

# The MetLife Survey of *THE AMERICAN TEACHER*

**Embargoed until February 14, 2007**

**Media Contact**

John Calagna  
(212) 578-6252  
jcalagna@metlife.com

**Program Contact**

Rick Love  
(212) 578-2419  
rlove1@metlife.com

Note to media: To listen in on the discussion of the survey findings, a teleconference dial-in has been arranged: 800-909-4985, taking place between the hours of 12:30 p.m. to 2 p.m. EST on Thursday, February 14.

**MetLife Survey Grades the Current State of Homework**  
**Today's kids are happier with school and schoolwork;**  
**Parents and students have concerns about quality of homework**

**Washington, DC – February 14, 2008** – The value of homework has long been a topic of debate among educators and families, particularly in recent years, when critics have raised pointed questions regarding whether homework delivers a benefit, or is simply busy work. Surprisingly, the newly-released *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience*, reveals a substantial majority of teachers, parents, and even students all feel strongly that doing homework is important, helps students learn more in school, and can help pave the way for future success. More students value homework now than in the past (30 percent of secondary school students say homework is busy work today, compared to 74 percent in 2002, and 19 percent of today's elementary school students in grades 3 through 6 considered homework "busywork."). The survey also revealed a strong connection between the importance that a student places on homework and academic success. Despite the positive views, however, there is reason for concern because significant numbers of parents and students raise questions about the quality of homework being assigned.

"Homework is a frequent topic of conversation among parents, teachers and students, and that conversation often leads to larger discussions about teaching and learning, parenting, and preparation for work, college, and life. This survey shares the voices and perspectives of those closest to homework," said MetLife Chairman and CEO Rob Henrikson. "We believe these views can stimulate discussions in homes, schools, and communities across the nation, help with teacher preparation, and contribute to an improvement in education."

Conducted by Harris Interactive®, the survey focused on contributing to a better understanding of the role homework plays in education by examining the views of teachers, students, and parents. All three groups were asked questions about the quantity of homework assigned and completed, how and when homework is accomplished, the impact of homework, perceived goals and value of homework, the level of student engagement in learning, and the amount of time teachers and students spend on homework. Additionally, a special on-line panel of public school principals, teachers and department chairs was convened to gain additional insights on the findings. The survey is the latest in the *MetLife American Teacher* series, which MetLife has sponsored since 1984.

The results revealed similarities among and within the groups around the value that homework brings and the quantity of homework assigned, although there were also sharp contrasts — particularly relating to the quality of homework assigned. In fact, the survey revealed a disconnect between teachers and parents, with fully one-third of parents rating the quality of homework assignments as fair or poor, as opposed to only 16% of teachers.

# The MetLife Survey of THE AMERICAN TEACHER

One-quarter of the students (26%) indicated that their homework is busywork and not related to what they are learning in school. Veteran teachers (with greater than 21 years of experience) are more likely than new teachers (five years or less) to believe that homework helps children learn more in school (60% versus 36%). There is a notable sleep dilemma, also: 60% of secondary school students indicated that they get fewer than eight hours, and nearly half of the elementary school students (48%) get fewer than nine hours of sleep on a school night. In contrast, the National Sleep Foundation recommends that children between 5 and 12 get about ten hours of sleep, and that teens get about nine hours.

“These findings can be used by parents and educators to improve teaching and learning for America’s students,” said Sibyl Jacobson, MetLife Foundation President and CEO. “By examining the areas where disconnects are occurring, and by drawing upon the insights of experienced teachers, educators can work to make homework a more engaging and fulfilling experience, and can maximize the impact of the homework being assigned.”

## Key findings include:

- 1. Teachers, students, and parents give homework high marks, in terms of its quantity and importance**
  - The majority of teachers, parents, and students believe in the value of homework, with 83% of teachers, 81% of parents, and 77% of students indicating that doing homework is important or very important.
  - Twice as many teachers today, compared to 1987, rate the quality of the homework assigned by their school as excellent (24% versus 12%), and teachers in 2007 are more likely than those in 1987 to rate the amount of homework assigned by the school as excellent (20% vs. 12%).
  - Although six in ten parents believe that their child’s teachers assign the right amount of homework, fully one-third of parents rate the quality of homework assignments as fair or poor, and four in ten believe that a great deal or some of the homework is busywork and not related to what students are learning in school. Fewer teachers (16%) give such low marks to the quality of homework assigned.
  - Although most students say they have enough time for homework, one quarter of students (26%) think that their homework is busywork and not related to what they are learning in school.
- 2. Substantial numbers of students and parents raise concerns about the quality of homework**
  - Twenty-six percent of all students say homework is just busywork and not related to what they are learning in school. Thirty percent of secondary students identify homework as busy work, down from 74 percent in 2002.
  - Forty percent of parents say a great deal or some homework assigned is busy work
  - One third (33%) of parents say the quality of homework assigned in their schools is fair or poor.
- 3. Teachers assign homework to meet a variety of needs; however, highly experienced and less experienced teachers differ in their view and implementation of homework.**
  - Most teachers use homework to help students practice skills or prepare for tests (86%), develop good work habits (80%), develop critical thinking skills (67%) and motivate students to learn (65%).
  - However, highly experienced teachers (21-plus years of experience) are more likely than new teachers (5 years experience or less) to believe that doing homework is important (87% vs. 74%), believe strongly that homework helps children learn more in school (60% vs. 36%), or agree strongly that homework helps students achieve their goals beyond high school (60% versus 48%).

# The MetLife Survey of THE AMERICAN TEACHER

- Further, highly experienced are more likely than less experienced teachers to use homework to develop students interests (57% vs. 41%), and are more likely to feel extremely/very prepared to create engaging assignments (74% vs. 58%).
- 4. Teachers and students alike devote substantial amounts of time to homework each week**
- Teachers report that they spend an average of 8.5 hours each week doing work related to students' homework.
  - Most students (77%) regardless of grade level, spend at least 30 minutes doing homework on a typical school day, while 45% reported spending at least an hour.
  - Three-quarters of students (77%) are assigned homework at least three days a week, including 42% who are assigned homework every day. Daily homework assignments are more common at upper grade levels.
- 5. Those who view homework as unimportant or lack time for homework are associated with lower student achievement and other risk factors.**
- Students who do not believe that homework is important are more likely than other students to: get C's or below (40% vs. 27%); not plan to go to college after high school (26% vs. 15%); and rate the quality of education that they receive as only fair or poor (29% vs. 13%).
  - Students who get C's or below are more likely than others to feel frequently stressed about homework (38% vs. 28% of "A" students).
  - Similarly, parents who report that homework is not important feel more alienated from their child's school, are less likely to have rules about homework, and are more likely to say that homework is burdensome.
- 6. Most students are not getting enough sleep, which has an impact on their ability to get to school and pay attention in class.**
- Nearly half of students (46%) think they do not get enough sleep. While this experience is more common among secondary school students (57%), 29% of elementary school students report also that they do not get enough sleep.
  - Nearly half of elementary school students (48%) get less than nine hours of sleep on a school night, and 60% of secondary school students say they get less than eight hours of sleep.
  - Four in ten students (37%) very often or often have trouble waking up in the morning.
  - One-third (34%) frequently feel tired during class, three in ten (29%) daydream in class, and seven percent frequently fall asleep during class.
  - Teachers seem to underestimate the extent and impact of lack of sleep. On average, teachers report that 28% of their students do not get enough sleep.
- 7. Doing homework is a solitary task...but with distractions.**
- Nine in ten elementary school students (89%) and eight in ten secondary school students (81%) usually do their homework at home.
  - While three in ten elementary school students (31%) report that they do nothing else while working on their homework, only one in nine secondary school students (11%) has this habit. In fact, nine in ten (89%) secondary students are doing other activities, or "multi-tasking" while doing homework, including 70% who listen to music and 51% who watch TV.

# The MetLife Survey of *THE AMERICAN TEACHER*

- Two in ten students report that they are usually talking on the phone (20%), instant messaging or emailing (20%) or text messaging (17%) while they do their homework.

The results of the survey were released today at a forum hosted by the Committee for Economic Development. Humphrey Taylor, Chairman of The Harris Poll<sup>®</sup>, presented survey findings to an audience of educational professionals, policymakers and high school students. Charles Kolb, president of the Committee for Economic Development then served as moderator of a panel discussion that included Dr. Mary Brabeck, dean of the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development at New York University, and Sean Bulson, principal of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School. The panel discussed the implications of the findings for teacher preparation programs and public schools.

## **About the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience**

The *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience* was conducted online by Harris Interactive between March 28 and June 14, 2007 among 1,000 public school teachers of grades K through 12, 501 parents of children in grades K through 12, and 2,101 students in grades 3 through 12. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. The survey with full methodology can be downloaded from MetLife's web site at [www.metlife.com/teachersurvey](http://www.metlife.com/teachersurvey) or obtained by writing to MetLife, ATTN: *Survey of the American Teacher*, 27-01 Queens Plaza North, Area 5C, Long Island City, New York 11101.

## **About MetLife**

MetLife is a leading provider of insurance and financial services with operations throughout the United States and the Latin America, Europe and Asia Pacific regions. It demonstrates its belief in education and contributes to its improvement in part through the sponsorship of the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* series since 1984 to give voice to those closest to the classroom. MetLife Foundation places strong emphasis on education and draws on the findings of the Survey to inform its grantmaking. For more information about MetLife, please visit the company's Web site at [www.metlife.com](http://www.metlife.com). Additional information about the Foundation is available at [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).

## **About Harris Interactive**

Harris Interactive is the one of the largest market research firms in the world. Harris Interactive is widely known for *The Harris Poll*, one of the longest running, independent opinion polls and for pioneering online market research methods. Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide. More information about Harris Interactive may be obtained at [www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com).

###