

**MetLife<sup>®</sup>**



The MetLife Survey of

*THE*  
**AMERICAN  
TEACHER**

**The Homework Experience**

**SUMMARY**

# MESSAGE FROM METLIFE

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In life and work, the phrase “doing your homework” means being prepared. In schools, of course, the meaning is more literal and specific. For most students, teachers and parents, homework is an almost daily fact of life. Still, it can also be about preparation, for the next day, for the next step in gaining the knowledge and skills needed for future success.

Homework is a subject of much debate: Is it done? Is it effective? Are its results worth the time required? MetLife places great value on hearing firsthand from stakeholders. *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience* asked students, teachers, and parents to share their perspectives on homework, its purposes, the time involved, the benefit.

Frequently a topic of specific communications among parents, teachers and students, homework can also lead 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 the issues. As we all work collaboratively to strengthen education, we believe these views can stimulate larger, beneficial discussions in homes, classrooms, schools, universities and communities across the nation.



C. Robert Henrikson  
Chairman of the Board,  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
MetLife, Inc.

## OVERVIEW

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*The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience* was conducted by Harris Interactive® and is the twenty-fourth in a series of surveys sponsored annually by MetLife since 1984. It gives voice to the perspectives and experiences of teachers, students and parents regarding the purposes, quantity, quality, and value of homework. The Survey also included an online strategy session with public school principals, teachers and department chairs. Its findings reveal the opinions about homework for each of these key stakeholders, challenge some popular perceptions about the impact of homework on children's and families' lives, and offer insights for teacher preparation and induction.

### **PURPOSES**

Most parents, as well as students and teachers, believe in the value of homework. They think homework is important and helps students learn more in school. Minority parents, in particular, have high expectations for the impact of homework. They are more likely than non-minority parents to believe that homework is important and helps students in school and in the future. Parents who do not believe homework is important appear to be more alienated and less connected to their child's school.

Teachers frequently use homework to serve a variety of goals, including skills important to succeeding in school and to succeeding in life, such as developing a sense of responsibility and critical thinking. Half or more of teachers frequently use homework to help students practice skills or prepare for tests, develop good work habits, develop their critical thinking skills,

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motivate them to learn, and develop students' interests. Teachers also use homework as part of assessment and, less frequently, because they did not have enough time during class to cover all of the material; these usages are more common among secondary school teachers than elementary school teachers.

Highly experienced teachers (21+ years of experience) are more likely than new teachers (5 years or less experience) to believe that homework is important: that it helps students learn more in school or that it helps students reach their goals for after high school. New teachers are less likely than highly experienced teachers to provide students with feedback on homework or to review completed assignments during class discussions. In addition, new teachers feel less prepared to create engaging homework assignments. Both the belief in a multifaceted value for homework and a feeling of confidence in utilizing homework effectively for teaching and learning appear to grow significantly with teacher experience. These findings can have important implications for teacher education and new teacher induction.

## **QUANTITY AND QUALITY**

More than eight in ten parents believe that their child's teachers assign the right amount of – or even too little – homework, and three-quarters of students report that they have enough time to do their assignments. These findings are somewhat surprising given recent attention in the popular press regarding parents who feel that too much homework is assigned, placing an undue burden on students' and families' time. Nine in ten parents report that helping their child with homework provides an opportunity for them to talk and spend time together.

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The majority of parents do not see homework as getting in the way of family time or as a major source of stress and disagreement in their family.

Although the majority of students report that they have enough time to do their homework, the one-quarter who report that they do not have enough time have higher rates of risk factors related to student achievement and other areas. Those who lack enough time for their homework are more likely to get low grades and are less likely to plan to go to college. They are less likely to believe that homework is important or to always finish their assignments. Frequent failure to complete homework may be an early signal of student disengagement that can lead to truancy and dropping out. Homework is not the only demand on their time – those students who do not have enough time for homework are also more likely to report that they do not get enough sleep.

Parents value having a quiet place for their child to do homework, but most students do their homework while doing other activities as well. Half of parents have a rule for their child that homework should be completed in a quiet place. Students also profess that having a quiet place to do homework is important to them. Yet while three-quarters of students agree that it is important to have a quiet place to do homework, this is not necessarily a goal that they put into practice. Most engage in other activities while doing homework. Among secondary school students, nine in ten are usually doing other activities, or “multi-tasking,” while doing their homework, including 70% who listen to music and 51%

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who watch TV. Although not measured directly in this *MetLife Survey*, these results imply that the amount of time students devote to homework may not reflect the attention they direct to this task.

Overall, most parents (and teachers) report that the quality of homework assigned by their school is less than excellent. 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 homework is busy-work and not related to what students are learning in school. These findings raise the possibility that increased parent satisfaction may come from improving the quality of homework and improving communication with parents about the purpose and relevancy of assignment.

Homework provides a window through which to view many important aspects of education and gain insight into the attitudes and experiences of students, teachers and parents. It occupies an intersection between school, home and the community, and, as such, can serve as a channel of communication between the school and parent, as well as the parent and child. An examination of homework can provide important insights into education and reveal opportunities for improvement.

# MAJOR FINDINGS

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## Most teachers, students and parents believe that doing homework is important and helps students learn more in school.

- Eight in ten teachers (83%) believe that doing homework is important or very important and nine in ten (91%) agree that doing homework helps students learn more in school.
- Eight in ten parents (81%) believe that doing homework is important or very important and nine in ten (89%) agree that doing homework helps students learn more in school.
- Three-quarters of students (77%) believe that doing homework is important or very important and seven in ten (69%) agree that doing homework helps them learn more in school.

### Homework Helps Students Learn More – Students, Parents and Teachers

**Students:** How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

*“Doing homework helps me learn more in school”*

**Parents:** How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

*“Doing homework helps students learn more in school”*

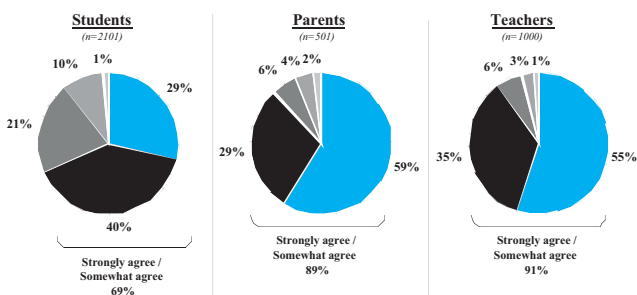
**Teachers:** How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

*“Doing homework helps students learn more in school”*

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■ Strongly agree   ■ Somewhat agree   ■ Somewhat disagree   ■ Strongly disagree  
■ No answer / Not sure

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**Teachers, students and parents believe that the impact of doing homework will resonate beyond the K–12 school years.**

- Nine in ten teachers (90%) agree that doing homework helps students reach their goals for after high school – a belief shared equally by elementary and secondary school teachers.
- A majority of students (56%) think that doing their homework will help them a lot in reaching their post-high school goals and
- Two-thirds of parents (64%) believe that doing homework will help their child a lot in reaching his/her goals.

**Teachers’ ratings of the quality and amount of homework have improved over the past 20 years.**

- Teachers in 2007 are more likely than those in 1987 to rate the quality of the homework assigned by their school as excellent (24% vs. 12%).
- 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%).

**Does Homework Bring Parents and Parents:** How much do you agree  
**% Strongly/**

	<b>Total</b>
Base:	501
	%
Helping my child with homework is an opportunity for us to talk and spend time together	87
The time my child spends doing homework gets in the way of our family spending time together	22
Homework is a major source of stress and disagreement in our family	29

**School-parent relations have improved since 1987, at the same time that parent-school contact is more common.**

- More parents today give an “excellent” rating for relations between parents and teachers in their school (34% vs. 25% in 1987).
- More parents today have spoken on the telephone with a teacher or school official at least once during the school year (90% vs. 81% in 1987).
- More parents today have exchanged written notes with a teacher or school official at least once during the school year (76% vs. 66% in 1987).

**Most parents view homework as an opportunity for parent-child communication.**

- Nine in ten parents report that helping their child with homework provides an opportunity for them to talk and spend time together. The majority of parents do not see homework as getting in the way of family time or as a major source of stress and disagreement in their family.

**Children Together or Drive Them Apart?**

or disagree with the following statements?

**Somewhat Agree**

	School Type		Race/Ethnicity	
	Elementary	Secondary	White/Other	Black/Hispanic
	257	244	393	108
	%	%	%	%
	86	87	85	91
	22	22	21	26
	30	28	32	23

**Teachers assign homework to meet a variety of student needs, including skills needed for their current school work, as well as skills that can be applicable to their future schooling, employment and ability to successfully navigate life in general. Secondary school teachers are twice as likely as elementary school teachers to use homework frequently as a continuation of class time to cover material not able to be addressed during class.**

- Nearly nine in ten teachers (86%) frequently use homework to help students practice skills or prepare for tests.

### Teachers' Goals in

**Teachers:** How often do you use home  
How often do you  
very often, often,

**% Very**

	<b>Total</b>
Base:	968
	%
To help students practice skills or prepare for tests	86
To help students develop good work habits	80
To develop students' critical thinking skills	67
To motivate students to learn	65
To assess students' skills and knowledge	63
To develop students' interests	51
Because there was not enough time during class to cover all the material	16

- Eight in ten teachers (80%) frequently use homework to help students develop good work habits.
- Two-thirds of teachers (67%) frequently use homework to develop critical thinking skills.
- Two-thirds of teachers (65%) frequently use homework to motivate students to learn.
- Six in ten teachers (63%) frequently use homework to assess students' skills and knowledge.
- Secondary school teachers are twice as likely as elementary school teachers to frequently assign homework because there was not enough time during class to cover all the material (26% vs. 10%).

### Assigning Homework

work assignments to do the following?

assign homework...

sometimes, rarely or never?

#### Often/Often

	Years of Experience			Level of School	
	0-5	6-20	21+	Elementary	Secondary
	100	465	403	606	311
	%	%	%	%	%
	81	88	86	85	88
	82	78	81	83	75
	62	65	70	60	76
	61	63	68	63	67
	68	65	59	57	74
	41	49	57	48	56
	11	15	20	10	26

**Teachers' level of experience distinguishes their views on homework's value and purpose, how they incorporate homework into their teaching, and how prepared they feel to create engaging and effective assignments. Highly experienced teachers (21+ years of experience) are more likely than new teachers (5 years experience or less):**

- To believe doing homework is important (87% vs. 74%);
- To believe strongly that doing homework helps students learn more in school (60% vs. 36%);

**Teachers' Preparedness to Create Teachers:** How prepared do you feel to extremely prepared, very prepared, not at all prepared?

	% Extremely/
	<b>Total</b>
Base:	1000
	%
<b>EXTREMELY/ VERY PREPARED (NET)</b>	<b>69</b>
Extremely prepared	25
Very prepared	44
<b>LESS PREPARED (NET)</b>	<b>29</b>
Prepared	27
Not very prepared	1
Not at all prepared	*
Not sure	1
Decline to answer	1

- To agree strongly that homework helps students reach their goals for after high school (60% vs. 48%);
- To frequently use homework to develop students' interests (57% vs. 41%);
- To feel extremely or very prepared to create engaging homework assignments (74% vs. 58%);
- To review completed homework assignments in class discussions most or all of the time (76% vs. 59%); and
- To speak at least once a week to their students' other teachers about how much homework they are assigning (41% vs. 21%).

### Engaging Homework Assignments

create engaging homework assignments—  
prepared, not too prepared or

Very Prepared				
Years of Experience			Level of School	
0 to 5	6 to 20	21+	Elementary	Secondary
102	482	416	622	321
%	%	%	%	%
<b>58</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>67</b>
15	24	30	26	24
43	43	45	45	43
<b>41</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>30</b>
37	28	23	26	29
1	1	1	1	*
3	*	--	*	1
1	2	1	1	2
--	1	1	*	1

**Teachers and students devote substantial amounts of time to homework each week.**

- Teachers spend an average of 8.5 hours a week on responsibilities related to students’ homework, accounting for 15% of the time they spend on school-related responsibilities in a week.

**Amount of Time Students Spend Per Weekday**

**Q630 (Students):** On a typical school day (Monday–Friday),  
**Base: All Students**

	<b>Total</b>
Base:	2101
	%
None	6
5 minutes	5
15 minutes	12
30 minutes	19
45 minutes	13
<b>1 HOUR OR MORE (NET)</b>	<b>45</b>
1 hour	18
1.5 hours	10
2 hours	8
2.5 hours	3
3 hours or more	6
No answer	1

- Three-quarters of students (77%) spend at least 30 minutes doing homework on a typical school day, and 45% of students spend at least one hour on homework on a school day.
- One-quarter of students (24%) report that they do not have enough time to do all their homework.

### on Homework – Students by Amount of Time

how much time do you spend doing homework?

	Grade Level		Level of School		
	3-6	7-12	Mostly A's	A's and B's	C's and below
	922	1179	558	961	749
	%	%	%	%	%
	2	8	4	5	8
	5	4	3	4	7
	15	10	12	10	14
	23	17	17	19	21
	18	10	15	12	15
	<b>37</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>35</b>
	18	18	17	20	16
	9	11	11	10	9
	5	9	11	8	6
	2	4	4	4	1
	2	8	7	8	3
	*	1	*	1	*

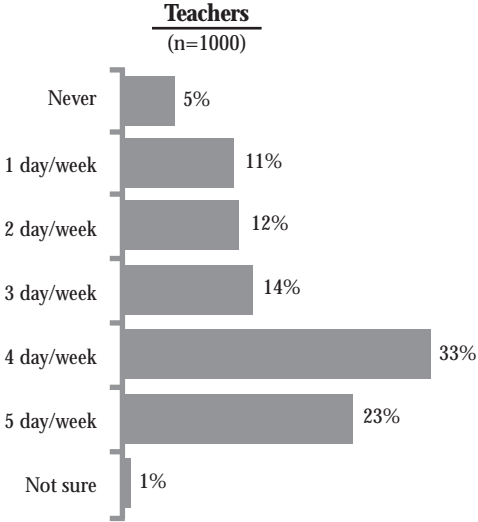
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## Frequency with Which Teachers Assign and Work on Homework

**Teacher:** During a typical school week, how often do you assign homework

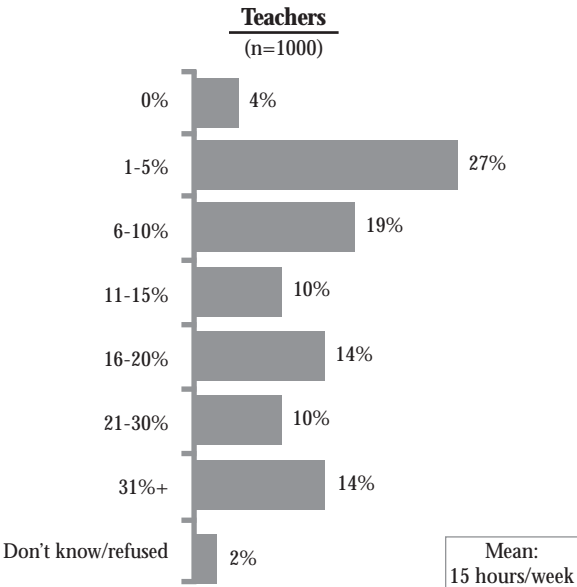
**Teachers:** How many hours would you say are related to students' homework?

### Frequency with Which Teachers Assign Homework



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### Proportion of Time Teachers Spend on Homework



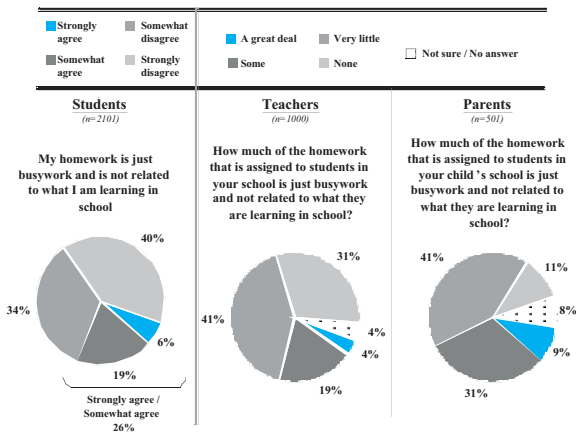
**A majority of parents believe that the right amount of homework is assigned.**

- Six in ten parents (60%) think that their child’s teachers assign the right amount of homework and an additional 25% think that too little homework is assigned.

**However, sizable numbers of students say that their homework is not relevant to their current schoolwork or their future goals.**

- One-quarter of students (26%) agree that their homework is busywork and not related to what they are learning in schools.
- Students who are not planning on going to college are more than twice as likely as others to believe that doing homework will not help them at all to reach their goals for after high school (19% vs. 7%).

**Perceptions About How Much of Homework is Busywork**



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**A sizable number of students, parents and teachers do not believe that homework is important.**

- One-quarter of students (23%) do not believe that doing homework is important.
- Two in ten parents (19%) do not believe that doing homework is important.
- Nearly two in ten teachers (16%) do not believe that doing homework is important.

**Students who do not believe that homework is important are lower achieving and say they receive a poorer quality of education than others.**

Students who do not believe that homework is important are more likely than other students:

- To usually get C's or below (40% vs. 27%);
- To not plan to go to college after high school (26% vs. 15%); and
- To rate the quality of education that they receive as only fair or poor (29% vs. 13%).

# CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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In conjunction with the *Survey*, a group of public school teachers, department chairs and principals representing a diverse range of schools from across the United States participated in an online strategy session to discuss their perceptions of the current homework experience and provide deeper insight into purposes, effectiveness, challenges and strategies for improvement.

## **PURPOSES.**

The educators emphasized that homework should reinforce what is taught in the classroom, enable students to practice concepts taught in class, build strong work habits, and teach skills of organization and responsibility.

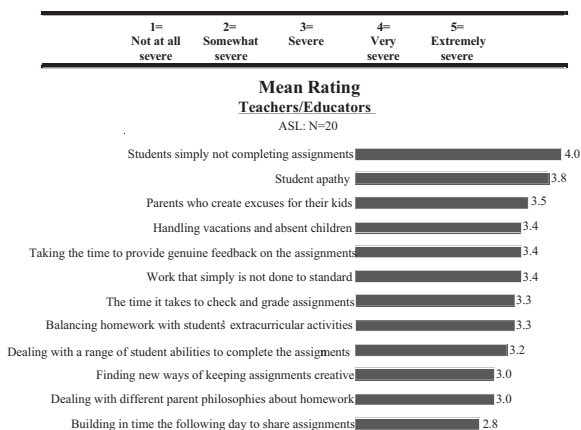
## **CHARACTERISTICS OF ENGAGING AND EFFECTIVE HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS.**

Effective homework, in the view of these educators, should have relevance to the lesson, actively reinforce the concept, be challenging yet doable, allow students to “work it out” on their own, relate to students’ lives, and be exploratory and be creative.

## **CHALLENGES.**

The educators identified homework challenges and rated their severity of impact each has on their ability to do their jobs well teachers/educators to effective homework.

## Severity of Top Homework Challenges in Teachers/Educators Doing Their Job Well



*Q: How severe are each of the following challenges to a teacher's ability to do their job well?*

### SOLUTIONS.

The educators identified potential solutions, rating each in terms of ease of implementation and level of impact, three of which were viewed as providing the most value with the least resistance:

- Ensure that assignments are genuinely relevant to the course and topic
- Build in time for feedback on assignments each day
- Establish effective policies at curriculum, grade and school levels

Other solutions worthy of consideration were not be rated as easy to implement but could have a significant impact on improving students' homework experience :

- Give teachers more time to effectively plan and prepare
- Give teachers more time to share best practices inside and outside of their schools and districts
- Check to make sure that students have the right support, space and tools at home
- Create better ongoing communication with parents about the homework and student success
- Do not allow teachers to assign busywork

# METLIFE SURVEY OF THE AMERICAN TEACHER

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Since 1984, MetLife has conducted this series of surveys that bring the views and voices of those closest to the classroom to the attention of policymakers and the public. Conducted by Harris Interactive, survey topics have changed to address key issues over the years – from reform to violence – but the premise remains the same: to give voice to teachers and others most familiar with classroom realities and most affected by education reform. Copies of *Surveys still in print may be requested by writing:* MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 27-01 Queens Plaza North, Long Island City, NY 11101.

**The full list of surveys and copies of the following recent surveys are available online at [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).**

- **The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience** examines the perspectives and experiences of teachers, students and parents regarding the purposes, quantity, quality, and value of homework (2007).
- **The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: 2006, Expectations and Experiences** examines the expectations of teachers upon entering the profession, factors that drive career satisfaction, and the perspectives of principals and education leaders on successful teacher preparation and long-term support.
- **The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2004-2005, Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships** examines the experiences of teachers, principals and secondary school students entering a new school; the degree to which personal connections affect their attitudes toward work and school; and the importance, and challenges of, parent involvement.

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- **The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2003, An Examination of School Leadership** explores the attitudes and opinions of teachers, principals, parents and students regarding school leadership; the role of the school leader in establishing the school's atmosphere; and relationships among members of the school community.
  - **The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2002: Student Life: School, Home & Community** focuses on student life by asking students and teachers their opinions on what students worry about, whether they participate in activities outside the school day and what parents know about their children's lives.
  - **The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2001: Key Elements of Quality Schools** explores how teachers, principals and students evaluate their own school on key measures of an effective school environment, such as: teacher quality, school building conditions, standards and expectations and relationships between key groups.
  - **The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 2000: Are We Preparing Students for the 21st Century?** examines teachers', students', and parents' views on where students are headed and how prepared they will be to reach their future goals.
  - **The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1999: Violence In America's Public Schools: Five Years Later** revisits issues addressed in the 1993 study, and compares current findings with the state of affairs five years ago. This survey investigates the issue of school violence from the perspectives of students, teachers and law enforcement officers.

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- **The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1998: Building Family-School Partnerships: Views of Teachers and Students**

revisits issues addressed in the 1987 survey and compares and contrasts current teacher opinions on parental involvement in education with those of a decade ago. This report focuses primarily on the various ways parents can be actively involved with their children's education.

## NOTES ON RESEARCH

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*The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience* was conducted by Harris Interactive®. A national sample of public school students in grades 3 through 12, public school teachers of grades K through 12 and parents of students in grades K through 12 participated in the *Survey*. In addition, public school principals, teachers and department chairs took part in an online strategy session on homework.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research combined both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a clear picture of attitudes and perceptions of teachers, parents and students. A nationally representative sample of 1,000 public school teachers of grades K through 12. Respondents were recruited using a targeted sample list. Telephone interviews averaged 12 minutes and were conducted in May 2007. A nationally representative sample of 501 parents of children in grades K through 12 was interviewed. Respondents were recruited using the Harris Interactive Panel Online (HPOL). Online interviews averaged 15 minutes in length and were conducted in June 2007. A nationally representative sample of 2,101 students in grades 3 through 12 was interviewed. A total of 976 students were surveyed during an English class using a self-administered questionnaire, and a total of 1,125 students were interviewed online using a self-administered questionnaire. Interviews averaged 15 minutes in length. All interviews were conducted between March and June 2007.

Detailed methodologies of all surveys and questionnaires, including the total responses to each

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question are included in the full *Survey* report.

In addition, Harris Interactive conducted a strategy session among twenty K through 12 teachers, principals and department chairs recruited from a targeted sample list. The session was conducted online using Harris Interactive's proprietary Advanced Strategy Lab® Online (ASL® Online) on June 12, 2007. Respondent comments from the group are included in the report.

### **ABOUT READING THE EXHIBITS AND FIGURES**

An asterisk (\*) on an exhibit signals a value of less than one-half percent (0.5%). A dash (-) represents a value of zero. Percentages may not always add up to 100% because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple answers from respondents. Calculations of responses discussed in the text are based on raw numbers and not percentages, therefore these figures may differ slightly from calculations based on percentages. The base for each question is the total number of respondents answering that question. Note that in some cases results may be based on small sample sizes. This is typically true when questions were asked of subgroups. Caution should be used in drawing any conclusions from the results based on these small samples. Percentages depicted may not add up to 100% because some answer categories may be excluded from the figure.

### **PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Harris team responsible for the design and analysis of the survey included Dana Markow, Ph.D., Vice President; Amie Kim, Research Manager; and Margot Liebman, Research Associate. Harris Interactive Inc. is responsible for final determination of the topics, question wording, collection of data, analysis and interpretation in the report.

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## **PUBLIC RELEASE OF SURVEY FINDINGS**

All Harris Interactive Inc. surveys are designed to comply with the code and standards of the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO) and the code of the National Council of Public Polls (NCPP). Because data from the survey may be released to the public, release must stipulate that the complete report is also available.

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A full copy of *The MetLife Survey of The American Teacher: The Homework Experience* (200 pages) can be downloaded from [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, 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).