

# **The State of the Teaching Profession in Ontario, 2003**

**A Report to the Ontario College of Teachers  
Based on a Survey of the Province's Teachers**



**COMPAS Inc.  
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## 1.0 Introduction

In an effort to gauge teachers' own assessments of the state of teaching in the province, the Ontario College of Teachers commissioned COMPAS to undertake a representative sample survey of more than 1000 teachers.<sup>1</sup> Conducted by professional interviewers using computer-assisted, telephone interviewing technology, the survey explored the judgements of 1027 teachers on such diverse themes as

- their confidence in various elements of teaching (e.g. the profession, the home school)
- whether they would recommend a career in teaching to a young person today and whether they themselves would be in the profession in five years
- the diverse virtues and downsides of teaching as an occupation
- the elements that make possible good teaching (e.g. formal training vs. on-the-job experience)
- the public affairs profile of teaching (e.g. what should be done)
- who's credible when it comes to speaking up about the profession
- accountability—to whom should teachers be accountable, and what's the value of self-regulation
- parents—how important is their role, and what is their most important task with respect to the schooling of their children
- Mentoring—what's its value and how well do schools administer mentoring programs
- Whether young teachers see the profession differently from their elders
- How men and women diverge in their attitudes towards teaching and the profession.

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<sup>1</sup> Completed August 1, 2003. Samples of this size are deemed accurate to within 3.5 percentage points 19 times out of 20.



## 2.0 Confidence in Education

### 2.1 Small Is Beautiful—Very High Confidence in Own Job and Own School, Less in the Profession, Still Less in the System

Ontario’s teachers are extremely confident in the individual job each is doing and almost equally confident in his or her own local school’s performance. They are less sure of the teaching profession as a whole, and still less sure of the system, as shown in table 2.1.

To the extent that teachers are confident in their own individual work, part of this confidence stems from positive feelings about their local school. Both elicit very high confidence scores, means of 4.4 and 4.3 respectively on 5-point confidence scales. Not surprisingly perhaps, confidence in self and confidence in their local school are well correlated;  $r = +.52$ , signifying that about 25% of the variance in school confidence and self-confidence are related to each other. No other two variables in the survey are as closely correlated as these two.

*Table 2.1: (Q1) On a 5-point scale where 1 means very little confidence and 5, a lot of confidence, please tell me how much confidence you have in [ROTATE]*

	Mean	5	4	3	2	1	DNK
(1.2) The job you are personally doing	4.4	54	34	6	1	1	5
(1.3) The school you work in	4.3	43	34	11	3	1	8
(1.4) The teaching profession as a whole	4.0	32	39	20	5	2	3
(1.1) The quality of Ontario’s education system	3.4	12	35	34	12	4	2

Teachers are marginally less confident in their profession and still less confident in the educational system. Confidence in the profession and the system are more correlated to each other ( $r = +.37$ ) than to individual self-confidence and confidence in



their local school.<sup>2</sup> It is as if confidence in one's home school breeds confidence in one's own performance, and vice-versa. Meanwhile, confidence in the profession breeds confidence in the system, and vice-versa.

## **2.2 Confidence Scores—Drivers of Recommending the Profession But Not of Early Retirement**

Logically, one might expect teachers' confidence scores to be drivers of behaviour, for example factors impacting on their likelihood of remaining teachers and advising young people to take up the profession. In practice, confidence in any aspect of teaching is not a strong driver of their propensity to remain in the profession. The highest product-moment correlation between one of the four confidence indicators and the probability of being a teacher in five years is  $r=.13$ , signifying that at most 2% of the variance on the likelihood of staying in the profession is related to confidence in any aspect of teaching.

Teachers' avowed likelihood of remaining in the profession is mainly a function of age. Among teachers under 50 years of age, 86% say that they will definitely (64%) or probably (23%) be teachers in five years. Among those 50 years of age and older, the corresponding figures are 42% (22% definitely, 19% probably).

While education confidence indicators are not factors in retirement from the profession, they may well affect to a modest extent teachers' propensity to recommend the profession to young people contemplating career selection. Mean confidence scores on all four indicators are higher among teachers who would recommend the profession than those who would not. The differences are statistically significant but not sizeable. Correlations are in the range of  $r=.18-.28$ . Furthermore the relationship is especially apparent at the extremes:

- ❑ With respect to confidence in the educational system, among those scoring their confidence "1", at the bottom of the scale, 73% would not recommend a career in teaching in contrast to 69% who would among those, score their confidence in the system a "5";
- ❑ The corresponding scores are 75% and 73%, respectively, among in the case of confidence in one's own teaching;
- ❑ 73% and 76% are the corresponding scores in the case of confidence in one's own school;
- ❑ 91% and 79% are the corresponding scores in the case of confidence in the profession.

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<sup>2</sup> The correlations of individual self-confidence with confidence in the profession and the system are respectively  $r=.32$  and  $.24$ .



Tables 2.2 and 2.3 display the responses of teachers as a whole to the questions about whether they would remain in the profession in five years and whether they would recommend teaching as a career.

*Table 2.2: (Q2) Would you advise someone about to enter university to consider teaching as a career? PROMPT ONLY IF NECESSARY*

	%
Yes	67
No	30
DNK	4

*Table 2.3: (Q5) Will you be a teacher in five years' time? [ROTATE POLES]*

	%
Yes, definitely will	45
Yes, probably will	20
No, probably will not	12
No, definitely will not	20
Undecided	4

## **3.0 Positives and Negatives of Teaching**

### **3.1 Inspiring Young People vs. System Conflict, the Difficulty Meeting the Needs of Individual Students, and a Society That Values Education Too Little**

Teachers are firmly united in what draws them to teaching, the opportunity to mentor or inspire young people, as shown in table 3.1. But teachers are divided in what they see as the most challenging aspects of teaching. Some point to an atmosphere of conflict in the system, others to the difficulties in meeting the needs of individual students, and still others to a society that does not value learning and education as much as it ought to, as shown in table 3.2. About one in every ten teachers laments an insufficient supply of classroom resources like computers or classes that are unduly large.



### **3.2 The Perceived Challenges of Teaching Do Not Generally Drive Attitudes to Teaching**

The challenges identified by teachers are generally not statistically related to either their propensity to recommend teaching as a career or their likelihood of remaining in the profession in five years. Nor are the challenges identified by teachers statistically related to any of the education confidence scores. Thus, it would appear that the challenges experienced by teachers should be seen as part of their professional culture or background setting rather than as drivers of individual teacher behaviour or opinion.<sup>3</sup>

*Table 3.1: (Q3) Suppose a young person about to go to university consulted you about career choices and asked what the best part of being a teacher was. Which of the following would you say was the best part of being a teacher [ROTATE]*

	%
Teaching, mentoring, or inspiring young people	81
Teaching a particular subject matter that you enjoy a lot	6
Liked the idea of being an educator	5
Being part of a wonderful profession and tradition	4
Work schedule and holidays	1
Job security	1
A job with community roots	*
Salary	*
Don't Know / Refused	1

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<sup>3</sup> One possible exception is split grades. Only 4% of teachers volunteer split grades as the most challenging aspect of their professional life. This tiny minority may be slightly more apt to quit the profession. Among this small group, 32% say that they will definitely not be teachers in five years compared to 20% among the profession as a whole. However, the vast majority of this group are 50 years of age or older and will be retiring. From this demographic fact it can be inferred that concern about split grades is probably not an independent driver of a propensity to leave the profession.





*Table 3.2: (Q4) Which of the following 7 features would you tell the young person is the most challenging aspect of being a teacher [ROTATE]*

	%
An atmosphere of conflict in the education system	29
Teaching to meet the needs of individual students	22
Society that doesn't encourage learning and education as much as it should	18
Lack of classroom resources like computers and text books	13
Class sizes	10
Split grades	4
Standardized testing	2
Don't Know / Refused	3

## 4.0 What Makes Good Teaching

### 4.1 Three Sources of Good Teaching—The System, Life Experience, and On-the-Job Experience

Teachers were asked to score the value of various sources of teaching skill, as shown in table 4.1, below. Three categories of such skill sources emerged from multivariate statistical analysis. A technique called factor analysis yielded three distinct factors:

- ❑ the formal educational system led by faculties of education (factor loading of .79) and including professional development (.69), practice teaching (.60), and good advice from principals (.57);
- ❑ a life experience factor led by what teachers learned from their families (.74) and including what they learned as students (.72), and old-fashioned common sense (.67); and
- ❑ an on-the-job experience factor consisting of on-the-job experience (.76) and good advice from older teachers or mentors (.69).

### 4.2 Job Experience Trumps All Other Sources of Skill

Teachers value job experience to an extraordinary degree. The mean score on a 5-point scale is an extraordinary 4.8 with 86% choosing the maximum score of 5, as



shown in table 4.1. Good advice from mentors follows in distant second place with old-fashioned common sense trailing in third place.

*Table 4.1: (Q6) As you know, people have different views about where and how teachers acquire skills. On a 5-point scale where 1 means it's not an important source of teaching skills and 5 it's a very important source, please score each of the following as a source of teaching skill [ROTATE]*

	Mean	5	4	3	2	1	DNK
(6.3) On-the-job experience	4.8	86	12	1	*	*	0
(6.5) Good advice from older teachers or mentors	4.3	49	38	12	2	1	*
(6.7) Old fashioned common sense	4.1	45	32	17	4	2	*
(6.2) Practise teaching during your teacher training	4.0	42	29	19	7	3	*
(6.4) Ongoing professional development	3.9	36	34	20	6	3	1
(6.9) What you learned from your parents or family	3.7	25	33	28	10	4	*
(6.8) What you yourself learned as a student over the years	3.6	25	31	29	11	4	1
(6.6) Good advice from principals	3.5	21	33	28	12	6	*
(6.1) Courses at faculties of education	3.2	14	26	34	16	9	*

### **4.3 Inspiration and Caring the Keys to Good Teaching**

Experience trumps formal preparation in part because inter-personal rather than intellectual skills are the keys to teaching effectiveness. The predominant responses are inspiring a love of learning (24%) and showing students that one cares (21%). Most of the remaining responses relate to interpersonal skills—being a good communicator (7%), having a good sense of humour (3%).



Table 4.2: (Q7) Which of the following features is the most important in good teaching? ROTATE

	%
Inspiring love of learning	24
Showing that they care about their students	21
Being good communicators	7
Being well organized	5
Having a good sense of humour	3
Knowing the subject matter	2
Most or all of the above	38
<i>Combined Interpersonal (caring, inspiring, humour)</i>	48
Don't Know / Refused	*

## 5.0 A Public Affairs Strategy—What Should Be Done

### 5.1 Teachers Call for Planned Communications Action

Teachers were asked to score their agreement or disagreement with a series of propositions relating to their profession's public profile, as shown in table 5.1, below. The application of factor analysis, a multivariate statistical technique, revealed that teachers tend to perceive their profession's profile through two prisms or factors:

- a factor that entails blaming the media for unfair coverage and
- a factor that focuses on the development of a public affairs strategy, represented by the view that teachers lack a credible public representative (.64), the public does not understand the complexity of teaching (.59), teachers need a comprehensive communications campaign (.59), and teachers should do more to promote their achievements (.58).



*Table 5.1: (Q8) Please tell me how you feel about the following opinions about the public profile of teaching where 1 means disagree strongly and 5, agree strongly [ROTATE]*

	Mean	5	4	3	2	1	dnk
(8.3) Most members of the public don't understand the complexity of the teacher's job	4.5	70	17	7	5	2	0
(8.1) A comprehensive communication campaign is needed to promote the public profile of teaching	4.1	49	25	17	5	4	1
(8.4) The teaching profession suffers from a lack of a widely-known and respected representative as its "public face"	3.8	30	30	26	8	4	2
(8.5) Teachers could do more to promote their achievements	3.4	19	31	30	12	7	1
(8.2) Compared to other professions such as physicians, teachers get fair media coverage	2.1	5	6	22	28	38	1

## **5.2 Comprehensive Communications Campaign Needed to Get Public to Understand the Complexity of Teaching**

Many teachers say that the public that does not understand the complexity of the teacher's job—mean score of 4.5 with 70% scoring "5". Large teacher majorities believe that the profession needs a comprehensive communications campaign (74% scoring 4-5), teachers suffer from the lack of a credible representative (60% scoring 4-5), and 66% do not believe that teachers get fair media coverage.

## **5.3 Credible Players—Teachers, Principals, and Students**

Of various possible players in the educational field, classroom teachers earn the highest confidence scores in the mind of teachers—a mean of 4.2 with 34% assigning



the maximum possible score of “5”. While teachers trust teachers more than any other group, in fairness they don’t trust their own to an unlimited degree. Trailing classroom teachers by a considerable margin are school principals (mean of 3.7), students (3.5), federations (3.4) and academic researchers (2.9).

*Table 5.2: (Q16) How much confidence do you have in each of the following as a source of information about education issues? Please use a 5-point scale where 1 means no confidence and 5, a lot of confidence.*  
**[ROTATE]**

	mean	5	4	3	2	1	dnk
(16.8) Classroom teachers	4.2	34	51	13	1	*	1
(16.9) School principals	3.7	19	46	27	6	2	*
(16.7) Students	3.5	15	35	33	9	6	2
(16.11) Teacher federations	3.4	14	33	34	13	5	1
(16.1) Academic researchers	3.3	9	32	38	14	6	2
(16.4) Parents’ groups	2.9	4	21	44	22	8	1
(16.6) School board admin.	2.9	4	25	37	22	11	2
(16.2) The Ontario College of Teachers	2.7	4	21	35	21	18	1
(16.10) Newspaper editorials	2.1	1	6	28	33	32	1
(16.3) Ministry of Education officials	2.0	2	8	21	29	39	1

## 5.4 Lightning Rod—Standardized Tests Bad in Every Way

Standardized tests are a heavy duty lightning rod insofar as teachers see little to no merit in any aspect of them. As displayed in table 5.3, overwhelming majorities of teachers see such testing as demoralizing students, as a poor way of tracking student success, as not improving student learning, as not a measure of school success, and not a good way of tracking teacher success.



*Table 5.3: (Q14) Please tell me how you feel about the following opinions about student testing where 1 means disagree strongly and 5, agree strongly [ROTATE]*

	mean	5	4	3	2	1	dnk
(14.4) The current level of testing runs a big risk of demoralizing and de-motivating students	3.9	44	23	18	9	5	1
(14.1) Standardized tests are a good way of tracking student success	2.1	3	8	23	25	40	1
(14.5) Standardized tests are improving student learning	2.0	2	8	21	24	45	1
(14.3) Standardized testing is a good measure of school success	1.8	2	5	17	23	52	1
(14.2) Standardizing tests are a good way of tracking teacher performance	1.6	2	3	11	21	63	1

## **6.0 Accountability—Accountability to Students, Ambivalence about Self-Regulation**

Teachers see themselves as accountable to students above all, as shown in table 6.1. Almost two-thirds feel that teachers should feel accountable most of all to students. In very distant second place are those who feel that the profession should be accountable to parents (14%). Very few believe that teachers should be mainly accountable to principals, school boards, or the public.

Given their widespread view that their profession should be primarily accountable to students, one might expect a certain uncertainty or ambivalence about self-regulation. Indeed, teachers are uncertain about it. Respondents were asked to score the value of self-regulation “from the perspective of protecting or enhancing the public interest.” Very few (11%) considered self-regulation to be of limited or no value. But a very sizeable minority, 42%, were either neutral in their assessment of its value (33%) or had no apparent opinion (9%). Only 16% considered self-regulation “very valuable.”



*Table 6.1: (Q17) Turning to the matter of the accountability of teachers, to which of the following groups should teachers feel most accountable: (CHOOSE ONE; ROTATE)*

	%
Students	65
Parents	14
Principals	6
School boards	5
The public	4
Colleagues	2
The provincial government	1
Don't Know / Refused	3

*Table 6.2: (Q18) How valuable is the self-regulation of the teaching profession from the perspective of protecting or enhancing the public interest? Please use a 5-point scale where 1 means not valuable and 5, very valuable.*

	%
Mean	4.0
Very Valuable	16
Valuable	30
Neutral	33
Less Valuable	7
Not Valuable	4
Don't Know / Refused	9

In keeping with their middling and semi-certain views about the value of self-regulation, teachers evince a similar uncertainty about the value of the amount of information they receive from the Ontario College of Teachers.<sup>4</sup> In practice, 33% say that they are satisfied or very satisfied (9%) while 31% say that they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (17%). As many as 36% say that they are neutral (35%) or have no opinion.

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<sup>4</sup> "(Q15) On a 5 point scale where 1 means very dissatisfied and 5, very satisfied, how satisfied are you with the amount of information you receive from the Ontario College of Teachers?"



## **7.0 The Roles of Parents—Absolutely Essential, Ideally to Hold Children to Account and to Work Cooperatively with Teachers**

Teachers see their roles as very complex, and they have no illusion that they alone can transform young people. They are concerned that society does not value learning enough, as reported above. They also perceive parents as absolutely essential to the schooling success of children. An extraordinary 85% agree strongly that supportive parents are “essential for a young person’s success in school with an effective mean of 4.8 on a quasi-5 point scale, as shown in table 7.1.

*Table 7.1: (Q9) On a 5-point scale where 1 means very non-essential and 5, very essential, how essential for a young person’s success in school are supportive parents, for example parents who read to their children or help with homework?*

	%
Mean	4.8
Agree Strongly	85
Agree	13
Neutral	2
Disagree	*
Disagree Strongly	*
Don’t Know / Refused	*

The key roles for parents, say teachers, are to hold their children accountable for their behaviour (35%) and to work with teachers in a cooperative fashion (35%). Secondary roles are to help young children learn to read (14%), help children with their homework (7%), and be active in school-related activities (5%).





*Table 7.2: (Q10) Which of the following activities is the most important for parents to be involved in? ROTATE*

	%
Holding children accountable for their behaviour	35
Working with teachers in a cooperative, non-aggressive manner	35
Helping young children learn to read	14
Helping children with their home work	7
Being active in school-related activities for parents	5
Don't Know / Refused	4

## 8.0 Teacher Mentoring—a Valued, Under-Recognized, Under-Prepared Experience

Most teachers (64%) have had the experience of being an Associate Teacher or mentor. Those with the experience report that it enhanced their professional practice, as shown in table 8.1. While seeing the experience as beneficial to themselves, they are less sure that their involvement had been adequately recognised or that they had been adequately prepared. Meanwhile, they believe that they should receive professional development credits for their Associate Teaching responsibility.

*Table 8.1: (Q12) [IF YES in Q11] Thinking of your own experiences, please tell me how you feel about the following opinions where 1 means disagree strongly and 5, agree strongly [ROTATE]*

	mean	5	4	3	2	1	dnk
(12.1) My involvement as an Associate Teacher enhanced my own professional practice	4.2	48	33	12	4	3	1
(12.5) I should receive professional development credits for my Associate Teaching responsibilities	4.1	56	19	8	5	9	4
(12.2) My involvement as an Associate Teacher was well recognized and supported	3.6	27	29	25	13	6	1



	mean	5	4	3	2	1	dnk
(12.6) I have been adequately prepared for my role as an Associate Teacher	3.6	27	29	24	11	8	1
(12.7) I see myself as a partner with the faculty advisor in the preparation of teacher candidates	3.6	30	25	22	12	8	3
(12.3) I had sufficient time to undertake my role in relation to Associate Teaching	3.2	19	23	29	16	12	2
(12.4) I am adequately compensated for my Associate Teaching responsibilities	2.9	17	18	22	14	25	3

## 9.0 Special Notes on Age and Gender

### 9.1 Young Teachers—Like their Elders in Virtually All Respects

Young teachers (25-34) are especially important because they are education's future. For this reason, any uniqueness in their attitudes merits noting. In practice, the young resemble very closely their older colleagues except for a hint of a possibly lower confidence in the profession along with, paradoxically, a nominally higher propensity to recommend teaching as a career.

The young share the same modest esteem for the educational system as their older colleagues (mean of 3.3 vs. 3.4 among all teachers). Meanwhile the young convey nominally less confidence in the teaching profession (3.8 vs. 4.0). The young are nonetheless at least as likely as their colleagues to recommend a teaching career to a young person seeking career advice—73% of those in the 25-34 year old cohort would advise someone to consider teaching as a career, compared to 67% among teachers as a whole. Compared to teachers as a whole, the youngest cohort place nominally more value on on-the-job experience as a source of teaching skill and express nominally more confidence in principals as a source of counsel.



## **9.2 Battle of the Sexes—Women More Sanguine/Less Alienated and More Disciplinarian about the Role of Parents**

The data contains hints that male teachers may be slightly more alienated than females.

- Male teachers find the atmosphere of conflict in the education system to be a more challenging aspect of teaching than do women (36% vs. 26%)
- Male teachers are also marginally more likely to feel as though they will not be a teacher in five years time (37% vs. 29% - combined bottom two-box)
- Women are more appreciative of courses than are men— Courses at faculties of education (3.3 women vs. 2.9 men), and ongoing professional development (4.1 women vs. 3.6 men).
- Women are generally more appreciative of all sources from which they can acquire teaching skills.
- Women are generally more positive about their experiences as an Associate teacher than are men.
- Women are more positive than are men about the information they receive from the Ontario College of Teachers (3.0 vs. 2.8)
- Women overall feel less negative towards the various sources of information about education issues.

When it comes to parenting, women emphasize discipline while men prefer parental involvement in learning:

- Women would like to see parents take more of a role in holding children accountable for their behaviour (37% women vs. 31% men). While men seem to emphasize that parents should spend time teaching young children to read (11% vs. 19%)
- Women more strongly feel teachers should be accountable to students (67% female vs. 58% male).

## **10.0 Conclusion**

Teachers are of two minds about their jobs. On the one hand, they would like a lot more respect from society, and they would like society to value learning a lot more. They favour an active communications and public affairs campaign to explain to the public the complex character of their mission. They are troubled by an atmosphere of



conflict in the educational system and feel challenged by the task of meeting the specific educational needs of individual students.

On the other hand, teachers derive a great deal of satisfaction from the work they do. They have a great deal of confidence in the jobs that they as individuals are doing, and they have a great deal of confidence in their individual home schools. They are inspired by the experience of inspiring young people. A significant minority of teachers are having misgivings about the profession and especially about the system. Such misgivings may prompt some teachers not to recommend to young people teaching as a career, but rarely leads to teachers' thinking of withdrawing from the profession.

Teachers see parents as absolutely vital partners. Teachers, especially female teachers, want parents to be somewhat disciplinarian, holding their children accountable for their school work. They also want parents involved with teachers in a cooperative spirit.

With respect to quality teaching, teachers see inspiration and interpersonal skills as greatly more valuable than subject knowledge. With respect to narrowly professional issues, teachers see much value in mentoring and very little value in standardized tests. Indeed, there appears to be hardly a criticism of standardized tests that teachers do not embrace.

