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National Survey Identifies Incentives To Attract Talented Career Changers into America's Classrooms

4 in 10 College-Educated Americans Would Teach; U.S. Could Improve Teacher Quality, Fill Shortages With \$50,000 Starting Pay and Better Preparation

PRINCETON N.J. – September 10, 2008 – Career changers may be one of the nation's best hopes to fill an anticipated 1.5 million teaching vacancies over the next decade, according to a new national survey released today by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation and funded by MetLife Foundation.

The survey, *Teaching as a Second Career*, finds that 42 percent of college-educated Americans aged 24 to 60 would consider becoming a teacher. These potential teachers are more likely than others to have a postgraduate degree, to have attended selective colleges, and to report having higher-than-average grades than other college graduates, the report finds. The survey was conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. and based on interviews with 2,292 college-educated adults aged 24 to 60.

“Career changers could help address persistent teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools—given the right compensation *and* the right preparation,” says Arthur Levine, president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. “While a number of programs have been created in the past 20 years to tap career changers as teachers, the nation needs to open teaching to a broader talent pool, and to recruit, prepare, and support those career changers more effectively.”

Findings indicate that more people would consider teaching as a second career if starting salaries were raised to \$50,000 and if career changers could receive quality training and support. Three in ten of those who are not interested in teaching say that teaching has appeal, but that there are aspects of teaching that prevent them from considering it, and low pay was the factor most often cited.

Even among those who are interested in teaching, low pay is their biggest concern about the field, and only 36 percent say a salary below \$50,000 is acceptable to them. More than two in five (43 percent) of potential teachers said the most important step to encourage them to become a teacher is ensuring that salaries are adequate and competitive with other professions.

“Raising starting pay is the single most important step states and districts could take to increase the attractiveness of teaching for career changers,” says Woodrow Wilson senior fellow David Haselkorn, who provided an introduction and commentary to the Hart Research study. “But money alone isn't the answer. Potential teachers also want better working conditions and quality preparation programs that offer classroom experience, deeper content and pedagogical knowledge, and ongoing support once they enter teaching.”

“Professionals from other fields are an untapped resource and could help schools solve crucial staffing problems in key shortage areas, such as math and science and hard-to-staff schools,” notes Sibyl Jacobson, president of MetLife Foundation. “The survey identifies who we need to recruit and how, and provides important clues into developing policies that will encourage more people to enter the teaching profession.”

In addition to the survey, MetLife Foundation supported a new research synthesis, *Encore Performances*, also released today. The research synthesis reveals that few programs for college graduates and midcareer professionals design their coursework to match candidates’ work experience, and that clinical placements are often haphazard and unrelated to the needs of candidates’ placements. This is consistent with survey findings. Roughly a fourth (23 percent) of potential teachers said developing the right kind of training to ease the transition to teaching is important.

Specifically, *Encore Performances* advises policymakers to create a channel for midcareer changers to explore teaching through preparation programs and short-term or part-time roles in schools, prior to making a high-stakes decision to switch careers.

The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation is developing a national fellowship program and state fellowship initiatives to provide one-year fellowships for prospective teachers, who will be paid \$30,000 stipends and receive a master’s degree. After completing the graduate program, Fellows will teach for three years in a well-functioning, high-need school, during which they will receive mentoring from an expert teacher. After the program was described to them, two-thirds of potential teachers surveyed said they found it appealing. Women, African Americans, Hispanics, and those with lower incomes were the most likely to find the program appealing.

Who Are the Potential Teachers?

According to the survey, two-thirds of those interested in teaching said that they had considered the idea in the past, suggesting that a potential career switch has more than just casual appeal. Those working in engineering, science, and information technology are somewhat more likely than others to consider teaching, an important finding given the need for more teachers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields.

Nearly half of all potential teachers among the respondents—most of whom are women and between 50 and 60—say they are considering teaching in the next five years. Fully three-fourths of this group had considered teaching in the past, suggesting that this group is the “low-hanging fruit” most ripe for recruitment into the field.

Potential teachers who would consider teaching within the next five years are somewhat more likely than the overall sample to have a postgraduate or higher (32 percent compared to 29 percent), and 38 percent said they earned above-average grades at a selective college, compared with 30 percent of the total sample.

Preference for Teaching in High School, Suburban Areas

In looking at specific teaching positions, both in schools and in geographic settings, potential teachers favor more traditional schools and schools in suburban areas. Four in nine (45 percent) of

the potential teachers find teaching in a high school to be extremely appealing, while 37 percent feel similar about teaching in an elementary school.

Roughly three in 10 potential teachers find a school with children from low-income or disadvantaged backgrounds to be extremely appealing (32 percent) as well as a charter school (31 percent), or a low-performing school where there is a special need for quality teachers (30 percent). And only 15 percent of potential teachers say that they would find a teaching position working with special education students that have special needs to be extremely appealing.

A large plurality of potential teachers (47 percent) indicates that the area that the school is in does not make a difference. However, 35 percent would prefer a suburban school with just 11 percent indicating their preference for an urban school and 6 percent for a rural school.

Mission, Meaning, and Money Are Key Drivers

Although the vast majority of potential teachers say they consider teaching personally rewarding and it offers them a chance to make a difference, money matters. Those with incomes below \$75,000 are more likely than those with higher incomes to consider teaching within the next five years, and 68 percent of potential teachers said teaching would mean a pay cut. When asked about the “sweet spot”—the salary they would need to consider teaching—21 percent said between \$50,000 and \$59,000, 24 percent said between \$60,000 and \$79,000, and 13 percent said \$80,000 or more. Only 12 percent said between \$20,000 and \$39,000. According to the most recent publicly available data from the American Federation of Teachers, the average beginning salary for teachers in 2004-05 was \$31,753.

Policy Actions

The research synthesis identifies specific policy recommendations, including creating a coherent system for midcareer changers to transition into teaching. That system should include preparation programs that are clinically based and tailored to adult learners; enable career changers to move through training and placement in cohorts that increase opportunities for collaborative learning and support; and expand opportunities for teacher candidates to explore teaching via well-supervised short-term or part-time roles in schools, prior to their making a high-stakes decision to switch careers. (*See attached list of recommendations.*)

The survey, *Teaching as a Second Career*, was based on interviews of 2,292 adults conducted between February 5 and 25, 2008. To be eligible, interviewees had to be between the ages of 24 and 60 and hold at least a bachelor’s degree. A total of 2,000 telephone interviews were conducted of this population, and an additional 292 on-line interviews were conducted for harder-to-reach groups, including 24- to 29-year-olds, Hispanics, and African Americans. The margin of error for the survey was 2.2 percentage points for the 2,000 interviews and 2.9 percentage points for the sample of 1,100 potential teachers.

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The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation (www.woodrow.org) identifies and develops the best minds for the nation’s most important challenges. In these areas of challenge, the Foundation awards fellowships to enrich human resources, works to improve public policy, and assists organizations and institutions in enhancing practice in the U.S. and abroad.

MetLife Foundation supports education, health, civic and cultural organizations. Education is a major focus of the Foundation, informed by findings from the annual MetLife Survey of the American Teacher. For more information visit www.metlife.org.

Recommendations from *Encore Performances*

What Policymakers Can Do:

- Support programs that use rigorous selection processes, as well as those tailored to adult learners.
- Design incentives that respond to the needs of the most desirable candidates.
- Support high quality teacher preparation by providing resources for promising programs and innovative new pathways for midcareer changers;
- Help develop a teaching pipeline that provides more thoughtful transitions to teaching, particularly in high need settings.
 - Focus on stronger and more systematic approaches to mentoring; thoughtful, cohort-based preparation and placement; scaffolded placement, avoiding the assignment of novices to the most difficult situations; and more graduated assumption of teaching roles and responsibilities in hard to staff schools.
 - Expand opportunities for prospective mid and second career teacher candidates to explore teaching via well-supervised short-term or part-time roles in schools, prior to their making a high stakes decision to switch careers.
 - Provide mentors with better preparation to work specifically with adult learners.
- Focus upon improving working conditions in schools.
- Support the development of state and district data systems to make clear the links between teachers' preparation, teachers' performance, and students' learning.

Teacher Recruitment and Preparation

- Use targeted selection processes that identify the strongest candidates.
- Design programs that take into account the specific needs of adult learners.
- Ground pedagogy in content and the needs of diverse learners, integrating theory and practice.
- Provide strong clinical experiences in schools that prepare candidates' for the settings in which they will teach.
- Assist with appropriate job placement in schools that make efforts to support novice teachers.
- Ensure that teacher preparation programs are organized to promote students' success as learners.

What the Research Tells Us About Career Changers

The research synthesis, *Encore Performances*, identifies seven key themes from its analysis of research on midcareer and second career teachers. This synthesis is a separate study from the survey findings and draws from a broader range of published research in the field.

1. **Career Changers Are Not a Monolithic Group.** They come into classrooms at different stages of their careers –as *delayed entrants*, candidates aged 24 to 29, who did not enter teaching immediately after college but who did not pursue another career; *midcareer teachers*, who did pursue another career and are in their 30s, 40s or even 50s; and *second-career teachers*, who pursued another career and are considering teaching as a second or encore career. Policies should take into account the different needs of these three groups of teachers.
2. **Not All Career Changers Are Content Experts.** The assumption that all midcareer and second-career candidates come to teaching with strong content knowledge and skills from the workplace might be overstated. Likewise, the assumption that these candidates lack any experience in classrooms may also be misleading; many have been substitute teachers or teachers' aides.
3. **Strengths and Weaknesses of Prior Work Backgrounds.** Prior work experience, such as knowledge of organizations, management skills, and time-management expertise, experience in working in teams, and motivational skills, could be extremely useful for teaching. Yet other experiences and abilities can clash with the skills and dispositions needed for teaching. Midcareer teachers can also be discouraged by the conditions in schools, as well as the school bureaucracy and perceived lack of autonomy.
4. **Difficulty Tailoring Preparation to Older Entrants' Needs.** More help and support might be needed to bridge the world of work outside of education and the world of classrooms, children, and schools. Teacher educators need to clarify what aspects of candidates' prior work experiences could be relevant and useful in teaching, and to make explicit for career changers the differences between their prior professional cultures and the cultures of schools.
5. **Personal Stresses on Career Changers.** Career changers can find teaching highly stressful. The new position can raise questions regarding their efficacy and potential to succeed in their new workplaces. These concerns argue for more robust preparation and support. Financial concerns are also a persistent cause of stress.
6. **Uniqueness of Labor Markets.** Labor markets may differ significantly across districts and geographies. New York, for example, is among the states with the youngest entering teachers, and it consistently hires about 10,000 teachers a year. But other states have a substantial number of older candidates in their alternative pathways. Teacher selection, recruitment, and preparation programs must take into account variations in labor markets.
7. **More Research Needed.** There is often more rhetoric than research on career changers and the programs designed to recruit and prepare them. Key questions—about who these older entering teachers are, how many are being recruited, what qualifications they bring into teaching—remain woefully under-examined. The field of teacher preparation needs more research to examine and adapt the nature of these programs, their relationship to the needs and qualifications of career changers, and the most effective structures and designs for learning.