

“There is not just a question of money. It will take a partnership of teachers, parents and administrators to improve student achievement. No one and no thing can accomplish this monumental task alone.”

“Treat all students equally, provide high-quality teaching, have high expectations and students will succeed.”

“In today’s world it is absolutely necessary for students to achieve at the highest level their ability allows, and then go beyond.”

# PRIMARY SOURCES: AMERICA’S TEACHERS ON AMERICA’S SCHOOLS PENNSYLVANIA

A PROJECT OF SCHOLASTIC AND THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

“Everyone should finish high school and move on to something higher. I think they all can.”

“Give them standardized tests, but not all the time, and their lives shouldn’t depend on it; and neither should ours.”

“Learning is a lifelong project and all students

are capable

being lifelong learners.”

BILL & MELINDA  
GATES foundation

“How do we prepare students for jobs that don’t yet exist?”

“We need to prepare teachers to hold all students to high standards and to differentiate instruction to help all students achieve.”  
– *Middle School Teacher in Pennsylvania*

***Primary Sources: Pennsylvania* is meant for use in conjunction with the complete *Primary Sources* report available at [www.scholastic.com/primarysources](http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources).**

# A NOTE FROM SCHOLASTIC AND THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

In March 2010, Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation released the landmark study, *Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's Schools*, placing the views of our nation's public school teachers at the center of the discussion on education reform.

More than 40,000 teachers participated in the survey – from every state and at every grade level – and the unprecedented size and scope of the study allows for the release of new, state-level data from Pennsylvania. *Primary Sources: Pennsylvania* is based on the responses of nearly 1,500 public school teachers across the state of Pennsylvania who participated in the national survey.

We asked teachers about the state of American education, the challenges facing students and the variety of supports and tools that teachers need to tackle those challenges. They responded with powerful, nuanced opinions on a number of issues, from student and teacher performance, to classroom innovation and academic standards, to the importance of the school-to-home connection.

Similar to their peers nationwide, teachers from Pennsylvania had important opinions about the critical issues in education at the national and state levels. Specifically, teachers in Pennsylvania:

- Are slightly more likely than the national average to rate student academic achievement at their schools as “Excellent.”
- Are divided in their opinions on the number and clarity of their state academic standards.
- Are less supportive of common standards and assessments across states than are their peers nationwide.
- Are less open to innovative compensation policies when compared to teachers nationwide, and are less likely to see performance rewards for teachers as making a strong impact on student achievement or teacher retention.

It is important to note that *Primary Sources: Pennsylvania* is a small subset of the data we collected on Pennsylvania's teachers. Although we have selected the most statistically significant and state-relevant data for inclusion in this mini-report, we encourage you to look at the additional data on Pennsylvania available in the appendices of the complete *Primary Sources* report.

Although *Primary Sources: Pennsylvania* reflects the wide range of voices and opinions of teachers across the state, one thing is constant: Teachers teach for the love of their students and the chance to make a difference in those young lives. Our goal should be to do all we can to support them in this endeavor.

Sincerely,



**Margery Mayer**

President, Scholastic Education, Scholastic Inc.



**Vicki L. Phillips**

Director of Education, College Ready, United States Program

# THE CHALLENGE

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## **Pennsylvania's Teachers Recognize the Challenges Facing Their Students**

Teachers in Pennsylvania are keenly aware of the limitations of a high school diploma and the disconnect between students' current levels of achievement and the levels at which they must perform to achieve success beyond high school.

Specifically, in Pennsylvania:

- Teachers say that a high school diploma is not enough for today's students. Ninety-six percent of teachers in the state say that the most important goal of schools and teaching is to prepare students for success beyond high school (93% nationally).
- Nine out of 10 (93%) teachers say that not all their students could leave high school prepared to succeed in a 2- or 4-year college (91% nationally).
- Only 21% of teachers strongly agree that their students enter their classroom prepared for on-grade-level work (an additional 45% "somewhat agree"). This is similar to 16% and 44%, respectively, among teachers nationwide.
- Teachers are slightly more likely than the national average to rate student academic achievement at their schools as "Excellent" (33% in Pennsylvania, 28% nationally).
- Less than half (45%) of teachers say that more than three quarters of the students currently in their classes could leave high school prepared to succeed in a 2- or 4-year college (46% nationally).

## **Teachers in Pennsylvania's Low-Income Communities Recognize Added Challenges**

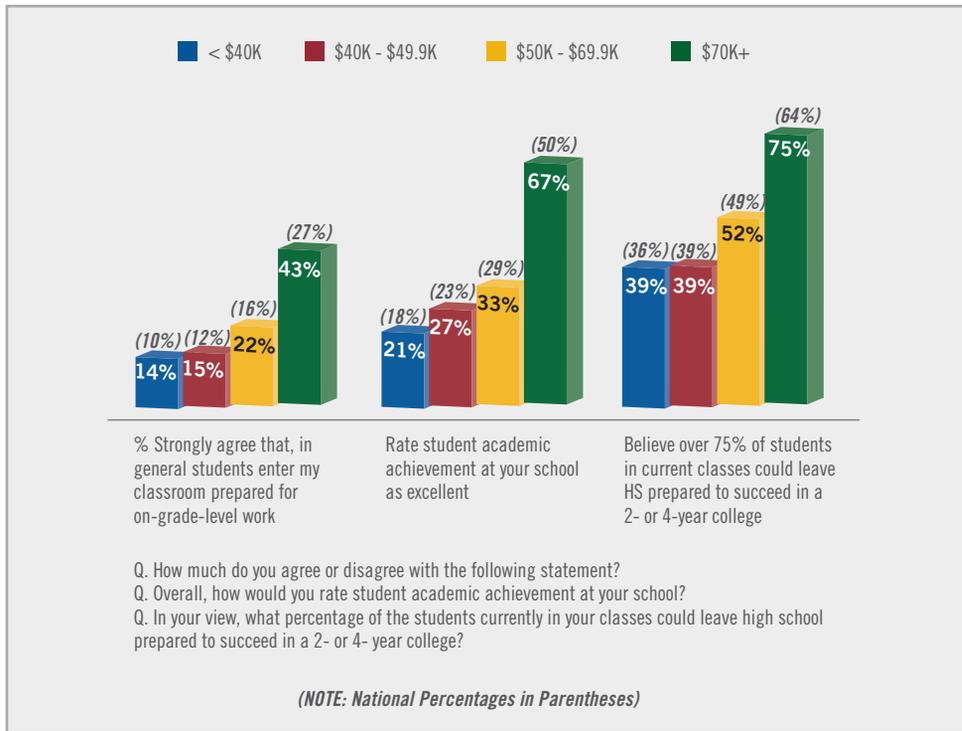
As with teachers nationwide, a comparison of responses from teachers in low- and high-income communities in Pennsylvania underscores the inequity facing students in schools across the state and the stark differences in teachers' perceptions of students' ability to meet the challenges of today's workplace.

This achievement gap identified by teachers in the lowest and highest income communities is far greater in Pennsylvania than it is nationally. For example:

- The gap in the percentage of teachers in lower and higher income communities who strongly agree that students enter their class prepared for on-grade-level work is 17 points nationally: from 10% to 27%. In Pennsylvania, that gap is 29 points (from 14% to 43%).

- Similarly large gaps—both much larger than the average nationwide gap—are seen in teacher ratings of student achievement at their school and in teacher estimates of how many of their students could leave high school prepared to succeed in college.

**Pennsylvania Teachers' Views on Student Preparedness, by schools' median household income**



It is important to note that despite the added challenges faced by teachers in low-income communities in Pennsylvania, there is little difference in their views and the views of their peers in high-income communities on the reform-related issues discussed in this report, and in the complete *Primary Sources*.

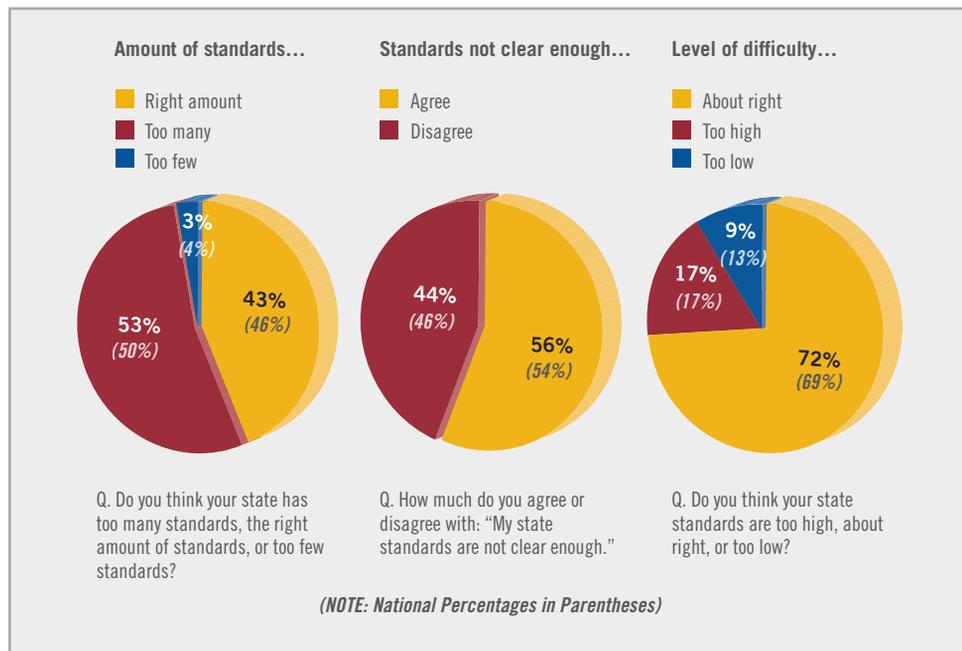
# STATE AND NATIONAL STANDARDS

## Pennsylvania Teachers' Views on Current Pennsylvania State Standards

As is the case with their peers across the nation, teachers in Pennsylvania recognize the role of academic standards in improving student achievement and preparedness. They are divided, however, in their opinions on the amount and clarity of their state standards:

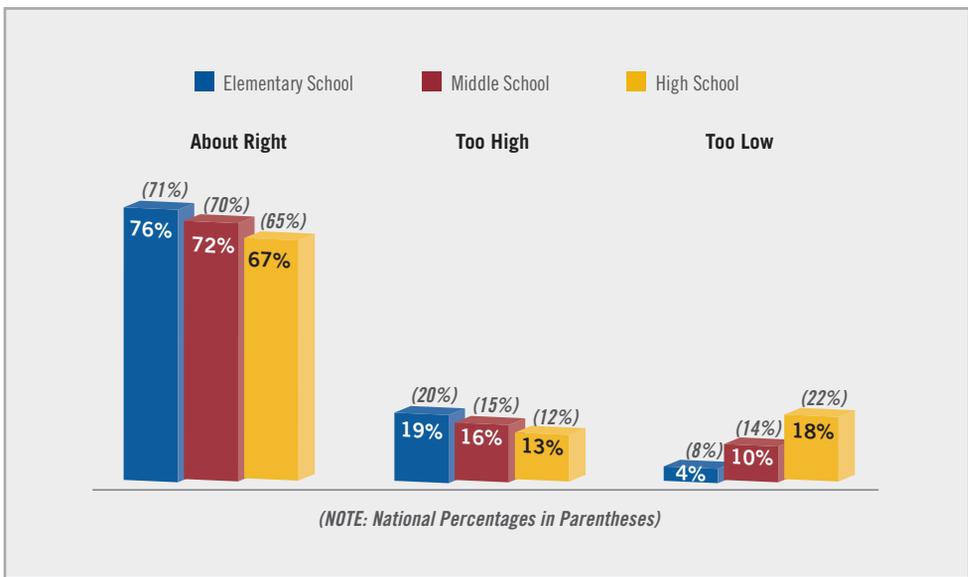
- Teachers are split in their opinions on amount of state academic standards, with just over half saying that Pennsylvania has too many standards (53%) and under half saying that the number of standards is “about right” (43%); (50% and 46% nationally, respectively).
- Like teachers nationwide, a small number of Pennsylvania teachers feel that there are too few standards (3% in Pennsylvania, 4% nationally).
- A slim majority (56%) say that the state’s standards are not clear enough.
- More than seven in 10 Pennsylvania teachers say the level of difficulty of their state standards is about right.

### Teachers' Views on Pennsylvania State Standards



Additionally, while the majority of teachers across grade levels say the degree of difficulty of state standards is about right, high school teachers are 4.5 times more likely as elementary school teachers and nearly twice as likely as middle school teachers to say standards are too low.

### Degree of Difficulty of Pennsylvania State Standards, by School Level



## Pennsylvania Teachers Support Clearer Standards, Common Across States

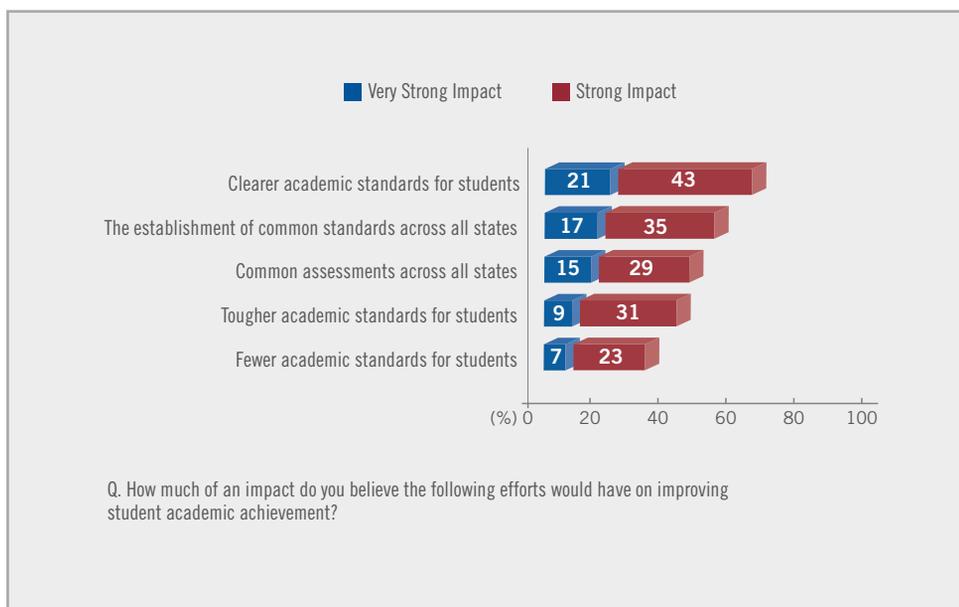
Pennsylvania teachers support the establishment of clear and common standards across states to a lesser extent than do their peers nationwide. They say the following measures would have a very strong/strong impact on improving student achievement:

- Clearer academic standards for students (64% in Pennsylvania, 74% nationally)
- The establishment of common standards across all states (52% in Pennsylvania, 60% nationally)

In keeping with the views of teachers across the country, Pennsylvania’s teachers are less certain that fewer and more challenging standards would make a strong or very strong impact on improving student achievement:

- Tougher academic standards for students (41% in Pennsylvania, 45% nationally)
- Fewer academic standards for students (30% in Pennsylvania, 34% nationally)

### Pennsylvania Teachers’ Views on the Impact Changes to Current Standards Would Have on Improving Academic Achievement



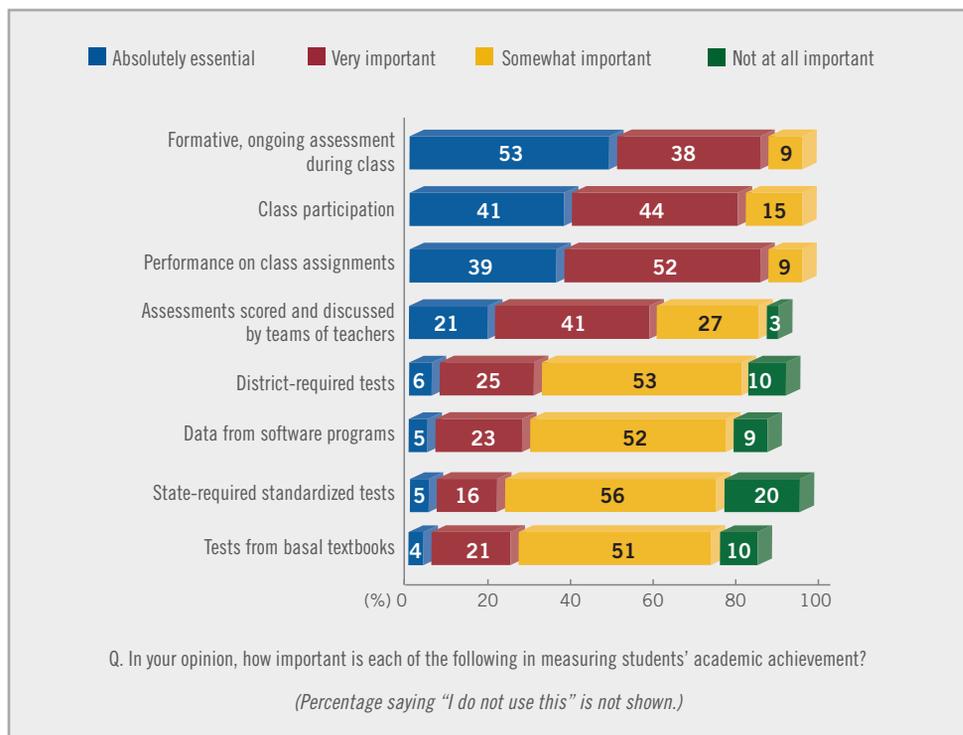
# EVALUATING STUDENT AND TEACHER PERFORMANCE

## Pennsylvania Teachers' Views on Evaluating Student Performance

Pennsylvania's teachers are similar to the nation's teachers in their firm belief that student assessment should be driven by in-classroom experiences, including formative ongoing assessments, class participation and performance on class assignments.

Teachers in Pennsylvania also see value in standardized tests as a way to evaluate student performance. Only 10% and 20% of teachers say district- and state-required tests, respectively, are “not at all” important in measuring student academic achievement (11% and 16% nationally).

## Pennsylvania Teachers' Views on Importance of Student Performance Measures



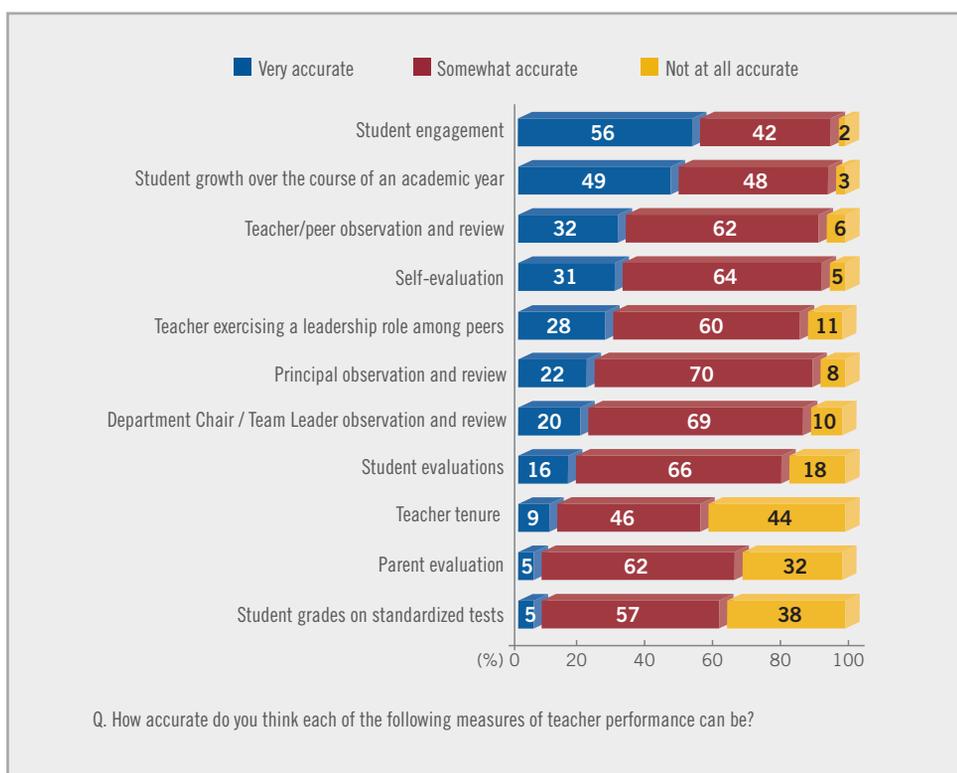
Further, as noted on page 6, 44% of Pennsylvania teachers say common assessments across states would have a very strong or strong impact on improving student achievement—with an additional 40% saying these would make a moderate impact.

## Pennsylvania Teachers' Views on Measuring Teacher Performance

In qualitative conversation, teachers stress a desire for their performance to be based on factors they can impact directly—like student growth and student engagement—and not on factors that fail to consider the realities of individual students in individual classrooms.

This is clearly borne out in *Primary Sources* data at both the national and Pennsylvania levels. By far, teachers say that student growth over the course of an academic year and student engagement are the most accurate measures of teacher performance.

### Pennsylvania Teachers' Views on the Degree of Accuracy of Measures of Teacher Performance



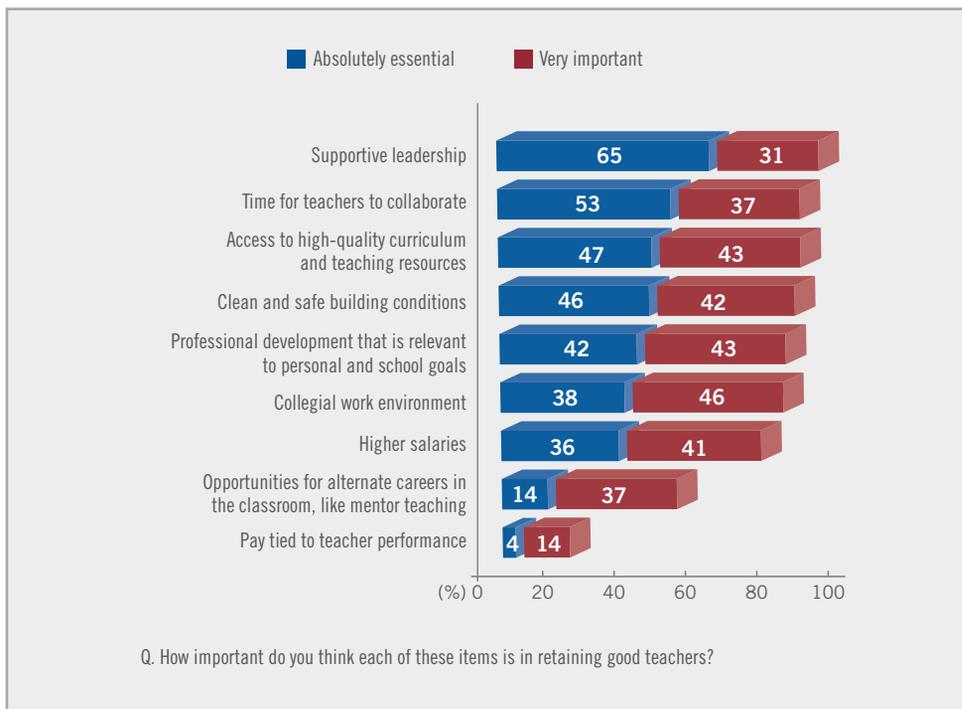
# TEACHER RETENTION

## Pennsylvania Teachers' Views on Factors Impacting Teacher Retention

Teachers who participated in *Primary Sources* were asked to evaluate the importance of nine different factors in retaining good teachers. This information provided insight on the things teachers most value in their profession.

In nearly every state in the nation, supportive leadership is ranked as the most important factor in retaining good teachers, and Pennsylvania is no exception. In Pennsylvania, 65% of teachers say that supportive leadership is absolutely essential in retaining good teachers (68% nationally).

## Pennsylvania Teachers' Views on Factors Impacting Teacher Retention



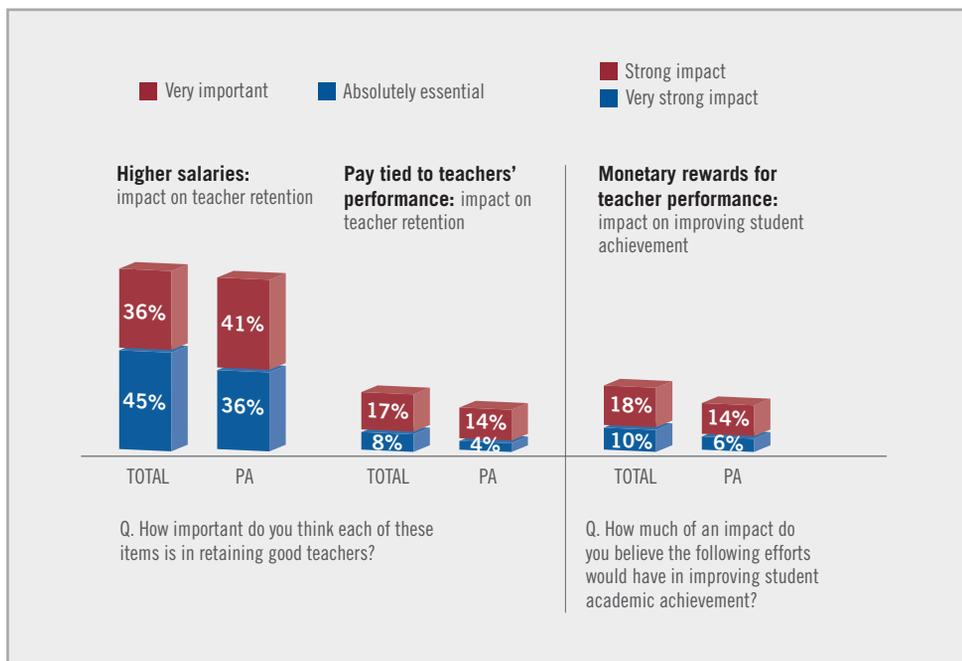
## Pennsylvania Teachers' Views on Monetary Compensation

Overall, Pennsylvania teachers' views are in sync with the views of teachers nationally in terms of the importance of various factors in retaining good teachers, with two exceptions—higher salaries and pay tied to teacher performance.

While higher salaries as an essential part of retaining good teachers shows a good deal more variation across states, they are deemed less important by Pennsylvania teachers than by the nation as a whole. Only 36% of teachers in Pennsylvania say higher salaries are absolutely essential, while 45% of teachers nationwide believe the same.

Similarly, only 19% of Pennsylvania teachers find pay tied to teacher performance to be absolutely essential or very important to teacher retention, compared to 26% nationally.

## Pennsylvania Teachers' Views on Monetary Issues



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## Methodology

This report is based on the responses of the 1,493 teachers in Pennsylvania who participated in the national survey for *Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's Schools*. The data reflect a cross-section of Pennsylvania's teachers across many teacher and school characteristics, including grade level(s) taught, years of teaching experience and community income.

The fieldwork for this survey was conducted in March through June of 2009 by phone (n=594) and online (n=899). For more details on the methodology of this study, please see the full *Primary Sources* report at: [www.scholastic.com/primarysources](http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources).

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“This job doesn't pay much but I always want to go to work”

“Teaching is not like any other job. It's a passion.”

“Value should be placed on education. Every job, career, and occupation starts here.”

“Standards are about equity and expectation.”

**PRIMARY SOURCES** is the beginning of an ongoing dialogue with America's Teachers.

We welcome your thoughts and opinions on the report at [www.scholastic.com/primarysources](http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources).

“If you're not tech-savvy, you can't compete in the global marketplace.”

“Role model the skills, believe in the students, and never give up.”

“If we are going to compete as a nation we should be learning as a nation.”

“We have a great system for getting them through the system. We don't have a great system to teach them to think outside the box.”