

Pay your nickel and take your choice...

US teachers more interested in reform than money

By Donna Gordon Blankinship
Associated Press Staff Writer

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<http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5ijJpqTNWF2GH1hgCR73IoQrx3VsAD9E6UPHG0>

SEATTLE – U.S. teachers are more interested in school reform and student achievement than their paychecks, according to a massive new survey.

The survey of 40,090 K-12 teachers - including 15,038 by telephone - was likely the largest national survey of teachers ever completed and includes the opinions of teachers in every grade, in every state and across the demographic spectrum.

Called “Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's School,” the survey was conducted by Harris Interactive between March 10 and June 18, 2009, and was to be released Wednesday. It was paid for by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Scholastic Inc.

The purpose of the survey was to keep teachers' voices in the debate over education reform, said Vicki L. Phillips, director of Gates Foundation's K-12 education program.

“If you're the heart and soul of this profession, you ought to have some say in it,” Phillips said on Tuesday.

Most teachers surveyed said they feel students in their states are doing OK in school, but they believe fewer than 75 percent will graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and work.

Teachers don't want to see their students judged on the results of one test and they also want their own performances graded on multiple measures.

Most value non-monetary rewards, such as time to collaborate with other teachers and a supportive school leadership, over higher salaries. Only 28 percent felt performance pay would have a strong impact and 30 percent felt performance pay would have no impact at all.

The flavor of the responses and more nuanced opinions come out in anonymous comments from teachers sprinkled throughout the report.

“If you ask a teacher what they think, you're going to hear what they think,” said Margery Mayer, executive vice president and president of Scholastic Education.

Most teachers said they spend time visiting students at home or participating in after-school and weekend events. They see themselves as a bridge between school and home and an important part of the effort to raise student achievement.

In general, the views of teachers surveyed closely mirror the beliefs of education reformers including the Gates Foundation. For example, only 6 percent of teachers surveyed said graduating all students with a high school diploma was one of the most important goals of schools and teaching, while 71 percent said one of the most important goals was to prepare all students for careers in the 21st century.

A majority of teachers surveyed said they would like to see tougher academic standards and have them be the same in every state, despite the extra work common academic standards could create for them.

Mayer was surprised by this response, because every time academic standards are changed the process creates extra work for teachers. She said their response was: “Bring it on.”

Another area they support, despite the potential for extra work, is the idea of differentiating instruction so kids are taught according to their abilities.

Fewer were in favor of having common academic tests in every state, which would presumably be based on the common standards, but more than half said common tests were a good idea.

The teachers are not opposed to standardized tests, despite union lobbying against graduation tests in some states like Washington. But instead of yearly tests, they want to see formative, ongoing assessments in class to help them understand how much their students are learning over time.

And, not surprisingly, nearly 100 percent felt effective and engaged teachers were very important or essential.

“They are very, very invested in the subject of reform,” Mayer said. “They view the challenge in much the way that one hears the challenge defined by our thought leaders in education.”

Survey: Supportive leadership helps retain top teachers

By Nick Anderson

Washington Post Staff Writer

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WASHINGTON DC – A national survey of more than 40,000 public school teachers suggests that while higher salaries are far more likely than performance pay to help keep top talent in the classroom, supportive leadership trumps financial incentives.

The survey, funded by a philanthropy [The Gates Foundation -- MLW] active in education reform, also shows that teachers have mixed feelings about proposals for new academic standards: Slightly more than half think that establishing common standards across all states would have a strong or very strong impact on student achievement, but two-thirds believe the rigor of standards in their own state is “about right.”

The survey, to be released Wednesday, was sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in collaboration with the publisher Scholastic Inc. Harris Interactive canvassed the teachers via telephone and online questionnaires from March 2009 to June 2009, as the Obama administration was developing strategies to promote higher standards and more sophisticated use of test data to improve achievement and reward effective teachers.

The Gates-funded survey, capturing a sample of the estimated 3.3 million public school teachers nationwide, shed some light on teacher opinion at a moment of ferment in public education. It also reflected, in part, the reform goals of the foundation itself.

“No doubt we wanted to put some of the big agenda items out there that are under discussion, some of which we care deeply about,” said Vicki L. Phillips, a foundation official who oversees grants in elementary and secondary education. Among the foundation's priorities, she said, are common standards, stronger data systems and compensation linked to performance. Last year the foundation announced it is investing \$290 million on experiments in tenure, evaluation, compensation, training and mentoring -- all meant to promote effective teaching in Pittsburgh, Memphis, Los Angeles and Tampa. Teachers' unions have collaborated with local administrators and the foundation on the initiative.

Critics have said the foundation is driving a misguided, business-oriented agenda in public schools.

Among the survey's findings:

To retain good teachers, 68 percent called supportive leadership “absolutely essential,” 45 percent said the same of higher salaries and 8 percent listed performance pay. Many of those surveyed also described “relevant” professional development as essential, along with “clean and safe” working conditions, time for teachers to collaborate and access to high-quality curriculum. In addition, 71 percent said monetary rewards for teacher performance would have moderate or no impact on student achievement.

Fifty-nine percent said establishing common standards across states would have a strong or very strong impact on achievement, and 73 percent said clearer academic standards would produce such benefits. But 69 percent said the rigor of their own state's standards was “about right,” and teachers were nearly evenly split on whether their own state has “too many standards” or “the right amount.”

Just over half of those responding called state and district tests somewhat important for measuring academic achievement, and more than one-quarter called them very important or essential.

The survey's margin of error was described as less than 1 percentage point. Melinda Gates is a member of The Washington Post Co. board of directors.