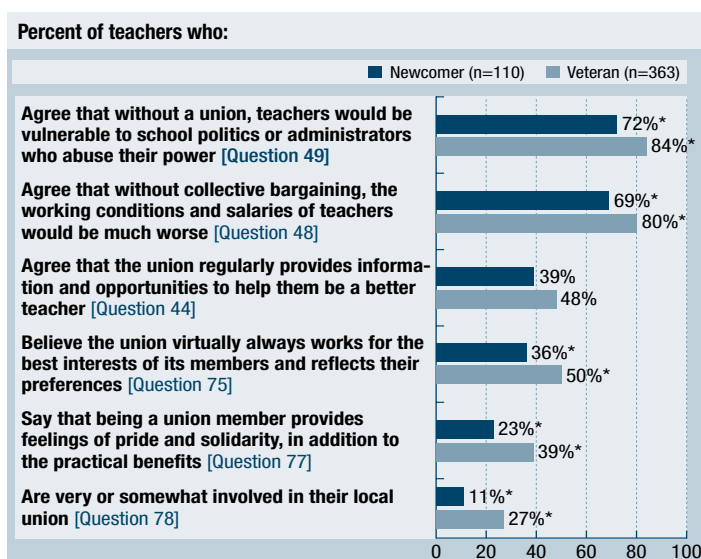


*Statistically significant difference.

Note: Newcomer=less than five years; Veteran=more than 20 years.

interests. For example, among those who say the union in their district protects teachers through due process and grievance procedures, veterans are more likely to think the union is doing an excellent or good job (78 percent vs. 62 percent of newcomers). And veteran teachers are also more likely than their newer counterparts to agree that “without a union, teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power” (84 percent vs. 72 percent); that “without collective bargaining, the working conditions and salaries of teachers would be much worse” (80 percent vs. 69 percent); that “the union regularly provides information and opportunities to help them be a better teacher” (48 percent vs. 39 percent); and that “being a union member provides feelings of pride and solidarity, in addition to the practical benefits” (39 percent vs. 23 percent). [Fig. 4–3]

Figure 4–3. On My Side



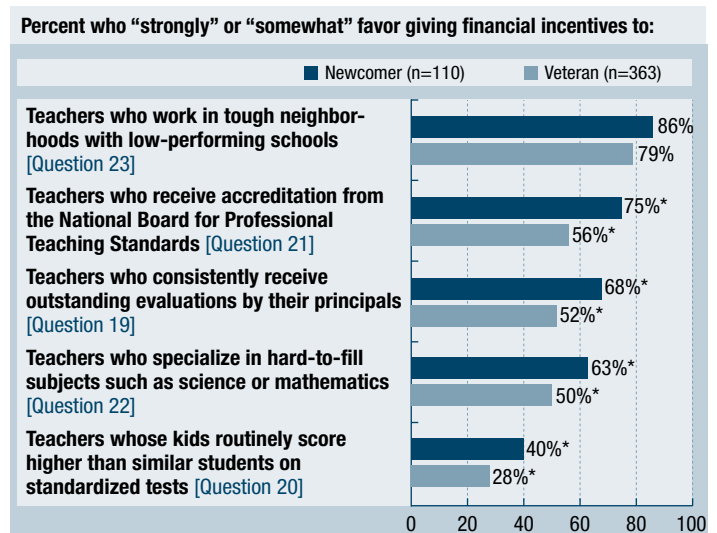
*Statistically significant difference.

Note: Newcomer=less than five years; Veteran=more than 20 years.

More Open to Reforms

Compared with veterans, newer teachers are more supportive of a range of reforms that would reward existing teachers for superior performance or recruit new high-quality candidates to the profession. On each of five proposals posed in the survey about giving financial incentives to teachers, newcomers are more likely than veterans to be positive. [Fig. 4–4]

Figure 4–4. Favoring Financial Incentives



*Statistically significant difference.

Note: Newcomer=less than five years; Veteran=more than 20 years.

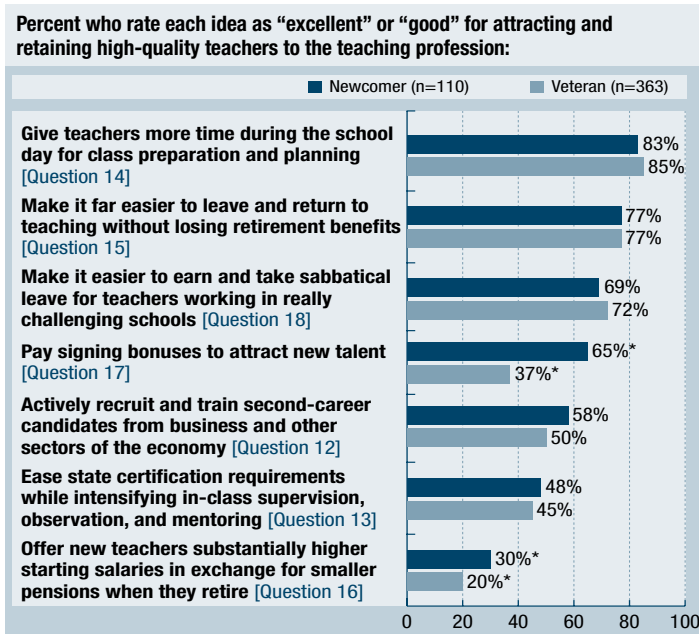
Most newcomers (65 percent) also support the union taking “the lead on negotiating a way to add teacher performance as a consideration when deciding an individual teacher’s salary.” Only 45 percent of veteran teachers are in favor.

While 58 percent of newcomers believe there are outstanding teachers in their school “who deserve to be especially rewarded because they do a stellar job,” only 39 percent of veterans agree. Newcomers are far more likely than veterans to think it is an excellent or good idea to “pay signing bonuses to attract new talent” (65 percent vs. 37 percent). Newcomers are also more likely to react positively toward “offering new teachers substantially higher starting salaries in exchange for smaller pensions when they retire (30 percent vs. 20 percent).

Finally, 58 percent of newcomers think it is an excellent or good idea to “actively recruit and train second-

career candidates from business and other sectors of the economy,” compared with 50 percent of veterans. [Fig. 4–5]

Figure 4–5. Improving the Profession



*Statistically significant difference.

Note: Newcomer=less than five years; Veteran=more than 20 years.

Summary and Analysis

In the public debate it is generally assumed that novice teachers are more skeptical of teachers unions and more open to change than veteran teachers. This is true in some ways, but not in all—the picture is far more complicated.

Veterans do express stronger positive sentiments than newcomers about the teachers union and the protections it offers. With more years in the system, veteran teachers are more likely to have witnessed the union defend their colleagues or themselves against what they perceive to be onerous or nonsensical work rules. Thus, they may be more aware of the value that unions offer. Likewise, over time in a career people tend to become more averse to change and risk, and veterans may see the union as a helpful bulwark against those things.

Yet, despite general assumptions, newcomers continue to view teachers unions as absolutely essential. In fact, over the past four years, an increasingly larger percentage

of newer teachers say they view teachers unions as absolutely essential (51 percent in 2007 vs. 30 percent in 2003); among veterans there was virtually no change (60 percent in 2007 and 57 percent in 2003). And newcomers are still attached to the union’s traditional functions. A majority of newcomers say the union should “mostly stick to traditional union issues” rather than “put more focus than they currently do” on reform-centered activities (59 percent vs. 29 percent).

The enduring appeal of unions to newer teachers could be the result of a number of things. Teachers may appreciate having union backing in a more contentious No Child Left Behind Act era, where the public schools—and teachers themselves—are under greater scrutiny than ever before. It may also be that as newer teachers perceive union power as on the decline, they may be more inclined to nostalgically reflect about its usefulness. Or it may be that today’s newer teachers are responding to broader economic and workplace changes. A Pew Research Center survey in 2006 showed that workers are more likely to worry that their employers are less loyal to them and that their jobs provide fewer benefits. In any case, newcomers and veterans alike may express support for teachers unions—warts and all—because they truly believe they need the protection they offer for things like salary and benefits.

But newcomers also have more doubts than veterans about how helpful unions really are. They are less likely to think the union offers protections from abusive administrators or safeguards the working conditions and salaries for teachers. They are less likely to think—and perhaps in a better position to know—that the union helps them be better teachers. Compared to veterans, newcomers are less likely to think the union always acts in the best interest of its members, which may partially explain why newcomers are also less inclined to feel pride or solidarity in regards to union membership or to be active in their local union.

Most importantly, newcomers are considerably more open to some reform-minded initiatives. They are amenable even to the more controversial proposals, that is, the ones involving the use of student achievement to determine teacher pay. There are also significant distinctions between the two groups on the overall topic of differentiated pay for teachers.

CONCLUSION

Various parties in the education debate often claim to know what teachers want or to speak on their behalf. Public school teachers' views, however, are hardly unanimous or monolithic; they are nuanced and sometimes even contradictory, which speaks to the complexity of the issues and the fact that reasonable people can disagree. The results of this survey clearly show that reformers, school districts, and teachers unions all have their work cut out for them if they truly want to lay claim to the support of the nation's teachers.

This survey points to several important takeaways. First, before the reform conversation can even get started, school district management must meet its core obligations to create a well-functioning workplace for teachers. For their part, the unions must take on, in a meaningful way, some of the chronic problems that damage their public brand, frustrate teachers, and have an adverse impact on students. Labor and management must find ways to work together and advance a reform agenda. Ultimately, their fortunes are intertwined.

Policymakers and policy advocates must become more effective in how they communicate with teachers and

explain reform ideas, particularly those ideas that are more controversial. White papers and reports are a thin reed and limited vehicle for sharing information in an environment where multiple institutions are seeking to communicate with teachers and win them over. Reform ideas must be communicated in multiple ways and to multiple audiences. Today, with the increasing prevalence of electronic forms of communication, this is more possible than ever before.

That the loyalty of K–12 public school teachers is up for grabs is ultimately an opportunity for education advocates, teachers unions, and policymakers but most importantly for the nation's current and future teachers. Research shows that teachers are the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement, but neither practice (in most schools and school districts) nor policy (local, state, or federal) is yet aligned with that finding. A vigorous debate about how to transform schools and teaching to meet today's challenges and create a profession that people seek to be part of, rather than one where they feel they need protection from unfair and capricious practices, is a vital one. The findings presented here, while not the last word, offer guideposts for that conversation.

Appendix A. Methodology

Waiting to Be Won Over is based on a nationally representative random sample of 1,010 K–12 public school teachers conducted in fall 2007. The margin of error for the overall sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points. The survey was preceded by six focus groups.

The Survey

The sample was randomly drawn from a comprehensive database of current K–12 teachers maintained by Market Data Retrieval, a subsidiary of Dun & Bradstreet. A multi-mode approach that included both mail and online versions of the survey was used.

The first mailing, which included a questionnaire and a cover letter, was sent via first-class mail on September 25, 2007, to 7,200 randomly selected K–12 public school teachers in the United States. A reminder postcard was sent on October 3, 2007. A second mailing of the questionnaire with instructions to those who had not yet participated was sent on October 16, 2007. Each mailing of the questionnaire included a prepaid business reply envelope. Teachers for whom an e-mail address was available—about 50 percent of the sample—were sent e-mails with an embedded URL linking them to the online version. A total of 139 surveys were completed online.

The margin of error for the results from the overall sample of 1,010 is plus or minus 3 percentage points. It is higher when comparing percentages across subgroups. Subgroup differences reported in this study are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Teachers in urban districts were oversampled to insure the survey netted a sufficient number (1,200 of the original 7,200 were part of the urban oversample). The results are weighted to reflect the actual distribution of urban teachers in the teacher population.

The overall response rate for the survey is 14 percent. As with all surveys, the risk of non-response is that the pool of survey respondents could differ from the true population of teachers, decreasing the ability to draw inferences from the data. A comparison of the demographic profile of respondents to that of the overall population of teachers shows they are very similar when it comes to such key variables as race and ethnicity, urbanicity, region, and sex (see Population vs. Sample Comparison). Results can also be affected by non-sampling sources of bias, such as question wording. Steps were taken to minimize these, including extensive pre-testing of the survey instrument with focus group participants and six one-on-one telephone interviews with current K–12 teachers.

The questionnaire (see Appendix B) was designed by the FDR Group and Education Sector; the two organizations are responsible for all interpretation and analysis contained within this report. FDR Group (Farkas Duffett Research Group) is a nonpartisan public opinion research firm specializing in surveys, focus groups, and program evaluations. The survey was fielded and tabulated by Robinson and Muenster Associates, Inc., of Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

The Focus Groups

To help develop the questionnaire, six focus groups with K–12 public school teachers were conducted, with each group having 10–12 participants. The groups were conducted in five sites selected for geographic and regional representation:

Milwaukee (one group with teachers working in the city, another with teachers working in the suburbs), New York City (teachers working in city only), Chicago (mix of city and suburban), Atlanta (mix of city and suburban), and Phoenix (mix of city and suburban). Participants were recruited to FDR Group specifications to ensure a proper demographic mix. These discussions were crucial to developing the wording of the survey questions and to understanding why teachers feel as they do. Quotes in this report are drawn from the focus groups and from comments survey respondents wrote on their questionnaires in response to open-ended questions. All focus groups were moderated by the FDR Group.

Population vs. Sample Comparison (by percent)

	Population	Sample (n=1,010)
Race/Ethnicity		
White	83	88
Black	8	5
Hispanic	6	4
Asian/Pacific	2	1
Native American/Other	2	2
Sex		
Male	25	21
Female	75	79
School Type		
Elementary	52	51
Middle	20	21
High	23	27
Something else	5	1
Urbanicity		
Urban	31	29
Suburban	38	42
Rural/small town	31	29
School Enrollment		
<300	11	10
300–499	23	26
500–999	45	36
1,000 or more	22	28
Region		
Northeast	18	17
Midwest	24	28
South	39	35
West	19	20

Sources: US Department of Education, Institute of Education Science, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 2006; NCES School and Staffing Survey, 2003–2004.

Appendix B. National Survey of Public School Teachers

This survey is based on a national random sample of 1,010 K–12 public school teachers. It was conducted by mail and online in fall 2007. The margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. Numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. An asterisk (*) indicates less than one percent; a dash (-) indicates zero.

1. **Are you:**
79 Female
21 Male
 2. **Which best describes your current teaching position:**
98 A full-time teacher in a traditional public school
1 A full-time teacher in a charter school
1 Something else
 3. **Do you currently teach at:**
51 Elementary school
21 Middle school or Junior high school
27 High School
1 Something else
 4. **For how many years have you been a PUBLIC school teacher?**
11 1–4 years
20 5–9 years
33 10–20 years
37 21 years or more
 5. **What subject or subjects do you primarily teach? [Check all that apply.]**
31 All subjects
22 English and/or Reading
19 Mathematics
16 Social Studies or Social Sciences
14 Science
9 Physical Education or Health
8 Art, Music or Fine Arts
7 Special Education/Gifted/ESL
3 Computer Science
2 Foreign Language
1 Business
7 Something else
 6. **Although they are on the front lines, teachers are rarely consulted about what happens in their schools**
35 Strongly Agree
45 Somewhat Agree
14 Somewhat Disagree
6 Strongly Disagree
* Not Sure
 7. **Teachers are required to do too much paperwork and documentation about what goes on in their classrooms**
49 Strongly Agree
37 Somewhat Agree
11 Somewhat Disagree
3 Strongly Disagree
* Not Sure
 8. **Too many veteran teachers who are burned out stay because they do not want to walk away from the benefits and service time they have accrued**
40 Strongly Agree
36 Somewhat Agree
13 Somewhat Disagree
7 Strongly Disagree
5 Not Sure
 9. **Too much negative press coverage about the public schools discourages talented, well-educated people from pursuing teaching as a career**
42 Strongly Agree
39 Somewhat Agree
13 Somewhat Disagree
3 Strongly Disagree
3 Not Sure
 10. **When individual schools fail it's usually because they have ineffective principals at the helm**
7 Strongly Agree
33 Somewhat Agree
35 Somewhat Disagree
21 Strongly Disagree
5 Not Sure
 11. **All the paperwork and legal and contractual restrictions make it difficult for principals to get things done**
15 Strongly Agree
44 Somewhat Agree
20 Somewhat Disagree
8 Strongly Disagree
13 Not Sure
 12. **Actively recruit and train second-career candidates from other fields and sectors of the economy**
17 Excellent
37 Good
30 Fair
13 Poor
4 Not Sure
 13. **Ease state certification requirements while intensifying in-class supervision, observation, and mentoring**
14 Excellent
29 Good
26 Fair
29 Poor
3 Not Sure
 14. **Give teachers more time during the school day for class preparation and planning**
57 Excellent
28 Good
11 Fair
4 Poor
* Not Sure
 15. **Make it far easier to leave and return to teaching without losing retirement benefits**
44 Excellent
34 Good
14 Fair
6 Poor
3 Not Sure
- How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about teachers and the public schools? [Questions 6–11]*
- How would you rate each of the following ideas for attracting and retaining high-quality teachers to the teaching profession? [Questions 12–18]*

16. **Offer new teachers substantially higher starting salaries in exchange for smaller pensions when they retire**
 7 Excellent
 15 Good
 23 Fair
 48 Poor
 7 Not Sure
17. **Pay signing bonuses to attract new talent**
 15 Excellent
 27 Good
 26 Fair
 27 Poor
 4 Not Sure
18. **Make it easier to earn and take sabbatical leave for teachers working in really challenging schools**
 30 Excellent
 40 Good
 18 Fair
 6 Poor
 6 Not Sure
- How much would you favor or oppose giving financial incentives to each of the following: [Questions 19–23]*
19. **Teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals**
 24 Strongly Favor
 34 Somewhat Favor
 18 Somewhat Oppose
 21 Strongly Oppose
 3 Not Sure
20. **Teachers whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests**
 11 Strongly Favor
 23 Somewhat Favor
 25 Somewhat Oppose
 39 Strongly Oppose
 3 Not Sure
21. **Teachers who receive accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**
 25 Strongly Favor
 40 Somewhat Favor
 16 Somewhat Oppose
 15 Strongly Oppose
 4 Not Sure
22. **Teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics**
 17 Strongly Favor
 37 Somewhat Favor
 23 Somewhat Oppose
 20 Strongly Oppose
 4 Not Sure
23. **Teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools**
 34 Strongly Favor
 46 Somewhat Favor
 11 Somewhat Oppose
 7 Strongly Oppose
 3 Not Sure
24. **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?**
 10 Strongly Favor
 34 Somewhat Favor
 22 Somewhat Oppose
 29 Strongly Oppose
 5 Not Sure
25. **At your school, do you think there are outstanding teachers who deserve to be especially rewarded because they do a stellar job?**
 48 Yes
 5 No
 40 There are outstanding teachers, but I don't think they should be especially rewarded
 7 Not Sure
26. **In what ways, if any, do school officials at your school or district reward outstanding teachers? [Check all that apply.]**
 5 Financial bonus
 16 Informal recognition (for example, better treatment or perks)
 29 Official recognition (for example, formal commendation or note to file)
 10 Token gift
 49 They do not reward outstanding teachers; the reward is solely intrinsic
 10 Not Sure
27. **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?**
 15 Excellent
 34 Good
 29 Fair
 20 Poor
 2 Not Sure
28. **Thinking of your own experience being evaluated as a teacher, which statement would come closest to describing your most recent formal evaluation?**
 26 It was useful and effective in terms of helping you be a better teacher
 32 It was well-intentioned but not particularly helpful to your teaching practice
 41 It was just a formality
 2 Not Sure
- The next few questions are about tenure. Although "tenure" policies vary from state to state, for the purposes of this survey, please think of a tenured teacher as one who has been awarded job protections and due process rights after successfully completing a probationary period, typically 2 to 4 years in length.*
29. **Are you currently a tenured teacher, or not?**
 64 Yes, a tenured teacher
 15 Yes, it's not called tenure, but I have job protections and due process rights
 14 No, not a tenured teacher
 6 No, there is no tenure at my school
 2 Not Sure

30. In general, when you hear that a teacher at your school has been awarded tenure, which of these two thoughts would be more likely to cross your mind?

- 23 That the teacher has proven to be very good at what s/he does
- 69 That it's just a formality—it has very little to do with whether a teacher is good or not
- 8 Not Sure

31. To what extent would you support or oppose strengthening the formal evaluation of probationary teachers so that they will get tenure only after they've proven to be very good at what they do?

- 38 Strongly Support
- 41 Somewhat Support
- 10 Somewhat Oppose
- 3 Strongly Oppose
- 8 Not Sure

32. And when it comes to tenured teachers, how often do you think they should be formally evaluated?

- 32 Yearly
- 26 At least every 2 years
- 22 Every 3–4 years
- 13 Every 5 years
- 1 Never
- 3 Something else
- 3 Not Sure

33. 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? [Base: Tenured Teachers]

- 25 Would trade tenure for a pay increase
- 29 Would have to be a lot higher
- 29 Would rather hold on to tenure
- 17 Not Sure

34. If you had the choice, would you personally be willing to trade tenure for more autonomy and control over decisions affecting your school, would it have to be a lot more autonomy and control, or would you rather hold on to tenure? [Base: Tenured Teachers]

- 10 Would trade tenure for more autonomy and control
- 18 Would have to be a lot more autonomy and control
- 53 Would rather hold on to tenure
- 20 Not Sure

35. Check the statement that best describes your current status:

- 68 I am a member of a teachers union or association that engages in collective bargaining
- 15 I am a member of a professional association that provides such things as liability insurance, but not collective bargaining
- 16 I am not a member of a teachers union or association
- 1 There is no teachers union or association to join in my district
- 1 Not Sure

Whether or not you are currently a member of a union or association, or whether collective bargaining exists in your district, please answer the remaining questions to the best of your knowledge. As a public school teacher, your opinion counts. Remember, if you feel an item is not applicable to you, please skip it and move on to the next one.

36. Do you think of teachers unions or associations as:

- 54 Absolutely essential
- 31 Important but not essential
- 11 Something you could do without
- 4 Not Sure

37. In many states, the teaching profession is unionized, and salary, benefits and work rules are determined by collective bargaining. When you chose to become a teacher, did this make the profession:

- 13 More appealing to you
- 5 Less appealing
- 79 Was not a consideration
- 3 Not Sure

38. Similarly, teaching is sometimes perceived as a profession with considerable job protection, one where it is rare to lose your job. When you chose to become a teacher, did this make the profession:

- 14 More appealing to you
- 1 Less appealing
- 84 Was not a consideration
- 2 Not Sure

39. Generally speaking, do you think that teachers unions or associations should:

- 32 Put more focus than they currently do on issues such as improving teacher quality and student achievement
- 52 Mostly stick to traditional union issues such as protecting teachers' salaries, benefits, and jobs
- 16 Not Sure

40. Today in your district, how would you describe the relationship between the teachers union or association and the district leadership? Is it mostly about:

- 28 Conflict and distrust
- 44 Cooperation and trust
- 4 There is no union or association
- 24 Not Sure

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Questions 41–49]

41. Teachers would have more prestige if collective bargaining and lifetime tenure were eliminated

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 17 Somewhat Agree
- 23 Somewhat Disagree
- 38 Strongly Disagree
- 19 Not Sure

42. Despite having the strength of their unions behind them, rank-and-file teachers usually have very little control over what goes on in their own schools

- 32 Strongly Agree
- 42 Somewhat Agree
- 16 Somewhat Disagree
- 4 Strongly Disagree
- 7 Not Sure

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

- 21 Strongly Agree
- 33 Somewhat Agree
- 19 Somewhat Disagree
- 15 Strongly Disagree
- 12 Not Sure

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

- 9 Strongly Agree
- 32 Somewhat Agree
- 26 Somewhat Disagree
- 21 Strongly Disagree
- 13 Not Sure

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

- 14 Strongly Agree
- 35 Somewhat Agree
- 18 Somewhat Disagree
- 10 Strongly Disagree
- 24 Not Sure

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

- 41 Strongly Agree
- 34 Somewhat Agree
- 12 Somewhat Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree
- 9 Not Sure

47. New teachers tend to place less value on the union

- 17 Strongly Agree
- 42 Somewhat Agree
- 10 Somewhat Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree
- 26 Not Sure

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

- 44 Strongly Agree
- 31 Somewhat Agree
- 7 Somewhat Disagree
- 4 Strongly Disagree
- 15 Not Sure

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

- 47 Strongly Agree
- 30 Somewhat Agree
- 9 Somewhat Disagree
- 4 Strongly Disagree
- 10 Not Sure

Overall, how effective would you say the teachers union or association is at the following levels: [Questions 50–53]

50. At the building where you work

- 22 Strongly Effective
- 42 Somewhat Effective
- 18 Not Too Effective
- 10 Not Effective At All
- 9 Not Sure

51. At the district level

- 25 Strongly Effective
- 48 Somewhat Effective
- 12 Not Too Effective
- 6 Not Effective At All
- 10 Not Sure

52. At the state level

- 18 Strongly Effective
- 44 Somewhat Effective
- 15 Not Too Effective
- 4 Not Effective At All
- 19 Not Sure

53. At the national level

- 13 Strongly Effective
- 39 Somewhat Effective
- 18 Not Too Effective
- 6 Not Effective At All
- 24 Not Sure

Here are some functions that teachers unions or associations may or may not perform. For each, please indicate whether the union or association in your district currently does it or not. Then, answer the corresponding “IF YES” or “IF NO” questions. [Questions 54–65]

54A. Effectively negotiate contracts, salary, and benefits on behalf of teachers—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

- 76 Yes
- 13 No
- 11 Not Sure/No Answer

54B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

- 26 Excellent
- 42 Good
- 25 Fair
- 6 Poor
- 2 Not Sure

54C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

- 29 Strongly Favor
- 28 Somewhat Favor
- 12 Somewhat Oppose
- 13 Strongly Oppose
- 19 Not Sure

55A. Keep teachers updated on new instructional methods and curriculum—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

- 41 Yes
- 46 No
- 13 Not Sure/No Answer

55B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

- 13 Excellent
- 39 Good
- 33 Fair
- 10 Poor
- 5 Not Sure

55C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

- 24 Strongly Favor
- 37 Somewhat Favor
- 14 Somewhat Oppose
- 13 Strongly Oppose
- 12 Not Sure

56A. Negotiate to keep class size down in the district—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

- 55 Yes
- 30 No
- 14 Not Sure/No Answer

56B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

- 13 Excellent
- 36 Good
- 28 Fair
- 18 Poor
- 5 Not Sure

56C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

- 56 Strongly Favor
- 27 Somewhat Favor
- 5 Somewhat Oppose
- 4 Strongly Oppose
- 9 Not Sure

57A. Protect teachers through due process and grievance procedures—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

84 Yes
4 No
12 Not Sure/No Answer

57B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

30 Excellent
40 Good
19 Fair
3 Poor
9 Not Sure

57C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

33 Strongly Favor
29 Somewhat Favor
4 Somewhat Oppose
11 Strongly Oppose
23 Not Sure

58A. Provide support and mentoring to new teachers—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

46 Yes
38 No
16 Not Sure/No Answer

58B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

18 Excellent
39 Good
28 Fair
7 Poor
8 Not Sure

58C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

33 Strongly Favor
33 Somewhat Favor
12 Somewhat Oppose
9 Strongly Oppose
13 Not Sure

59A. Provide teachers with high-quality training and professional development—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

38 Yes
46 No
16 Not Sure/No Answer

59B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

14 Excellent
41 Good
28 Fair
10 Poor
7 Not Sure

59C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

27 Strongly Favor
34 Somewhat Favor
15 Somewhat Oppose
11 Strongly Oppose
14 Not Sure

60A. Regularly inform teachers about their benefits, rights, and responsibilities—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

79 Yes
10 No
11 Not Sure/No Answer

60B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

27 Excellent
43 Good
25 Fair
4 Poor
1 Not Sure

60C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

38 Strongly Favor
35 Somewhat Favor
4 Somewhat Oppose
8 Strongly Oppose
15 Not Sure

61A. Expand the career ladder for teachers by negotiating new and differentiated roles and responsibilities—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

33 Yes
44 No
23 Not Sure/No Answer

61B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

12 Excellent
31 Good
30 Fair
14 Poor
14 Not Sure

61C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

27 Strongly Favor
38 Somewhat Favor
8 Somewhat Oppose
6 Strongly Oppose
22 Not Sure

62A. Guide ineffective teachers out of the profession—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

15 Yes
61 No
24 Not Sure/No Answer

62B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

5 Excellent
13 Good
21 Fair
22 Poor
39 Not Sure

62C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

36 Strongly Favor
30 Somewhat Favor
9 Somewhat Oppose
9 Strongly Oppose
16 Not Sure

- 63A. Lead efforts to identify ineffective teachers and retrain them—does the union or association in your district currently do this?**
 17 Yes
 60 No
 24 Not Sure/No Answer
- 63B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?**
 6 Excellent
 20 Good
 22 Fair
 18 Poor
 35 Not Sure
- 63C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?**
 34 Strongly Favor
 31 Somewhat Favor
 10 Somewhat Oppose
 11 Strongly Oppose
 14 Not Sure
- 64A. Negotiate new ways to more meaningfully and effectively evaluate teachers—does the union or association in your district currently do this?**
 41 Yes
 39 No
 20 Not Sure/No Answer
- 64B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?**
 11 Excellent
 34 Good
 34 Fair
 11 Poor
 10 Not Sure
- 64C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?**
 36 Strongly Favor
 36 Somewhat Favor
 8 Somewhat Oppose
 8 Strongly Oppose
 12 Not Sure
- 65A. Screen teachers who are new or transferring to ensure they are a good fit with the schools they're going to—does the union or association in your district currently do this?**
 15 Yes
 66 No
 19 Not Sure/No Answer
- 65B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?**
 14 Excellent
 18 Good
 23 Fair
 16 Poor
 28 Not Sure
- 65C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?**
 20 Strongly Favor
 27 Somewhat Favor
 19 Somewhat Oppose
 17 Strongly Oppose
 17 Not Sure
- 66. On the whole, which type of school do you think would be better for students?**
 21 One where work rules and school duties affecting teachers are defined by contract
 68 One where principals and teachers have more control and flexibility over these matters
 2 Something else
 1 Both
 8 Not Sure
- 67. In some districts, the process for removing teachers who are clearly ineffective and shouldn't be in the classroom—but who are past the probationary period—is very difficult and time-consuming. Is this the case in your district, or not?**
 55 Yes 13 No 32 Not Sure
- 68. Do you personally know a teacher in your building who is past the probationary period but who is clearly ineffective and shouldn't be in the classroom, or not?**
 46 Yes 42 No 12 Not Sure
- 69. Assume that teachers would keep some due process protection against unfair practices by administrators. If the union or association in your district were to take the lead on ways to simplify the process for removing such teachers, how much would you support or oppose the effort?**
 22 Strongly Support
 41 Somewhat Support
 10 Somewhat Oppose
 7 Strongly Oppose
 2 Union already does this
 19 Not Sure
- 70. Which of these do you think is the most likely course of action a principal in your district would take if faced with a persistently ineffective teacher who was already past the probationary period?**
 14 Do nothing
 18 Initiate formal proceedings to remove the teacher from the district's employ
 26 Make a serious effort to retrain the teacher
 13 Quietly encourage the teacher to leave
 14 Transfer the teacher to another school in the district
 15 Not Sure
- 71. Typically, teachers get salary increases according to a strictly defined schedule mostly driven by their years of service and the credits they attain. Is this mostly how it works in your district, or not?**
 97 Yes 2 No 1 Not Sure
- 72. Assume that years of service and number of credits would still be taken into account. If the union or association in your district were to take the lead on negotiating a way to add teacher performance as a consideration when deciding an individual teacher's salary, how much would you support or oppose the effort?**
 18 Strongly Support
 34 Somewhat Support
 18 Somewhat Oppose
 23 Strongly Oppose
 1 Union already does this
 8 Not Sure

73. **Some school districts have a system for matching teachers with schools where any teacher, regardless of seniority, has an equal opportunity to fill a vacancy. It basically comes down to whether the teacher wants to work in the school and whether the school wants the teacher. Is this mostly how it works in your district, or not?**
44 Yes 38 No 19 Not Sure
74. **If the union or association in your district was trying to move in this direction, how much would you support or oppose the effort?**
17 Strongly Support
31 Somewhat Support
11 Somewhat Oppose
9 Strongly Oppose
4 Union already does this
20 Not Sure
75. **Overall, when the union or association in your district negotiates with district leadership, does it:**
43 Virtually always work for the best interests of its members and reflect their preferences
17 Sometimes take positions that are not in the best interests of its members or not aligned with what members want
15 Both equally
26 Not Sure
76. **Would you say that the teachers union or association in your district leans more toward:**
14 Taking care of the needs of veteran teachers
7 Tending to the needs of the district's newer teachers
59 It's about equal
20 Not Sure
77. **Which of these best describes what it means to you personally to be a member of a teachers union or association:**
31 It provides feelings of pride and solidarity, in addition to the practical benefits
52 It brings practical benefits, not really any more than that
7 It is something that makes you feel uncomfortable
10 Not Sure
78. **Other than receiving mailings and notices, how involved and engaged are you in the local union?**
6 Very Involved
18 Somewhat Involved
35 Not Too Involved
39 Not At All Involved
2 Not Sure
79. **During the time you have been a public school teacher, have you personally filed a grievance against a district or not? [If you have filed more than one, please think about the most recent.] [Base: Personally Filed a Grievance]**
8 Yes 92 No 1 Not Sure
80. **Did it end in your favor, or not? [Base: Personally Filed a Grievance]**
73 Yes 25 No 3 It is currently in process
81. **In general, did you feel the union:**
70 Did a good job representing you
27 Could have worked a lot harder
4 Not Sure
82. **How much do you know about charter schools?**
5 A great deal
18 Quite a bit
39 Only some
32 Very little
7 Nothing at all
* Not Sure
83. **As you may know, charter schools operate under a charter or contract that frees them from many of the state regulations imposed on public schools and permits them to operate independently. How much do you favor or oppose the idea of charter schools?**
9 Strongly Favor
33 Somewhat Favor
20 Somewhat Oppose
24 Strongly Oppose
14 Not Sure
84. **In several districts across the nation, teachers unions are sponsoring and managing charter schools. Do you:**
34 Generally support this because it means school policies would be set by the people best qualified to run the school—the teachers and their union
26 Generally oppose this because charter schools are a threat to traditional public schools and the union might make decisions that are not in the best interests of teachers
40 Not Sure
85. **How old are you?**
2 24 years old or less
8 25 to 29 years
10 30 to 34 years
10 35 to 39 years
23 40 to 49 years
21 50 to 54 years
27 55 or more years
86. **Is teaching your first career, or did you work full time in another field beforehand?**
71 First career
29 Worked full time in another field beforehand
87. **Were either of your parents a public school teacher when you were growing up?**
16 Yes 84 No
88. **Whether or not they were public school teachers, were either of your parents a member of a union when you were growing up?**
35 Yes 65 No
89. **Which best describes your school?**
14 Inner city
15 Urban
42 Suburban
29 Rural
90. **Approximately how many students are in your school?**
10 Less than 300
26 300 to 499
36 500 to 999
19 1,000 to 1,999
9 2,000 or more

91. How many of your school's students are African-American or Hispanic?

- 12 Virtually all
- 17 Most
- 46 Some
- 25 A few or none

92. Approximately what percentage of students at your school are eligible for the free or reduced lunch program? Your best guess is OK.

- 26 Under 25%
- 31 25% to 49%
- 21 50% to 74%
- 22 75% or more

93. What state do you teach in?

- [By region]*
- 17 Northeast
 - 28 Midwest
 - 35 South
 - 20 West

94. As far as you know, which national organization is your district's union or association affiliated with?

- 1 None
- 13 American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
- 71 National Education Association (NEA)
- 2 Something else
- 3 AFT and NEA
- 10 Not Sure

95. Which of the following best describes your own race/ethnicity?

- 5 African-American or Black
- 1 Asian or Pacific Islander
- 4 Hispanic or Latino
- 88 White or Caucasian
- 2 Something else

May 2008



WAITING TO BE WON OVER:

Teachers Speak on the Profession, Unions, and Reform

By Ann Duffett, Steve Farkas, Andrew J. Rotherham, and Elena Silva

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	1
Systemic Problems	2
Considering Change.....	4
Unions as Protectors and Reformers.....	8
Newcomers and Veterans.....	12
Conclusion	16
Appendix A: Methodology	17
Appendix B: Survey.....	18

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ABOUT EDUCATION SECTOR

Education Sector is an independent think tank that challenges conventional thinking in education policy. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to achieving real, measurable impact in education, both by improving existing reform initiatives and by developing new, innovative solutions to our nation's most pressing education problems.

American public education is in the midst of intense change, and teachers, in particular, are facing pressure to produce better outcomes for students. As policymakers, teachers unions, and other stakeholders react to changing demands on the nation’s public education system, there remains considerable debate about what teachers think and what they want. Too often assumptions define the conversation rather than actual evidence of teachers’ views. Teachers unions and associations often claim to represent the voice of all teachers. But, while these groups serve an important role, they cannot possibly be expected to represent the diverse viewpoints of a profession with 3.2 million practitioners.¹ As such, independent public opinion research that investigates what teachers think about various issues is a necessary contribution to the national conversation on education policy and reform.

In an effort to facilitate and inform this conversation, Education Sector and the FDR Group surveyed 1,010 K–12 public school teachers about their views on the teaching profession, teachers unions, and a host of reforms aimed at improving teacher quality.² The survey asks specific questions about the work teachers do and about reform proposals that are currently being debated. It also examines the views of new teachers and veterans. And, when possible, the survey discerns trends by asking some identical questions from a 2003 national survey of K–12 public school teachers and comparing the responses.³ In order to probe themes and develop the survey instrument, Education Sector and the FDR Group conducted six focus groups in five cities with approximately 60 current public school teachers. (See appendices for a full discussion of methods and the questionnaire.)

The survey revealed that it is hard to place teachers definitively in any one camp even though advocates on all

sides of various issues do just that. As a whole, teachers today are what political analysts might describe as “in play” and waiting to be won over by one side or another. Despite frustrations with schools, school districts, their unions, and a number of aspects of the job in general, teachers are not sold on any one reform agenda. They want change but are a skeptical audience. For instance, nearly half of teachers surveyed say that they personally know a teacher who is ineffective and should not be in the classroom. But, although teachers want something done about low-performing colleagues, they are leery of proposals to substantially change how teachers can be dismissed.

Today’s teachers have different expectations than teachers in the past, and they expect different things from their professional lives. Yet, they recognize the problems that undermine their profession, including job lock, weak evaluation and reward structures, and too much bureaucracy. With reformers pushing hard for change and teachers unions holding tight to tradition, teachers are caught in the middle, unsure of how their profession should change but very aware that it needs to.

Teachers see problems with their unions as well. For example, many say that the union sometimes fights to protect teachers who really should be out of the

¹ Digest of Educational Statistics, 2007.

² The term “union” is used throughout this report to refer to unions and associations. The survey referenced both.

³ Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, and Ann Duffett, *Stand By Me: What Teachers Really Think About Unions, Merit Pay and Other Professional Matters*, (New York: Public Agenda, 2003).

classroom. But teachers still see the union as essential, and they value the union’s traditional role in safeguarding their jobs. New teachers are more likely today than they were in 2003 to call unions “absolutely essential.” And many teachers would like to see their unions explore some new activities, especially some of the ideas associated with the “new unionism” agenda, and take the greater role in reform, but not if that comes at the expense of the union’s core mission.

The fluid environment presents both challenges and opportunities for education leaders and policymakers. Teachers unions may claim a deep loyalty from their members but the relationship seems to be based mostly on the practical benefits that the union provides. Likewise, school districts face high hurdles to convince teachers that they have their best interests in mind and deserve their trust. And in an environment of distrust, reformers face real challenges to earn the support of teachers and turn today’s most popular reform ideas aimed at improving teaching and learning into public policy.

This report is organized into four sections. The first highlights key findings about the challenges that teachers see in their profession, including weak evaluation processes and a rigid tenure and pay system. The second section describes how teachers feel about a range of reforms aimed at improving their profession, from new evaluation approaches to differential pay proposals. The third section focuses on teachers’ opinions about their union and what they feel the union role should be in improving teacher quality. The final section examines some key points of comparison between new teachers, who have been on the job fewer than five years, and veteran teachers, who have been teaching for more than 20 years.

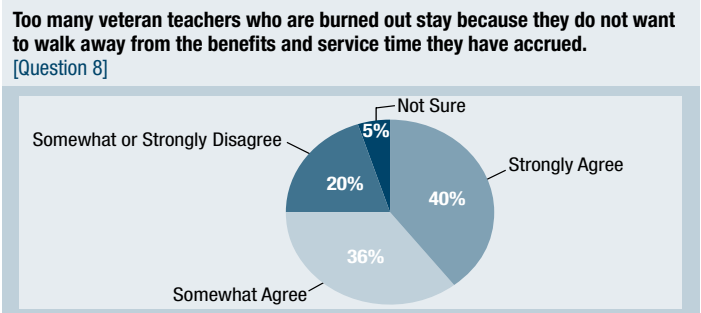
SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS

In order for teacher quality to improve, there are some systemic problems in the profession that must be changed. Teachers, for instance, say the benefits structure works against teacher quality by locking in people who would rather move on or retire, and laws and contractual rules hinder quality by making it difficult to remove persistently ineffective teachers. Teachers also point to weak evaluation procedures and bureaucracy as serious problems that hold back the profession.

Locked In

Three in four public school teachers (76 percent) agree that, “Too many veteran teachers who are burned out stay because they do not want to walk away from the benefits and service time they have accrued.” And this view resonates with majorities of teachers whether they are newcomers to the profession (80 percent) or veterans (68 percent). [Fig. 1–1]

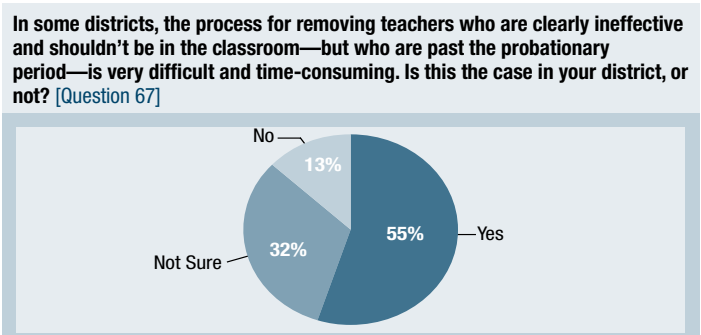
Figure 1–1.* Trapped by Benefits



*Percentages in figures may not equal 100 percent due to rounding or omission of answer categories. Question wording may be edited for space. Full question wording is available in Appendix B. Small discrepancies between percentages in the text and figures are due to rounding.

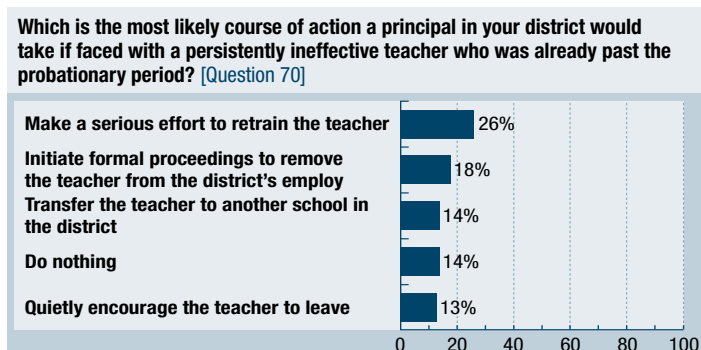
According to teachers, not only do the system’s incentives lock in teachers who’d rather leave; its rules make it hard to push colleagues out when they really should not be teaching. Well over half of the teachers surveyed (55 percent) say that in their district it is very difficult and time-consuming to remove clearly ineffective teachers who shouldn’t be in the classroom but who are past their probationary period. Only 13 percent say this is not the case. And almost half of teachers (46 percent) say they know a teacher in their own building who is past the probationary period but who is clearly ineffective and shouldn’t be in the classroom (42 percent say they do not know such a teacher). [Fig. 1–2]

Figure 1–2. Breaking Up Is Hard to Do



At the same time, teachers can't point to a single, preferred strategy that principals use to deal with teachers who clearly should not be in the classroom. One in four teachers (26 percent) says a principal in their district, if faced with a persistently ineffective teacher, would "make a serious effort to retrain the teacher." And 18 percent say a principal in their district would most likely "initiate formal proceedings to remove the teacher." But some think that their district's principals would be most likely to do nothing (14 percent); or that they would "transfer the teacher to another school" (14 percent). Another 13 percent say the principals would "quietly encourage the teacher to leave." [Fig. 1-3]

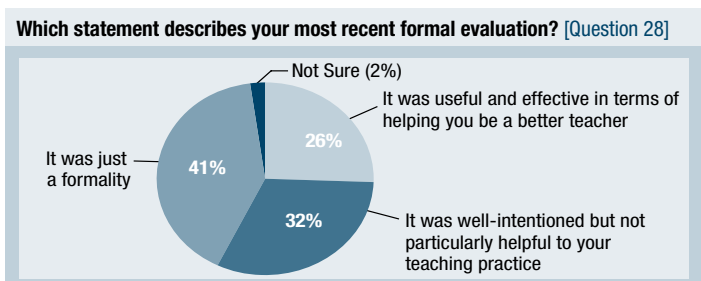
Figure 1-3. No Clear Solution to Ineffectual Teachers



Weak Evaluations

Teachers indicate that the most obvious technique used to assess teacher quality—the formal observation and evaluation—is not doing the job. In fact, only 26 percent of teachers report that their own most recent formal evaluation was "useful and effective." The plurality—41 percent—say it was "just a formality," while another 32 percent say at best it was "well-intentioned but not particularly helpful" to their teaching practice. Almost seven in 10 teachers (69 percent) say that when they hear a teacher at their school has been awarded tenure, they think that it's "just a formality—it has very little to do with whether a teacher is good or not." [Fig. 1-4]

Figure 1-4. Evaluations: Just a Formality



Voices From the Field ...

On Benefits:

An experienced teacher in Chicago described the calculations going through her mind as she approaches retirement: "They will take 5 percent of your pension away from you for every year that you quit before the age of 60. If you're at 30 years, and you're burned out, you better go the 34, or they're going to take 20 percent of your pension from you. That is the really bad thing about it because it almost makes these teachers be there whether they want to be or not."

Newcomers talked about being forewarned about the pitfalls of the benefit structure: "I've been around four years, and I've heard people say, 'If you want to get out of the system, get out of it now before you're locked in,'" explained a relatively novice Milwaukee teacher.

On Ineffective Peers:

Teachers acknowledged the existence of ineffective peers and how hard it is to remove them from the classroom. "I have children in school right now, and there certainly are some teachers that I will not let my children go into their classrooms," said a teacher working in the suburbs of Milwaukee.

A teacher from the Milwaukee public schools described her school's effort to remove a problematic colleague: "They have to go through a lot of hoops. ... We had blatant documentation, parent complaints, calls to a school board, all sorts of things, but the principal's hands were tied on every single situation."

And a teacher from a Milwaukee suburb said: "In our district there's a male teacher. ... He is struggling very, very much and is still probationary, but they renewed his contract. Our entire department is shocked."

Few Rewards

Outstanding teachers are unlikely to be recognized in any formal way, if at all. Half of teachers (49 percent) say school and district officials "do not reward outstanding teachers; the reward is solely intrinsic." Twenty-nine percent say outstanding teachers receive "official recognition (for example, formal commendation or note to file)," 16 percent say they receive some form of "informal recognition (for example, better treatment or perks)," and 10 percent say they get a "token gift."

Only 5 percent say that teachers receive a "financial bonus" for outstanding work. Ninety-seven percent of teachers say salary increases in their district are determined "according to a strictly defined schedule mostly driven by their years of service and the credits they attain."

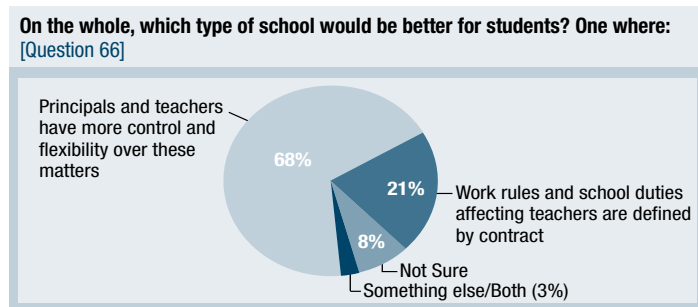
A Lot of Rules

Teachers describe schools that are tied up by bureaucracy, governed by a clutter of rules, legal stipulations, and contractual obligations that force good teaching and learning to take a back seat. The vast majority of teachers (86 percent) agree that, “Teachers are required to do too much paperwork and documentation about what goes on in their classrooms.”

They acknowledge that principals also work under difficult conditions, strapped for time and bogged down by the restrictions of a heavily bureaucratic system. Almost six in 10 (59 percent) agree that, “All the paperwork and legal and contractual restrictions make it difficult for principals to get things done”; only 28 percent disagree. In the end, when things go wrong, teachers are somewhat more likely to blame the system than to blame principals. More than half (55 percent) *reject* the view that, “When individual schools fail, it’s usually because they have ineffective principals at the helm,” although 40 percent agree with that statement.

Most teachers, by a 68 percent to 21 percent margin, say schools would be better for students if principals and teachers had more control and flexibility about work rules and school duties. [Fig. 1–5]

Figure 1–5. More Flexible Schools



Summary and Analysis

Public school teachers in this national survey depict a system that seems to be stuck when it comes to fine-tuning its workforce and making the most of its professionals’ talents. Teachers who would rather move on are often trapped by benefits, and teachers who *should* move on are often unduly protected. “We do have people in the profession that get there and are entrenched, burned out. I remember there was one teacher who wanted to laminate her lesson plans. There are those people, and that’s a negative stigma against our profession,” said a Phoenix teacher.

Yet, even when teachers are identified as not being effective, the system does not make it easy to get rid of them, primarily because the most common technique used to assess teacher quality and award tenure—the formal observation and evaluation—is not doing the job. When evaluations are a mere formality, as many teachers say they are, not only do teachers lose out on the chance to improve their craft, but ineffective teachers slip through and gain tenure.

According to these findings, teachers see themselves, and the principals who lead them, as overly constrained by work rules that define what they can do, how they should do it, and when it can be done. As a result, they feel treated as less than professional. “It’s demoralizing,” said one New York City teacher about having to punch a timecard each day. “I have a master’s degree plus 30 credits, but I have a timecard with my name on it. ... It’s ridiculous.”

The findings suggest support among teachers for a system that has more flexible work rules, more trust in teachers’ judgment and professionalism, and where decisions about teacher quality are not dependent on rigid rules, weak evaluations, and faulty tenure systems.

CONSIDERING CHANGE

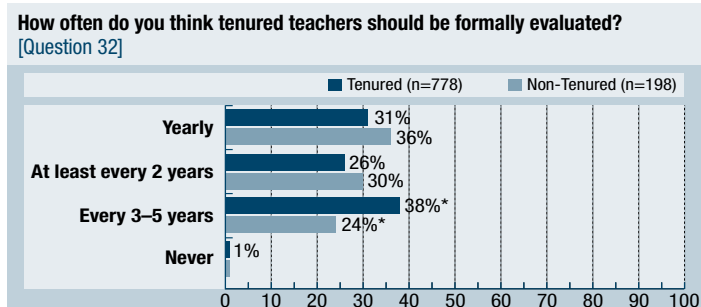
In order to change and eliminate systemic problems, school systems will need the support of teachers. Many public school teachers are open to some new ways of evaluating, rewarding, and paying teachers as well as ideas for attracting and retaining high-quality teachers. But some proposals do not gain wide support. For instance, teachers are resistant to using student test scores as a way of measuring teacher effectiveness in the classroom, and most oppose the idea of offering higher starting salaries in exchange for smaller pensions.

Stronger Evaluations

Concerned that the current evaluation process is weak and often no more than a formality, teachers express a willingness to reform the tenure system. Almost eight in 10 teachers (79 percent) support strengthening the formal evaluation of *probationary* teachers so that they will get tenure only after they’ve proven to be very good at what they do. Tenured teachers are more likely to support this proposal than their non-tenured colleagues (83 percent vs.

66 percent). What's more, most teachers think that even *tenured* teachers should be formally evaluated on a regular basis. Evaluations should occur each year according to 31 percent of tenured and 36 percent of non-tenured teachers, and at least every two years according to 26 percent of tenured and 30 percent of non-tenured teachers. [Fig. 2-1]

Figure 2-1. Regular Evaluations for Tenured Teachers



*Statistically significant difference.

Putting Pay on the Table

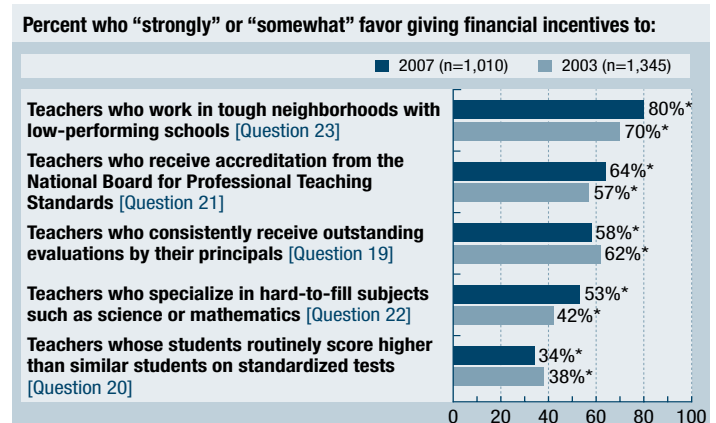
Teachers show support for some pay proposals, especially those that reward demanding assignments or additional work.

Eighty percent of public school teachers favor giving financial incentives to “teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools,” an increase of 10 percentage points from the 70 percent of teachers who favored an identical proposal in 2003. A large majority of teachers (64 percent) also favor giving financial incentives to “teachers who have pursued and achieved accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards,” an increase of 7 percentage points since the question was asked in 2003.

More than half of teachers (53 percent) favor giving financial incentives to “teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics,” an increase of 11 percentage points from 2003. And a solid majority (58 percent) favors giving financial incentives to “teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals.” [Fig. 2-2]

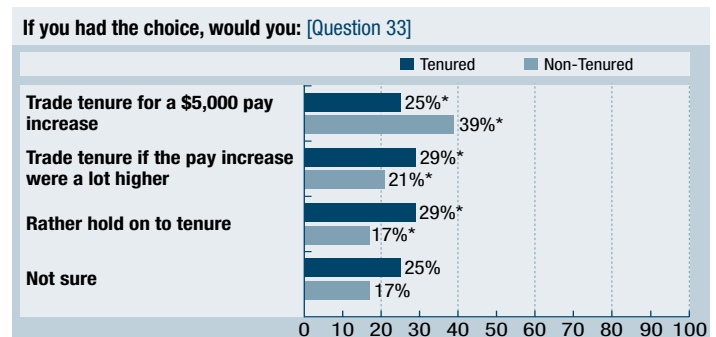
Even a proposal to trade tenure or job protection for higher pay garners some support—although it is hardly overwhelming. One in four tenured teachers (25 percent) would trade their tenure for a pay increase of \$5,000 per year, while an additional 29 percent would consider the trade if the pay increase was “a lot higher.” About three in 10 (29 percent) reject the idea outright. [Fig. 2-3]

Figure 2-2. What Merits More Pay?



*Statistically significant difference.

Figure 2-3. Swapping Tenure



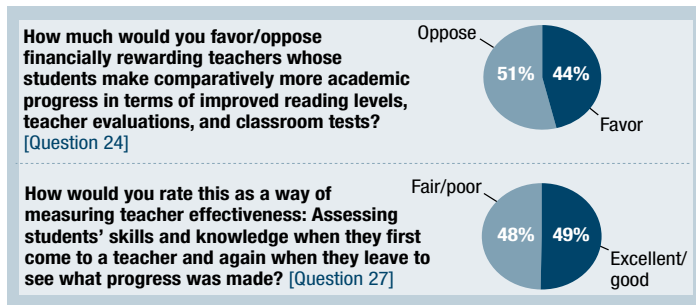
*Statistically significant difference.

Still Uneasy About Test Scores

Teachers are resistant to using test scores as a measurement of their performance and pay. As shown in Figure 2-2, one in three teachers (34 percent) favors giving financial incentives to teachers “whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests.” Most teachers today (64 percent) oppose the idea, up 8 percentage points from the 56 percent who opposed it in 2003.

Almost half of the public school teachers surveyed (49 percent) say it's an excellent (15 percent) or good (34 percent) idea to measure teacher effectiveness based on student growth, or “to assess students’ skills and knowledge when they first come to a teacher and to measure them again when students leave.” But almost half (48 percent) say it is a poor or fair idea. Similarly, the percent of public school teachers who favor (44 percent) or oppose (51 percent) financially rewarding teachers whose students make comparatively more academic progress in terms of “improved reading levels, teacher evaluations, and classroom tests” hovers around the halfway mark. [Fig. 2-4]

Figure 2–4. Adding Value



Attracting and Retaining Teachers

Teachers show strong support for recruitment strategies that improve the conditions and flexibility of their work. The majority of teachers (85 percent) agree that it is an excellent or good idea to “give teachers more time during the school day for class preparation and planning” as a way to attract and retain high-quality teachers. Almost eight in 10 (78 percent) say it is either an excellent or good idea to “make it far easier to leave and return to teaching without losing retirement benefits.” And seven in 10 (70 percent) think positively of a proposal that would “make it easier to earn and take sabbatical leave for teachers working in really challenging schools.”

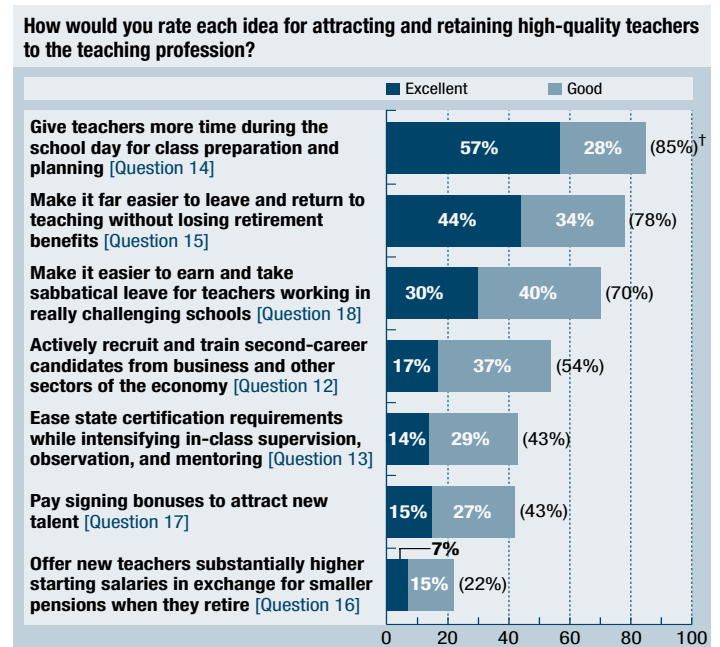
Support among public school teachers is also apparent for recruiting teachers from other industries and easing state certification requirements. Fifty-four percent say they would be open to “actively recruiting and training second-career candidates from business and other sectors of the economy.” High school teachers are more likely than elementary school teachers to support this idea (62 percent vs. 49 percent). However, only 43 percent of teachers think it is an excellent or good idea “to ease state certification requirements while intensifying in-class supervision, observation, and mentoring.”

Teachers are less supportive about using financial incentives to attract teachers. Less than half (43 percent) of teachers say it is an excellent or good idea to “pay signing bonuses to attract new talent.” Non-union members are more likely than union members to be supportive of this proposal (52 percent vs. 39 percent). And minority teachers (self-identified as African-American, Hispanic, or Asian) are more likely to support this idea than white teachers (63 percent vs. 41 percent).

Only 22 percent of public school teachers think it’s an excellent or good idea to offer new teachers “substantially

higher starting salaries in exchange for smaller pensions when they retire.” A large majority (71 percent) view it as either a poor or fair idea. Large majorities of both union members and non-members view this proposal negatively (72 percent of members and 69 percent of non-members). [Fig. 2–5]

Figure 2–5. Attracting the Best and Brightest



[†]Figures in parentheses represent totals.

Summary and Analysis

This national survey highlights public school teachers’ willingness to explore new ideas for assessing and rewarding performance and for attracting new candidates to the profession. And while teachers overall are far from convinced that differences in teacher impact can be measured fairly or measured at all, there does seem to be room for negotiation around pay initiatives, an insight that is often masked in the highly charged debates about pay for performance proposals. Still, some teachers may be insulted by the very idea that they would respond to financial incentives or that public schools would benefit from the management techniques used in the private sector.

A series of survey questions on differentiated pay approaches demonstrates there are situations where teachers agree that paying colleagues differently is justified. Teachers know that working in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools is a difficult

assignment and may feel that it's only fair to reward those willing to put forth the extra effort. Teachers also feel positively about paying more money to colleagues who have pursued and achieved National Board certification. Many know that it takes a lot of work to get such accreditation and may feel that this extra effort deserves reward. Most likely, teachers favor bonus pay for tough assignments and National Board certification because they are familiar with these ideas and know colleagues who have benefited from them. Teachers may also be amenable to these ideas because they see them as "objective" and not susceptible to favoritism. There has been growing support among teachers for some of these proposals; three of the five proposals about financial incentives that we tested have gained support in the past four years.

Paying teachers based on student test scores, however, remains controversial. Teachers' suspicion of standardized tests as a fair and objective measure drives some of this resistance. "To reward teachers for great test scores is absurd," commented one teacher. "There is such a range of external issues that work in a classroom; there is no way to accurately assess how great a job [a teacher] is doing based on test scores! And if it is based on test scores, who ultimately decides? How can favoritism, cronyism, and all other matters of human subjectiveness not come into play?"

Teachers also appear to be split over the use of growth or "value-added" measures of teacher performance, which assess teacher effectiveness based on student progress over time. Despite increased attention to these ideas in education policy, teachers are no more likely today to support them than they were in 2003.

Even though teachers show openness to some changes, it's hard to ignore the misgivings they revealed (across different types of questions) about using student achievement to measure, evaluate, and compensate them. And in focus groups, teachers bristled at even the suggestion that they should be solely responsible for a child's academic achievement when so many others—parents, administrators, even the students themselves—are not doing their part. In Milwaukee, a city school teacher told us, "I would love to be rewarded for the merits that I do make, but I would not like to be penalized for things that are out of my control."

Voices From the Field ...

On Merit Pay:

A Chicago teacher's experience illustrates the mixed feelings teachers may have on value-added measures, especially when used to determine pay bonuses: "*Prior to this year, I would say that merit-based pay ... it's an insult. Like I'm going to work harder? I work as hard as I can, and I'm not going to work harder for more money. That's an insult to me. My school ... got a very large federal grant starting next year for this merit-based pay, so the way that it's worked out, I really like it. ... It's based on the value-added of what I do. ... My kids started at 10. ... So if I take that from a 10 to a 25, are they at grade level? No. Did I do a really good job? Did I bring them up significantly? Yes. ... We'll see. It's not been implemented yet. In theory, I like it.*"

To teachers, one of the critical downsides of differentiating teacher pay—whatever the approach—is that it will breed unhealthy competition and wreak havoc on the collaborative spirit that they see as essential to effective teaching and student learning. One teacher wrote, "*I still feel that teaching is one of the most valuable and fulfilling professions in the world. I am afraid that by tying teacher compensation to effectiveness, there will be less willingness for teachers to work together. Teaching will become a competition for getting the most money.*"

A New York teacher said, "*Merit pay would make us all like cave people fighting for a bone.*"

Educators and policymakers frequently discuss ways to attract and retain high-quality teachers. One idea getting attention these days is to swap some of the benefits teachers enjoy later in their careers for more money in the early years. The survey finds teachers are protective of their pensions, and the vast majority of teachers overall do not like the idea of raising starting salaries in exchange for fewer retirement benefits. But many teachers are open to other new ways of attracting and keeping good teachers. Generally speaking, teachers appear to be considerably more interested in recruitment and retention strategies that would improve the flexibility and conditions of their work. For example, most support making it easier to leave and return to the profession without losing benefits. A suburban teacher from California wrote, "As a mom of two kids under five, I'd like to see it more feasible to take a few years off and be able to go back without retirement being so negatively affected." And an overwhelming majority supports giving teachers more time for class planning and preparation. While this measure would come with a large price tag for public schools, it is notable that the measure teachers are most likely to favor does not come with any monetary gain for individual teachers.

UNIONS AS PROTECTORS AND REFORMERS

Teachers unions play a powerful role in influencing the direction and success of district reforms aimed at improving teacher quality. Public school teachers expect unions to continue playing their traditional role: to bargain for benefits, safeguard jobs, and protect teachers from political machinations in their districts. But teachers also are open to their local union playing a role in improving teacher quality. While relatively few see the union in their own district as active in doing so, large numbers would support union efforts to mentor and train teachers, to negotiate new ways to evaluate teachers, and even to engage in high-stakes reform efforts such as guiding ineffective teachers out of the profession.

Unions Matter

Most teachers see the teachers union as vital to their profession. When asked how they think of teachers unions or associations, 54 percent of teachers responded that they are “absolutely essential.” This is an increase of 8 percentage points from 46 percent in 2003. Another 31 percent see unions as “important but not essential,” and just 11 percent as “something [they] could do without.” Among union members, almost 2 out of 3 (65 percent) view them as absolutely essential. [Fig. 3–1]

Figure 3–1. Still Critical

Do you think of teachers unions or associations as: [Question 36]		
	Total 2003 (n=1,345)	Total 2007 (n=1,010)
Absolutely essential	46*	54*
Important but not essential	38*	31*
Something you could do without	12	11

*Statistically significant difference.

And most teachers strongly value the traditional protections that unions offer. Approximately three in four teachers (74 percent) agree that, “Without collective bargaining, the working conditions and salaries of teachers would be much worse.” This has declined by 7 percentage points, from 81 percent who agreed in 2003. Not surprisingly, union members are far more likely than non-members to feel this way (87 percent vs. 50 percent).

Seventy-four percent agree that, “Teachers facing unfair charges from parents or students would have nowhere to turn without the union.” Union members are more than twice as likely as their non-union colleagues to feel this way (85 percent vs. 39 percent).

Almost eight in 10 teachers (78 percent) agree that, “Without a union, teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power.” Again, union members are twice as likely to feel this way compared with non-members (91 percent vs. 45 percent).

Finally, most teachers do not think that union presence hinders the reputation of the profession. Just 21 percent of teachers agree that, “Teachers would have more prestige if collective bargaining and lifetime tenure were eliminated.” Sixty percent of teachers overall *disagree* with this statement, as do 68 percent of union members and a smaller 44 percent of non-members.

On the Union Agenda

Public school teachers rely on their unions mainly for traditional functions. More than three quarters of teachers say that their local union “protects teachers through due process and grievance procedures,” “regularly informs teachers about their benefits, rights, and responsibilities,” and “effectively negotiates contracts, salary, and benefits on behalf of teachers.” And of those teachers who report that their local union performs such traditional functions, most say it is doing an excellent or good job (approximately seven out of 10). While only 8 percent of teachers said they had filed a grievance against their district, the majority (73 percent) of these teachers reported that their only or most recent grievance ended in their favor. And 70 percent of these same teachers said the union did a good job representing them, while only 27 percent felt the union could have worked a lot harder.

Some unions, however, are moving outside of the traditional role and engaging in activities typically associated with a more vigorous school reform agenda. Fifty-five percent of teachers overall say the union in their district “negotiates to keep class size down in the district.” Nearly half of teachers (46 percent) say that the local union “provides support and mentoring to new teachers.” Forty-one percent say it “negotiates new ways to more meaningfully and effectively evaluate teachers” and that it “keeps teachers updated on new instructional methods and curriculum.” Almost four in 10 (38 percent)

say their district’s union “provides teachers with high-quality training and professional development,” and one in three (33 percent) that it “expands the career ladder for teachers by negotiating new and differentiated roles and responsibilities.”

Still, according to these survey results, most unions do not appear to be engaged in efforts to deal with ineffective teachers. Only 17 percent of teachers say that the union in their district “leads efforts to identify ineffective teachers and retrain them.” Fifteen percent (for both) say that the union “guides ineffective teachers out of the profession” or “screens teachers who are new or transferring to ensure a good fit with the schools they’re going to.” [Fig. 3–2] Half of teachers (49 percent) agree that their union “sometimes fights to protect teachers who really should be out of the classroom.” And nearly half (46 percent) say they “personally know a teacher in their building who is past the probationary period but who is clearly ineffective and shouldn’t be in the classroom.”

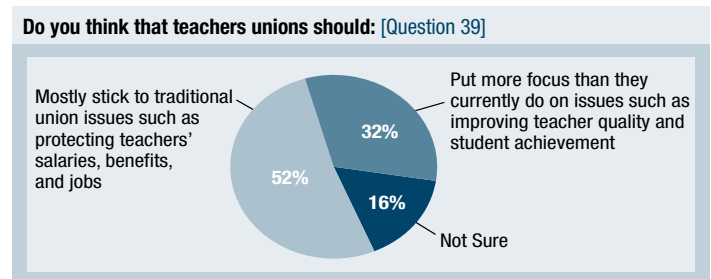
Figure 3–2. The Unions and Teacher Quality

Percent who say the union in their district currently does each item:	
	Total (n=1,010)
Provide support and mentoring to new teachers [Question 58]	46
Negotiate new ways to more meaningfully and effectively evaluate teachers [Question 64]	41
Keep teachers updated on new instructional methods and curriculum [Question 55]	41
Provide teachers with high-quality training and professional development [Question 59]	38
Expand the career ladder for teachers by negotiating new and differentiated roles and responsibilities [Question 61]	33
Lead efforts to identify ineffective teachers and retrain them [Question 63]	17
Guide ineffective teachers out of the profession [Question 62]	15
Screen teachers who are new or transferring to ensure a good fit with the schools they’re going to [Question 65]	15

Room to Grow

While teachers value unions for their traditional protections, sizeable numbers also seem open to the union as a player in reform. When forced to choose, more than half of teachers (52 percent) prefer that their union stick to traditional issues such as protecting teachers’ salaries, benefits, and jobs. But nearly a third (32 percent) say that unions should increase their focus on things like teacher quality and student achievement (16 percent are unsure). [Fig. 3–3]

Figure 3–3. Remember Bread and Butter



Among the teachers who say that the union or association in their district currently *does not* perform certain functions typically associated with a more vigorous school reform agenda, sizeable numbers would strongly favor their local union taking on such activities. For example, while 38 percent of teachers report that their local union doesn’t provide support and mentoring to new teachers, the majority of these teachers indicate that the union *should* take on this responsibility (66 percent would favor the union doing so). And, while 39 percent of teachers report that their union currently doesn’t negotiate new ways to more meaningfully and effectively evaluate teachers, the majority (72 percent) of these teachers would favor the union doing so.

The same pattern continues across other reforms. Among those who say the union in their district does not currently do so, approximately two out of three would favor their local union playing a role in guiding ineffective teachers out of the profession (66 percent), in expanding the career ladder for teachers (65 percent), and in identifying and retraining ineffective teachers (65 percent). Six in 10 support the union getting more involved in providing guidance on instructional and curriculum matters (61 percent) and also providing professional development opportunities (61 percent).

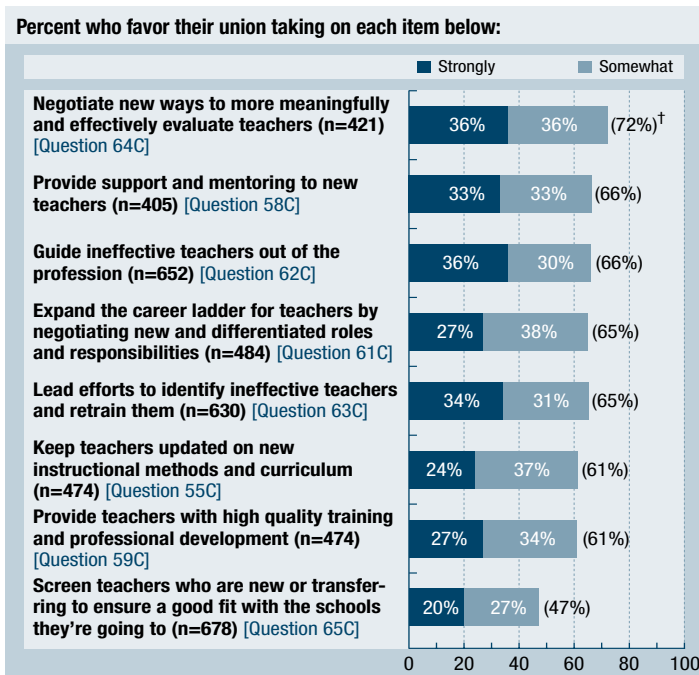
The one exception where there is less than a majority in favor is for the union to take a more active role in ensuring a good fit between teachers and schools; for this item, just under half (47 percent) say they are in favor. [Fig. 3–4]

Permission to Lead

Sizeable numbers of public school teachers indicate strong support for teachers unions to take the initiative on what many would consider to be controversial reforms.

More than six in 10 (63 percent) teachers in the overall sample say they would support the union or association

Figure 3–4. How Unions Can Improve Teaching

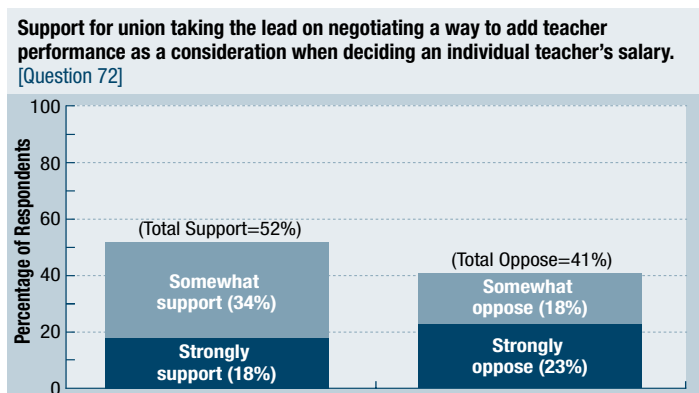


[†]Figures in parentheses represent totals.
Base: Teachers who say union currently does not do each item.

in their district taking the lead on ways to simplify the process for removing teachers who are past the probationary period and who are clearly ineffective and shouldn't be in the classroom. Just 16 percent would oppose it. Majorities of both union members (65 percent) and non-members (58 percent) are in favor of this idea.

Also, more than half of teachers overall (52 percent) say they would support the local union or association taking the lead on negotiating a way to add teacher performance as a consideration when deciding an individual teacher's salary; 40 percent would oppose it. [Fig. 3–5]

Figure 3–5. The Unions and Pay for Performance



Voices From the Field ...

On Unions as Protectors:
"I would never give up my continuing contract rights," a 31-year veteran wrote. "I have seen too many parents and administrators make unfounded accusations that could ruin a career."

"Without our union, teachers are quite powerless," wrote a teacher from Hawaii.

"One of the reasons that I belong to the union, as ineffective as it may be ... I belong because of the liability policy. If you're going to be a teacher, you need to have that liability. There are so many situations I couldn't even begin to name. If you coach, do an activity, or something in the classroom, I just believe that they have lawyers that are specially trained for the educational system, not just somebody who went to law school and can interpret law, but somebody that really knows educational law," said a Phoenix teacher.

"I have to say I just don't know what it would be like if we didn't have a union," said one New York City teacher. "I'm losing faith in the union more and more all the time, but I don't know. ... What would it be, if we didn't have one?"

On Unions as Reformers:
 Through the focus groups, it became evident that teachers fear losing the services and protections they have come to expect from unions if the unions were to take on more responsibilities. A Milwaukee area teacher was explicit: *"I would worry [that] my union couldn't handle taking on anything else. ... Get me a contract. We haven't had a contract in 10 years. Then think about something else."*

Many teachers felt that it would be acceptable for their union to take on new things as long as old things keep getting done. *"I just think that there are other things that are more true to my feelings or my concerns. ... If they were involved with [teacher quality/student achievement], I mean honestly, I would still probably have my focus or my concerns with my salary, the work day, those kinds of things,"* said a Phoenix teacher.

Cooperation and Conflict

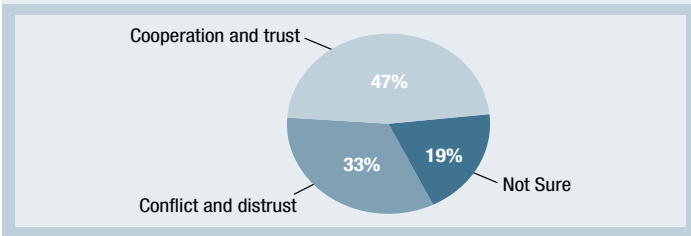
A third (33 percent) of the union members surveyed for this study say the relationship between district leadership and the teachers union is mostly about "conflict and distrust." But the plurality (47 percent) characterizes the relationship as one of "cooperation and trust." [Fig. 3–6]

Summary and Analysis

The majority of public school teachers continue to view teachers unions as vital, and based on the survey results, membership continues to be strong, although participation levels vary. (See sidebar, The Union Way,

Figure 3–6. Conflict or Cooperation

Today in your district, how would you describe the relationship between the teachers union or association and the district leadership? Is it mostly about: [Question 40]



Base: Union member (n=671)

Page 11.) But loyalty to the union seems borne more of immediate practical concerns than a broader sense of unionism. “They’re the policemen [sic] who just keep an eye on the laws and regulations,” explained one teacher. And to a large extent, this may be how most teachers generally experience their union or association—as a necessary protector of their rights in an environment that often seems disconnected from, if not hostile to, their daily work lives.

As such, teachers tend to rely on their unions mainly for traditional bread-and-butter issues—securing money, benefits, and legal representation—and teachers report considerable satisfaction with their unions on these matters. Similar to other professionals, teachers worry about the increasing costs of health and dental insurance, about retirement—and they’re counting on the union to protect those benefits. Teachers often talk about feeling extremely vulnerable to the powers that be—parents, principals, legislators. Partly for these reasons, and despite what teachers sometimes see as the unions’ shortcomings, teachers continue to be tethered to the traditional role of unions.

Teachers do not appear to automatically associate their unions with efforts to improve teacher quality. In a New York City focus group, for example, teachers mentioned many recent instructional improvements such as smaller learning academies and curriculum compacting—but, rightly or wrongly, they did not attribute them to union initiatives. When asked specifically where the teachers union fit in, several teachers in the group identified as union-initiated a program that provides teacher coaching and a union-designed violence prevention workshop. But they did not intrinsically associate their unions with substantive initiatives until the moderator probed in this direction. As one New York City teacher said, “I never

The Union Way

Based on these survey results, the vast majority of public school teachers continue to value union membership, although most union members do not participate actively in their unions. In 2003, 83 percent of teachers reported that they were members of a teachers union or association; in 2007, the number remains virtually unchanged at 82 percent. But large majorities—approximately two out of three members—say they are not involved or engaged with the local union other than to receive mailings and notices (66 percent in 2003 and 69 percent in 2007).

There are disparities among union members on how well teachers unions reflect the views of most teachers—and how effective teachers unions are in general. Slightly more than half (51 percent) of the union members surveyed are of the opinion that when their union negotiates with district leadership, it “virtually always works for the best interests of its members and reflects their preferences,” compared with just 18 percent that say the union “sometimes takes positions that are not in the best interests of its members or not aligned with what members want.” Another 16 percent say it does both equally, and 14 percent are not sure. On three out of five initiatives regarding differentiated pay for teachers, union members are substantially less optimistic than their non-union counterparts.

While majorities of union members view the various levels of the union—building, district, state, national—as effective, a larger percentage points to the *district* level as effective compared with the others. Eighty-five percent of union members say the teachers union or association at the district level is effective. This is followed by 78 percent who say the union in their building is effective; 68 percent the state level; and 57 percent the national level.

Merit Pay by Union Membership

Percent who “strongly” or “somewhat” favor giving financial incentives to:	Percent who “strongly” or “somewhat” favor giving financial incentives to:	
	Union Member (n=671)	Non-Member (n=165)
Teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools [Question 23]	79	79
Teachers who receive accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [Question 21]	63	67
Teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals [Question 19]	52*	71*
Teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics [Question 22]	49*	61*
Teachers whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests [Question 20]	28*	47*

*Statistically significant difference.

looked to the union for professional development. If I did [look to the union] it was a contractual question or something like that.” Teachers also revealed confusion about the role unions should play in supporting innovation such as charter schools. (See sidebar, Charter Confusion, Page 12.)

Charter Confusion

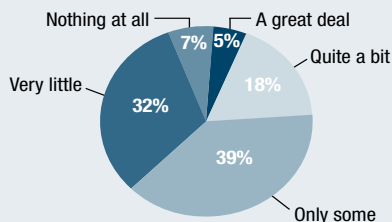
Public school teachers are about as likely to favor (42 percent) as they are to oppose (45 percent) the fundamental idea behind charter schools—schools that “operate under a charter or contract that frees them from many of the state regulations imposed on public schools and permits them to operate independently.” In comparison, the public at large is somewhat more likely to favor charters, according to a recent survey that found 53 percent in favor and 34 percent in opposition.*

Despite the more than 4,000 charter schools that operate nationally and the intense debate that surrounds them, public school teachers appear to know little about charter schools.† Only 22 percent of teachers say they know “a great deal” or “quite a bit.” Nearly four in 10 (39 percent) know either “very little” or “nothing at all.” This is only slightly better than the public’s knowledge level. A recent survey shows that 12 percent of registered voters, for example, know a lot about charter schools.‡

Teachers’ unfamiliarity with charter schools is surprising given the footprint that charters now have in many communities. Findings from both the focus groups and the survey revealed confusion about charter schools and the role unions might play in managing or sponsoring them. The survey found that public school teachers are somewhat more likely to support (34 percent) than oppose (26 percent) having teachers unions themselves sponsor and manage charter schools, but the plurality (40 percent) are not sure—an unusually high percentage that indicates unsettled views. In New York City, where the teachers union is championing several charter school initiatives, only one teacher in the focus group seemed to have heard about it at all and announced that “the jury is still out.” In Milwaukee, where charter schools are relatively prevalent, many teachers appeared to be uninformed and uninterested in the topic. As union leaders think about organizing charter schools or sponsoring schools of their own, they have considerable work to do to educate their membership.

Don’t Know Much About Charter Schools?

How much do you know about charter schools? [Question 82]



*38th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, 2006.

†According to the Center for Education Reform, the exact number is 4,147 as of 2007 (http://www.edreform.com/_upload/CER_charter_numbers.pdf).

‡Glover Park Group, 2005.

According to teachers, unions do not appear to be particularly active on the teacher quality front, although many teachers indicate support for this type of union activity. Thus, teachers unions have a lot of room to expand the role they play in improving teacher quality. Initiatives such as mentoring new teachers or serving as a resource on curriculum and teaching methods are low-hanging fruit—fairly easy to implement and relatively non-controversial.

Overall, teachers are fairly receptive to expanding the union role in reform, especially when it comes to improving the state of their craft. The findings strongly suggest teachers would back the union in their district if it were to take on such things as high-quality professional training or if it tried to expand the career ladder for teachers. And teachers seem willing to go even further. They’d want to see their union working toward new ways to effectively evaluate teachers—and even to guide ineffective colleagues out.

Still, this is not a tame agenda for unions, and they do not pursue it without some risk. For the unions to take on all of these things at the same time might be overwhelming and may raise questions about their ability to deliver on the traditional issues that teachers say matter most. Moreover, it’s one thing for teachers to voice support for an initiative or idea in a survey, quite another to do so in real life when there are high stakes attached.

NEWCOMERS AND VETERANS

Teachers with fewer than five years of experience (newcomers) and those with more than 20 years (veterans) agree on many issues. They both, for instance, value unions and the more traditional services they provide. But newer teachers and veteran teachers have substantially different attitudes toward differentiated pay as well as other aspects of their profession. Teachers also differ in opinions according to the regions in which they live—South, Northeast, West, Midwest. (See sidebar, Southern Comfort, Page 13.)

Shared Values

Both veteran teachers and newcomers value unions, especially their role in safeguarding teachers’ jobs. Veterans are more likely than newcomers to say the

Southern Comfort

The survey findings strongly suggest that public school teachers in the South are more willing to push for reform than their peers in the Northeast, where union tradition remains stronger. For example, teachers working in southern states are more likely to favor pay for performance measured by student standardized test scores (44 percent, compared with 21 percent Northeast, 30 percent West, and 30 percent Midwest).

Also, there is a clear pattern of stronger support for the value-added approach for measuring teacher effectiveness among those in the South (55 percent, compared with 44 percent Northeast, 50 percent West, and 44 percent Midwest).

These regional differences may be more a function of union penetration than anything else, as teachers are far more likely

to be union members in the Northeast and far less likely in the South. On virtually all of the questions in the survey pertaining to union activities, teachers in the Northeast are more likely than those in the South to say the union in their district currently takes part, that it is doing a good job, or that they would favor the union taking on that responsibility. In a nutshell, pro-union sentiment is prevalent among teachers in the Northeast, lacking among teachers in the South, and tends to fall somewhere in between for teachers in the West and Midwest.

Merit Pay by Region

Percent who “strongly” or “somewhat” favor giving financial incentives to:

	Northeast (n=163)	South (n=342)	West (n=200)	Midwest (n=266)
Teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools [Question 23]	75*	80	86*	78
Teachers who receive accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [Question 21]	59*	69*	65	61
Teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals [Question 19]	48*	65*	56	54
Teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics [Question 22]	42*	60*	57	49
Teachers whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests [Question 20]	21*	44*	30	30

*Statistically significant difference.

What Unions Do for Me

Percent of teachers who:

	Northeast (n=163)	South (n=342)	West (n=200)	Midwest (n=266)
Agree that without a union, teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power [Question 49]	93	65*	83	82
Agree that without collective bargaining, the working conditions and salaries of teachers would be much worse [Question 48]	88	60*	80	81
Agree that the union regularly provides information and opportunities to help them be a better teacher [Question 44]	52*	37	38	41
Say that being a union member provides feelings of pride and solidarity, in addition to the practical benefits [Question 77]	44*	25	29	29
Believe that the type of school that would be better for children is one where work rules and school duties affecting teachers are defined by contract [Question 66]	35*	15	21	21

*Statistically significant difference.

teachers union is “absolutely essential” (60 percent compared with 51 percent). And, notably, newer teachers are considerably more likely to say the union is absolutely essential than they were four years ago (51 percent in 2007 compared to 30 percent in 2003). [Fig. 4–1]

Figure 4–1. The Continued Importance of Unions

Do you think of teachers unions or associations as: [Question 36]

	Newcomer		Veteran	
	2003 (n=211)	2007 (n=110)	2003 (n=484)	2007 (n=363)
Absolutely essential	30*	51*	57	60
Important but not essential	49*	32*	30	27
Something you could do without	13	11	11	11

*Statistically significant difference.

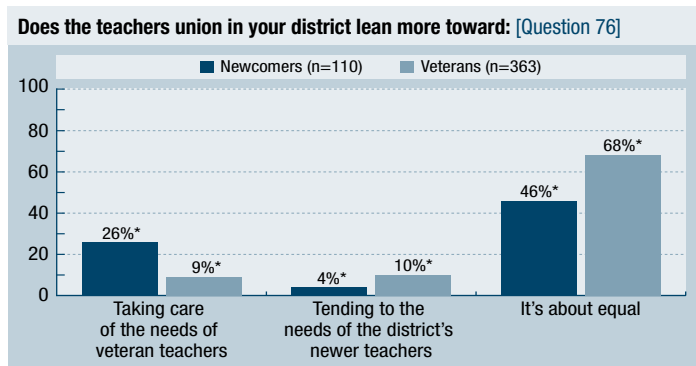
Note: Newcomer=less than five years; Veteran=more than 20 years.

Although a quarter of newcomers think unions lean toward tending to the needs of veteran teachers (26 percent), large numbers of both groups see no patterns of favoritism. Forty-six percent of newer teachers and 68 percent of veteran teachers believe that the union in their district focuses about equally on both groups. Few think the needs of new teachers get most of the attention (4 percent of newcomers and 10 percent of veterans). Fully one in four (25 percent) newer teachers is not sure, compared with 13 percent of veterans. [Fig. 4–2]

More Positive About Union Protections

It is not surprising that teachers with more than 20 years of experience would be more active in the teachers union or to perceive the union as acting in its members’ best

Figure 4–2. Favoritism?

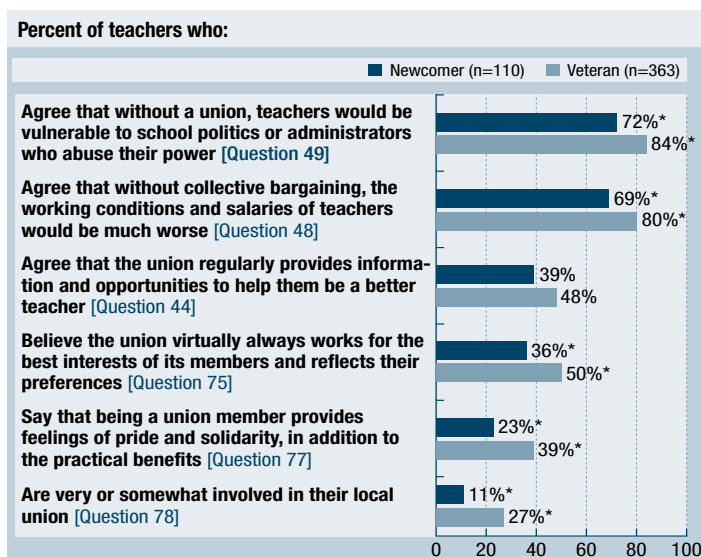


*Statistically significant difference.

Note: Newcomer=less than five years; Veteran=more than 20 years.

interests. For example, among those who say the union in their district protects teachers through due process and grievance procedures, veterans are more likely to think the union is doing an excellent or good job (78 percent vs. 62 percent of newcomers). And veteran teachers are also more likely than their newer counterparts to agree that “without a union, teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power” (84 percent vs. 72 percent); that “without collective bargaining, the working conditions and salaries of teachers would be much worse” (80 percent vs. 69 percent); that “the union regularly provides information and opportunities to help them be a better teacher” (48 percent vs. 39 percent); and that “being a union member provides feelings of pride and solidarity, in addition to the practical benefits” (39 percent vs. 23 percent). [Fig. 4–3]

Figure 4–3. On My Side



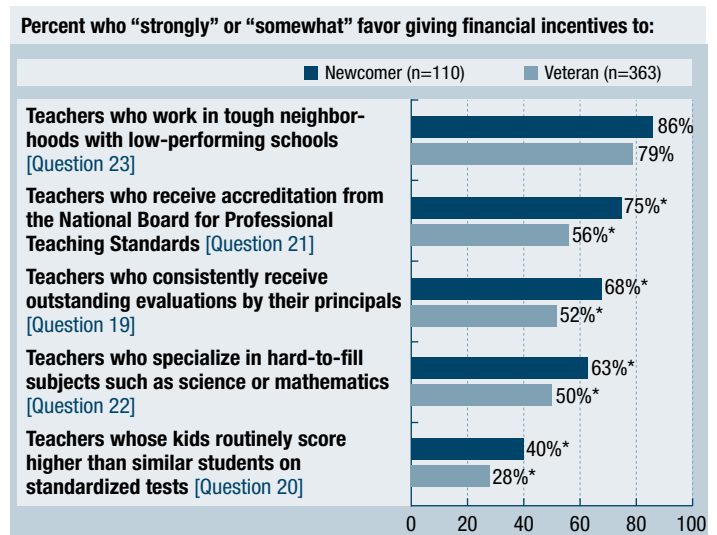
*Statistically significant difference.

Note: Newcomer=less than five years; Veteran=more than 20 years.

More Open to Reforms

Compared with veterans, newer teachers are more supportive of a range of reforms that would reward existing teachers for superior performance or recruit new high-quality candidates to the profession. On each of five proposals posed in the survey about giving financial incentives to teachers, newcomers are more likely than veterans to be positive. [Fig. 4–4]

Figure 4–4. Favoring Financial Incentives



*Statistically significant difference.

Note: Newcomer=less than five years; Veteran=more than 20 years.

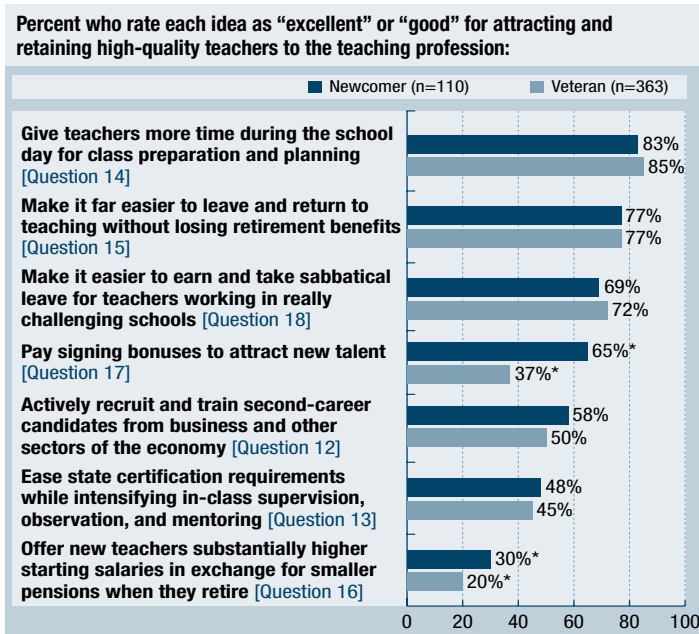
Most newcomers (65 percent) also support the union taking “the lead on negotiating a way to add teacher performance as a consideration when deciding an individual teacher’s salary.” Only 45 percent of veteran teachers are in favor.

While 58 percent of newcomers believe there are outstanding teachers in their school “who deserve to be especially rewarded because they do a stellar job,” only 39 percent of veterans agree. Newcomers are far more likely than veterans to think it is an excellent or good idea to “pay signing bonuses to attract new talent” (65 percent vs. 37 percent). Newcomers are also more likely to react positively toward “offering new teachers substantially higher starting salaries in exchange for smaller pensions when they retire (30 percent vs. 20 percent).

Finally, 58 percent of newcomers think it is an excellent or good idea to “actively recruit and train second-

career candidates from business and other sectors of the economy,” compared with 50 percent of veterans. [Fig. 4–5]

Figure 4–5. Improving the Profession



*Statistically significant difference.

Note: Newcomer=less than five years; Veteran=more than 20 years.

Summary and Analysis

In the public debate it is generally assumed that novice teachers are more skeptical of teachers unions and more open to change than veteran teachers. This is true in some ways, but not in all—the picture is far more complicated.

Veterans do express stronger positive sentiments than newcomers about the teachers union and the protections it offers. With more years in the system, veteran teachers are more likely to have witnessed the union defend their colleagues or themselves against what they perceive to be onerous or nonsensical work rules. Thus, they may be more aware of the value that unions offer. Likewise, over time in a career people tend to become more averse to change and risk, and veterans may see the union as a helpful bulwark against those things.

Yet, despite general assumptions, newcomers continue to view teachers unions as absolutely essential. In fact, over the past four years, an increasingly larger percentage

of newer teachers say they view teachers unions as absolutely essential (51 percent in 2007 vs. 30 percent in 2003); among veterans there was virtually no change (60 percent in 2007 and 57 percent in 2003). And newcomers are still attached to the union’s traditional functions. A majority of newcomers say the union should “mostly stick to traditional union issues” rather than “put more focus than they currently do” on reform-centered activities (59 percent vs. 29 percent).

The enduring appeal of unions to newer teachers could be the result of a number of things. Teachers may appreciate having union backing in a more contentious No Child Left Behind Act era, where the public schools—and teachers themselves—are under greater scrutiny than ever before. It may also be that as newer teachers perceive union power as on the decline, they may be more inclined to nostalgically reflect about its usefulness. Or it may be that today’s newer teachers are responding to broader economic and workplace changes. A Pew Research Center survey in 2006 showed that workers are more likely to worry that their employers are less loyal to them and that their jobs provide fewer benefits. In any case, newcomers and veterans alike may express support for teachers unions—warts and all—because they truly believe they need the protection they offer for things like salary and benefits.

But newcomers also have more doubts than veterans about how helpful unions really are. They are less likely to think the union offers protections from abusive administrators or safeguards the working conditions and salaries for teachers. They are less likely to think—and perhaps in a better position to know—that the union helps them be better teachers. Compared to veterans, newcomers are less likely to think the union always acts in the best interest of its members, which may partially explain why newcomers are also less inclined to feel pride or solidarity in regards to union membership or to be active in their local union.

Most importantly, newcomers are considerably more open to some reform-minded initiatives. They are amenable even to the more controversial proposals, that is, the ones involving the use of student achievement to determine teacher pay. There are also significant distinctions between the two groups on the overall topic of differentiated pay for teachers.

CONCLUSION

Various parties in the education debate often claim to know what teachers want or to speak on their behalf. Public school teachers' views, however, are hardly unanimous or monolithic; they are nuanced and sometimes even contradictory, which speaks to the complexity of the issues and the fact that reasonable people can disagree. The results of this survey clearly show that reformers, school districts, and teachers unions all have their work cut out for them if they truly want to lay claim to the support of the nation's teachers.

This survey points to several important takeaways. First, before the reform conversation can even get started, school district management must meet its core obligations to create a well-functioning workplace for teachers. For their part, the unions must take on, in a meaningful way, some of the chronic problems that damage their public brand, frustrate teachers, and have an adverse impact on students. Labor and management must find ways to work together and advance a reform agenda. Ultimately, their fortunes are intertwined.

Policymakers and policy advocates must become more effective in how they communicate with teachers and

explain reform ideas, particularly those ideas that are more controversial. White papers and reports are a thin reed and limited vehicle for sharing information in an environment where multiple institutions are seeking to communicate with teachers and win them over. Reform ideas must be communicated in multiple ways and to multiple audiences. Today, with the increasing prevalence of electronic forms of communication, this is more possible than ever before.

That the loyalty of K–12 public school teachers is up for grabs is ultimately an opportunity for education advocates, teachers unions, and policymakers but most importantly for the nation's current and future teachers. Research shows that teachers are the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement, but neither practice (in most schools and school districts) nor policy (local, state, or federal) is yet aligned with that finding. A vigorous debate about how to transform schools and teaching to meet today's challenges and create a profession that people seek to be part of, rather than one where they feel they need protection from unfair and capricious practices, is a vital one. The findings presented here, while not the last word, offer guideposts for that conversation.

Appendix A. Methodology

Waiting to Be Won Over is based on a nationally representative random sample of 1,010 K–12 public school teachers conducted in fall 2007. The margin of error for the overall sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points. The survey was preceded by six focus groups.

The Survey

The sample was randomly drawn from a comprehensive database of current K–12 teachers maintained by Market Data Retrieval, a subsidiary of Dun & Bradstreet. A multi-mode approach that included both mail and online versions of the survey was used.

The first mailing, which included a questionnaire and a cover letter, was sent via first-class mail on September 25, 2007, to 7,200 randomly selected K–12 public school teachers in the United States. A reminder postcard was sent on October 3, 2007. A second mailing of the questionnaire with instructions to those who had not yet participated was sent on October 16, 2007. Each mailing of the questionnaire included a prepaid business reply envelope. Teachers for whom an e-mail address was available—about 50 percent of the sample—were sent e-mails with an embedded URL linking them to the online version. A total of 139 surveys were completed online.

The margin of error for the results from the overall sample of 1,010 is plus or minus 3 percentage points. It is higher when comparing percentages across subgroups. Subgroup differences reported in this study are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Teachers in urban districts were oversampled to insure the survey netted a sufficient number (1,200 of the original 7,200 were part of the urban oversample). The results are weighted to reflect the actual distribution of urban teachers in the teacher population.

The overall response rate for the survey is 14 percent. As with all surveys, the risk of non-response is that the pool of survey respondents could differ from the true population of teachers, decreasing the ability to draw inferences from the data. A comparison of the demographic profile of respondents to that of the overall population of teachers shows they are very similar when it comes to such key variables as race and ethnicity, urbanicity, region, and sex (see Population vs. Sample Comparison). Results can also be affected by non-sampling sources of bias, such as question wording. Steps were taken to minimize these, including extensive pre-testing of the survey instrument with focus group participants and six one-on-one telephone interviews with current K–12 teachers.

The questionnaire (see Appendix B) was designed by the FDR Group and Education Sector; the two organizations are responsible for all interpretation and analysis contained within this report. FDR Group (Farkas Duffett Research Group) is a nonpartisan public opinion research firm specializing in surveys, focus groups, and program evaluations. The survey was fielded and tabulated by Robinson and Muenster Associates, Inc., of Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

The Focus Groups

To help develop the questionnaire, six focus groups with K–12 public school teachers were conducted, with each group having 10–12 participants. The groups were conducted in five sites selected for geographic and regional representation:

Milwaukee (one group with teachers working in the city, another with teachers working in the suburbs), New York City (teachers working in city only), Chicago (mix of city and suburban), Atlanta (mix of city and suburban), and Phoenix (mix of city and suburban). Participants were recruited to FDR Group specifications to ensure a proper demographic mix. These discussions were crucial to developing the wording of the survey questions and to understanding why teachers feel as they do. Quotes in this report are drawn from the focus groups and from comments survey respondents wrote on their questionnaires in response to open-ended questions. All focus groups were moderated by the FDR Group.

Population vs. Sample Comparison (by percent)

	Population	Sample (n=1,010)
Race/Ethnicity		
White	83	88
Black	8	5
Hispanic	6	4
Asian/Pacific	2	1
Native American/Other	2	2
Sex		
Male	25	21
Female	75	79
School Type		
Elementary	52	51
Middle	20	21
High	23	27
Something else	5	1
Urbanicity		
Urban	31	29
Suburban	38	42
Rural/small town	31	29
School Enrollment		
<300	11	10
300–499	23	26
500–999	45	36
1,000 or more	22	28
Region		
Northeast	18	17
Midwest	24	28
South	39	35
West	19	20

Sources: US Department of Education, Institute of Education Science, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 2006; NCES School and Staffing Survey, 2003–2004.

Appendix B. National Survey of Public School Teachers

This survey is based on a national random sample of 1,010 K–12 public school teachers. It was conducted by mail and online in fall 2007. The margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. Numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. An asterisk (*) indicates less than one percent; a dash (-) indicates zero.

1. **Are you:**
79 Female
21 Male
 2. **Which best describes your current teaching position:**
98 A full-time teacher in a traditional public school
1 A full-time teacher in a charter school
1 Something else
 3. **Do you currently teach at:**
51 Elementary school
21 Middle school or Junior high school
27 High School
1 Something else
 4. **For how many years have you been a PUBLIC school teacher?**
11 1–4 years
20 5–9 years
33 10–20 years
37 21 years or more
 5. **What subject or subjects do you primarily teach? [Check all that apply.]**
31 All subjects
22 English and/or Reading
19 Mathematics
16 Social Studies or Social Sciences
14 Science
9 Physical Education or Health
8 Art, Music or Fine Arts
7 Special Education/Gifted/ESL
3 Computer Science
2 Foreign Language
1 Business
7 Something else
 6. **Although they are on the front lines, teachers are rarely consulted about what happens in their schools**
35 Strongly Agree
45 Somewhat Agree
14 Somewhat Disagree
6 Strongly Disagree
* Not Sure
 7. **Teachers are required to do too much paperwork and documentation about what goes on in their classrooms**
49 Strongly Agree
37 Somewhat Agree
11 Somewhat Disagree
3 Strongly Disagree
* Not Sure
 8. **Too many veteran teachers who are burned out stay because they do not want to walk away from the benefits and service time they have accrued**
40 Strongly Agree
36 Somewhat Agree
13 Somewhat Disagree
7 Strongly Disagree
5 Not Sure
 9. **Too much negative press coverage about the public schools discourages talented, well-educated people from pursuing teaching as a career**
42 Strongly Agree
39 Somewhat Agree
13 Somewhat Disagree
3 Strongly Disagree
3 Not Sure
 10. **When individual schools fail it's usually because they have ineffective principals at the helm**
7 Strongly Agree
33 Somewhat Agree
35 Somewhat Disagree
21 Strongly Disagree
5 Not Sure
 11. **All the paperwork and legal and contractual restrictions make it difficult for principals to get things done**
15 Strongly Agree
44 Somewhat Agree
20 Somewhat Disagree
8 Strongly Disagree
13 Not Sure
 12. **Actively recruit and train second-career candidates from other fields and sectors of the economy**
17 Excellent
37 Good
30 Fair
13 Poor
4 Not Sure
 13. **Ease state certification requirements while intensifying in-class supervision, observation, and mentoring**
14 Excellent
29 Good
26 Fair
29 Poor
3 Not Sure
 14. **Give teachers more time during the school day for class preparation and planning**
57 Excellent
28 Good
11 Fair
4 Poor
* Not Sure
 15. **Make it far easier to leave and return to teaching without losing retirement benefits**
44 Excellent
34 Good
14 Fair
6 Poor
3 Not Sure
- How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about teachers and the public schools? [Questions 6–11]*
- How would you rate each of the following ideas for attracting and retaining high-quality teachers to the teaching profession? [Questions 12–18]*

16. **Offer new teachers substantially higher starting salaries in exchange for smaller pensions when they retire**
 7 Excellent
 15 Good
 23 Fair
 48 Poor
 7 Not Sure
17. **Pay signing bonuses to attract new talent**
 15 Excellent
 27 Good
 26 Fair
 27 Poor
 4 Not Sure
18. **Make it easier to earn and take sabbatical leave for teachers working in really challenging schools**
 30 Excellent
 40 Good
 18 Fair
 6 Poor
 6 Not Sure
- How much would you favor or oppose giving financial incentives to each of the following: [Questions 19–23]*
19. **Teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals**
 24 Strongly Favor
 34 Somewhat Favor
 18 Somewhat Oppose
 21 Strongly Oppose
 3 Not Sure
20. **Teachers whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests**
 11 Strongly Favor
 23 Somewhat Favor
 25 Somewhat Oppose
 39 Strongly Oppose
 3 Not Sure
21. **Teachers who receive accreditation from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**
 25 Strongly Favor
 40 Somewhat Favor
 16 Somewhat Oppose
 15 Strongly Oppose
 4 Not Sure
22. **Teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics**
 17 Strongly Favor
 37 Somewhat Favor
 23 Somewhat Oppose
 20 Strongly Oppose
 4 Not Sure
23. **Teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools**
 34 Strongly Favor
 46 Somewhat Favor
 11 Somewhat Oppose
 7 Strongly Oppose
 3 Not Sure
24. **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?**
 10 Strongly Favor
 34 Somewhat Favor
 22 Somewhat Oppose
 29 Strongly Oppose
 5 Not Sure
25. **At your school, do you think there are outstanding teachers who deserve to be especially rewarded because they do a stellar job?**
 48 Yes
 5 No
 40 There are outstanding teachers, but I don't think they should be especially rewarded
 7 Not Sure
26. **In what ways, if any, do school officials at your school or district reward outstanding teachers? [Check all that apply.]**
 5 Financial bonus
 16 Informal recognition (for example, better treatment or perks)
 29 Official recognition (for example, formal commendation or note to file)
 10 Token gift
 49 They do not reward outstanding teachers; the reward is solely intrinsic
 10 Not Sure
27. **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?**
 15 Excellent
 34 Good
 29 Fair
 20 Poor
 2 Not Sure
28. **Thinking of your own experience being evaluated as a teacher, which statement would come closest to describing your most recent formal evaluation?**
 26 It was useful and effective in terms of helping you be a better teacher
 32 It was well-intentioned but not particularly helpful to your teaching practice
 41 It was just a formality
 2 Not Sure
- The next few questions are about tenure. Although "tenure" policies vary from state to state, for the purposes of this survey, please think of a tenured teacher as one who has been awarded job protections and due process rights after successfully completing a probationary period, typically 2 to 4 years in length.*
29. **Are you currently a tenured teacher, or not?**
 64 Yes, a tenured teacher
 15 Yes, it's not called tenure, but I have job protections and due process rights
 14 No, not a tenured teacher
 6 No, there is no tenure at my school
 2 Not Sure

- 30. In general, when you hear that a teacher at your school has been awarded tenure, which of these two thoughts would be more likely to cross your mind?**
 23 That the teacher has proven to be very good at what s/he does
 69 That it's just a formality—it has very little to do with whether a teacher is good or not
 8 Not Sure
- 31. To what extent would you support or oppose strengthening the formal evaluation of probationary teachers so that they will get tenure only after they've proven to be very good at what they do?**
 38 Strongly Support
 41 Somewhat Support
 10 Somewhat Oppose
 3 Strongly Oppose
 8 Not Sure
- 32. And when it comes to tenured teachers, how often do you think they should be formally evaluated?**
 32 Yearly
 26 At least every 2 years
 22 Every 3–4 years
 13 Every 5 years
 1 Never
 3 Something else
 3 Not Sure
- 33. 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? [Base: Tenured Teachers]**
 25 Would trade tenure for a pay increase
 29 Would have to be a lot higher
 29 Would rather hold on to tenure
 17 Not Sure
- 34. If you had the choice, would you personally be willing to trade tenure for more autonomy and control over decisions affecting your school, would it have to be a lot more autonomy and control, or would you rather hold on to tenure? [Base: Tenured Teachers]**
 10 Would trade tenure for more autonomy and control
 18 Would have to be a lot more autonomy and control
 53 Would rather hold on to tenure
 20 Not Sure
- 35. Check the statement that best describes your current status:**
 68 I am a member of a teachers union or association that engages in collective bargaining
 15 I am a member of a professional association that provides such things as liability insurance, but not collective bargaining
 16 I am not a member of a teachers union or association
 1 There is no teachers union or association to join in my district
 1 Not Sure
- Whether or not you are currently a member of a union or association, or whether collective bargaining exists in your district, please answer the remaining questions to the best of your knowledge. As a public school teacher, your opinion counts. Remember, if you feel an item is not applicable to you, please skip it and move on to the next one.*
- 36. Do you think of teachers unions or associations as:**
 54 Absolutely essential
 31 Important but not essential
 11 Something you could do without
 4 Not Sure
- 37. In many states, the teaching profession is unionized, and salary, benefits and work rules are determined by collective bargaining. When you chose to become a teacher, did this make the profession:**
 13 More appealing to you
 5 Less appealing
 79 Was not a consideration
 3 Not Sure
- 38. Similarly, teaching is sometimes perceived as a profession with considerable job protection, one where it is rare to lose your job. When you chose to become a teacher, did this make the profession:**
 14 More appealing to you
 1 Less appealing
 84 Was not a consideration
 2 Not Sure
- 39. Generally speaking, do you think that teachers unions or associations should:**
 32 Put more focus than they currently do on issues such as improving teacher quality and student achievement
 52 Mostly stick to traditional union issues such as protecting teachers' salaries, benefits, and jobs
 16 Not Sure
- 40. Today in your district, how would you describe the relationship between the teachers union or association and the district leadership? Is it mostly about:**
 28 Conflict and distrust
 44 Cooperation and trust
 4 There is no union or association
 24 Not Sure
- How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Questions 41–49]*
- 41. Teachers would have more prestige if collective bargaining and lifetime tenure were eliminated**
 4 Strongly Agree
 17 Somewhat Agree
 23 Somewhat Disagree
 38 Strongly Disagree
 19 Not Sure
- 42. Despite having the strength of their unions behind them, rank-and-file teachers usually have very little control over what goes on in their own schools**
 32 Strongly Agree
 42 Somewhat Agree
 16 Somewhat Disagree
 4 Strongly Disagree
 7 Not Sure
- 43. The union charges far higher dues than are warranted by what it does for teachers**
 21 Strongly Agree
 33 Somewhat Agree
 19 Somewhat Disagree
 15 Strongly Disagree
 12 Not Sure
- 44. The union regularly provides information and opportunities to help me be a better teacher**
 9 Strongly Agree
 32 Somewhat Agree
 26 Somewhat Disagree
 21 Strongly Disagree
 13 Not Sure

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

- 14 Strongly Agree
- 35 Somewhat Agree
- 18 Somewhat Disagree
- 10 Strongly Disagree
- 24 Not Sure

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

- 41 Strongly Agree
- 34 Somewhat Agree
- 12 Somewhat Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree
- 9 Not Sure

47. New teachers tend to place less value on the union

- 17 Strongly Agree
- 42 Somewhat Agree
- 10 Somewhat Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree
- 26 Not Sure

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

- 44 Strongly Agree
- 31 Somewhat Agree
- 7 Somewhat Disagree
- 4 Strongly Disagree
- 15 Not Sure

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

- 47 Strongly Agree
- 30 Somewhat Agree
- 9 Somewhat Disagree
- 4 Strongly Disagree
- 10 Not Sure

Overall, how effective would you say the teachers union or association is at the following levels: [Questions 50–53]

50. At the building where you work

- 22 Strongly Effective
- 42 Somewhat Effective
- 18 Not Too Effective
- 10 Not Effective At All
- 9 Not Sure

51. At the district level

- 25 Strongly Effective
- 48 Somewhat Effective
- 12 Not Too Effective
- 6 Not Effective At All
- 10 Not Sure

52. At the state level

- 18 Strongly Effective
- 44 Somewhat Effective
- 15 Not Too Effective
- 4 Not Effective At All
- 19 Not Sure

53. At the national level

- 13 Strongly Effective
- 39 Somewhat Effective
- 18 Not Too Effective
- 6 Not Effective At All
- 24 Not Sure

Here are some functions that teachers unions or associations may or may not perform. For each, please indicate whether the union or association in your district currently does it or not. Then, answer the corresponding “IF YES” or “IF NO” questions. [Questions 54–65]

54A. Effectively negotiate contracts, salary, and benefits on behalf of teachers—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

- 76 Yes
- 13 No
- 11 Not Sure/No Answer

54B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

- 26 Excellent
- 42 Good
- 25 Fair
- 6 Poor
- 2 Not Sure

54C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

- 29 Strongly Favor
- 28 Somewhat Favor
- 12 Somewhat Oppose
- 13 Strongly Oppose
- 19 Not Sure

55A. Keep teachers updated on new instructional methods and curriculum—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

- 41 Yes
- 46 No
- 13 Not Sure/No Answer

55B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

- 13 Excellent
- 39 Good
- 33 Fair
- 10 Poor
- 5 Not Sure

55C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

- 24 Strongly Favor
- 37 Somewhat Favor
- 14 Somewhat Oppose
- 13 Strongly Oppose
- 12 Not Sure

56A. Negotiate to keep class size down in the district—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

- 55 Yes
- 30 No
- 14 Not Sure/No Answer

56B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

- 13 Excellent
- 36 Good
- 28 Fair
- 18 Poor
- 5 Not Sure

56C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

- 56 Strongly Favor
- 27 Somewhat Favor
- 5 Somewhat Oppose
- 4 Strongly Oppose
- 9 Not Sure

57A. Protect teachers through due process and grievance procedures—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

84 Yes
4 No
12 Not Sure/No Answer

57B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

30 Excellent
40 Good
19 Fair
3 Poor
9 Not Sure

57C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

33 Strongly Favor
29 Somewhat Favor
4 Somewhat Oppose
11 Strongly Oppose
23 Not Sure

58A. Provide support and mentoring to new teachers—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

46 Yes
38 No
16 Not Sure/No Answer

58B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

18 Excellent
39 Good
28 Fair
7 Poor
8 Not Sure

58C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

33 Strongly Favor
33 Somewhat Favor
12 Somewhat Oppose
9 Strongly Oppose
13 Not Sure

59A. Provide teachers with high-quality training and professional development—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

38 Yes
46 No
16 Not Sure/No Answer

59B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

14 Excellent
41 Good
28 Fair
10 Poor
7 Not Sure

59C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

27 Strongly Favor
34 Somewhat Favor
15 Somewhat Oppose
11 Strongly Oppose
14 Not Sure

60A. Regularly inform teachers about their benefits, rights, and responsibilities—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

79 Yes
10 No
11 Not Sure/No Answer

60B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

27 Excellent
43 Good
25 Fair
4 Poor
1 Not Sure

60C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

38 Strongly Favor
35 Somewhat Favor
4 Somewhat Oppose
8 Strongly Oppose
15 Not Sure

61A. Expand the career ladder for teachers by negotiating new and differentiated roles and responsibilities—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

33 Yes
44 No
23 Not Sure/No Answer

61B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

12 Excellent
31 Good
30 Fair
14 Poor
14 Not Sure

61C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

27 Strongly Favor
38 Somewhat Favor
8 Somewhat Oppose
6 Strongly Oppose
22 Not Sure

62A. Guide ineffective teachers out of the profession—does the union or association in your district currently do this?

15 Yes
61 No
24 Not Sure/No Answer

62B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?

5 Excellent
13 Good
21 Fair
22 Poor
39 Not Sure

62C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?

36 Strongly Favor
30 Somewhat Favor
9 Somewhat Oppose
9 Strongly Oppose
16 Not Sure

- 63A. Lead efforts to identify ineffective teachers and retrain them—does the union or association in your district currently do this?**
 17 Yes
 60 No
 24 Not Sure/No Answer
- 63B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?**
 6 Excellent
 20 Good
 22 Fair
 18 Poor
 35 Not Sure
- 63C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?**
 34 Strongly Favor
 31 Somewhat Favor
 10 Somewhat Oppose
 11 Strongly Oppose
 14 Not Sure
- 64A. Negotiate new ways to more meaningfully and effectively evaluate teachers—does the union or association in your district currently do this?**
 41 Yes
 39 No
 20 Not Sure/No Answer
- 64B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?**
 11 Excellent
 34 Good
 34 Fair
 11 Poor
 10 Not Sure
- 64C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?**
 36 Strongly Favor
 36 Somewhat Favor
 8 Somewhat Oppose
 8 Strongly Oppose
 12 Not Sure
- 65A. Screen teachers who are new or transferring to ensure they are a good fit with the schools they're going to—does the union or association in your district currently do this?**
 15 Yes
 66 No
 19 Not Sure/No Answer
- 65B. IF YES: How good a job is it doing?**
 14 Excellent
 18 Good
 23 Fair
 16 Poor
 28 Not Sure
- 65C. IF NO: Would you favor or oppose the union taking on this function?**
 20 Strongly Favor
 27 Somewhat Favor
 19 Somewhat Oppose
 17 Strongly Oppose
 17 Not Sure
- 66. On the whole, which type of school do you think would be better for students?**
 21 One where work rules and school duties affecting teachers are defined by contract
 68 One where principals and teachers have more control and flexibility over these matters
 2 Something else
 1 Both
 8 Not Sure
- 67. In some districts, the process for removing teachers who are clearly ineffective and shouldn't be in the classroom—but who are past the probationary period—is very difficult and time-consuming. Is this the case in your district, or not?**
 55 Yes 13 No 32 Not Sure
- 68. Do you personally know a teacher in your building who is past the probationary period but who is clearly ineffective and shouldn't be in the classroom, or not?**
 46 Yes 42 No 12 Not Sure
- 69. Assume that teachers would keep some due process protection against unfair practices by administrators. If the union or association in your district were to take the lead on ways to simplify the process for removing such teachers, how much would you support or oppose the effort?**
 22 Strongly Support
 41 Somewhat Support
 10 Somewhat Oppose
 7 Strongly Oppose
 2 Union already does this
 19 Not Sure
- 70. Which of these do you think is the most likely course of action a principal in your district would take if faced with a persistently ineffective teacher who was already past the probationary period?**
 14 Do nothing
 18 Initiate formal proceedings to remove the teacher from the district's employ
 26 Make a serious effort to retrain the teacher
 13 Quietly encourage the teacher to leave
 14 Transfer the teacher to another school in the district
 15 Not Sure
- 71. Typically, teachers get salary increases according to a strictly defined schedule mostly driven by their years of service and the credits they attain. Is this mostly how it works in your district, or not?**
 97 Yes 2 No 1 Not Sure
- 72. Assume that years of service and number of credits would still be taken into account. If the union or association in your district were to take the lead on negotiating a way to add teacher performance as a consideration when deciding an individual teacher's salary, how much would you support or oppose the effort?**
 18 Strongly Support
 34 Somewhat Support
 18 Somewhat Oppose
 23 Strongly Oppose
 1 Union already does this
 8 Not Sure

73. **Some school districts have a system for matching teachers with schools where any teacher, regardless of seniority, has an equal opportunity to fill a vacancy. It basically comes down to whether the teacher wants to work in the school and whether the school wants the teacher. Is this mostly how it works in your district, or not?**
44 Yes 38 No 19 Not Sure
74. **If the union or association in your district was trying to move in this direction, how much would you support or oppose the effort?**
17 Strongly Support
31 Somewhat Support
11 Somewhat Oppose
9 Strongly Oppose
4 Union already does this
20 Not Sure
75. **Overall, when the union or association in your district negotiates with district leadership, does it:**
43 Virtually always work for the best interests of its members and reflect their preferences
17 Sometimes take positions that are not in the best interests of its members or not aligned with what members want
15 Both equally
26 Not Sure
76. **Would you say that the teachers union or association in your district leans more toward:**
14 Taking care of the needs of veteran teachers
7 Tending to the needs of the district's newer teachers
59 It's about equal
20 Not Sure
77. **Which of these best describes what it means to you personally to be a member of a teachers union or association:**
31 It provides feelings of pride and solidarity, in addition to the practical benefits
52 It brings practical benefits, not really any more than that
7 It is something that makes you feel uncomfortable
10 Not Sure
78. **Other than receiving mailings and notices, how involved and engaged are you in the local union?**
6 Very Involved
18 Somewhat Involved
35 Not Too Involved
39 Not At All Involved
2 Not Sure
79. **During the time you have been a public school teacher, have you personally filed a grievance against a district or not? [If you have filed more than one, please think about the most recent.] [Base: Personally Filed a Grievance]**
8 Yes 92 No 1 Not Sure
80. **Did it end in your favor, or not? [Base: Personally Filed a Grievance]**
73 Yes 25 No 3 It is currently in process
81. **In general, did you feel the union:**
70 Did a good job representing you
27 Could have worked a lot harder
4 Not Sure
82. **How much do you know about charter schools?**
5 A great deal
18 Quite a bit
39 Only some
32 Very little
7 Nothing at all
* Not Sure
83. **As you may know, charter schools operate under a charter or contract that frees them from many of the state regulations imposed on public schools and permits them to operate independently. How much do you favor or oppose the idea of charter schools?**
9 Strongly Favor
33 Somewhat Favor
20 Somewhat Oppose
24 Strongly Oppose
14 Not Sure
84. **In several districts across the nation, teachers unions are sponsoring and managing charter schools. Do you:**
34 Generally support this because it means school policies would be set by the people best qualified to run the school—the teachers and their union
26 Generally oppose this because charter schools are a threat to traditional public schools and the union might make decisions that are not in the best interests of teachers
40 Not Sure
85. **How old are you?**
2 24 years old or less
8 25 to 29 years
10 30 to 34 years
10 35 to 39 years
23 40 to 49 years
21 50 to 54 years
27 55 or more years
86. **Is teaching your first career, or did you work full time in another field beforehand?**
71 First career
29 Worked full time in another field beforehand
87. **Were either of your parents a public school teacher when you were growing up?**
16 Yes 84 No
88. **Whether or not they were public school teachers, were either of your parents a member of a union when you were growing up?**
35 Yes 65 No
89. **Which best describes your school?**
14 Inner city
15 Urban
42 Suburban
29 Rural
90. **Approximately how many students are in your school?**
10 Less than 300
26 300 to 499
36 500 to 999
19 1,000 to 1,999
9 2,000 or more

91. How many of your school's students are African-American or Hispanic?

- 12 Virtually all
- 17 Most
- 46 Some
- 25 A few or none

92. Approximately what percentage of students at your school are eligible for the free or reduced lunch program? Your best guess is OK.

- 26 Under 25%
- 31 25% to 49%
- 21 50% to 74%
- 22 75% or more

93. What state do you teach in?

- [By region]*
- 17 Northeast
 - 28 Midwest
 - 35 South
 - 20 West

94. As far as you know, which national organization is your district's union or association affiliated with?

- 1 None
- 13 American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
- 71 National Education Association (NEA)
- 2 Something else
- 3 AFT and NEA
- 10 Not Sure

95. Which of the following best describes your own race/ethnicity?

- 5 African-American or Black
- 1 Asian or Pacific Islander
- 4 Hispanic or Latino
- 88 White or Caucasian
- 2 Something else

Waiting to Be Won Over: Teachers Speak on the Profession, Unions and Reform

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