

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

For Learning Point Associates:
Audrey Mann Cronin
914-861-2009
audrey@manncroninpr.com

For Public Agenda:
Melissa R. Feldsher
212-686-6610, ext. 50
mfeldsher@publicagenda.org

New Analysis Suggests Teachers' Voices Do Not Have a Strong Influence on the Policy Agenda

Research From Learning Point Associates and Public Agenda
Released on New Site: www.RetainingTeacherTalent.org

WASHINGTON, D.C. (January 26, 2010) — Educational reformers of all stripes have focused tremendous energy on thinking of ways to identify effective teachers and in turn recruit, retain, compensate, and support them. But what do teachers think of their ideas? The Retaining Teacher Talent study, a nationwide study conducted by Learning Point Associates and Public Agenda, suggests that what teachers think are good indicators of effectiveness—and what they think will make them more effective—are not always aligned with current priorities in education policy.

This third release of data from the Retaining Teacher Talent study, *Convergence and Contradictions in Teachers' Perceptions of Policy Reform Ideas*, seeks to draw teachers into the debate to bring nuance and experience to the conversation. This report describes the implications of the results of the nationwide survey for policymakers and teachers who want to influence policy.

“As we enter this new decade, teachers stand at the center of this policy vortex,” said Sabrina Laine, Ph.D., chief program officer for educator effectiveness at Learning Point Associates. “Democratizing the national policy conversation by getting teachers involved provides a bridge between policy and practice. Ultimately, grounding this debate with the voices of experience and evidence is of critical importance. The success of these reforms rests in large part on the support of those who will be most directly affected—teachers.”

“There’s a conventional wisdom that teachers uniformly resist the idea of measuring teacher effectiveness, but in fact, teachers are open to a number of different ways of doing it, including looking at how much their own students learn compared to other students. And most teachers agree that making it easier to take ineffective teachers out of the classroom would improve education,” said Jean Johnson, director of Education Insights at Public Agenda. “It’s way past time to get teachers themselves involved in these crucial discussions about how to judge teacher effectiveness.”

Although education policy reform has focused on dramatic changes to teacher evaluation and compensation, this report suggests that these reform ideas are not the most popular among teachers. This study explores the attitudes of all teachers toward how they would measure effectiveness, examines how they perceive themselves to be effective relative to their teaching conditions, and indicates what they believe will improve overall teacher effectiveness.

www.learningpt.org**Chicago**

20 North Wacker Drive, Suite 1231
Chicago, IL 60606-2901
312-288-7600

Washington, D.C.

1100 17th Street NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036-4632
877-322-8700 · 202-223-6690

Naperville

1120 East Diehl Road, Suite 200
Naperville, IL 60563-1486
800-356-2735 · 630-649-6500

New York

22 Cortlandt Street, Floor 16
New York, NY 10007-3139
212-419-0415

Top findings include the following:

- **The majority of teachers agree on four possible ways to judge teacher performance.** Nearly all teachers (92 percent) rated the level of student interest and engagement as an *excellent* or *good* indicator of teacher effectiveness. Teachers also gave *excellent* or *good* ratings to how much their own students learn compared with other students (72 percent), feedback from principals and administrators (70 percent), and how well students perform on district standardized tests (56 percent). At the same time, fewer teachers (12 percent) gave standardized tests the top rating than they gave any of the other measures of effectiveness.
- **Teachers with less experience in the classroom are more likely to have concerns about using standardized test scores to measure their performance.** Although the majority of teachers said that standardized tests are *good* or *excellent* indicators of teacher effectiveness, less experienced teachers were more divided: Half of all teachers with less than five years of experience gave this assessment a fair or poor rating, compared with just 32 percent of teachers with more than 20 years of experience.
- **Teachers prefer having a principal who frequently observes their classroom and gives detailed feedback.** A majority of teachers indicated that they want their principals to be involved (63 percent). As national education policy begins to extend measuring effectiveness to principals, teachers underscored the importance of strong principals to support their success in the classroom.
- **Teachers indicate that class size reduction and addressing student discipline would improve their overall effectiveness.** Although many policy reform experts have prioritized teacher evaluation, preparation, and compensation and reward, the majority of teachers ranked class size reduction (66 percent) and addressing student discipline (68 percent) as the most important factors in improving their overall effectiveness.

As part of the survey analysis, the report compares teachers who were most confident about their effectiveness in the classroom (33 percent of the sample) with those who were less sure (66 percent). Among other differences noted in the report, the self-perceived effective teachers were more likely to report better working conditions in their schools and to give better ratings to their principal for providing instructional feedback.

Policymakers have proposed and adopted various reform ideas to improve teacher effectiveness. In addition to the importance of engaging teachers in education reform, this report highlights the continued lack of solid, replicated empirical evidence on which to base policy decisions. This dearth of evidence hinders effective policymaking and ensures that the debate will continue.

Convergence and Contradictions in Teachers' Perceptions of Policy Reform Ideas is based on six focus group interviews conducted throughout the country as well as a national, random-sample survey of 890 public school teachers conducted in spring and summer 2009, including an oversample of 241 teachers aged 32 and under. The researchers used a factor analysis and established criteria of teacher effectiveness to compare the views of those who are more confident about their teaching with those who are less sure of their impact on students. The questions used to define this group are available in the report at www.RetainingTeacherTalent.org. The work was underwritten by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The Joyce Foundation.

A discussion of this report's methodology, as well as a full complement of research on Retaining Teacher Talent—including a video capturing the voices of Gen Y teachers—can be found on the new comprehensive website (www.RetainingTeacherTalent.org).

About Public Agenda

Public Agenda is a nonprofit organization dedicated to nonpartisan public policy research. Founded in 1975 by former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Daniel Yankelovich, the social scientist and author, Public Agenda is well respected for its influential public opinion surveys and balanced citizen education materials. Its mission is to inject the public's voice into crucial policy debates. For more information, visit <http://www.publicagenda.org>.

About Learning Point Associates

Learning Point Associates is a nationally recognized, nonprofit education research and consulting organization with 25 years of experience working with educators and policymakers to transform education systems and student learning. The organization's reputation is built on a solid foundation of designing and conducting rigorous and relevant education research and evaluations; developing and delivering tools, services, and resources targeted at pressing education issues; and analyzing and synthesizing education policy trends and practices. For more information, visit <http://www.learningpt.org>.