



For Immediate Release

Contact: Norman Black, The Hatcher Group
301-656-0348
norman@thehatchergroup.com

NATION'S EDUCATION REPORTERS CONFIDENT THEY'RE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

***First-ever survey also reveals gender pay gap,
concerns about clicks and time pressures***

BOSTON, May 1, 2016 – Despite facing real challenges, the men and women who report on education are confident about their professional futures, believe they're making a difference in their communities, and view their "beat" as a destination rather than a steppingstone to another position.

"Reporters who cover education are finding purpose in covering a subject that they believe is critical to America's future," said Scott Elliott, the president of the Education Writers Association's Board of Directors and the bureau chief of Chalkbeat Indiana. "They know the work they do matters."

The survey, "*State of the Education Beat 2016*," (ewa.org/BeatReport) was conducted last fall by the nonprofit, nonpartisan Education Week Research Center on EWA's behalf. More than 400 journalists responded to the online survey and 61 participated in follow-up telephone interviews. The report aims to paint a portrait of the field and to answer such questions as where education journalists turn for story ideas and information and what obstacles they face in helping the American public make sense of the education landscape.

"This report challenges conventional wisdom," said Caroline Hendrie, the executive director of EWA, which commissioned the independent survey of reporters who cover education across the country. "No one believes the beat is easy street. But education journalists aren't singing the blues. On the contrary, the state of the education beat is strong."

Compared to U.S. journalists as a whole, those covering education are younger and more likely to be women and people of color, the survey shows. While the typical American journalist is a 47-year-old white male with 20 years of experience, the typical education journalist is a 36-year-old white female with 11 years in journalism.

A top challenge cited by survey respondents is carving out time for in-depth reporting. They also want editors to gain a better understanding of the education beat and one-third report difficulty getting in-person access to schools and college campuses. Yet nearly all the respondents believe their journalism has a positive influence on education and most say coverage of the topic at their own news outlets is going in the right direction.

In one innovative aspect of the project, the polling and interview data were used to develop an Education Journalism Confidence Index to measure the journalists' perception of the overall strength of their sector. The index, a composite analysis of 13 survey questions, shows that most education journalists – 76 percent – have a favorable outlook on the profession.

“This runs counter to the prevailing view that journalists feel defeated in the face of financial uncertainties and change,” said Holly Yettick, the director of the Education Week Research Center. “More than three-quarters of education journalists are committed to the field and persuaded that it is a prestigious career path.”

Key findings from survey respondents:

- 79 percent say education is a career path they are committed to pursuing. Millennial journalists have higher confidence levels, boding well for the field.
- 95 percent say their work makes a positive impact on education, raising awareness or explaining issues that are poorly or only partially understood.
- Female education journalists are paid about \$3,000 less per year on average than their male counterparts.
- Inequality is cited as the most undercovered issue in education today, while student testing as well as budgets and funding are seen as the top education news stories of 2016-17.
- Just 5 percent express confidence in TV education news, compared to 72 percent for newspapers. Not even TV journalists express confidence in their medium.
- 32 percent say their outlets' education news staff shrank over the past two years, 27 percent say staffs grew, and 41 percent say the size hasn't changed.
- News releases, press conferences or public relations professionals are top sources of story ideas for education journalists.
- Teachers or faculty members are top sources of information for reporters' stories but are less likely to be the genesis of story ideas.
- Journalists worry about outlets' push to track which stories attract the most online readers because it can create pressure to prioritize popularity over substance.

“Education journalism has until now suffered from a dearth of information about the field itself,” said Erik Robelen, EWA's deputy director. “We hope this report will be used to inform decisions about resources devoted to the education beat and for assessments by media outlets of how they cover – or do not cover – education.”

The Education Writers Association is the national nonprofit professional organization for members of the media who cover education at all levels.

#