The Impact of Respect on Teacher Retention

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The US Department of Education estimates that approximately 150,000 new teachers are hired each year to replace those that have retired or left the profession (Natt, 1999). Enrollment increases over the next 10 years will push the number of new hires needed to staff the Nation’s classrooms from 150,000 to 220,000 annually (Curran, Abrahams, & Manual, 2000). Approximately 2.4 million newly hired public school teachers and 568,000 private school teachers are needed between now and 2009. Retaining teachers in the teaching profession is critical (Natt, 1999). One in five graduates start teaching after college but move on to a profession other than teaching within four years. In some urban districts the percentage of new teachers leaving the teaching profession is as high as 50% (Streisand & Toch, 1998). The most common reasons teachers leave teaching include low salaries, poor working conditions, difficult teaching assignments, and no opportunity for advancement (Boe et al., 1996; Bondi & Trowbridge, 1999; Bradley, 1999a; Curran et al., 2000; Henry, 1986; Natt, 1999; Streisand & Toch, 1998. Does professional respect impact teacher recruitment and retention? This paper will explore professional respect and teaching.

Teachers and Respect

Webster’s New World College Dictionary defines respect as, “to feel or show honor or esteem for, hold in high regard” (Agnes, 2000, p. 1221). Teaching as a profession, for preschool through university levels, must be recognized as a valued profession. Teachers deserve respect from school administrators, legislators, and society at large. Society respects “professionals” such as doctors, lawyers (Elliott, 2002). Teaching requires four to five years of college and certification, yet teachers are not always respected. Salary is sometimes a respect issue (Cromwell, 1999; Nissen, 2000).

Salaries

Scholastic Inc. and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2000) conducted a poll of 400 educators honored as national teachers of the year and state teachers of the year and found that eight out of 10 teachers polled believe that salary is a factor in teacher respect. Although teachers are often motivated by intrinsic rewards, such as self-respect, responsibility, a sense of accomplishment, and personal growth; extrinsic rewards, such as a good salary sends the message that teaching is valued, while low pay for teaching may be interpreted as teaching is not valued (Blair, 2000).

In some states teaching salaries are so low teachers qualify for food stamps. Teachers should be paid adequately so that they can afford to live in at least middle-class neighborhoods, enjoy the social and cultural attractions of their communities, and continue their personal educational enrichment through further study and travel. In addition to adequate pay, teacher knowledge and expertise must be valued (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). State legislators must realize that attracting and keeping teachers in the profession requires a state and national commitment. Only after the respect issue is addressed will parents and neighbors encourage children to teach (Elliott, 2002; Trimble, 2002).

Teacher Empowerment

Pastor (1982) and Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) in studies of teacher motivation found that teachers experience self respect and the respect of fellow educators by being allowed to participate in campus decision making, by being viewed as possessing a valued skill, by being given freedom to teach, and by being afforded opportunities to learn. Empowered teachers become active participants rather than passive workers (Feimen-Nemser & Floden, 1986). Teacher empowerment can generate positive emotions about work and gives teachers opportunities to demonstrate knowledge (Shore, 1992; Short & Greer, 1997. Short and Greer (1997) studied teacher empowerment and suggest that there are six dimensions that comprise empowerment. Those dimensions are decision-making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy, autonomy, and impact. Empowerment can lead to job satisfaction and self respect and a positive learning climate for the school (Martin & Kragler, 1999; Voke, 2002).

Societal Attitudes About Teaching
Bill Maxwell (2002), a St. Petersburg Times columnist, states that politicians with anti-public school agendas have contributed to the negative attitudes many people in society have for public school teachers. The US Secretary of Education, Ron Paige has even made negative comments about teachers.

Miriam Hill, Florida teacher and guest columnist for the St. Petersburg Times stated that the lack of teacher respect is an indicator of the disintegration of society. When both parents must work, parents often find it difficult to give children the individual attention they need to successful in school. Although parents with little time for children needs may be the cause of school failure for some students, teachers receive the blame (2002). A lack of support for teachers from parents makes teaching impossible (Hill, 2002).

Educator respect has eroded with the increase in news stories and political speeches about poor test scores and failing students. Due to the negative publicity education has received over the past 30 years, it will take at least 10 years to convince young people that teaching is a profession worth considering. After seeing the struggle teachers have to maintain a positive learning climate, it is understandable that many youth choose careers other than teaching (Nissen, 2000; Elliott, 2002).

Methodology

The descriptive study examined how respect impacted teacher retention. A questionnaire was administered to practicing teachers to determine perceptions of teachers in South Texas about respect.

Procedures

Dr. Carolyn McCreight and Dr. Trace Pirtle developed the Purpose in Life Questionnaire in March 2002. Institutional Review Board approval for the study was received in March 13, 2002. To establish the validity of the questionnaire, 20 teachers enrolled in summer graduate classes completed the questionnaire and offered suggestions for improving the clarity of the instrument. A reliability coefficient of .89 for the 16 items was obtained.

Participants

Participants included 146 South Texas teachers participating in a Purpose in Life seminar sponsored by the Professional Programs Department at Texas A & M International University during June 2001. Forty percent of the teachers were elementary teachers, 29% were middle school teachers, and 31% were secondary teachers. Ethnicity of the group was 88% Hispanic, 10% Caucasian, 1% American Indian and 1% Black. Seventy-one females and 28 males participated in the study.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation was a Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of 16 statements. Participants answered Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), or Strongly Disagree (5) for each of 16 statements. The percentages of response were calculated for each of the five response categories explored.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the raw data. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to examine and analyze participant responses. The data was analyzed by calculating percentages and displaying frequencies of responses as shown in Table I, Teacher Empowerment; Table II, Student Respect; Table III, Community Respect; and Table IV, Society Respect.

Summary

Retaining teachers in the teaching profession is critical. Approximately 2.4 million newly hired public school teachers and 568,000 private school teachers are needed between now and 2008-2009. Numerous studies point to low salaries, lack of empowerment, and difficult student behavior as reasons for individuals leave teaching (Boe et al., 1996; Bondi & Trowbridge, 1999; Bradley, 1999a; Curran et al., 2000; Henry, 1986; Natt, 1999; Streisand & Toch, 1998. Literature about teacher respect consistently reveals that teachers feel that respect is a factor in teacher retention.

Results

Statements soliciting responses for Strongly Agree and Agree were grouped for analysis of the data. Statements of Strongly Disagree and Disagree were also grouped for data analysis.

Six statements solicited information about administrator teacher empowerment. Forty-seven percent of respondents felt that the principal sought teacher opinions on instructional matters. More than 60% of respondents indicated that administrators felt confident in delegating assignments to teachers, believed teacher attendance was important, provided needed instructional materials, and supported
classroom management decisions. Neutral responds for the six questions ranged from 14% to 27%. Responses of Disagree and Strongly Disagree ranged from 3% to 25%. Nineteen percent of participants felt that administrators did not supplement teacher income for special duties, such as test coordinator, mentor teacher, etc.

Three statements solicited responses for student respect of teachers. Ninety-three percent of respondents indicated that students followed directions in class, 92% of respondents felt that students spoke to them in public, and 60% indicated that student graduates thanked them for contributing to their learning. Neutral responses ranged from 5% to 33%, with 33% representing opinions on graduates thanking teachers for teaching them. Responses of Disagree and Strongly Disagree ranged from .7% to 3%.

Two statements solicited responses about parent respect. Sixty-eight percent of respondents believed that parents valued teacher opinion about academic concerns and 78% felt parents feel free to speak to teachers in public. Parent respect seems to be present, according to the teachers questioned. Neutral responses for the two questions were 25% and 18%, respectively. Responses of Strongly Disagree and Disagree were 6.7% and 2.7%, respectively.

Two statements about community respect indicated that 71% of respondents believed that the community values teaching and 44% felt that the community consulted teachers about school happenings. Neutral responses for the two statements were 19% and 41%, respectively. Strongly Disagree and Disagree responses were 10% and 15%, respectively.

Three statements solicited responses on societal respect. Forty-five percent of respondents indicated that the nation considered teaching an honored profession, 38% perceived that teachers were held in high esteem in the country, and 57% believed that teachers received respect. Thirty-three percent of teachers were Neutral about the nation honoring teachers, 37% were Neutral about the teaching profession being held in high esteem and 30% were Neutral on being respected as a teacher. Strongly Disagree and Disagree responses ranged from 10% to 25%, respectively.

Conclusions

Participant responses indicated that teachers in a South Texas border city felt that administrators, students, parents, community and society respect teachers. However, only 38% of teachers Strongly Agree or Agree teachers are held in high esteem in the country. The statement that solicited the greatest Neutral response concerned community members seeking teacher opinion on school matters at 41%. The greatest Strongly Disagree and Disagree responses were about the principal seeking teacher opinion on instructional matters and teachers being held in high esteem in the country. Each statement received 25% of Strongly Disagree or Disagree responses.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Empowerment</th>
<th>Strongly Agree F(%)</th>
<th>Agree F(%)</th>
<th>Neutral F(%)</th>
<th>Disagree F(%)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree F(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The principal seeks my opinion on instructional matters.</td>
<td>24(16)</td>
<td>45(31)</td>
<td>38(26)</td>
<td>28(19)</td>
<td>8(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal feels confident delegating assignments to me.</td>
<td>50(34)</td>
<td>47(30)</td>
<td>38(26)</td>
<td>7(05)</td>
<td>2(01)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The principal considers teacher attendance critical to student achievement.  

My principal provides requested instructional items when I request them.  

My principal supports my classroom management decisions.  

School administration seeks ways to supplement my income through special duty assignments.  

Note: F = frequency of respondents and numbers in parenthesis represent percentages of participants that strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree to each statement. Discrepancies in percentages resulting in 100% are due to rounding.  

Table II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Respect</th>
<th>Strongly Agree F(%)</th>
<th>Agree F(%)</th>
<th>Neutral F(%)</th>
<th>Disagree F(%)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree F(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students follow my directions in class.</td>
<td>68(47)</td>
<td>67(46)</td>
<td>7(5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1(.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students speak to me in public.</td>
<td>90(62)</td>
<td>44(30)</td>
<td>7(5)</td>
<td>3(2.1)</td>
<td>1(.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates thank me for what I have taught them.</td>
<td>44(30)</td>
<td>44(30)</td>
<td>48(33)</td>
<td>3(2)</td>
<td>2(1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: F = frequency of respondents and numbers in parenthesis represent percentages of participants that strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree to each statement. Discrepancies in percentages resulting in 100% are due to rounding.  

Table III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Respect</th>
<th>Strongly Agree F(%)</th>
<th>Agree F(%)</th>
<th>Neutral F(%)</th>
<th>Disagree F(%)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree F(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Agrees</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagrees</td>
<td>Strongly Disagrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents seek my opinion on academic concerns.</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents speak to me in public.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: F = frequency of respondents and numbers in parenthesis represent percentages of participants that strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree to each statement. Discrepancies in percentages resulting in 100% are due to rounding.
Table IV

Community Respect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree F(%)</th>
<th>Agree F(%)</th>
<th>Neutral F(%)</th>
<th>Disagree F(%)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree F(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching is valued in my community.</td>
<td>53(36)</td>
<td>51(35)</td>
<td>27(19)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community members seek my opinion on school happenings.</td>
<td>17(12)</td>
<td>46(32)</td>
<td>60(41)</td>
<td>21(14)</td>
<td>2(01)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: F = frequency of respondents and numbers in parenthesis represent percentages of participants that strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree to each statement. Discrepancies in percentages resulting in 100% are due to rounding.

Table V

Societal Respect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree F(%)</th>
<th>Agree F(%)</th>
<th>Neutral F(%)</th>
<th>Disagree F(%)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree F(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The nation considers teaching an honored profession.</td>
<td>25(17)</td>
<td>41(28)</td>
<td>48(33)</td>
<td>26(18)</td>
<td>5(03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are held in high esteem in my country.</td>
<td>19(13)</td>
<td>36(25)</td>
<td>54(37)</td>
<td>29(20)</td>
<td>7(05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am shown a great amount of respect as a teacher.</td>
<td>27(19)</td>
<td>55(38)</td>
<td>44(30)</td>
<td>15(10)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: F = frequency of respondents and numbers in parenthesis represent percentages of participants that strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree to each statement. Discrepancies in percentages resulting in 100% are due to rounding.
References


