

Staff Satisfaction in The Wentzville R-IV School District

A survey conducted by
Wentzville NEA



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Introduction

One of the priorities of the Wentzville National Education Association is to develop a collaborative working relationship with district administration and the Board of Education to shape the future of the district, the teachers, and our students in a positive way.

Over the last few months, in communicating with association members, it started to become clear that an undercurrent of discontent and mistrust was running through the district. WNEA felt the need to measure the extent of the discontent among the teachers and its potential impact on the district's educational mission. This report is the result of that effort to quantify the level of teacher dissatisfaction in the Wentzville R-IV School District.

WNEA designed and conducted a survey using Zoomerang.com, an online survey generation program. On October 24, 2006, all teachers in the district were invited to take the survey online or they could request a paper copy from a WNEA building representative. The survey was closed on November 3, 2006. A total of 261 respondents or approximately 32% of the certified staff completed the survey.

Key Findings:

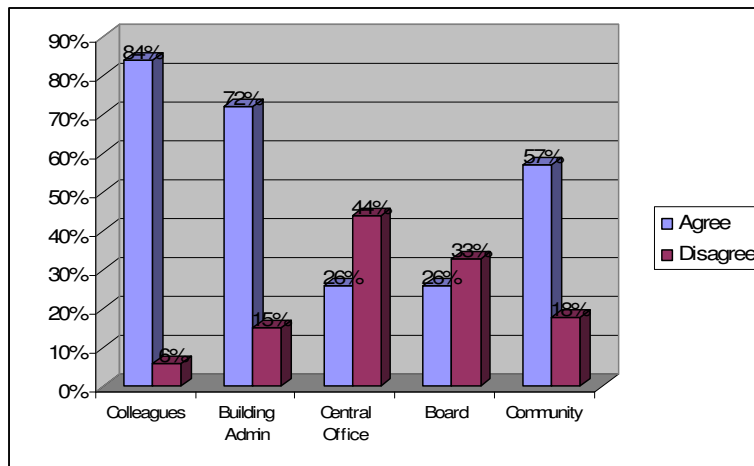
- Teachers do not feel respected as professionals by Central Office administration.
- Teachers do not trust Central Office systems to do what is best for teachers and the district.
- Teachers feel that there is not effective communication within the district.
- Teachers do not feel as though they are allowed input into district decisions.
- Teachers do not consider their salaries to be fair compensation for the work they do, nor do they believe that the salaries in the district are competitive enough.
- An alarming number of teachers have, and still are, considering leaving the district.
- Morale in the district is low.
- Central Office has a low credibility rating with teachers and the community.

Findings

Respect and Trust are the Keys

The WNEA survey asked a series of questions to identify relationships in which teachers feel respected in the district. Teachers agreed with statements about being respected as professionals by their colleagues, building administrators, and the community. However, 44% either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement, “Teachers are respected as professionals by Central Office Administration,” while only 26% agreed. When asked about the Board of Education, the majority of respondents (40%) were unsure.

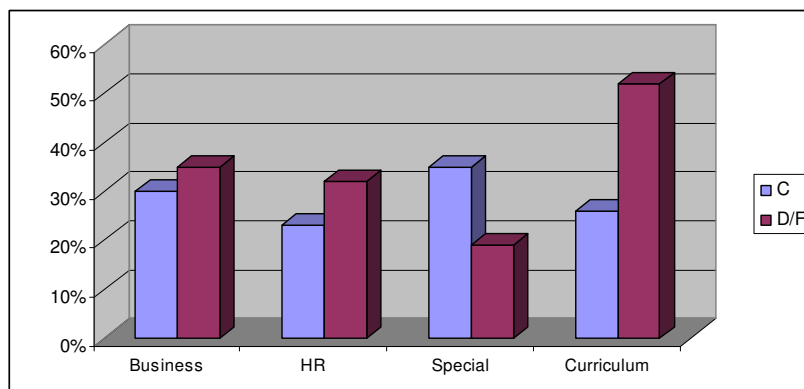
Teachers are respected as professionals by...



Over half (52%) of the respondents indicated that they feel like Central Office is lacking compassion when dealing with the needs of staff by disagreeing with the statement, “The district administration is compassionate about the needs of the teaching staff.” Only 24% agreed with the statement, “I trust the systems in place at Central Office are effective and beneficial for the staff as well as the school district,” while 58% disagreed.

WNEA believes that a competent and trustworthy central office is the foundation and sets the tone for the rest of the district. The survey asked respondents to assign a grade to the departments within Central Office. The results are as follows:

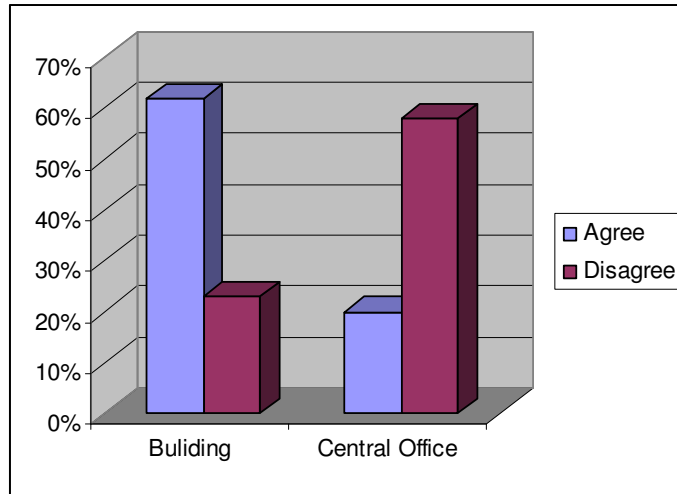
Business/Payroll	66% C, D, or F
Human Resources	55% C, D, or F
Special Services	54% C, D, or F
Curriculum/Staff Development	78% C or lower, 52% D or F



Communication and Collaboration are Lacking

Teachers believe that the lack of respect on the part of district leadership has led to poor communications between district administrators and faculty. Over half of the survey respondents (58%) agreed with the statement, “The district has problems keeping school employees informed.” The respondents also indicated that they believe that open channels of communication do not exist between staff and Central Office administrators.

Teachers have the ability to be part of and influence decisions in my building.
Teachers have the ability to be part of and influence decisions in the district.

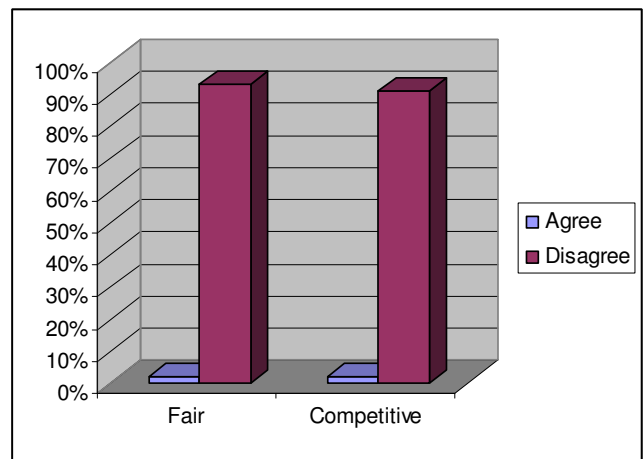


Of the communication that does exist, teachers feel it seldom leads to practical application or collaboration. The WNEA survey asked several questions designed to identify the degree to which teacher input is sought in the decision making process and how much credence that input is given. A full 58% disagreed with the statement, “Teachers have the ability to be part of and influence decisions in the district.” By contrast, 63% answered in the affirmative when the same statement was applied to their building level, indicating that faculty feels that they have a voice in building decisions but not at the district level. Over half of the respondents disagreed with the statement, “District level administrators seek teacher input and give that input credence or consideration.”

The salaries in this district are fair compensation for the work teachers do.
The salaries in this district are competitive enough to recruit and retain experienced, high quality teachers.

Salary

93% of the respondents believe that teacher salaries in this district are not fair compensation for the work teachers do. In addition, 91% believe that teacher salaries in this district are not competitive enough to recruit and/or retain experienced, high quality teachers.



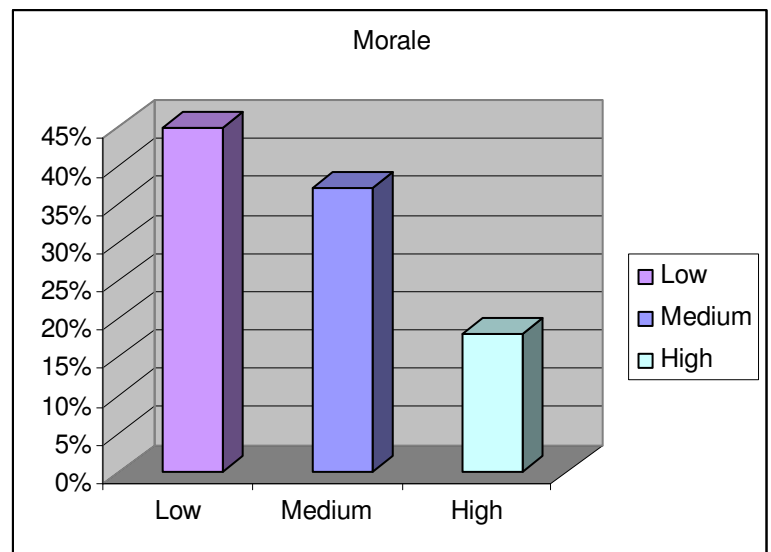
Clearly teachers are struggling to support their families when 73% answered “yes” to the question, “Do you work a second job or take on extra duties during the school year or in the summer to make ends meet?” Over two thirds (67%) feel that teachers are not fairly compensated for special projects, extra duty assignments etc. which they undertake. 87% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that teachers are provided with the materials and resources they need to effectively teach and motivate students in the classroom, requiring teachers to spend their own time creating materials or spend their own money purchasing them. (A full list of the services and materials teachers provide to the district on their own time or at not cost to the district is included in the complete survey data and in the Appendix.)

Teacher Retention

In the last twelve months 50% of the people who answered question #26 (129 people) have taken steps to pursue employment opportunities outside of the Wentzville R-IV School District. In addition, 44% or 113 of the people who answered question #27 said that they plan to take steps to pursue employment elsewhere within the next twelve months. A list of the alternative employment options our teachers are considering is included in the Appendix.

Morale Is Low.

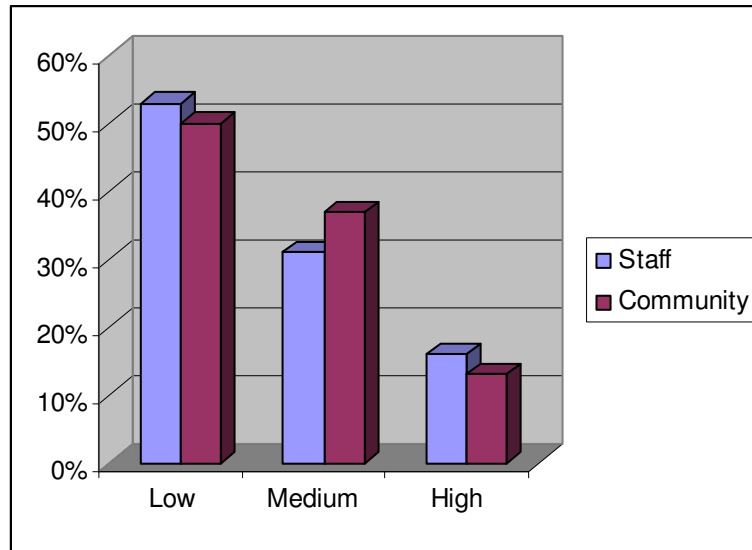
Faculty morale in the Wentzville R-IV School District is at a very low level. The WNEA survey asked certified staff to rate morale on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. Of the 259 teachers who responded to this question, 45% rated morale at 1 or 2. By contrast, only 18% rated morale as a 4 or 5, the above average ratings.



52% of the respondents agreed with the statement, “I would encourage a friend/ relative or son/daughter of mine to take up teaching as a career.” However, only 34% said they would advise someone who took up teaching as a career to seek employment in the Wentzville R-IV School District.

Credibility

According to the survey respondents, Central Office has a low credibility rating with teachers and the community as shown in the graph below.



What does it all mean....

Low teacher morale and lack of confidence in the systems of leadership can have consequences. WNEA believes in a community of learners and teachers striving toward academic excellence. The plummeting morale in the district has a corrosive effect that only serves to undermine our educational mission.

Data from new studies in both North and South Carolina demonstrate the link between teacher working conditions and student achievement.

Statewide studies showed that teachers' responses are significant and powerful predictors of whether or not schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and performed well on the state's school accountability model both in terms of growth and school designation. Analysis of working conditions survey results surfaced six primary findings:

1. Teacher Working Conditions Are Important Predictors of Student Achievement
2. Teacher Working Conditions Make a Difference in Teacher Retention
3. Teachers' Perceptions of Working Conditions Reflect Actual School Conditions
4. Teacher and Principal Perceptions of Working Conditions are In Synchrony

5. Teachers, Regardless of their Background and Experience, View Working Conditions Similarly
 6. Many Aspects of Working Conditions have “Ripple Effects” (“Teacher Working Conditions” 2004)
- To read more about the study go to:
<http://www.teachingquality.org/twc/twcbriefs.htm>

We are already seeing some of these effects in Wentzville. Teacher salaries have sunk to the lowest in the area while expectations for teachers to go above and beyond the call of duty increase. Wentzville teachers consistently rise to that call by routinely providing materials and services to the students of the district at the teacher’s own expense or on his/her own time.

As teachers we know that students perform best when they come to school well rested and prepared for their day. Yet, our teachers, finding it necessary to work second jobs or take on extra duties to make ends meet, are often not able to work at their highest potential.

These financial stressors combined with the feeling that teachers are not respected and that their input is not valued are contributing to a growing number of our teachers seeking employment elsewhere. When asked if they had taken steps to pursue employment elsewhere in the last 12 months 50% of the survey respondents answered **yes**. When asked if they planned to pursue employment elsewhere in the next twelve months 44% also answered **yes**. One need only look at the open ended responses to question #41 included in the Appendix to see the level of frustration felt by teachers in the district.

In order to fulfill our commitment to the district’s community of learners we must have a highly qualified and enthusiastic teacher in every classroom. This can only happen if teachers feel that they are respected, supported in their efforts, part of a collaborative process, well compensated, and have confidence in their leadership.

What can be done....

The mission of the Wentzville R-IV School District is *To provide a challenging educational environment to ensure lifelong learners*. WNEA shares in the district’s mission and is committed to providing assistance to help address the issues related to teacher working conditions raised in this survey.

Teacher Retention: Lori Roach, MNEA Uniserv Director, in cooperation with the district, is currently conducting a statistical analysis of teacher retention in the district. WNEA proposes that a Teacher Retention Task Force consisting of administration, Board of Education representatives, WNEA officers, and teachers be formed upon

completion of the study to determine strategies for retaining and recruiting experienced, high quality teachers in our school district.

Keys to Excellence for Your Schools: WNEA sees the need for a comprehensive evaluation of our school community. We recommend implementation of the Keys 2.0 (Keys to Excellence for Your Schools) Initiative to be fully funded through NEA and its members. This initiative is designed, “to help the school community better understand its problems, develop a shared vision for the school, and engage in organizational and curricular activities to realize the vision.” See the Appendix for a full description of the initiative or visit <http://www.keysonline.org/guide/>. (Board Priority #4: Develop more effective delivery systems in curriculum and instruction.)

Public Engagement Program: In order to improve relations with the community and increase parental involvement in student achievement, WNEA believes it is important to engage community members in constructive dialogue about their schools. Instead of protecting ourselves from the media and public criticism, we need to seek common ground and build our network of stakeholders. With increased civic participation we will reap the benefits and support of this growing community we so desperately need. WNEA proposes the district use the NEA Public Engagement Program (PEP) to get this process started in the district. PEP will send trained staff members to the district to initiate the process of public engagement conversations. WNEA will arrange for the resources for the program. More details are provided in the Appendix. (Board Priority #2: Improve communications throughout the District.)

Family-School-Community Partnership: When strong partnerships develop between schools and communities not only do students benefit, but also parents, teachers, and administrators. The Family-School-Community Partnership Initiative is an intensive training program based on sound research that helps schools get families and communities involved in school efforts. There is a focus on strategies for closing the achievement gap(s). WNEA believes this program would be beneficial for our schools struggling to make AYP. We would like for Dr. Adams, Dr. Marcantonio, and the Board of Education to participate in a presentation about the initiative to be given by a trained Missouri NEA staff member. WNEA will cover any expenses for the presentation. (Board Priority #2: Improve communications throughout the District and Board Priority #4: Develop more effective delivery systems in curriculum and instruction.)

Central Office Oversight Committee: Issues of mistrust and credibility often arise out of lack of communication and the perception that the district is trying to keep things hidden from staff. The business practices of a public institution should be transparent enough so that no one can question the competence or impropriety in the system. WNEA suggests the formation of a Central Office Oversight Committee comprised of administration, Board of Education representatives, WNEA officers, and teachers to conduct regular evaluations of CO business procedures in meeting the needs of the district. (Board Priority #1: Improve communications throughout the District and Board Priority #2: Develop plans to effectively deal with issues relative to growth.)

Teacher Input on Administrative Hiring: No one understands the climate and needs of a building and a district better than the building's teachers. Yet, teachers are denied any input into the hiring of their building administrators. Teachers have asked for input on the administrative hiring process during negotiations the last two years, citing examples of other districts which have such procedures in place. WNEA would like to team with administration and the Board of Education to research how this process works in other quality districts and move toward establishing a procedure for teacher input on administrative hiring in the Wentzville district.

Well Teachers Program: Studies have shown that in low morale can lead to increased absenteeism, sickness, depression, anxiety, general mental distress, heart disease, and chronic pain (Black 2001). WNEA would like to assist the district in showing that it has compassion for meeting the needs of the staff by working together on forming a staff wellness program for employees. For an example see Pattonville Wellness Department webpage document in the Appendix or visit

<http://www2.psd3.org/education/dept/dept.php?sectionid=762>.

Negotiations: Salary and financial stressors are a major concern for nearly every member of the teaching staff. WNEA is ready to begin the negotiations process as soon as possible and make the process an open and ongoing dialog. We believe that starting discussions now would allow time to examine the issues in depth in order to make the best decisions for the district. It would build good will with teachers by showing that administration is willing to have an ongoing discussion about their issues. And finally, we believe it would show teachers that working together to find a way to raise teacher salary is, in fact, a priority in this district.

References

Black, S. (2001) Morale Matters. American School Board Journal, retrieved November 2, 2006, from <http://www.asbj.com/2001/01/0101research.html>

Teacher Working Conditions Are Student Learning Conditions. (2004). Center for Teaching Quality. Retrieved November 6, 2006, from <http://www.teachingquality.org/twc/whatweknow.htm>

Appendix