In recognition of National Employee Freedom Week (August 16-22, 2015), The Association of American Educators (AAE) is pleased to share direct member feedback about critical workforce and pension issues facing our nation’s teachers.

AAE provides an authentic educator voice to stakeholders searching for commonsense public policy solutions. Polling members from coast to coast, this survey paints the picture of a well educated and dedicated teacher workforce. Forty-six percent hold a Master’s degree and 86 percent say they are satisfied or very satisfied with their careers.

AAE member teachers tackle the tough issues including the changing profession, labor policy, pension portability, and transparency in public schools. While the status quo would have you believe that teachers are in lock-step with the views of union leaders, AAE members are growing in their support of commonsense reform and professionalism.
The Changing Profession

Experts agree that the single largest factor in ensuring a student gets an excellent education is making sure they have an excellent teacher. As baby boomers retire and the demand for great teachers rises, policymakers are examining initiatives that attract, retain, and support great talent.

AAE members are eager to get involved in the discussion. Roughly half (53 percent) of teachers surveyed reported that they are taken seriously when giving feedback to administrators. As educators on the frontlines, it’s critical that teachers serve as partners in crafting policy that works.

In an effort to reward teachers for advancing professionally, several states are in the beginning stages of creating a multi-tiered teacher licensure structure. Sixty-eight percent of teachers support a system that would require teachers to demonstrate increased teaching efficacy and growth to advance to higher licensure levels/increased pay. Another 72 percent of teachers would support a hybrid teaching role that would split time spent in the classroom with other roles and responsibilities in a school or district.

As the profession changes, 76 percent of AAE members support states moving toward a la carte benefits packages where prospective hires could pick and choose salaries based on need. For example, a recent college graduate may choose a higher base salary with a lower benefits package for the first few years of teaching.

Of the 72 percent of teachers who support a proposed North Carolina law that would give teachers an 11 percent pay raise in exchange for electing to give up tenure, 32 percent would elect to participate if given the chance. Similarly, 72 percent of teachers disagreed with policies that retain teachers solely on seniority, otherwise known as “last in, first out” or LIFO.

Boosting teacher morale has been heavily debated in recent years. According to AAE members, the single biggest contributor to improving their job satisfaction is increased professional autonomy. Members also suggested increasing rewards and recognition and flexibility as a means to improve teacher morale.

Workforce Policy

As an organization founded on the principles of workplace freedom, a near unanimous 98 percent of teachers support a teacher’s right to choose an association that best meets their needs. Educators surveyed are adamant that membership in any

As the profession evolves and changes in 2015, teachers are embracing commonsense solutions. AAE is listening and we look forward to sharing member opinions with policymakers and stakeholders on all levels.

- A tiered licensure system requires teachers to demonstrate increased teaching efficacy and growth to advance to higher licensure levels/increased pay. Along with years of service, teachers would have to demonstrate various professional attributes including, but not limited to, effectiveness and leadership roles. Do you support this policy?

- What would improve your job satisfaction? (check all that apply)

  - Increased professional autonomy (53%)
  - Rewards or recognition (51%)
  - Flexibility (47%)
  - Opportunities for advancement (42%)
  - Hybrid teaching roles (31%)
  - Professional development opportunities (29%)

  32% Don’t support
  68% Support
association should be entirely voluntary and no union fees should be paid as a condition of employment.

In districts represented by a collective bargaining agreement, a mere 8 percent of teachers surveyed report participating in a union certification election, illustrating that the vast majority of teachers surveyed never voted to be represented by a union organization in the first place.

Sixty-eight percent of AAE members would prefer to negotiate their own contract so that they could secure a salary and benefits package that best suits their lifestyle. Another 84 percent of teachers agree that a one-size-fits-all collective bargaining agreement does little to recognize excellent teachers.

Worker’s Choice is a new proposed policy that would allow a teacher to opt-out of the collective bargaining agreement in their district and negotiate their own salary and benefits package. Of the 70 percent of AAE members in support of such a policy, 60 percent of members indicated they would be interested in participating.

Although educators are interested in embracing Worker’s Choice, some AAE members were quick to point out that the current workforce is overall ill-prepared to tackle the challenge. “I know a lot of teachers would feel intimidated by the process without training or background knowledge.” Despite a gap in preparation, 59 percent of teachers agreed that negotiating individual contracts is critical to advancing the professionalism of teachers, suggesting a need for a shift in the current system.

Pensions & Budgets

During the recession, state budgets took monumental hits leaving many economists questioning the sustainability of public employee pensions. Eighty-nine percent of teachers would support a portable pension system that would allow teachers to take the pension money earned during their time in a school system to be rolled into a 401K in another job.

In order to foster a climate of accountability in public schools, educators are calling for a system that promotes a culture of transparency. Seventy-three percent of survey respondents agree with a Colorado proposal requiring school boards to let the public observe collective bargaining negotiations.

Nearly 700 teachers from all 50 states participated in this AAE member survey. For more information, visit aaeteachers.org.