

# Teaching for a Living

How Teachers See the Profession Today

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS  
FROM LEARNING POINT ASSOCIATES  
AND PUBLIC AGENDA

# Research Goals

- Survey of 890 public school teachers
- Explore why teachers enter profession, pros and cons of field, future plans, openness to innovations
- Test whether teachers' views have shifted since 2003 (Public Agenda, "Stand by Me")
- Compare views of "Gen Y" teachers (age 32 and under) to those of older teachers
- Learn more about how to support and retain the most promising teachers



# Three Types of Teachers

- A cluster analysis: Focuses on shared perceptions and viewpoints versus standard categories
  - The Idealists
  - The Contented
  - The Disheartened
- Questions for the Field
  - Should Idealists be retained and nurtured? Are they “Transformers?”
  - Could/should we try to attract the Contented to high-needs schools?
  - Should the Disheartened be eased out of the profession? Can some be reclaimed, and what would it take to do it?

# The Idealists: 23% of Sample

- Their outlook
  - 88%: “good teachers can lead all students to learn, even those from poor families or who have uninvolved parents”—the highest percentage of any group in the survey
  - Three-quarters: student effort is “mainly determined by what teachers do” rather than existing student motivation—a higher percentage than any other group
  - 78%: “the idea of putting underprivileged kids on the path to success” was a major reason they chose to teach
  - 54%: “strongly agree” that all of their students, “given the right support, can go to college”—again, the highest percentage of any group
  - 50%: own students’ test scores have increased because of their teaching

# The Idealists (continued)

- And who are they?
  - 77%: teaching less than 10 years
  - More than half of the “Gen Y” age group are here
  - 45% teach in low-income schools
  - Nearly 6 in 10 are elementary teachers
  - Roughly 6 in 10 see teaching as a lifelong career choice
  - But 36% plan to leave the classroom for another job in education

# The Contented: 37% of Sample

- Their outlook
  - 63%: strongly agree that “teaching is exactly what I wanted—there’s nothing else I’d rather be doing;” less than half of other groups say this
  - 76%: have very good working conditions when it to an “orderly, safe and respectful school atmosphere”—the highest percentage of any group studied
  - 7 in 10: have enough planning time to create high quality lesson plans—again the highest percentage of the three groups
  - Only 26% consider low pay a major drawback of teaching
  - Even fewer (11%) see lack of prestige as a significant disadvantage



# The Contented (continued)

- And who are they?
  - 94%: teaching for more than 10 years
  - 81%: at current school at least that long
  - 64%: teach in middle-income or affluent schools
  - 53%: have a Master's degree or higher

# The Disheartened: 40% of Sample

- Their outlook
  - 73%: strongly agree that teaching is “so demanding, it's a wonder that more people don't burn out,” and another 24% agree somewhat
  - 72%: “too many kids with discipline and behavior issues” is a major drawback of teaching—at least 30 points higher than the other groups
  - 70%: testing is a major drawback to teaching
  - 61%: lack of administrative support is major drawback to teaching; fewer than 1 in 10 of the teachers in the other groups say this
  - 14%: give their principal “excellent” ratings; in contrast, some 6 in 10 teachers in the other groups give their principals excellent ratings

# The Disheartened (continued)

- And who are they?
  - 77%: teaching more than 10 years
  - Nearly 9 in 10 are older than 32
  - More than half teach in low-income schools
  - A quarter say they would be very interested in teaching in a charter school run by teachers—twice as many as the other groups

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