

# June 2014 Horace Mann Educator Advisory Panel Survey\*

Horace Mann Market Research

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## Life of a Teacher

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\*The Horace Mann Educator Advisory Panel has been in place since 2004 and consists of educators from across the country. Educators that sign up for the advisory panel are asked to complete 4 to 5 online surveys each year. Survey topics include a mix of educational-related topics and topics related to insurance and retirement. Currently, around 1,700 educators belong to the panel and are mostly Public K-12 teachers. Less than 15% of the panel members are Horace Mann customers.

# Why Be a Teacher?

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# Life of a Teacher: What is the most fulfilling part about being a teacher?

527 Educators Responding	% Educators
Watching kids learn, grow, and develop	38%
Having an impact on the next generation	28%
Seeing a child "get it" / Seeing the light go on	25%
Working with kids and having a passion for teaching	10%
Building relationships / visiting with former students	8%
Seeing kids get excited / Seeing their smiles	7%
Working with parents and families / Being a role model for students	3%

Teachers enjoy watching kids develop both academically and emotionally. Having an Impact on students' lives is the reason why many go into teaching.

Teachers also take great pleasure in witnessing the moment when students first understand a new concept, the "aha" moment.

*"The most fulfilling part of being a teacher is watching students at the moment they realize they have learned something new. They got it and no one can take it away. It is a light bulb moment."*

*"Helping young children explore their world and learn about all the things that they are interested in and watch their love of learning grow."*

*"Watching kids learn and grow, socially, emotionally, and academically."*

*"My most rewarding part about being a teacher is watching children absorb knowledge like a sponge and blossom into mature productive adults."*

*"30 seconds of what we say or do can change a life for good or for bad. That's making a difference!"*

**Some teachers like seeing former students and hearing about their accomplishments. It lets them know that their efforts are appreciated and worthwhile.**

*"When your former students come back to visit, and say, 'I know how to do this because of you.'"*

*"I have been teaching long enough to experience my former students bringing their children into my classroom. I have often heard the words: 'You were my favorite teacher' or 'You always made me feel important.' This keeps me in education!"*

**Q. What is the most fulfilling part about being a teacher?**

# Life of a Teacher: Why did you become a teacher?

526 Educators Responding	% Educators
Have a passion for teaching / Love kids	34%
Wanted to help children	18%
Love to learn	14%
Believed I could make a difference	14%
Was influenced by friends/family	9%
Always admired my teachers	8%
Was in another related career	3%
Didn't know what else to do	3%
Like the schedule and the hours	2%
Played school as a child	2%
It's entertaining	1%
Had a negative experience at school	1%

**Teachers cite many reasons for becoming teachers. They love working with children, learning, and helping others learn. For some, it's a family occupation and for others their inspiration came from former teachers.**

*"I love kids."*

*"It's something I've always naturally done and I wanted to be able to help kids."*

*"Making a difference in children's lives is the reason I teach. It is very fulfilling to watch a child's eyes light up when he 'gets' it. Helping a child overcome adversities is inspiring."*

*"I love science and wanted to pass along that love of science."*

*"I have always enjoyed learning and sharing my knowledge with others. This job allows me to do this and get paid for it."*

*"I say the profession chose me. I never really considered any other career as teaching fit my personality, style, and nature."*

*"Having come from a family where both of my parents are teachers I saw how rewarding of a job it was to help students learn and become a life long learner."*

*"It is sort of our family business...everyone is a teacher!"*

*"All the good teachers I had! I feel like I've known since third grade I've wanted to be a teacher, and I've never wanted to be anything else!"*

*"I had a Math teacher in middle school who flipped the switch for me and I knew that I could do the same thing for students. It was something I thought that I could share with the students and help make middle school not so bad for students."*

**Q. Why did you choose to become a teacher?**

# Life of a Teacher: Moment of Greatest Impact

447 Educators Responding	% Educators
Being visited by a former student	20%
Watching a struggling student succeed	15%
A compliment from a parent	14%
Being recognized/appreciated by a student or the community	14%
Just seeing students learn	7%
Seeing your students graduate	7%
When a child reads for the first time	6%
Getting a "thank you" note from a student	5%
A particular Principal / Administrative initiative	4%
<i>Principal/Initiatives – positive</i>	2%
<i>Principal/Initiatives - less than positive</i>	2%
Interacting with, or being inspired by other teachers	4%
A workshop or educational achievement	3%
A different teaching assignment	3%
Helping an abused or neglected student	2%
A particular class that was special	2%
Dealing with the death of a student or a student's family member	2%
Teaching your own children	1%

**Seeing students do well and being a part of their accomplishments provide the most meaningful moments for many teachers.**

*“I went to Sam's Warehouse to pick up a few items and ran into a student who had been in my remedial class about four years earlier. He was the door greeter there and, after the normal pleasantries, said, ‘Please tell me you are still teaching.’ I assured him I was and asked why; his response has kept me going in my most frustrating moments: ‘I just want you to know, you are the reason I started reading. I never really read an entire book until we read 1984 in your class. I never realized the ideas that were in books. I have a whole library now and read at least one book every month. Thank you.’ I thanked him for reminding me of the real reason I teach.”*

*“I was shopping at the local grocery store and one of the checkers was a former student. He told me he was going to become a prison guard and that if it weren't for me he would have been on ‘the other side of the bars.’ WOW!”*

*“Watching a young man (in a poverty stricken area with little support from home) practice his trumpet in the morning before school started. A large crowd of students surrounded him and applauded at the end of his piece. I saw true hope in the eyes of a little boy who seldom has the opportunity to experience success.”*

*“When a student stated that I was the first one who ever told him I was proud of him.”*

**Q. Describe the single moment that has had the most impact in your teaching career.**

# Life of a Teacher: Most Memorable Classroom Event

442 Educators Responding	% Educators
Student projects / Science experiments	20%
The success of a student or class	15%
Celebrations	11%
Connecting with a student	9%
Student performances	7%
Field trips	5%
Funny misunderstandings or happenings	4%
Achievement of a special needs student	4%
Tragedies such as 9/11 or death of a student	3%
Special guest in the classroom	3%
Getting an award	2%
Success of a former student	2%
Classroom prank	2%
Special project for the community	2%
Gift from a student	2%
Seeing students graduate	2%
Student's bad behavior	2%
Fundraising projects	1%
Playtime / Relaxing time with students	1%
Student emergency	1%
Being included in family events	0.5%
Leading/sponsoring student clubs	0.5%
Misc.	2%

**Teachers have many rich and colorful experiences in the classroom. Below are just a few memorable moments.**

*“While dissecting sharks in Biology class, I had a student who got ‘bitten’ by the shark.”*

*“Helping a group of students blow up a volcano experiment in front of my student teacher's practicum supervising teacher. Oh boy.....all over myself, all over the four students, and all over the practicum supervising teacher.”*

*“Building the bridges of Portland with the Architectural Society of Portland. We had real architects come into the classroom to help the students build the bridges using real wood products.”*

*“Getting a student who was on a 1st grade level with lots of behavior problems to write a rap explaining Newton’s laws and sing to the whole school.”*

*“When a cat fell through the ceiling in the really old building I was teaching in my very first year.”*

*“Having a group of students engaged in an historical debate and then having a fire drill only to have the students continue the debate down the stairs, in the parking lot, back up the stairs and continuing throughout the period!”*

*“Christmas breakfasts -- Each year I make snowman pancakes for my class.”*

*After my car had been broken into and my laptop and all my flash drives stolen, my honors English class threw a surprise party and presented me with poems and flash drives with a homemade card telling me that they cared.*

**Q. What has been your most memorable classroom event ever?**

# Finding Humor in the Classroom

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# Life of a Teacher: Funny Things a Student Said

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*“... the best was when a student shouted out the answer to the water cycle, saying that when the water goes into the cloud, it's ‘constipation’ [condensation].”*

*“A student found out I was pregnant and asked ‘Well, how did that happen?’”*

*“A student told me her grandpa had an antique car. It was so old you had to turn a key to open the door.”*

*“Are we getting on your nerves? Your hair is turning gray!’ ‘I bet you do math in your sleep’”*

*“Are you sure you like your new haircut?’ ‘Do you really think that outfit goes together?’”*

*“I know I'm not supposed to ask during a test, but is a yard about as long as a yard stick?’ After teaching a class about how to use a thesaurus, one boy shouted, ‘This is the greatest book ever!’”*

*“But I always wore my goggles’: a former student said this after I had not seen him for several years. I asked him what he has been doing, and he said three to five (making meth). I am a chemistry teacher.”*

*“Calling me mom. And when a student told me he thought I was 54 when I was 28.”*

*“Can I live with you? You shop at Publix?’”*

*“Can I live with you because I want to be taller? How much food does it take to feed you?’”*

*“From a parent: ‘My student is at home, can you send someone to get them?’”*

*“I am a Spanish teacher. Each year, at least one student asks me: 1. How do you say ‘taco’ in Spanish? 2. Are there female bulls?”*

*“I had a group of students come to my room from a different class and one student said, ‘We had a prostitute in our room!’ (he meant substitute!)”*

*You're almost smart enough to teach third grade. (teaching second then) We love to hang the garlic on our tree. (garland)*

**Q. What are the top 2 or 3 funniest things a student has ever said to you?**

# Life of a Teacher: Funny Things About Being a Teacher

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*“Being called Mom by tons of children that are not yours... “*

*“The kids slang!!!! It is a language all its own.”*

*“Trying to make it to the restroom, eating on the go, being both the child's teacher and parent.”*

*“Eating lunch in less than 5 minutes... much like being a parent. Feeling shocked at the end of the day that you are making your FIRST trip to the restroom all day.”*

*“Kids will tell just about anything that happens at home to people at school.”*

*“You gulp your lunch down because you never know what emergency might come up in your 25 minute ‘duty-free’ lunch - ha! ha! Teachers have given speeches about things like body noises, and how to respond to them, no matter what level they teach.”*

*“You correct grammar in public. I have asked total strangers to pull their pants up. Parents ask you how to handle their kids at times.”*

*“You have to have a sense of humor when students exhibit extreme behaviors. Primary children often expect you to cater to their every need and can throw some pretty good fits if everything doesn't go their way. I would love to replay some of them at their graduations.”*

*“You have to keep a straight face when students tell you about things that happened at home that parents would not want you to know.”*

*“What they bring to share during show and share. What is in their back packs?”*

*“To be a good teacher you need to sometimes be a kid yourself.”*

*“There most definitely are ‘stupid’ questions and anyone who believes there aren't should come visit my room.”*

**Q. What are the top 2 or 3 funniest things about being a teacher that no one on the outside could ever understand?**

# Life of a Teacher: Things Teachers Joke About

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*"1). We count down to summer, 'Hang in there only 6 more weeks' 2). What's the three best things about teaching? 'June, July and August'"*

*"Again, because my program is SO different. We joke about crazy things that happen during home-visits (dog pee, questionable liquids, questionable smells, etc.) and how funny infants and toddlers are in general."*

*"Placing Ritalin in the water to calm all students down."*

*"Probably the hygiene/or lack of that we have to deal with!"*

*"Parents excuses for students not doing homework or why they are late for school."*

*"Private matters and sometimes comical comments about administration....."*

*"Students facial expressions."*

*"Students picking their noses!!"*

*"Talking to other adults in their teacher voice."*

*"Teachers joke about having an 'iron' bladder, because in what other industry do professionals have to 'schedule' a bathroom break with a co-worker!"*

*"The disgusting things that get left behind in your room are astounding. Oh, and adults that don't teach have no idea how many bags of Cheetos they eat."*

*"We joke about 'summer' that we never get, students' funny personalities and sayings, crazy things that happen in class, students we share that are particularly trying (keeps us sane)."*

*"We joke about student's excuses for being late."*

**Q. What do teachers joke about with each other that no one on the outside could ever understand?**

# Hardest Part About Being a Teacher

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# Life of a Teacher: What is the hardest part about being a teacher?

500 Educators Responding	% Educators
Dealing with parents / Parental involvement	20%
The workload - too little time	18%
Decision makers: government, administrators	17%
Unrealistic expectations / Can't help every child	13%
Amount of paperwork	9%
Motivating students	8%
Students' home lives	7%
Amount of testing / Fairness of testing	7%
Student discipline / Behavior problems	5%
Teacher pay / Lack of respect for teachers	5%
Preparing lesson plans	3%
Grading	2%
Too many meetings	2%
Maintaining objectivity	2%
Misc.	2%

**Parents, time constraints, administrators, testing, and paperwork are just a few of the challenges teachers face on a day to day basis.**

*“Managing the workload. Here are a few jobs I do that are not directly teaching class: daily attendance, grade papers, monitor struggling student's grades, gather missing work for absent, in and out of school suspended, long-term homebound, modify assignments and tests for IEP students, make parent contacts, meet with the clubs and teams I sponsor, arrange transportation for competitions and field trips, apply for grants to pay for transportation, deal with upset students (relationships, friends, family issues), make sure all students have supplies, weekly reports to admin on my advisement students, weekly collaboration, monthly professional development, run the recycling program, search the internet for new resources and technology, learn how to use new technology being implemented in my school, help plan the outdoor classroom we are trying to build, and oh yeah, lesson planning.”*

*“It seems as though parents are less and less willing to play a role in their children's education...which in turn leads to children taking less responsibility for it.”*

*“Teaching students to overcome their home environment... i.e. students who have parents in prison.”*

*“Different expectations from so many different people (other teachers, parents, administration, special ed. staff, etc.).”*

*“Hard work, long hours, and small pay.”*

**Q. What is the hardest part about being a teacher?**

# Life of a Teacher: What do you wish you could do better?

442 Educators Responding	% Educators
Manage time better / Be better organized	31%
Reach more students / Be innovative	26%
Motivate/engage/inspire students	9%
Communicate with parents / Recognize family problems	7%
Work on classroom management	5%
Utilize technology better	4%
Be more patient	3%
Be a disciplinarian	3%
Be more approachable / Build better relationships	3%
Balance workload	2%
Accept limitations / Accept things as they are	2%
Be a better advocate for education	2%
Do more hands-on projects	2%
Professional development / Help other teachers	1%
Prepare students for tests	1%
Understand and implement Common Core	1%
Spend more money on supplies	1%
Misc.	2%

**Managing a difficult workload and helping every student succeed are two themes that run throughout teachers' comments. Many teachers express the desire to help every child, and would like to be more innovative, but are frustrated with limited time and resources.**

*"I wish that I could reach out to more students in our district. We have a very high poverty and minority student population and they have so many needs that are not being met. I wish that there were more supports and resources to offer them to get ahead in their lives."*

*"Explain concepts in many different ways so that everyone gets it."*

*"I wish I knew how to reach and motivate more students to show them how important free education is."*

*"Meet more of the individual needs of each child."*

*"Have more time with the students to teach."*

*"Give students immediate feedback on their work but I lack the time to do this."*

*"I wish I could motivate students to do better or even do something."*

*"Be more observant of family dynamics that may not be obvious."*

*"I wish I could spend more time on certain subjects. Whether it be because of high interest or just because they need more instruction...it feels like we are always having to move on in order to 'fit it all in'."*

**Q. What do you wish you could do better?**

# Life of a Teacher: Is your work valued by your students?

479 Educators Responding	% Educators
<b>Yes - Valued by students / Get positive feedback</b>	<b>80%</b>
They say "Thank you"	8%
Give hugs	7%
Students pay compliments such as "You're the best"	5%
Write notes/letters of appreciation	4%
Get smiles	4%
Create pictures or booklets	2%
<b>Sometimes / Some do, some don't</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>No - Not valued by students</b>	<b>10%</b>
Complain about homework or subject	3%
Former students show appreciation	3%

**Most teachers believe that students generally appreciate what they do. While not all students are expressive, some say thank you, pay compliments, give hugs, write notes or draw pictures. Older students offer less feedback than younger students but occasionally a former student returns to say, "Thank you."**

*"I feel that my work is valuable. I have a drawer full of testimonials from past students who have reached out to me to let me know that I have played an important role in their education. I reread this cards and letters during moments of depression. Some students are just not going to ever be happy no matter what you do!"*

*"Absolutely, yes. I hear about once a month - "best day ever!". Too funny. I hear frequently my words coming from the mouths of students, that is some of the best feedback possible!"*

*"If I didn't feel like my work and effort was valued, I wouldn't be teaching."*

*"I get both positive and negative feedback; on the positive- smiles, 'I like your class,' students who later tell me how much they appreciate what I taught them; on the negative-rolled eyes, 'I don't like your class.'"*

*"Very valued = that is why we keep putting the hours in."*

*"I really think they don't value it at first, but as time passes they come back and tell me how they appreciated the things they learned in my class."*

*"Unfortunately I feel less and less valued by my students every year. Yes I have a few that I can tell want to learn and appreciate the effort I put into teaching. But, more and more that is getting fewer and farther between."*

**Q. Do you feel like your work and effort is valued by your students and what kinds of feedback (positive or negative) do you most often get from your students?**

# Life of a Teacher: Is your work valued by parents?

477 Educators Responding	% Educators
<b>Yes - Valued by parents / Get positive feedback</b>	<b>65%</b>
“Thank you” / Compliments	12%
Cards / Letters / Email	7%
Small gifts / Food	1%
Invited to family event	0.2%
<b>Sometimes / Some do, Some don't</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>No - Not valued by parents</b>	<b>25%</b>
Complaints / Negative remarks	6%

**Teachers are less optimistic about feedback they get from parents than from students. Occasionally, parents look at the teacher as the reason for their child's problems at school.**

*“I am split on this. Many of my parents do value my time and effort. They tell me this and I can see it in their actions. Some parents do not express that my effort is valued in that they feel that they do not share a part of the responsibility in helping their child. They do not see that their actions away from school have a big impact on the child at school.”*

*“Most feedback is not good from parents, they want to blame someone besides their child.”*

*“Yes, I do. I approach parents asking them essentially to be in a partnership with me to help educate their child. I get positive feedback from parents. It is a rare parent who will not ‘partner’ with me to help their child succeed.”*

*“No, no, no, no, no, no.”*

*“Generally, the feedback that I get back from parents is positive. Recently, I saw a parent leaving a restaurant as I was entering. I asked her how her son (a former student now graduated) was doing. Her response to me was, ‘He is doing just fine’. She walked out the door, and then she turned to me and said, ‘Thanks to you’. That is what makes teaching worthwhile. Not all feedback from parents will be positive. There are some who didn't like you when you had their child, and still won't. You can't dwell on that. Just do your best as a caring teacher.”*

*“I feel that it was valued when I was in elementary school but not so much in high school.”*

**Q. Do you feel like your work and effort is valued by your students' parents and what kinds of feedback (positive or negative) do you most often get from parents?**

# Rewarding and Recognizing Teachers

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# Life of a Teacher: Rewarding a Teacher

479 Educators Responding	% Educators
Technology	41%
Vacation	18%
Cash / Gift cards	17%
Field trips	14%
Classroom/Office supplies	13%
Books / Library / Classroom library	10%
Classroom makeover	9%
Professional development / Sabbatical	9%
Spa / Luxury time	5%
New car / A van to transport students	2%
A science lab / Music room / Outdoor classroom	2%
Down payment on a house	2%
Paid helper / Classroom assistant	2%

**Rewards ranged from educational items like a classroom makeover to personal items like a cruise or a spa vacation. Technology was the most common suggestion. Technology items requested were: tablets or computers for all students, smartboards, projectors, printers, and photo copiers.**

*“A vacation far, far away from teaching for a week!”*

*“I would give the money to someone who wanted to travel and do research for the subject they teach.”*

*“Pay off student loans, supply classroom, add new technology.”*

*“An Ipad for every student in the classroom.”*

*“Use that money to buy things for his or her classroom or go to training/conferences that interest him or her.”*

*“Classroom supplies and a vacation!”*

*“A complete drum line for the band teachers in my district.”*

*“A part time aide...we always need more adults to lower the student to adult ratio.”*

*“A gift card to buy books for their classroom.”*

*“CASH to do with what they pleased.”*

*“A total room make over...new desks and equipment, carpet...the works. 2) Any technology they needed 3) Year of massages and facials.”*

**Q. If you had \$10,000 and could give away a prize that would DELIGHT a fellow teacher, what would it be?**

# Life of a Teacher: Advertisements Targeting Teachers

210 Educators Responding - Specific ads	# Educators
Hallmark commercials / Greeting cards / Movies	20
Kid President	11
Freedom Writers	7
Taylor Mali	3
Ron Clark Story	3
Stand and Deliver	3
Dr. Seuss	2
Jimmy Kimmel	2
Mr. Holland's Opus	2
Paul Harvey ad	2
Dead Poet's Society	2
Gettysburg Address ad on PBS	2
Dangerous Minds	2
Chicken soup for teachers	2
TED videos	2
Matt Damon ad	2
Thank You Mr. Falker	2
Mrs. Hatcher (McDonald's commercial)	1
Dear Abby letter	1
Video about Michael Jordan	1
Facing the Giants	1
Staples - Happiest Time of The Year	1

Specific ads continued	# Educators
People Magazine - Educator of the Year Issue	1
TEACH - Davis Guggenheim	1
The Essential 55	1
Pay it Forward	1
Up the Down Stair Case	1
To Sir with Love	1

General Preference	# Educators
Ads that show teachers being appreciated	53
Ads that are inspirational	44
Ads that are funny	24
Ads that are educational	8
Videos on anti-bullying	5

Ads seen on Social Media	# Educators
Videos on Youtube	12
Something seen on Facebook	8
Something seen on Pinterest	4

**Teachers don't like negative political ads targeting education, or videos such as Waiting for Superman, Won't Back Down, or Bad Teacher.**

*“Several commercials over the years have used former students discussing their favorite teachers.”*

*“Any that show appreciation for what teachers do every day. Tying shoes, standing out for yard duty in the rain, cleaning up messes, crowd control, correcting papers, wiping tears and giving hugs.”*

*“I saw posters from Scholastic showing a teacher and a sport figure/actor/important person with their favorite teacher.”*

*“Hallmark often has advertisements about teachers that are quite moving.”*

**Q. Have you ever seen an advertisement or video targeting teachers or educators that really moved you emotionally, whether via humor, inspiration, empathy or otherwise?**

# Final Comments

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# Life of a Teacher: Final Comments

377 Educators Responding	% Educators
Teaching is difficult but rewarding / It's a great job	45%
Teachers work long hours	14%
Salary could be better / Teachers need raises	13%
Teachers are underappreciated / There's a general lack of respect	13%
Govt. and school administrators sometimes create obstacles	11%
Teachers care about their students	6%
Testing is a burden on both teachers and students	4%
Burnout can be a problem	4%
Love to hear from former students	2%
A teacher's success is the success of their students	2%
Education is changing and not for the better	2%
Summer gives teachers a chance to rejuvenate	1%
Misc.	2%

**Despite the long hours and many challenges, teachers love what they do. They adapt to changes in curriculum, technology, political climate, and teaching methods and manage to stay focused on teaching students and helping them succeed.**

*"Teachers are in it for the children."*

*"Teaching has lost respect through the last several generations."*

*"It's much more difficult than the public perceives."*

*"It is hard, rewarding, fun, and challenging. I can't imagine doing anything else. It is the best job ever!"*

*"I love being a teacher, but I really dislike the current climate of public education. I am concerned for the children and for the teachers. Many good teachers are unhappy and I am concerned about my own children being in public schools in the US. I wholeheartedly believe in the value of a good public education system and feel very worried about the current climate."*

*"It can be frustrating, but I wouldn't do anything else. I love being a teacher."*

*"Most of us love our kids and want to see them succeed however we can."*

*"I don't need accolades. My success is the success of my students."*

*"Teaching is a rewarding profession, but it is also very draining. Hours and hours are put into it outside the classroom."*

*"The demands from our legislators are draining the life out of really good teachers."*

**Q. Is there anything else you would like to share with us about life as a teacher?**