

# The MetLife Survey of *THE AMERICAN TEACHER*

## LISTENING TO TEACHERS IN RURAL SCHOOLS

MetLife has sponsored and Harris Interactive has conducted the annual MetLife Survey of the American Teacher series since 1984 to share the voices of teachers with educators, policymakers and the public. The series examines significant changes and trends over time, highlights important current issues, and explores topics relevant to the future of education, teaching and student success. Periodically the surveys include the views of others closest to the classroom – students, parents and principals. Reports from the entire survey series, including survey methodology, are available at [www.metlife.com/teachersurvey](http://www.metlife.com/teachersurvey).

Throughout the MetLife Survey series, reports have noted the important ways in which the experiences of teachers, principals and students can vary depending on the school setting, including such factors as school level (elementary, middle and high school), school location (urban, suburban, rural), and student population (proportion of low income students and/or minority students).

The following are selected findings from recent survey reports highlighting views from rural schools.

### **Teachers and Professional Learning**

*Rural educators hold similar views to their suburban and rural counterparts on the value of professional collaboration and confidence in teachers' abilities to teach to the Common Core State Standards.*

- Half of teachers (50%) and four in ten principals (41%) in rural schools are very confident that teachers in their schools currently have the academic abilities and skills to teach to the Common Core State Standards, similar to views of educators in urban and suburban schools. [2012]
- Most rural teachers (69%) and principals (78%) agree that greater collaboration among teachers and school leaders would have a major impact on student achievement. In this regard, their views are similar to educators in suburban and urban areas. [2009]

*Teacher guidance and support in rural schools differs from suburban and urban schools on some measures.*

- Teachers in rural schools (88%) are the most likely to report they have the guidance and support they need to be an effective teacher compared to urban (81%) and suburban (80%) teachers. [2008]
- Seven in ten (70%) of principals report spending time observing teachers in the classroom and providing feedback about teaching skills at least once a week. Rural principals (61%) are less likely to do this at least once a week compared to urban principals (86%), but are on par with suburban principals (67%). [2008]

*Teachers' views on resources needed to address learning needs of individual students vary based on school location.*

- Rural and suburban secondary school teachers are less likely than those in urban schools to say that instructional strategies to teach in a classroom where many students speak a language other than English (61% vs. 57% vs. 72%) and access to online and other technology-based resources that allow them to personalize education to students' learning profiles (64% vs. 57% vs. 74%) would have a major impact on their ability to effectively address different learning needs. Secondary school teachers in rural schools (61%) are also less likely than those in urban schools (71%) to say that opportunities for collaborative teaching would have a major impact on their ability to effectively address the different learning needs of individual students, but do not differ from suburban teachers (65%) in this view. [2010]

*Rural teachers express more interest than suburban teachers in a hybrid role that combines teaching with other responsibilities.*

- Teachers in rural schools (51%) are more likely than suburban teachers (42%) and less likely than urban teachers (61%) to be at least somewhat interested in a hybrid role combining part-time classroom teaching with other roles or responsibilities in the school or district. [2012]
- Half (51%) of rural teachers report having a formal leadership role in their school, such as department chair, instructional resource, teacher mentor, or leadership team member, in line with urban (56%) and suburban (47%) teachers. [2012]

### **Student Success**

*Rural schools face issues with dropout rates and below-grade-level performance in English language arts and math, although to a lesser degree than do urban schools.*

- Rural teachers (41%) are more likely to report that dropout rates are a somewhat or very serious problem in their district compared to suburban teachers (32%), although they are less likely to report this than are urban teachers (63%). [2008]
- Rural teachers (54%) are more likely than urban teachers (35%) but less likely than suburban teachers (70%) to report that all or most of their students are performing at or above grade level in English language arts and mathematics. Rural principals (68%) and suburban principals (78%) are more likely than urban principals (49%) to report that all or most of their students are performing at or above grade level. [2012]

*College readiness is a priority and a concern in rural schools.*

- Secondary teachers in rural (57%) and urban (57%) schools are more likely than teachers in suburban schools (48%) to consider graduating all students to be college- and career-ready as one of the highest priorities in education. [2010]
- Fewer students in rural schools (49%) than those in suburban (57%) or urban (64%) schools say their school is excellent or good at creating a culture that emphasizes college readiness for all students. [2010]

*Rural teachers view implementation of the Common Core as challenging and are slightly less confident than suburban teachers about the impact these standards will have on student achievement and college readiness.*

- A majority of rural teachers (64%) view implementation of Common Core State Standards as challenging or very challenging for school leaders, as do their urban (56%) and suburban (58%) counterparts. [2012]
- Rural teachers are less likely than suburban teachers and as likely as urban teachers to be very confident that implementation of the Common Core will improve student achievement (13% vs. 20% vs. 18%) and that it will better prepare students for college and the workforce (16% vs. 23% vs. 19%). [2012]

### **Parent and Community Involvement**

*Educators in rural schools rate parent and community engagement more highly and as less challenging than those in urban schools. However, parents of children in rural schools are less likely than their urban or suburban counterparts to rate members of the school community highly.*

- Principals in rural schools (71%) and suburban schools (63%) are less likely than urban principals (82%) to say that it is challenging or very challenging for a school's leaders to engage parents and the community in improving the education of students. Teachers in rural schools (75%) are less likely to say this than those in urban schools (86%), but more likely to hold this view than those in suburban schools (61%). [2012]

- Most teachers in rural (69%) and suburban (78%) schools rate parental and community support at their school as good or excellent, compared to only half (52%) of teachers in urban schools. [2008]
- Parents of students in rural schools are less likely than those of students in urban or suburban schools to give good or excellent ratings for engaging them in their child's school and education to their child's teachers (73% vs. 81% vs. 82%), the principal of their child's school (63% vs. 74% vs. 74%) or other parents at their child's school (43% vs. 59% vs. 58%). [2011]

### **School Leadership**

*One half of teachers at rural schools rate their principals as doing an excellent job. However, they do acknowledge that there are various challenges that school leaders face.*

- Teachers in rural (48%) and suburban (48%) schools are more likely than urban teachers (38%) to rate their principals as excellent. [2012]
- In most instances, principals' and teachers' ratings of how challenging school leadership responsibilities are do not differ significantly based on school location (see Figures 1 and 2). One exception is that fewer rural (44%) and suburban (43%) principals compared to urban principals (60%) say it is challenging or very challenging to maintain an adequate supply of effective teachers in their schools. [2012]

## **SOURCES**

*The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership* (2012) examines the views of teachers and principals on the responsibilities and challenges facing school leaders, including the changing roles of principals and teachers, budget and resources, professional satisfaction, and implementation of the Common Core State Standards for college and career readiness.

*The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Teachers, Parents and the Economy* (2011) examines the views of teachers, parents and students about the teaching profession, parent and community engagement, and effects of the economy on teaching and learning in schools.

*The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Preparing Students for College and Careers* (2010) examines the meaning of college and career readiness, its place among priorities for the education of all students, and the implications for teaching. The Survey includes the views of public middle and high school teachers, students and parents, and Fortune 1000 business executives.

*The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success* (2009) examines the views of teachers, principals and students about respective roles and responsibilities, if and how they collaborate, and their expectations for the future. The Survey findings were originally released in three parts addressing the issues of effective teaching and leadership, student achievement and teaching as a career, all of which are combined in this report.

*The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Past, Present and Future* (2008) looks back to important questions posed in the earliest surveys to examine changes in the perspectives of teachers, principals and students about teachers, teaching and learning, and professional and parent relationships, and consider future implications. 25th Anniversary Edition.

Reports from the entire survey series are available at [www.metlife.com/teachersurvey](http://www.metlife.com/teachersurvey).

**Figure 1**  
**Challenges Facing School Leaders by School Location (2012)**  
 (% Very challenging/Challenging)

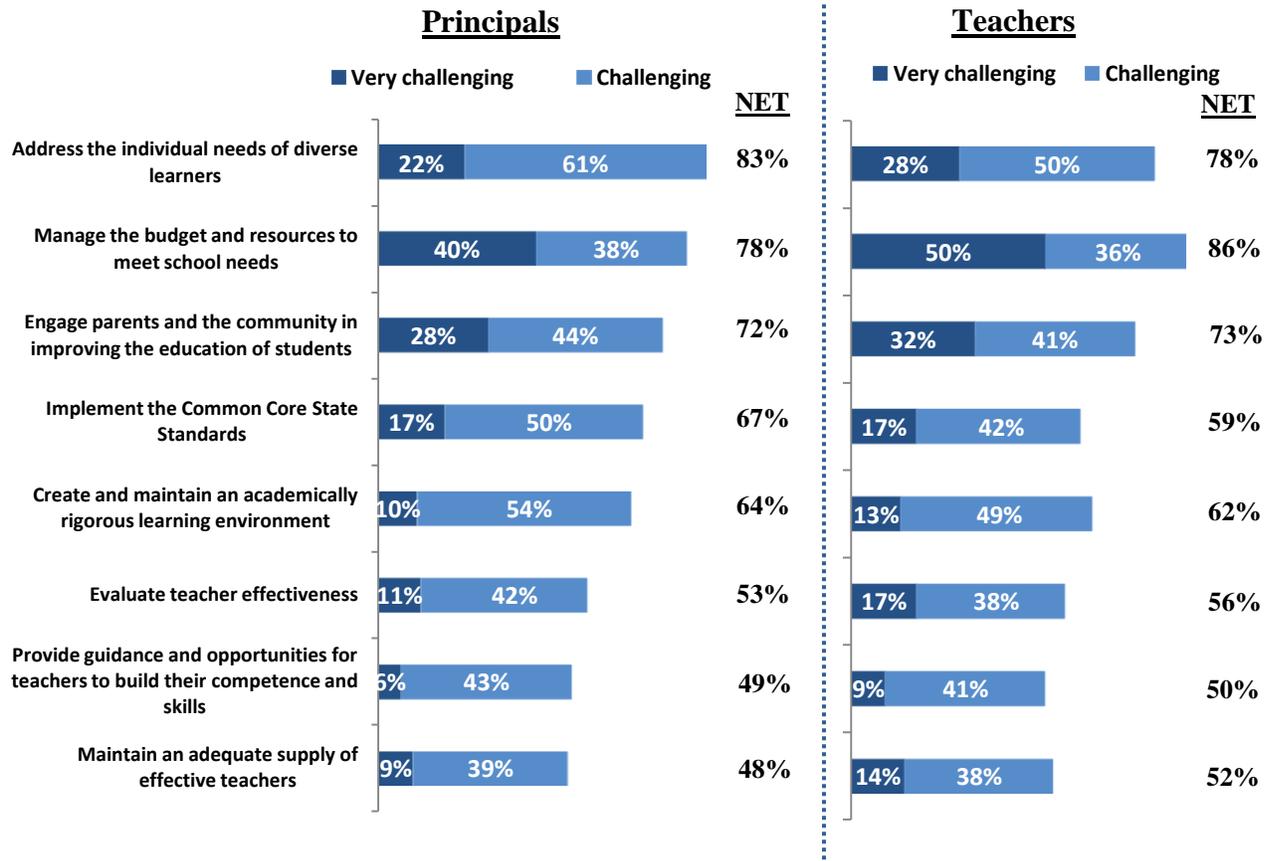
|  | Principals |       |           |       | Teachers    |       |           |       |
|--|------------|-------|-----------|-------|-------------|-------|-----------|-------|
|  | Total      | Urban | Sub-urban | Rural | Total       | Urban | Sub-urban | Rural |
| <i>Base:</i>   | <b>500</b> | 138   | 137       | 220   | <b>1000</b> | 302   | 286       | 401   |
| Address the individual needs of diverse learners                                     | <b>83%</b> | 83%   | 87%       | 81%   | <b>78%</b>  | 79%   | 76%       | 78%   |
| Manage the budget and resources to meet school needs                                 | <b>78%</b> | 75%   | 85%       | 77%   | <b>86%</b>  | 87%   | 85%       | 86%   |
| Engage parents and the community in improving the education of students              | <b>72%</b> | 82%   | 63%       | 71%   | <b>73%</b>  | 86%   | 61%       | 75%   |
| Implement the Common Core State Standards  | <b>67%</b> | 66%   | 68%       | 68%   | <b>59%</b>  | 56%   | 58%       | 64%   |
| Create and maintain an academically rigorous learning environment                    | <b>64%</b> | 68%   | 58%       | 65%   | <b>62%</b>  | 64%   | 61%       | 62%   |
| Evaluate teacher effectiveness   | <b>53%</b> | 50%   | 55%       | 55%   | <b>56%</b>  | 60%   | 55%       | 53%   |
| Provide guidance and opportunities for teachers to build their competence and skills | <b>49%</b> | 39%   | 54%       | 52%   | <b>50%</b>  | 52%   | 44%       | 54%   |
| Maintain an adequate supply of effective teachers                                    | <b>48%</b> | 60%   | 43%       | 44%   | <b>52%</b>  | 57%   | 47%       | 55%   |

Base: Principals (n=500); Teachers (n=1,000)

Q730: How challenging is it for a school's leaders to do each of the following? Very challenging, Challenging, Not too challenging, Not at all challenging

Source: *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership (2012)*. Supplemental analyses.

**Figure 2**  
**Challenges Facing School Leaders**  
 (% Very challenging/Challenging)



Base: Principals (n=500); Teachers (n=1,000)

Q730: How challenging is it for a school's leaders to do each of the following? Very challenging, Challenging, Not too challenging, Not at all challenging

Source: *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership (2012)*. Figure 1.1, page 12.

This brief was prepared by MetLife and Harris Interactive for

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