Teachers’ perceptions of education and their profession
Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of the ASG-ACE Teachers Report Card, a collaboration between ASG and the Australian College of Educators (ACE) which measured teachers’ perceptions of education and their profession.

Education is one of the most critical investments parents, families and communities can make. However, just as important is the investment in the teachers who share their time, passion and energy teaching students and preparing them for a future that will demand entrepreneurial drive in a global marketplace.

To secure perspectives from across the industry, we surveyed 380 teachers with varying degrees of industry experience, ranging from school principals and heads of department to part-time teaching staff in metropolitan and regional areas. The teachers who participated in the survey teach at government, private and faith based schools around Australia.

We hope the report will give a voice to teachers and encourage open conversations about education, including testing, stress, engagement and use of technology.

It’s our hope, schools, teachers, policy makers and other stakeholders with a passion for education find the results from the survey useful and that it leads to better outcomes for Australian students and the education sector as a whole.

John Velegrinis,
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1 Government schools – a school that is conducted by or on behalf of the government of a state or territory. Faith based schools – these are sometimes known as systemic schools i.e. managed by a centralised system authority and some are independent schools. Private schools – some private schools are also classified as independent schools i.e. set up and governed on an individual school basis and answerable to a governing board or management committee.
The inaugural ASG-ACE Teachers Report Card, a joint initiative between ASG and the Australian College of Educators (ACE) surveyed teachers on a range of issues including testing, curriculum, stress, wellbeing, support, engagement, satisfaction, technology and opportunity at schools.

The report discovered:

- One in five (21 per cent) teachers have considered leaving the profession in the past three months.
- Almost half of educators (49 per cent) believe there is too much standardised testing (e.g. NAPLAN) at schools, while three per cent of teachers surveyed believe there is too little.
- 48 per cent of educators feel stressed either ‘most of the time’ or ‘fairly often’ in a typical week.
- Teachers in faith based schools say they have the worst work-life balance, with 74 per cent reporting a typical week is either ‘less balanced than they would like’ or ‘not balanced at all’.
- 49 per cent of government school teachers believe students are missing out on educational opportunities either ‘very often’ or ‘often’ because of their parents’ financial situation.
- 47 per cent of government school educators believe the level of infrastructure at their school is either ‘inadequate or non-existent’, compared to 24 per cent of private school teachers and 21 per cent of faith based school teachers.
A passion for teaching

The ASG-ACE Teachers Report Card confirmed teachers are passionate about their job, with 96 per cent of respondents saying they find teaching rewarding, and 91 per cent of teachers either ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with their profession.

Nine out of 10 teachers reported a sense of pride about their profession and speak positively about their jobs to their friends and family. This is not surprising as teaching is widely acknowledged as a profession that is driven by passion.

The survey also discovered that teachers who have been in the profession for more than two decades are more satisfied (93 per cent) in their job compared to teachers who have been teaching for less than 20 years (85 per cent).

Getting that promotion

While nearly six in 10 (59 per cent) teachers agree having the opportunity to get promoted is important, the survey found more than half (55 per cent) think it rarely happens.

The survey revealed 73 per cent of school leaders (principals, deputy principals and heads of departments) believe the opportunity to get promoted is either ‘very important’ or ‘important’, significantly above classroom teachers (53 per cent).

The perception is more acute when you factor in gender. Six out of 10 female teachers said opportunities for teachers to get promoted happen rarely, compared to 48 per cent of male teachers.

The survey also revealed teachers who have been in the profession for more than two decades are more accepting of not being promoted (46 per cent) than teachers who have been teaching for less than 20 years (29 per cent).

The opportunity for promotion appears more prevalent in secondary schools with 80 per cent of preschool teachers and 68 per cent of primary school teachers revealing promotion was ‘limited’ or ‘very limited’ compared to 51 per cent of secondary school teachers.

These results correlate with the finding that one in five teachers (21 per cent) have seriously thought about leaving the profession in the past three months.

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<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>I find teaching very rewarding/rewarding</td>
<td>96%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall, in my job I am very satisfied/satisfied</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When talking about my job, I am typically very positive/positive</td>
<td>89%</td>
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What about professional development?

While an overwhelming majority of teachers (95 per cent) agree they are either ‘very supported’ or ‘supported’ by their colleagues, more than half (51 per cent) feel they occasionally or hardly ever have access to mentoring if needed. Among teachers who participated in some form of professional development in the past three months, there was a high level of agreement (87 per cent) that it was ‘very beneficial’ or ‘beneficial’.

While you would not expect a teacher to dip into their pocket to pay for their own professional development, 43 per cent of teachers revealed they paid for at least some of the costs of their own professional development.
Teacher stress and work-life balance

Teachers have a demanding workload and it is taking its toll. Almost half the teachers surveyed (48 per cent) reported they are stressed either ‘most of the time’ or ‘fairly often’ in a typical week, with only 12 per cent of teachers indicating they are very rarely stressed.

The research also found teachers in faith based schools believe they have the worst work-life balance, with 74 per cent reporting a typical week is either ‘less balanced than they would like’ or ‘not balanced at all’, just ahead of private school teachers (73 per cent) and government school educators (67 per cent).

The findings were even more concerning for teachers in leadership positions, with 77 per cent of principals, deputy principals and heads of departments revealing a typical week is either ‘less balanced than they would like’ or ‘not balanced at all’.

On average, classroom teachers conduct almost 40 per cent of their working life outside standard teaching hours, with 21 per cent doing additional work from home. Classroom teachers also reported they only spend half (51 per cent) of their time actually teaching, with the remainder spent on planning, administration work, marking and engaging with parents.

The results of the survey indicate that stress is dealt with differently according to gender and length of time in the teaching profession.

Significantly more female teachers (52 per cent) feel stressed at work compared to their male colleagues (41 per cent). Experience also makes a difference, with 62 per cent of teachers who have been in the profession for 20 years or less revealing they felt stressed either ‘most of the time’ or ‘fairly often’ compared to 41 per cent of teachers who have been teaching for more than two decades.
The parent-teacher partnership

It is commonly understood parents and teachers need to work together for the benefit of the child, but how do teachers rate this partnership?

The ASG-ACE Teachers Report Card found 81 per cent of teachers believe the level of engagement between teachers and parents is ‘about right’, with 10 per cent believing it is ‘too little’, and nine per cent believe it is ‘too much’.

Teachers also believe their views and that of parents towards their children are ‘aligned’ or ‘perfectly aligned’ 85 per cent of the time, while 15 per cent of teachers believe there is no alignment.

Six in 10 (61 per cent) teachers also believe parents regard them ‘highly’ or ‘very highly’. However, there is room for improvement with 39 per cent feeling teachers are generally ‘disregarded’ or ‘not highly regarded’ by parents.

Dealing with disruptive classroom behaviour

Reassuringly, the research found 96 per cent of teachers believe their ability to deal with disruptive behaviour in class is either ‘adequate’ or ‘more than adequate’. However, 10 per cent of teachers who have been in the profession for 20 years or less feel they have either an ‘inadequate’ or ‘very inadequate’ ability to deal with disruptive behaviour.

The ability to deal effectively with disruptive classroom behaviour significantly increases for teachers with more than 20 years’ experience (52 per cent) compared to 35 per cent of educators who have been teaching for less than two decades.

While teachers acknowledge they play an important role in managing students’ behaviour in the classroom, almost two thirds of teachers (64 per cent) believe the responsibility for students’ behaviours rests mainly with parents.
To test or not to test

‘How much is too much’ is a question that lies at the heart of many conversations around standardised testing in schools. Opinions on this subject are generally divided and teachers are no exception with almost half (49 per cent) believing there is too much standardised testing at schools.

When school types were factored in, 61 per cent of teachers in faith based schools reported the amount of standardised testing (e.g. NAPLAN) is about right, compared to 45 per cent of private school teachers and 42 per cent of government school teachers.

When asked about the effectiveness of the current forms of testing learning outcomes, 45 per cent of teachers said it was either ‘ineffective’ or ‘very ineffective’, compared to 55 per cent of teachers who said it was ‘effective’ or ‘very effective’.

The research also revealed 48 per cent of all teachers surveyed believe the focus at their school is more on standardised testing. A higher number (66 per cent) of teachers in leadership positions think that the focus of their school is more on supporting student development than standardised testing.
The role of technology in the classroom

The use of technology in the classroom has been an important talking point in education circles, so it is not surprising the majority of teachers (84 per cent) agree technology enhances learning.

However, a look at how these perceptions play out in different education sectors show there are some key differences.

The research found 90 per cent of government school teachers believe the increasing use of technology has either ‘significantly enhanced’ or ‘enhanced’ learning outcomes in the classroom, compared to 84 per cent of private school teachers.

But not everyone agrees. Interestingly, the report found 25 per cent of teachers in faith based schools believe technology has had a detrimental effect in the classroom, claiming technology has either ‘decreased’ or ‘significantly decreased’ learning outcomes.

A third of preschool educators also believe the use of technology in the classroom should be ‘reduced’ or ‘significantly reduced’. However, 47 per cent of teachers based in regional areas would like the use of technology in the classroom to be either ‘significantly increased’ or ‘increased’ compared to just 35 per cent of their metropolitan counterparts.

Access to education

Access to education is a universal right, and while this is generally a given in Australia not every child has access to educational opportunities if a financial investment is required.

This perception is more acute among government school teachers with almost half (49 per cent) believing students miss out on opportunities because of their parents’ financial situation.

In comparison, 31 per cent of private school teachers and 17 per cent of teachers in faith based schools think similarly.

The research also revealed 67 per cent of teachers believe the level of infrastructure at their school is either ‘adequate’ or ‘more than adequate’. However, a third of educators indicated infrastructure at their school was either ‘inadequate’ or ‘non-existent’ with this perception increasing to almost half of government school educators (47 per cent).
What is the future of education?

Teachers agree technology is the way of the future when asked about the biggest shifts in education over the next decade.

Teachers also believe students must develop strong communication skills (89 per cent), critical thinking and problem solving (87 per cent), collaboration and relationship skills (85 per cent), adaptability (84 per cent), and imaginative and creativity skills (74 per cent).

Almost three-quarters of teachers (74 per cent) believe it is ‘very important’ or ‘extremely important’ to increase their experience and skills in building strong relationships with students, and 70 per cent of educators believe motivating students is also an important skill to meet the future demands of education.

It is reassuring to note that 90 per cent of teachers are either ‘confident’ or ‘very confident’ in their teaching ability to meet the demands in the classroom of the future.
Conclusion

Teachers play a valuable and inspirational role in the development of our young people and it is essential their views are heard by decision makers, policy makers and key stakeholders with a passion for the education sector.

We must actively seek the opinions of our teachers who will continue to play a critical role in shaping the future of Australia. It is time to listen and make smart decisions regarding schools, resources and the opportunities teachers need.

Specifically, we must improve teacher retention levels because it is unacceptable that one in five educators have considered quitting the profession in the past three months. We must find a way to reduce the level of stress our teachers face through greater support or additional health and wellbeing options, which in turn should improve their work-life balance ratio.

While challenging, we must also find a happy medium between the levels of standardised testing and supporting student development in our schools so teachers and students can flourish.

Students should be given the best opportunity to succeed, irrespective of their parents pay packet. It is important that we find ways to support students so that they are not missing out on valuable educational opportunities because of their parents’ or guardians’ financial situation.

Most importantly we must work as a community to ensure the standing of the teaching profession is more valued and respected by the broader public.
About ASG

We help families and individuals fulfil their education aspirations with savings plans that help cover the rising cost of education, and a range of resources to support learning.

We support children’s education from early childhood, primary to secondary, and adult education from post-secondary to professional development for upskilling or retraining for a new career.

Since our inception in 1974, we have supported the education journey of more than 530,000 children, and have returned more than $2.5 billion in education benefits and scholarship payments to members and their children. We are a member owned organisation, which means profits are invested into the business to benefit our members and their children.

ASG is an active advocate for education and teachers. We manage the popular ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (ASG NEiTA), a national community based teacher recognition program. Over the years we have recognised and awarded more than 1000 teachers and disbursed $940,000 in professional grants, prizes, and endowments to support the ongoing development of teachers and schools.

We also work in partnership with Monash University’s Faculty of Education on a mentoring program, which links up the ASG NEiTA recipients with Monash University student teachers to provide the students an invaluable opportunity to learn about ‘real classroom’ experiences from expert teachers.

For more information about ASG call 131 ASG (131 274) or visit www.asg.com.au

About ACE

The Australian College of Educators (ACE) is the national professional association for educators across all sectors and systems.

ACE provides a collective voice for all Australian educators. It advocates, leads and drives positive change and raises the status of the education profession.

ACE encourages and fosters open, collaborative discussion to enable our broad membership to provide the best outcomes for Australian students across all levels of education.

For more information about ACE call 03 9035 5473 or visit www.austcolled.com.au

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