The business literature is filled with accounts of workers who are “satisfied” with their jobs being more productive than those who are not. For example, satisfied employees are more likely to accept and work collaboratively toward collective goals, whereas dissatisfied employees are likely to perform at minimum levels and disrupt organizational effectiveness. Satisfaction levels can also have a profound effect on attitudes and behaviors, including how long an employee stays in a job.

Given the role that employee satisfaction plays in organizational effectiveness, we find it surprising that few large-scale studies have examined what produces satisfied teachers and, perhaps more importantly, what causes them to be dissatisfied. School business professionals are often led to believe that salaries and benefits largely determine whether our teachers are generally satisfied with their jobs. Similarly, we are often told that our districts’ comparably low compensation prompted “good teachers” to leave the district or perhaps even leave the profession.

To better understand what makes teachers satisfied and what we can do to increase teacher satisfaction, we surveyed 7,063 public school teachers about their school environment and their level of satisfaction. What we learned...
1. Teacher Ratings of School Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Ratings</th>
<th>Mean (Standard Deviation)</th>
<th>Equivalent Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School atmosphere</td>
<td>7.40 (2.16)</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School's equipment and facilities</td>
<td>7.02 (2.35)</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental support</td>
<td>5.71 (3.05)</td>
<td>B-/C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal leadership</td>
<td>7.86 (2.46)</td>
<td>B/B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>7.83 (1.83)</td>
<td>B/B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student behavior</td>
<td>6.42 (2.43)</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Respondents are asked to indicate their overall rating using the following Likert scale: 10 = A, 9 = A-, 8 = B+, 7 = B, 6 = B-, 5 = C+, 4 = C, 3 = C-, 2 = D+, 1 = D, 0 = F.

might surprise school business officials and other education leaders.

Are Teachers Satisfied?

We first asked teachers to rate their overall satisfaction with their school using a scale from 0 (equivalent to an F) to 10 (equivalent to an A). On average, teachers rated their overall satisfaction with their school a 7.02 or a B. This was somewhat encouraging given the reported effects of high-stakes testing environments on teacher morale.

Next, we asked the teachers to rate different aspects of their working environment using the same scale. As illustrated in Table 1, teachers rated most aspects of their environment between a B- and a B. Teachers rated principal leadership and their views of their careers the highest, on average, with a B to B+ rating. In contrast, they rated student behavior and parental support a B- or below.

What Matters Most to Dissatisfied Teachers?

Table 1 offers insight into teacher satisfaction levels when considered broadly. However, when we looked more closely at our data, we found that teacher satisfaction levels vary greatly among teachers.

For example, approximately 67% of the highly satisfied teachers rated their level of satisfaction with their school between an A and a B. Nearly 25% of the moderately satisfied teachers rated their satisfaction between a B- and a C. Finally, nearly 10% of the dissatisfied teachers rated their satisfaction between a C- and an F. Given these disparities, we hypothesized that the relative importance of the factors listed in Table 1 would differ according to how satisfied or dissatisfied a given teacher was. As Table 2 indicates, this is what we found.

For the highly satisfied teachers, all the factors were important and contributed to their satisfaction. Similarly, all but the school's equipment and facilities affected moderately satisfied teachers' satisfaction. Alternatively, our data suggest that only three factors matter to dissatisfied teachers: the school atmosphere, student behavior, and principal leadership.

In essence, several organizational features must be in place for teachers to be satisfied. However, knowing that all these organizational factors are associated with satisfaction can be overwhelming for schools, particularly when resources are limited. Therefore, to identify priority areas for schools, we looked more closely at the factors that were important to dissatisfied teachers.

School atmosphere. The high level of dissatisfaction among these teachers was likely related to a school culture or climate in which teachers work in isolation and have low expectations for students. This type of culture can permeate the organization and deteriorate morale and teacher motivation.

A first step toward more satisfied teachers is to create a productive working environment, which involves developing collaborative relationships among teachers, providing additional time for teachers to help individual students, and developing a culture of high expectations.
Next, dissatisfied teachers indicated that student behavior was associated significantly with their satisfaction. Their high levels of dissatisfaction, in other words, were related to a spectrum of negative behaviors, ranging from student apathy to absenteeism, threats, violence, and other disorderly behaviors in their schools.

Several less aggressive behaviors that may not be covered under zero-tolerance policies and legislation, including apathy and absenteeism, in combination with the more violent behaviors (such as fights) and potentially violent behaviors (such as threats), may have a profound effect on teacher satisfaction. Many schools and districts have delineated codes of conduct for students to limit these types of behaviors; however, the problem may not be articulating expectations, but rather developing a culture in which these behaviors are not tolerated. Creating a more orderly and safe working environment may improve this high level of dissatisfaction among some teachers.

Finally, teachers' perceptions of their principals were associated with their satisfaction. Dissatisfied teachers were those who thought that their principals were not strong leaders. Whether their principals provided direction, handled discipline fairly, had confidence in them and sought their input, provided support and appreciation, or respected them truly mattered to teachers. Our study suggests that schools with leaders who do not exhibit these transformational behaviors are likely to have dissatisfied teachers, thereby limiting both the potential for improvement and the organizational stability of those schools.

Although improving the school atmosphere, student behavior, and principal leadership are important first steps and may move a dissatisfied teacher to becoming moderately satisfied, our study suggests that parental support and positive views of their career were significant for those teachers with higher satisfaction levels. A first step toward more satisfied teachers is to create a productive working environment.

After focusing on these areas, an important next step in improving teacher satisfaction may be to strengthen communication among parents and school staff. In addition, when teachers feel valued, fairly paid, and recognized for their hard work, and when they enjoy their work, they exhibit higher levels of satisfaction. Some of these factors relate back to school atmosphere and leadership: school leaders can potentially improve teacher satisfaction by developing a culture of recognition and respect.

Finally, although these data indicate that equipment and facilities in teachers' working environments, such as nice work spaces, clean buildings and bathrooms, and accessible copiers or telephones, were important to teacher satisfaction (separating out the highly satisfied teachers), other aspects of their organizational environments were more salient.

What Can District Officials Do?

District officials should first consider whether current policies, including those focused on teacher retention, target the underlying factors that influence satisfaction as found in this study. For example, through mandates or inducements, district officials could emphasize the development of a positive culture, orderly student behavior, and transformational leadership as a way of improving teachers' satisfaction levels.

At the school level, principals should direct their efforts toward improving the school atmosphere, student discipline, and their own behaviors and attitudes, particularly the support and respect they provide teachers. By developing a collaborative and supportive working environment, developing (and implementing) consequences for students' disruptive behaviors, and strengthening their transformational leadership behaviors and practices, school leaders can develop more satisfying working conditions for teachers.

These changes may reverse the powerful negative effect of dissatisfaction on the functioning of the school organization as a step toward organizational improvement.