

US teacher discouragement at 20-year high

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A new survey finds discouragement among American teachers at an all-time high. According to the “MetLife Survey of the American Teacher,” released Wednesday, disaffection from the teaching profession is being driven by budget-cutting and lack of job security in the public schools.

Over 50 percent of teachers said that they had reservations about their jobs, the highest level recorded in the survey since 1989. Job satisfaction has plummeted by 15 percentage points since 2009, the first year of the Obama administration. Fully one third said they would probably leave their field within the next five years, up from one quarter only three years ago.

The survey, conducted by Harris Interactive with about 3,000 teachers, parents, and students, clearly reveals the dimensions of the assault on public education. Over 75 percent of surveyed teachers said schools where they work had ordered budget cuts last year, and nearly 75 percent said that these cuts had included layoffs of school staff. The share of teachers who say their job is not secure shot up from 8 percent in 2006 to 34 percent last year.

Six in 10 surveyed teachers said that the average class sizes in their schools had increased. About one third said that educational technologies and classroom materials failed to keep pace with student need, and one fifth indicated that basic maintenance and cleaning was inadequate.

The humanities have been hardest hit. About one third of teachers said that their schools had cut or eliminated arts, music, and language programs.

The cuts have damaged the ability of schools to provide vital social services for children and to reach out to communities. Nearly three in 10 teachers reported that their schools have reduced or eliminated health or social services and afterschool programs. Two thirds of teachers report that their schools have had layoffs among parent/community liaisons staff in the

last year.

Cuts to these services could not come at a worse time. “At the same time teachers report a reduction in school budgets, programs, and services, students and their families report an increase in needs,” according to the survey’s executive summary. Nearly two thirds of “teachers across schools of all demographic types [report] that the number of students and families requiring health and social support services has increased in the past year.”

“Economic fears are also on the minds of students and their parents,” the report explains. “Two thirds of students and nearly three-quarters of parents worry about their families not having enough money for the things they need. Majorities of students and parents also worry about the parents’ losing or not being able to find a job.”

Perhaps the report’s most revealing statistic is that more than one third of teachers, 35 percent, reported that the number of students coming to school hungry has increased in one year’s time.

The budget cuts have hit “the full range of school types: urban, suburban and rural schools, as well as in schools with either low or high concentrations of low-income students, minority students and English language learner (ELL) students,” the survey authors write.

Unsurprisingly, around 40 percent of surveyed teachers and parents said that they doubted student achievement would improve in the coming five years. The survey also found a close association between budget-cutting and job dissatisfaction.

The survey exposes the damaging results of President Obama’s public education policy three years after its launch. These years have seen a tidal wave of cuts to public education, with no let-up in sight. In the same period, trillions of dollars have been handed over to Wall Street and spent on Washington’s neo-colonial

wars in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia.

Obama's "Race to the Top Initiative," like George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind" before it, is based on the notion that money should be rewarded to "successful" charter schools and diverted away from "failing" public schools. Success is to be measured by standardized tests and school districts' and state governments' willingness to tear up the work rules that have long governed teaching. The unstated goal is to create an openly class-based system of public education in America.

The Obama program has been conjoined to a clear anti-teacher and anti-public school rhetoric, no different in either principle or effect from that coming from the Republican Party, whose standard-bearers like Rick Santorum now openly deride public schools as "factories."

In outlining his initiative in 2009, Obama said it would impel "states and school districts taking steps to move bad teachers out of the classroom.... [T]here is no excuse for that person to continue teaching. I reject a system that rewards failure and protects a person from its consequences." Of course, Obama's "courage" in attacking teachers in 2009 did not extend to the Wall Street executives whose criminal activities drove the world into its greatest crisis since the Great Depression.

Teachers can find no outlet for their grievances through the trade unions. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) have already endorsed Obama's re-election campaign and are channeling tens of millions of dollars in teachers' dues to the re-election of the same Democratic Party representatives who are mercilessly slashing public education.

The union's dishonesty is shameless. In a video endorsement of Obama posted to the AFT web site, union head Randi Weingarten asserts that Obama's stimulus package has "prevented cuts to K-12 education, higher education, and other vital services." The MetLife survey shows that teachers know otherwise.

In spite of the mass wage-cutting and layoffs among the teachers they nominally represent, the union executives have rewarded themselves with record salaries. New data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that Weingarten took home \$493,859 last year, up

about \$65,000 in one year, while her rival, NEA president Dennis Van Roekel, collected \$460,000, also an increase of about \$65,000.



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