

The 49th Annual PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

A black and white photograph of two students, a boy and a girl, working together on a large, intricate sculpture made of cardboard in a workshop. The boy, on the left, is wearing a dark jacket with white stripes on the sleeves and is using a tool to work on the sculpture. The girl, on the right, is wearing glasses and a light-colored hoodie. The sculpture is a large, stylized figure with many long, thin, radiating pieces attached to its back, resembling a sunburst or a fan. The background shows shelves filled with various materials and tools.

Academic
achievement
isn't the only
mission

Americans
overwhelmingly
support investments
in career preparation,
personal skills.

Americans speak out on

- Using public money to support private schools
- Valuing diversity in public schools
- Measuring school quality
- Wrapping support around kids who need it most



Phi Delta Kappan

Joan Richardson
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, KAPPAN
MAGAZINE & PDK POLL
DIRECTOR

Rafael Heller
MANAGING EDITOR/
CONTENT

Carol Bucheri
MANAGING EDITOR/
DESIGN & PRODUCTION

Michele Jacques
COPY EDITOR/PROOFREADER

**Langer Research
Associates**

Gary Langer
PRESIDENT

Gregory Holyk
SENIOR RESEARCH ANALYST

Christine Filer
RESEARCH ANALYST

Sofi Sinozich
RESEARCH ANALYST

Allison De Jong
RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

Phi Delta
Kappan

USPS 429-840
ISSN 0031-7217

September 2017 V99 N1

Published by PDK International, 1625 Wilson Blvd., Suite 705, Arlington, VA 20598-0047, eight times per year, September to May with a combined December/January issue. Subscription prices available at kappanmagazine.org. Periodicals postage paid at Arlington, Va., and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Phi Delta Kappan, P.O. Box 13090, Arlington, VA 22219.

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

©2017 by Phi Delta Kappa International. All rights reserved.

Publications Mail Agreement PM# 41450540
Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 2600, Mississauga, ON L4T 0A8.

The 49th Annual PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

K3

Academic achievement isn't the only mission

Americans want schools to focus on career and personal skills to ensure that students are prepared for life after high school.

K10

Preparing for life after high school

Americans overwhelmingly want schools to do more than educate students academically.

K12

Using public money to support private schools

Substantially more Americans oppose than support school vouchers. Whether parents would use a voucher depends on how much tuition it would cover.

K16

Valuing diversity in public schools

Most parents value racial/ethnic and economic diversity in schools — but they don't believe it's worth a longer commute to school.

K21

Wrapping support around children who need it most

Most Americans say schools should provide wraparound services for students and seek additional public money to pay for them.

K23

Measuring school quality

Parents say standardized tests don't measure what's important to them, and they put such tests at the bottom of a list of indicators of school quality.

K26

Grading the public schools

Public schools get their highest grades from those who know them best: public school parents.

K28

Expecting children to attend college

Most public school parents expect their child to attend college full time, but that may not mean a four-year college.

K31

Methodology

Cover: Tenth graders at MC2 STEM High School fit together their capstone project, which combines art and engineering. Photo by Allison Shelle/The Verbatim Agency for American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action.

K8

**Commentary
by PDK CEO
Joshua P. Starr**

Learn more
and join the
conversation at
pdkpoll.org

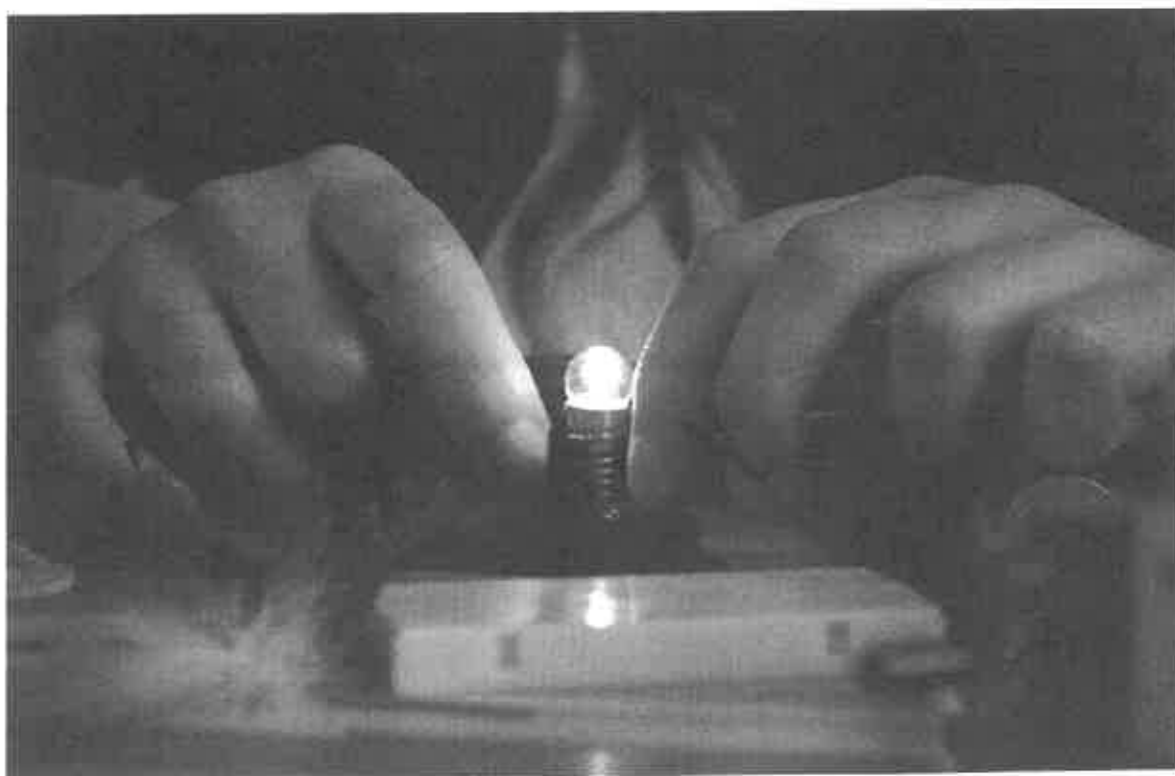
Academic achievement isn't the only mission

Americans overwhelmingly support investments in career preparation but give a thumbs-down to vouchers, standardized testing.

The three R's alone don't cut it anymore: Americans overwhelmingly want schools to do more than educate students in academic subjects. According to the 2017 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, they also want schools to help position students for their working lives after school. That means both direct career preparation and efforts to develop students' interpersonal skills.

When judging school quality, the public gives much more weight to students' job preparation and interpersonal development than to their standardized test scores, the poll shows. That said, though, Americans do still value traditional academic preparation, especially opportunities for advanced academic studies.

As in past years, the 2017 poll shows little public support for using public money to send children to private schools. The more Americans know about how voucher programs work, the less likely they are to support them or to say they'd participate in them.



These and other results suggest that some of the most prominent ideas that dominate current policy debates — from supporting vouchers to doubling down on high-stakes tests to cutting federal education funding — are out of step with parents' main concern: They want their children prepared for life after they complete high school.

The PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools is the most trusted source of public opinion data about K-12 education because of its rigor, its depth, and its commitment to capturing all voices and viewpoints. This year, as always, PDK has taken great care to frame poll questions as objectively as possible and to share

the full and unvarnished results. Rather than offering a partial or restricted view of the data, we are committed to allowing the public to speak for itself.

The 49th annual PDK survey is based on a random, representative, 50-state sample of 1,588 adults interviewed by cell or landline telephone, in English or Spanish, in May 2017. For the first time, this year's study also includes a pair of statewide samples — focusing on Georgia and New York — that we cover in separate reports. Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y., produced this year's poll. For details about the methodology of the 2017 poll, see p. K31.

Key findings of the 2017 poll


**Follow
us on
Twitter
@pdkintl**



Preparing students for life after high school

The strong emphasis on job preparation is consistent with and expands upon the findings from PDK's 2016 survey, in which fewer than half of respondents said academic preparation should be the main goal of a public school education. (The rest were divided between preparation for work or for citizenship as the top priority.)

This year's survey sharpens the point:

- A vast 82% of Americans support job or career skills classes even if that means students might spend less time in academic classes.
- 86% say schools in their community should offer certificate or licensing programs that qualify students for employment in a given field.

- Eight in 10 see technology and engineering classes as an extremely important or very important element of school quality.
- 82% also say that it is highly important for schools to help students develop interpersonal skills, such as being cooperative, respectful of others, and persistent at solving problems.

These interests complement rather than supplant an interest in academics: 76% of respondents see advanced academic classes as highly important indicators of school quality. Notably, nearly as many say it's also extremely or very important that schools offer extracurricular activities (70%) and art and music classes (71%).

The public offers little support for standardized testing in contrast to the deep interest in testing by policy makers over the last two decades. Less than half of adults (42%) say performance on standardized tests is a highly important indicator of school quality — that includes just 13% who call test scores extremely important. Far more point to developing students' interpersonal skills (39%) and offering technology and engineering instruction (37%) as extremely important.



Using public money to support private schools

Just as the policy focus on standardized tests seems out of step with the American majority so, too, does the emphasis on vouchers. More Americans continue to oppose rather than favor using public funds to send students to private school (52% to 39%). And opposition rises — to 61% — when the issue is described in more detail.

As we have 20 times previously, we asked Americans whether they supported using vouchers to attend private schools. This year, we also asked whether vouchers could be used to attend religious or private schools. When religious schools are mentioned, opposition to vouchers rises sharply among Americans who have no religious affiliation or profess a non-Christian religion.

Other key findings:

- Traditional public schools don't command vast loyalty. If cost and location were not issues, just one-third of parents say they'd pick a traditional public school over a private school (31%), public charter school (17%), or a religious school (14%).
- Only slightly more than half of public school parents (54%) say they'd stick with a public school if they were offered public funds to send their child to a private or religious school. (But that assumes full tuition coverage.)
- If a voucher covered just half of private or religious school tuition, the number of parents who say they'd stick with a public school swells to 72%.
- Just 21% agree that vouchers erode the quality of public schools. Opposition to vouchers seems based on views about the appropriate use of public funds.



Valuing diversity in public schools

Questions on diversity reveal a mix of receptiveness and compunctions. Most parents say they value racial/ethnic and economic diversity in schools — but they're divided on its actual benefits, and interest wanes if it means a longer trip to school.

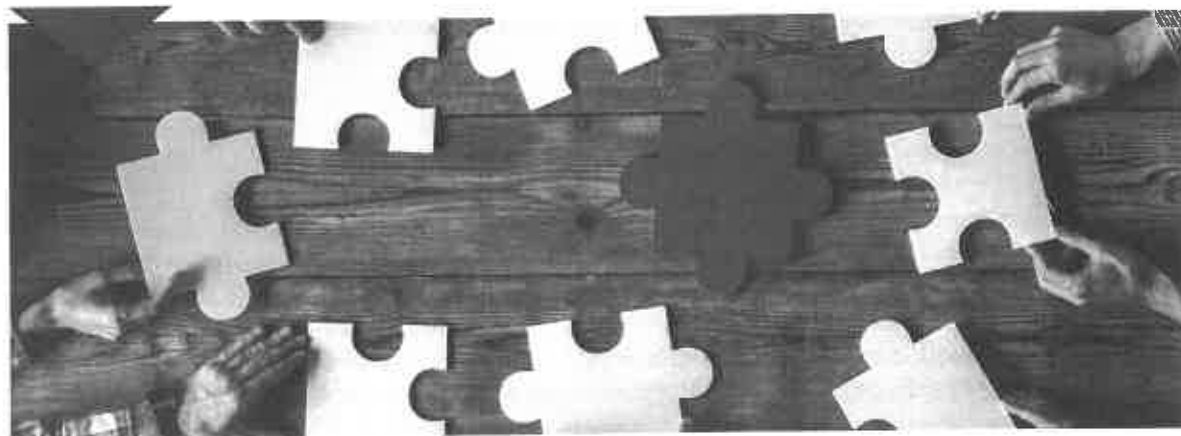
Seventy percent of parents say they'd prefer to have their child in a racially diverse school, including equal numbers of whites and nonwhites. But other results suggest that some of that may reflect a socially desirable answer rather than one on which individuals are fully convinced or willing to act.

Other key findings:

- A slight majority (55%) say having a mix of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds in public schools is extremely or very important.
- Blacks (72%) are more likely than Hispanics (57%) and whites (48%) to call racial and ethnic diversity highly important. This view also is nearly twice as prevalent among Democrats as it is among Republicans, and, in statistical modeling, political party affiliation is the strongest predictor for this view.
- Similarly tepid majorities overall say that racially diverse schools produce a better learning environment for white students (51%) or black and Hispanic students (55%). Nearly all the rest say it makes no difference.
- If a racially diverse school is farther away, 57% say they'd prefer to send their child to a closer but less diverse school; 61% of whites say so, as do 52% of nonwhites. Just 25% overall say it's worth the trip.
- Responses on economic diversity are generally similar, though more muted. Fewer parents (61%) say they'd prefer to send their child to a school with a mix of students from different economic backgrounds; less than half (45%) see this as highly important. Comparatively few (20%) say they'd accept a longer commute to a more economically diverse school.



Follow
#pdkpoll
for updates



Wrapping support around children who need it most

Wraparound services — such as mental health services and after-school programs — are receiving increasing attention as schools seek to ensure that students have the full range of supports they need to succeed. Americans generally say that public schools should provide such services to students who don't have access to them somewhere else and that schools should be able to seek additional public funds to do so.

Other key findings:

- Among the services mentioned, those that respondents rate as most important for public schools to provide to students in need include after-school programs (92%) and mental health services (87%), and most by far feel that way strongly.
- Three-quarters of respondents say that schools are justified in seeking additional public funds to pay to provide such services.



Follow
us at
[pdkintl](#)

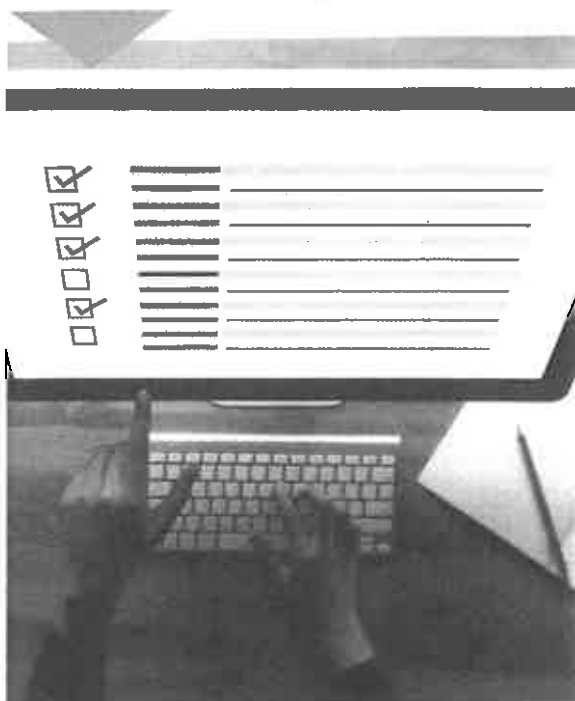
Measuring school quality

Standardized testing, which has driven much of the policy activity in education over the past two decades, draws little support from the public: Just 42% of Americans call performance on standardized tests a highly important indicator of school quality — that includes just 13% who call test scores extremely important. Compare that to the 39% who say it's extremely important for schools to develop students' interpersonal skills and 37% who say offering technology and engineering instruction is extremely important.

Every other potential quality metric tested in this survey far surpasses testing as a measure of school quality: having extracurricular activities, art and music classes, advanced academic classes, technology and engineering classes, and efforts to develop students' interpersonal skills.

Other key findings:

- 58% of public school parents are confident that standardized tests do a good job measuring how well their child is learning, but a mere 19% are very confident of this.
- 49% of public school parents say standardized tests don't measure aspects of their child's education that are important to them personally.
- Although Americans are far more likely to see the development of interpersonal skills as an important indicator of school quality, just 39% are confident that standardized tests can measure these skills. That said, 84% say schools should assess students on their interpersonal skills, and 66% say schools should be held accountable for these test results as well as for academic skill results. Even if skills are imperfectly assessed, these results suggest, accountability still is in demand.



Grading the public schools

As it has for nearly five decades, the 2017 PDK survey repeats its annual assessment of the public schools overall. While results are largely similar to last year's, one item stands out: The proportion of Americans who give their community's public schools an A grade is its highest in more than 40 years of PDK polling. Fifteen percent — one in seven Americans — give their local schools an A, up from 9% a decade ago. That figure has been surpassed just once, in 1974.

Other key findings:

- 49% of Americans give their local public schools an A or B grade, matching its average since 1999. The percentage is even higher — 62% — among public school parents.
- As in previous years, the public schools nationally are graded more severely — 24% of respondents give them an A or B grade. Local public schools are graded more negatively in the nation's most densely populated cities, with ratings rising as population density decreases. Similarly, big city dwellers are least trusting of their state's ability to evaluate their local schools.
- 22% of Americans cite a lack of funding as the biggest problem facing their local schools, similar to the past two years but down from the mid-30s during the aftermath of the economic downturn from 2009 to 2014.

Translate the public's desires into policy

Education leaders play a crucial role by bringing a listening ear plus expertise to the table when policy makers are at work.



By Joshua P. Starr

When I was a school superintendent, I used to remind my team that the community consists mainly of reasonable, if silent, people. Every time an important decision has to be made about educational policy

or practice, a vocal minority of parents and other community members will show up at meetings, flood the district office with emails and calls, and maybe even get themselves elected to the school board. But most people just want a clear explanation about what's going on, what you've decided to do, and why. And if you are transparent and forthright — especially when the results aren't positive, a strategy isn't working, or mistakes have been made — they will tend to believe you and trust your judgment.

One of the advantages of a survey like the annual PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools is that it pulls back the curtain on that silent majority. This year, as in many recent years, the poll showed a wide gap between what the most strident policy makers and reformers are advocating and what the American public actually wants and believes.

School and district leaders are in a unique position to help close that gap. Not only do they hear directly from parents and other community members, but they also have the ear of policy makers, and they can help them translate the public's

JOSHUA P. STARR (@JoshuaPStarr) is CEO of PDK International.

desires into policies that make sense for schools and for kids.

Last year, we learned from the poll that a majority of parents wanted more offerings that would prepare their children for the world of work, even at the expense of honors courses. This year, they seem to be saying that it shouldn't be an either-or decision. Americans recognize that success in the workplace and in life requires people skills as much as academic smarts, and they believe that schools should focus on both.

Unfortunately, most parents don't really know what goes on in school on a daily basis, other than what they gather from the homework that gets sent home or what their teenagers mumble at the dinner table. To help keep them informed, school and district leaders can hold forums and curriculum nights, post materials on the web, host science fairs and art exhibitions, or invite parents to "family Fridays" (as my own children's elementary school used to do). But while such efforts are great, they don't really shed much light on what kids do 180 days of the year for 6.5 hours a day.

the marketplace will try to convince educators that it does have the ability to measure SEL and that policy makers will soon want to use those measures to evaluate teachers. It is imperative that superintendents and school boards resist attempts to misuse a solid theory to support another purpose, much in the way that policy makers have misused value-added measurements.

Superintendents can get ahead of this by implementing measures of SEL that focus on the school as the unit of change and include measures of school climate and culture that lead to positive outcomes for students. For example, schools with a highly collaborative professional culture tend to achieve better outcomes for students; that can be measured with a survey of staff. Or, ask every middle and high school student one question: "Is there one adult in the school who knows you well and has your back?" Answers to that question will tell you a lot about how students feel about their school and is a great entry point into further inquiry about school climate.

The challenge remains: What can principals and superintendents do to ensure that parents truly understand what their kids are learning and how it connects to life after high school?

Beyond improving communication between school and home, public school leaders must move more aggressively to integrate academic skills with the necessary work skills — and do so at scale. How can we help teachers design instructional environments that combine both the academic skills to tackle a complex problem and the skills to work in teams, understand others' perspectives, and persevere? The nascent social-emotional learning movement isn't yet at scale in our schools, but we've seen enough evidence to know the value of incorporating SEL into instruction and finding ways to measure it.

The danger lies with the measurement. This year's poll results tell us that parents not only value the instruction of interpersonal skills; they also want schools to measure the results. I personally have grave concerns about our ability to measure social-emotional learning and use those results for accountability purposes. The public's desire for measurement has significant implications for practitioners and policy makers since the science of such measurement is lagging. I fear that

Superintendents also can point to districts that have done such measurement effectively and encourage policy makers to support these good practices and avoid wandering down a dangerous road toward accountability measures that cause more harm than good.

The PDK poll consistently shows that what the public and parents want at the policy and classroom levels is often not consistent with many of the policies enacted by local, state, and federal lawmakers. Educational leaders can't merely admire the problem; they must proactively be part of the response and the solution. When they wade into the public arena, educational leaders must be mindful that they are responsible for not only teaching children but also teaching adults about the possibilities of public education. That can mean counteracting the views of the majority when those may lead in dangerous directions and protecting the interests of the minority even when those are deemed unpopular. It is a balancing act but suited to those with expertise about what's required for effective teaching and learning. The annual PDK poll is a great place to start that conversation by understanding more precisely what parents are seeking for their schools.



Follow
@JoshuaPStarr

Preparing students for life after high school

Fewer than half of Americans in the 2016 PDK survey said the main goal of public education should be to prepare students academically, as opposed to providing work training or citizenship skills. And the desire for more career, technical, or skills-based classes outpaced preference for more advanced academic classes by more than three to one. Those results constituted a wake-up call to educators that the public sees academics, while important, as only part of today's educational mission.

This year's results expand upon those findings, exposing the depth and breadth of public interest in the role of public schools in job and career training.

Among the results, a vast 86% of Americans say public schools should offer classes that award certificates or licenses qualifying students for employment in specific fields; six in 10 feel strongly about it, a high level of intensity in support for such programs.

Nearly as many (82%) say public high schools should offer job or career skills classes in place of academic classes, again demonstrating broad support for jobs-focused education.

Eighty-two percent also see technology and engineering classes to prepare students for careers in those fields as extremely or very important in school quality, placing it in a tie for the top item of six that

were assessed. Alongside it is how well schools help students develop interpersonal skills such as cooperation, respect, and persistence — another outcome essential to success outside the school gates and beyond the realm of traditional academic instruction.

While support for jobs-focused education is uniformly high in the measures described above, there's more differentiation in another question: Fifty-one percent say public high schools in their community should provide more career skills classes than they do now vs. only 4% who say they should offer fewer such classes. The rest either say that the right amount of job or career skills classes are currently available (30%) or express no opinion (15%).



Follow
us at
pdkintl

Attitudes toward job/career skills classes

National totals, 2017

	Offer more %	Right amount %	Offer fewer %
All adults	51	30	4
Responses by demographic groups			
RACE/ETHNICITY			
Whites	50	31	3
Blacks	60	21	8
Hispanics	49	32	8
HOUSEHOLD INCOME			
<\$100K	54	28	5
\$100K+	44	39	2
AGE			
18-64	53	29	5
65+	42	32	2
GENDER OF CHILD			
Public school parents of boys	64	25	2
Public school parents of girls	49	34	7

Responses by comparison to other questions

Q30. LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS GRADE

A	39	45	4
B	48	37	4
C/D	61	22	5
F	64	16	1

Q23. EXPECTATION FOR CHILD

Full-time college	52	32	4
Part- or full-time work	62	27	4

Q24. CONFIDENCE IN STANDARDIZED TESTS

Very	40	37	11
Somewhat/not so	59	32	2
Not at all	71	12	5

THE QUESTIONS

Q1. Do you think public high schools should or should not offer job or career skills classes if it means that those students spend less time in academic classes?

Q2. Do you think public high schools in your community should offer more job or career skills classes than they do now, fewer such classes, or do they offer about the right amount of them?

Q3. Do you think public high schools in your community should or should not offer programs in which students can earn a certificate or license that qualifies them for employment in a specific field?

A deeper dive

Support for public high schools offering job or career skills classes, offering technology and engineering classes, and promoting interpersonal skills is broadly based across groups. But differences emerge in support for more such classes. Support peaks at 64% among parents whose oldest child in public school is a boy vs. 49% if it's a girl.

Further, satisfaction with job-related classes relates to views of school quality. Among Americans who say their local public schools are offering the right amount of job or career classes, 64% give those schools an A or B grade for their performance overall. Among those who see a need for more such classes, just 44% offer A or B grades to their local schools.

Views on the reliability of standardized tests also are relevant. Among public school parents who are very confident that standardized tests do a good job measuring learning, 40% favor more jobs-related classes. Among those who are somewhat or not so confident in standardized testing, support for more such classes rises to 59%. And support is 71% among those who aren't confident in standardized tests at all.

In another result — and a logical one — public school parents who expect their child to get a full-time job or go to college part time while also working are more apt to support more job skills classes than parents who expect their child to go to college full time (62% vs. 52%).

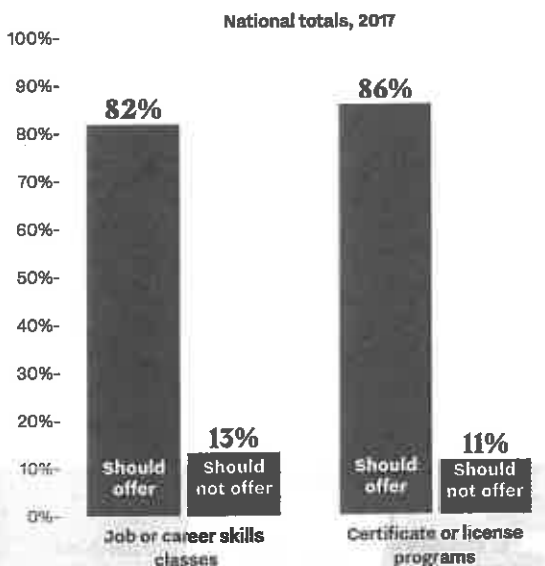
Similarly, although the sample size is too small to make definitive conclusions, the data suggest that public school parents who think their child will get a full-time job after high school, rather than additional schooling, are most apt to favor schools offering job and career classes.

Wanting more job/career skills classes is greater among blacks (60%) than among whites (50%) or

Hispanics (49%). Blacks also are more apt to say that technology and engineering-related classes are extremely important. Support for more jobs classes also is greater among those with household incomes less than \$100,000 than those with higher incomes (54% vs. 44%) and among those younger than 65 than seniors (53% vs. 42%).

Under-65s, less-than-\$100,000 earners, and non-whites are more apt than their counterparts to feel strongly that schools should offer certificate or license programs. Strong support for licensing programs also rises as local school ratings decline — 68% among those who grade their schools a C or lower vs. 55% among those who give them an A or B.

Career-related courses in public high schools



A teacher helps a student mount a pipe on an engineering project. Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action.

Using public money to support private schools

Substantially more Americans oppose rather than support school vouchers. But the size of that margin depends on how the question is posed, and intentions to use a voucher system depend on how much tuition it covers.

Twenty times since 1993, PDK surveys have asked: "Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?" Asked again this year, 52% of Americans oppose the idea while 39% are in favor, a 13-point gap.

However, this year's survey also included a more detailed question: "Some people say public funds should be used only to pay for public schools that offer tuition-free education for all students. Others say parents should be able to direct some public funds to any school their child attends, whether public, private, or religious. This would cover the full cost of public school or the partial cost of private or religious schools."

Given this description, 61% prefer a system that funds public schools only vs. 34% support for the voucher option, a broader 27-point gap. Further, when told that a voucher system either could help public schools by making them compete or hurt them by reducing their funding, preference for only funding public schools rises to 67%, compared to 26% support for vouchers, a 41-point gap.



Follow
#pdkpoll
for updates

THE QUESTIONS

Q4. On another subject, do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?

Q5. I have a question about four types of schools. One is traditional public schools. Another is charter schools, which are publicly funded but run outside of the public school system. The third is parochial or religious schools. And the fourth is private schools. Imagine you could send your child to any one of these four kinds of schools, and cost and location were not an issue. All things equal, which would you pick . . . public, charter, religious, or private?



Q6. As far as you are aware, are there any charter, religious, or private schools in your community where your child could go or not?

Q7. I have a question about how public funds for education should be spent. Some people say public funds should be used only to pay for public schools that offer tuition-free education for all students. Others say parents should be able to direct some public funds to any school their child attends, whether public, private, or religious. This would cover the full cost of public school or the partial cost of private or religious school. Which of these do you prefer?

The striking difference in the two main questions is not chiefly informed by a sense that vouchers would make public schools worse; only 21% hold this view, while 34% think they'd make them better, and 37% expect no effect. (That said, support for vouchers, naturally, is lowest among those who say they would make public schools worse and highest among those who say they'd make them better.)

Instead, increased opposition appears to relate to including religious schools in the more detailed question. The first question only mentions using public funds for private schools, while the second version references funding private or religious schools. As detailed below, opposition to vouchers increases most sharply with the new wording among non-Christians.

The role of cost

The results suggest that if cost were not an issue, public schools would lose students. In that hypothetical, 34% of parents say they would send their child to a public school, but 31% would choose a private school, 17% a charter school, and 14% a religious school.

In response to a separate question, a slim majority of public school parents (54%) say that if they had a choice to send their child to a private or religious school using public funds, they would still send their child to a public school. But, of course, cost is a factor: If the voucher were to cover just half of private or religious school tuition, then the proportion of parents who say they would stick with public schools rises to 72%. Local school quality also matters. In statistical modeling, public school parents who give higher grades to local schools are less likely to send a child to a nonpublic school when only half-tuition coverage is provided.

Q8. Some say allowing public funds to go to any school would improve public schools by making them more competitive; others say this would hurt public schools by reducing their funding. Given those views, which do you prefer?

Q9. Say parents in your community could use public funds to send their children to either public, private, or religious schools. Public schools would receive funding only for students who continue to attend them. Do you think this would make your local public schools better, make them worse, or make no difference in their quality?

Support for vouchers

National totals, 2017

	Use for private school		Use for any school		Use only for public school
	Favor %	Oppose %	%	%	%
All	39	52	34	61	
Responses by demographic group					
RACE/ETHNICITY					
Whites	35	55	34	61	
Nonwhites	46	46	34	61	
AGE					
18-29	48	39	33	62	
65+	34	57	33	60	
HOUSEHOLD INCOME					
<\$100K	40	52	35	61	
\$100K+	31	62	31	67	
RELIGION					
Christian	40	52	39	56	
Non-Christian	38	51	23	73	
POLITICAL PARTY					
Democrats	31	58	26	67	
Republicans	46	46	50	48	
Independents	42	50	32	64	
POLITICAL LEANING					
Liberals	30	63	24	73	
Moderates	41	51	29	64	
Conservatives	47	44	50	47	

Responses by comparison to other questions

Q5. ALL ELSE EQUAL WOULD SEND CHILD TO:					
Public/charter school	37	53	28	67	
Private/religious school	47	48	52	45	
Q30. LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS GRADE					
A/B	35	56	33	63	
C/D	46	50	36	62	
F	51	34	42	51	

Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Q10. If you were offered public funds to send your child in public school to a private or religious school instead, do you think you probably would keep them in public school, or would you probably send them to a private school or to a religious school?

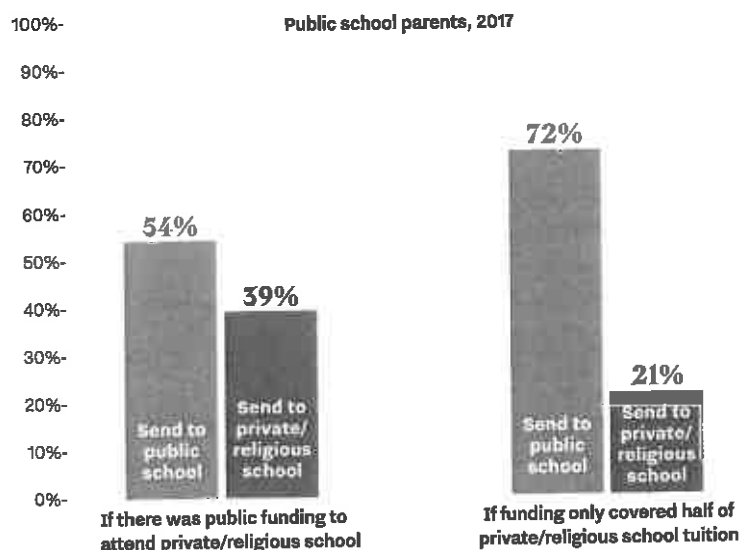
Q11. What if the money this program made available paid no more than half of the private or religious school tuition, and you had to make up the rest — in that case do you think you probably would keep your child in public school, or would you probably send them to a private or religious school?



Past PDK poll questions have used the term “parochial or church-related schools” to refer to religious schools. A split-sample test conducted before fielding this year’s full survey found no significant difference between the two, so the more inclusive term was used this year.

Where would you send your child?

A deeper dive



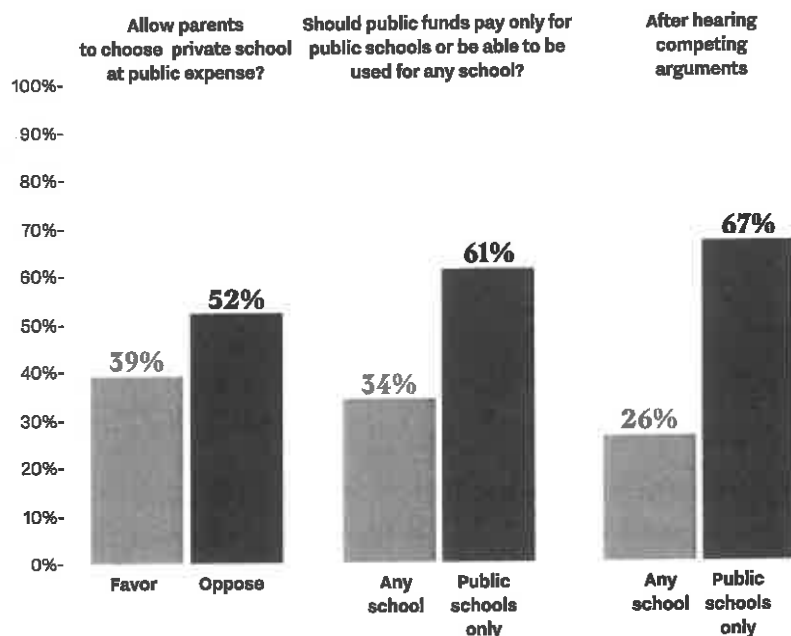
There are profound differences among groups in views on school vouchers. Political partisanship and ideology are key factors, as are ratings of the quality of local public schools. And mentioning that religious schools would be eligible for voucher funding brings religious identity strongly into the mix.

When only funding for private schools is mentioned, Christians and non-Christians react similarly, with 52% and 51% opposing vouchers, respectively. In the question noting that vouchers would fund both private and religious schools, views among Christians are similar (opposed by 56%), while 73% of non-Christians oppose the practice. (Non-Christians comprise 32% of the adult population in this survey, including 26% with no religious affiliation and 6% with a different religious identity.)

In terms of partisanship and ideology, support for using public funds for private schools is 15 points higher among Republicans than Democrats, and 17 points higher among conservatives than liberals. These gaps increase to 24 and 26 points, respectively, in the more detailed question.

Vouchers: Public education fund allocation

National totals, 2017



Views across the two questions hold essentially stable among Republicans and conservatives, while opposition rises sharply among Democrats, independents, liberals, and moderates. The shifts are striking: Preference for funding public schools only rises from a 27- to a 41-point margin among Democrats, from an 8- to a 32-point margin among independents, from a 33- to a 49-point margin among liberals and from a 10- to a 35-point margin among moderates.

Again, religion seems to be a key factor: Republicans and conservatives are more apt than other Americans to be Christians, by 27 points compared with Democrats and 22 points compared with liberals. In statistical modeling controlling for other demographic characteristics and selected attitudes, including partisanship and ideology, being a non-Christian is significantly associated with opposition to vouchers when religious schools are mentioned but not in the question that references only private schools. Being a non-Christian is significantly associated with opposition to vouchers when religious schools are mentioned but not when only private schools are included.

Reactions also differ by factors such as race/ethnicity, income, age, and urban status. Nonwhites split evenly on vouchers when only private schools are mentioned but oppose them by a 27-point margin when religious schools are included. Whites are about equally negative in both cases, by 20- and 27-point margins, respectively.

The margin of opposition to vouchers grows by 38 points among young adults and by 14 points among people in less-than-\$100,000 households using the more detailed question, while holding essentially steady among seniors and among top-income Americans.

Parents who would send their child to a traditional public school or a public charter school even if a voucher program were available are more likely to support using public funds for public schools only (67%). By contrast, and not surprisingly, those who would send their child to a private or religious school are less likely to favor using public funds only for public schools (45%).



Follow
#pdkpoll
for updates



Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Valuing diversity in public schools



Follow
us at
pdkintl

Parents of a school-aged child see racial and economic diversity in the classroom as positives in general — but fewer are persuaded of their importance or practical value, and most don't see school diversity as worthy of a longer commute.

Seven in 10 parents overall say they would rather see their child attend a school where the student body is racially diverse, with 49% feeling that way strongly. However:

- Fewer (55%) say it's very or extremely important

that schools have a mix of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds — with sharp racial divisions in this view.

- Just more than half say that such a mix of students improves the learning environment.
- But only one-quarter of parents say that they'd like their child to attend a racially diverse school and that they'd accept a longer commute to do it.

Results are similar on economic diversity, albeit

THE QUESTIONS

Q12a. How important is it to you that the public schools in your community have a mix of students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds? Is this extremely important, very important, somewhat important, not so important, or not important at all?

Q12b. How important is it to you that the public schools in your community have a mix of students from different economic backgrounds? Is this extremely important, very important, somewhat important, not so important, or not important at all?

Q13. Do you think having a mix of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds makes the learning environment better, worse, or the same for:

- a. White students
- b. Black and Hispanic students

Q14. Do you think having a mix of students from different economic backgrounds makes the learning environment better, worse, or the same for:

- a. Students from poor families
- b. Students from middle-income families
- c. Students from higher-income families

more muted: Sixty-one percent of parents say they would rather their child attend a school where the student body is economically diverse, with 36% feeling that way strongly. But fewer than half call this highly important (45%) or think it improves the learning environment. And only 20% both desire economic diversity and say they'd accept a longer commute for their child to obtain it.

The perceived importance of diversity

The poll reveals stark divisions on the perceived importance of racial and ethnic diversity in public schools. Blacks, Democrats, and liberals value diversity most highly, as do those who also value economic diversity.

Seventy-two percent of black parents say that having a mix of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds is extremely or very important, declining to 57% of Hispanics and 48% of whites. This gap is even wider between Democrats (70%) and Republicans (38%), with independents in between. Liberals (72%) and conservatives (43%) differ widely as well. In statistical modeling, political party affiliation consistently is the strongest predictor of this viewpoint (controlling for demographics, political ideology, and attitudes about school quality).

Parents living in the South are 16 points more likely than those in the Northeast to rate racial and ethnic diversity in the schools as very or extremely important, and those in the West are more apt than those in the Northeast or Midwest to find such diversity extremely important (35% vs. 20% and 21%, respectively). These regional differences hold up in statistical modeling before controlling for the importance of different aspects of school quality.

Perceptions of the level of racial and ethnic diversity in one's community also play an important role in predicting the view that diverse schools are

Importance of a racially and ethnically diverse student body

National totals, 2017

	Extremely/very important %	Somewhat important %	Not so/not at all important %
All parents	55	18	22
Responses by demographic group			
RACE/ETHNICITY			
Whites	48	22	25
Blacks	72	15	13
Hispanics	57	13	24
POLITICAL PARTY			
Democrats	70	16	10
Independents	56	20	18
Republicans	38	20	39
POLITICAL LEANING			
Liberals	72	10	10
Moderates	60	27	12
Conservatives	43	17	36
REGION			
Northeast	45	22	26
Midwest	47	23	29
South	61	18	16
West	59	14	20

important. There are no significant differences by gender, age, or income once these perceptions are taken into account.

There's also a very strong connection between support for economic and racial diversity. Ninety percent of those who say economic diversity is highly important say the same about racial diversity, compared with 35% of those who say economic diversity is just somewhat important, and just 19% of those who say it's not so important or not important at all.

Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Q15. All else equal, would you rather have your child attend a school where most of the students are of the same race or where the student body is racially diverse? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

Q16. What if your child had to commute farther than they do today to get to a more racially diverse school — would you prefer a closer but less diverse school or a farther away but more diverse school?

Q17. All else equal, would you rather have your child attend a school where most of the students are of the same economic background or where the student body is economically diverse?

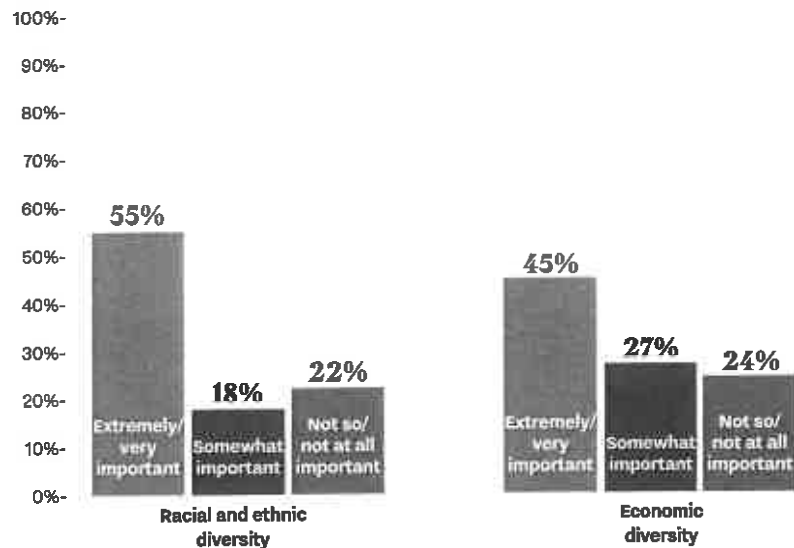
Q18. What if your child had to commute farther than they do today to get to a more economically diverse school — would you prefer a closer but less diverse school or a farther away but more diverse school?

Q19a. How diverse is your own community in terms of the racial/ethnic backgrounds of people living there? Would you say very diverse, somewhat diverse, not so diverse, or not diverse at all?

Q19b. How diverse is your own community in terms of the economic backgrounds of people living there? Would you say very diverse, somewhat diverse, not so diverse, or not diverse at all?

Importance of diversity in public schools

Parents of school-age children, 2017



Follow us on Twitter @pdkintl

Having racial/ethnic and economic diversity in schools appeals to parents — but interest wanes if it means a longer trip to school.



Diversity improves the learning environment for students who are . . .

National totals, 2017

	Poor %	Middle income %	Higher income %
All parents	48	41	42
Responses by demographic group			
HOUSEHOLD INCOME			
<\$50K	39	35	36
\$50-100K	53	46	45
\$100K+	60	51	51
RACE/ETHNICITY			
Whites	51	42	42
Blacks	56	56	52
Hispanics	33	26	28
POLITICAL PARTY			
Democrats	54	48	46
Independents	53	43	45
Republicans	35	32	32
POLITICAL LEANING			
Liberals	61	54	53
Moderates	50	42	41
Conservatives	41	34	37

Effect on the learning environment

The number who call racial and ethnic diversity highly important (55%) is very similar to the numbers who say such diversity improves the learning environment: Fifty-five percent see it as a positive for black and Hispanic students, 51% for white students.

There's a great deal of overlap: Among those who say this kind of diversity is highly important, 72% also say it improves the learning environment for minority students, and 68% say it improves the learning environment for white students. This drops to 17% for both groups among those who see racial and ethnic diversity as less important or not important at all.

Saying that racial and ethnic diversity in public schools improves the learning environment for black and Hispanic students peaks among college graduates (68%), those who expect their child to go to college full time (63%), and those earning at least \$50,000 a year (62%). Results are generally similar on views of the learning environment for white students.

In the sharpest racial/ethnic difference, Hispanics are much less likely than whites or blacks to say that racial diversity improves the learning environment for white students: Just 33% of Hispanics feel this way, compared with 59% of blacks and 51% of whites. In terms of the learning environment for minority students, Hispanics are numerically less likely than whites and blacks to say diversity helps, but this difference does not reach statistical significance.

Preferring a racially diverse school peaks among blacks (78%), compared with 61% of Hispanics and 70% among whites. And 62% of blacks feel this way strongly, compared with 45% of whites and 44% of Hispanics. Blacks also are most likely to say they'd accept a longer commute for a more diverse school: 41% do so vs. 23% of whites and 17% of Hispanics.

In political terms, moderates are most likely to prefer a racially diverse student body — 81% say so, compared to 71% of liberals and 64% of conservatives.

Differences by party identification and ideology widen on strong preferences for one's child to attend a racially diverse school. Fifty-nine percent of Democrats and 51% of independents feel this way vs. 32% of Republicans. So do 56% of liberals and 57% of moderates, compared with 39% of conservatives.

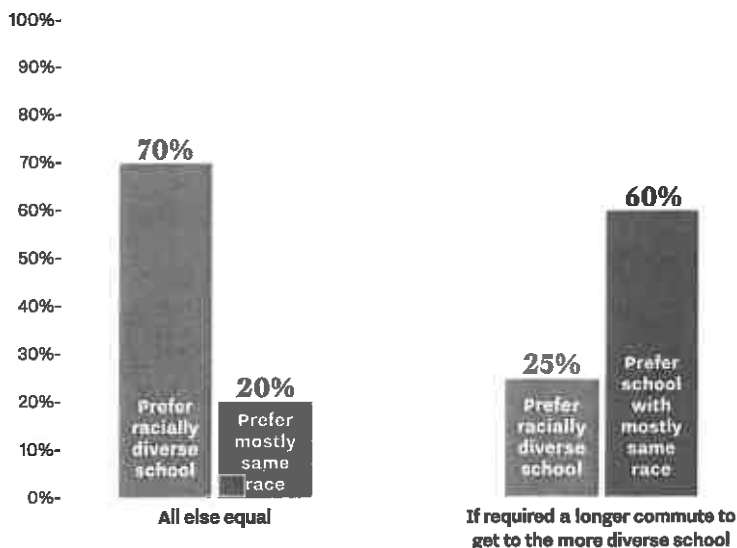
More Democrats (36%), liberals (36%), and moderates (31%) express commitment to this goal, saying they'd accept a longer commute for a more diverse school. That compares with 23% of Republicans, 21% of independents, and 18% of conservatives.

Economic diversity

Economic diversity has somewhat less of a constituency; 45% of parents see this as extremely or very important. About half (48%) say having students from different economic backgrounds makes the learning environment better for students from poor families. Somewhat fewer (41%) say such a mix makes the learning environment better for middle-income

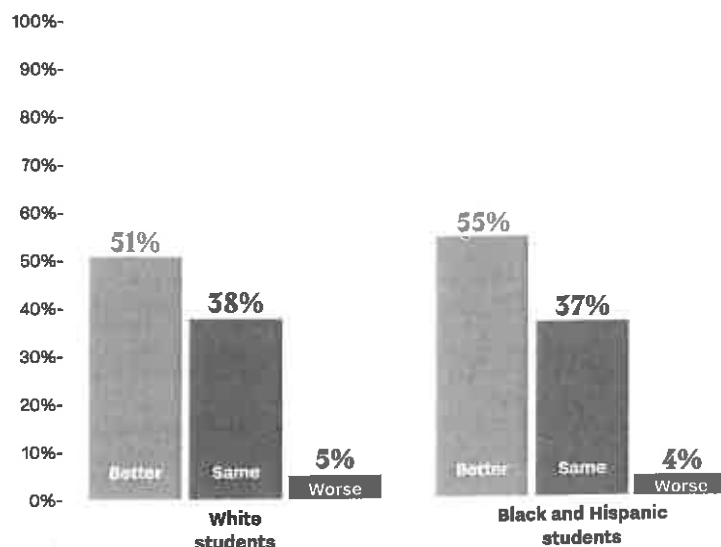
Preference for racial diversity

Parents of school-age children, 2017



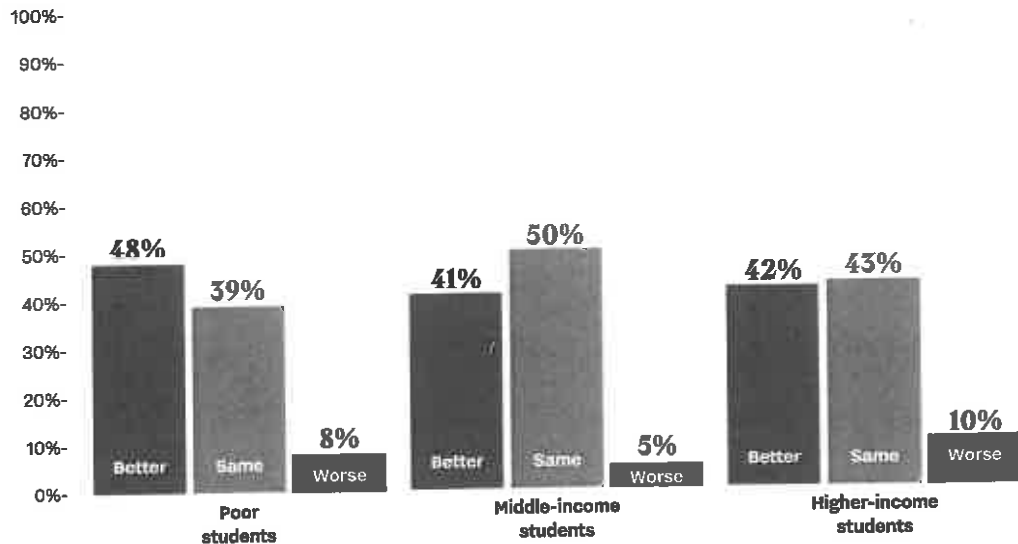
Effect of racial diversity on the learning environment

Parents of school-age children, 2017



Effect of economic diversity on the learning environment

Parents of school-age children, 2017



students, and about as many see a benefit to higher-income students (42%).

As with racial/ethnic diversity, there are differences in views by ideology, political partisanship, and race/ethnicity. Family income also plays a role: About half of parents with incomes less than \$100,000 call economic diversity highly important; this falls to 37% of those in the \$100,000+ bracket (which comprises 22% of all parents).

Fifty-eight percent of liberals and 48% of moderates see economic diversity as highly important, compared with 36% of conservatives. In statistical modeling controlling for other factors, ideology is the strongest predictor of this view, just as it's the strongest predictor of seeing racial/ethnic diversity as important. Partisanship is relevant as well.

One additional gap is notable: Hispanic parents are much less likely than others to say that having a mix of students from different economic backgrounds makes the learning environment better for students. Just 26% to 33% of Hispanic parents say economic diversity improves the learning environment for poor, middle-income, or higher-income students, compared with 42% to 51% of white parents and 52% to 56% of black parents.

There are no differences among income groups in views on attending an economically diverse school, but other gaps emerge. One is regional: A low of 49% in the Northeast prefer an economically diverse school, compared with 58% in the South, 60% in the Midwest, and a peak of 74% in the West.

As expected given their lack of confidence in economic diversity improving the learning environ-

ment, Hispanics (47%) are less likely than whites (63%) or blacks (65%) to prefer sending their child to an economically diverse school. And while whites and blacks don't differ in initial preference, blacks again are more apt to accept a longer commute.

Democrats, liberals, and moderates again are more likely than Republicans and conservatives to strongly prefer that their child attend an economically diverse school. Forty-eight percent of liberals, 46% of Democrats, and 42% of moderates feel this way vs. 24% of Republicans and 25% of conservatives. (It's 36% among independents.) And commitment again peaks among liberals; when considering the commute, two-thirds of moderates who had previously preferred diversity opt for a closer but less diverse school, compared with 44% of liberals.



Wrapping support around children who need it most

Americans express high or very high levels of support for public schools providing wraparound services to students who don't have access to them elsewhere. That peaks at a near-unanimous 92% who favor after-school programs, often a victim of budget cuts, yet a godsend to working parents.

Eighty-seven percent also support schools providing mental health services to students who can't get this help somewhere else, and 79% support offering general health services in such cases. Support for dental services trails, though it is a still considerable 65% support. Moreover, strong support for these services also is substantial, ranging from 48% to 77%.

Further, 76% of Americans say schools that offer

such services are justified in seeking additional public funding to pay for them.

Funding

In terms of seeking public funding to pay for such services, support peaks among liberals (88%), Democrats (85%) and about eight in 10 in other groups — adults under 40, those who give public schools nationally A or B grades, urbanites, and those with household incomes less than \$50,000.

Notably, funding support reaches majorities, albeit smaller ones, among their counterparts — those who call racial or economic diversity unimportant (53% and 55%), and 65% to 70% of strong conservatives, Republicans, rural residents, those who give public schools a failing grade nationally, \$100,000+ earners, and seniors.



Strong support for wraparound services

National totals, 2017

	After-school %	Mental health %	Health %	Dental %
All	77	76	66	48

Responses by demographic group

POLITICAL PARTY

Democrats	84	84	77	59
Republicans	70	68	49	31
Independents	77	76	67	47

POLITICAL LEANING

Liberals	82	84	77	57
Moderates	76	74	63	45
Conservatives	71	71	58	41
Somewhat cons.	72	75	61	42
Very cons.	71	65	54	38

RACE/ETHNICITY

Whites	74	70	58	39
Nonwhites NET	84	87	78	62
Blacks	85	87	83	67
Hispanics	81	88	80	67

AGE

18-29	83	88	82	51
65+	68	58	49	36

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

<\$50K	79	80	71	53
\$100K+	72	64	53	39

TYPE OF COMMUNITY

Urban	80	77	72	55
Suburban	76	76	67	45
Rural	77	76	54	40

EDUCATION

College graduates	76	71	60	39
Nongraduates	78	79	68	52



Follow
us on
Twitter
@pdkintl

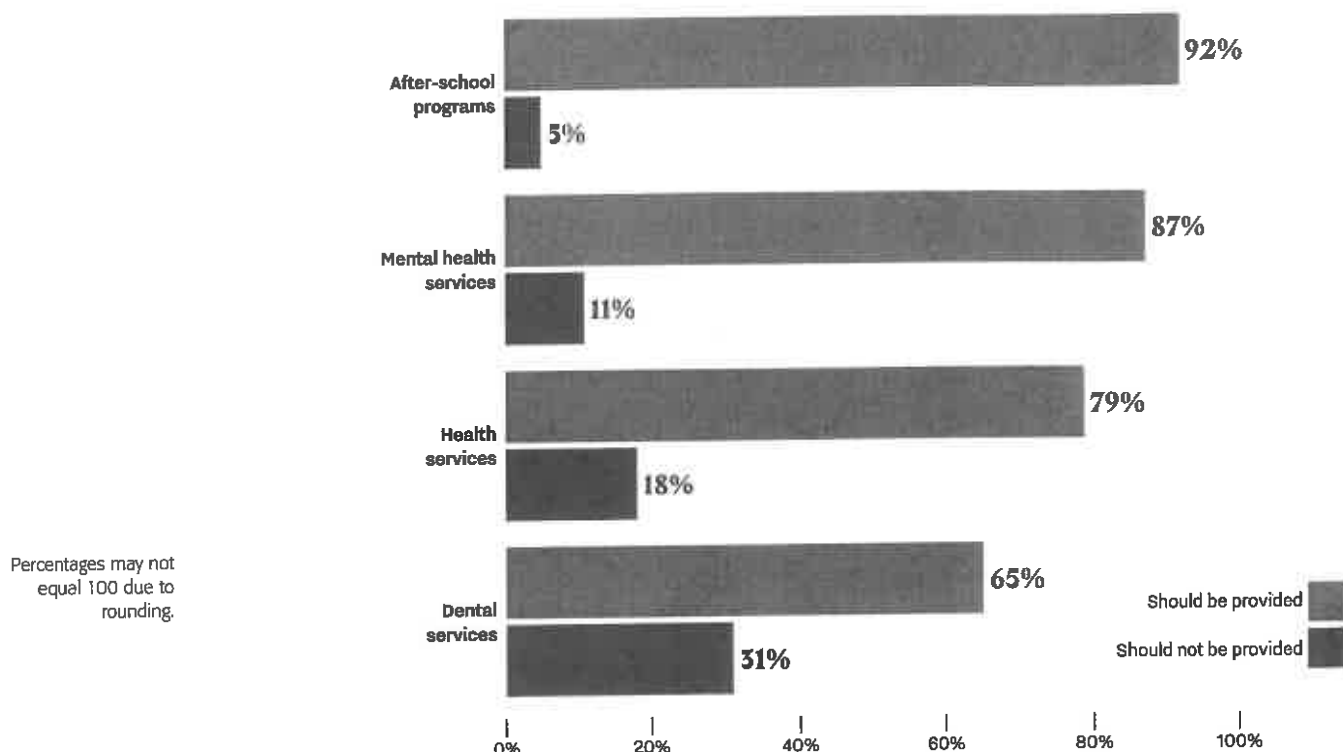
THE QUESTIONS

Q20. Some public schools may offer something called wraparound services that are intended to give students support to succeed at school. For each one I name, please tell me if you think this is something public schools should or should not provide to students who don't have access to the service somewhere else. First, how about health services? Dental services? Mental health services? After-school programs?

Q21. Do you think schools that provide these additional services are or are not justified in seeking additional public funds to pay for them?

Support for wraparound services

National totals, 2017



Three-quarters of adults feel strongly that public schools should provide mental health services to students who don't have access to them elsewhere.

In statistical modeling, aside from supporting the services themselves, education is the strongest predictor of saying that asking for extra public funding is justified, while being Republican, or having a child in public school stand out as predictors of saying it's unjustified.

A deeper dive

Support for all four wraparound services assessed in the survey was computed using a 1-4 scale, with an average overall score of 3.43 — quite high. Scores are highest among young adults, Democrats, liberals, nonwhites, and those with lower incomes and less education. In statistical modeling, income, and race/ethnicity emerge as the strongest predictors of support for these services, holding other factors constant.

Among individual items, three-quarters overall strongly feel that public schools should provide mental health services to students who don't have access to them elsewhere. Strong support is highest (84% to 88%) among under-30s, nonwhites, Democrats,

and liberals, while it's lowest — but still substantial — among seniors (58%), those in \$100,000+ households (64%), strong conservatives (65%), and Republicans (68%).

A similar 77% overall strongly support providing after-school programs, but there's less variation among groups, indicating a broader base of support for this service.

Two-thirds strongly support providing health services, peaking among blacks (83%) and under-30s (82%), and bottoming out among seniors and Republicans (both 49%), those in \$100,000+ households (53%), and strong conservatives and rural residents (both 54%).

Fewer than half (48%) feel strongly that dental services should be provided. Strong support tops out among blacks and Hispanics (67%) followed by 57% to 59% among Democrats, parents, and liberals; it hits lows among those in \$100,000+ households (28%), Republicans (31%), and 36% to 39% of seniors, strong conservatives, those with a college degree, and whites.

Measuring school quality

This year's survey makes clear the public's substantial skepticism toward standardized testing. Consider:

- Student performance on standardized tests ranks last — by a very wide margin — among six indicators of school quality tested in PDK's study.
- Among public school parents, fewer than six in 10 are very or somewhat confident that standardized tests measure how well their child is learning, including just 19% who are very confident that this is the case.
- Again, fewer than six in 10 (57%) say their state does a very or somewhat good job evaluating the quality of their local schools, including just 14% who say their state does a very good job of this. Such assessments typically rely in large part on test scores.
- Fewer than half (46%) are very or somewhat confident that standardized tests measure "the things about your child's public school education that are most important to you personally," including just 17% who are very confident of this.

THE QUESTIONS

Q22. For each item I name, please tell me how important it is in school quality — extremely important, very important, somewhat important, not so important, or not important at all.

- a. How well students do on standardized tests
- b. How well the school helps students learn skills like being cooperative, respectful of others, and persistent at solving problems
- c. Having advanced academic classes
- d. Having art and music classes
- e. Having extracurricular activities
- f. Having technology and engineering classes to help students prepare for careers in those fields

Q23. As far as you are aware, how good a job does your state do when it evaluates the quality of public schools in your community — does it do this very well, somewhat well, somewhat poorly, or very poorly?

Q24. Thinking of the standardized tests your child in public school takes, how confident are you that these tests do a good job measuring how well your child is learning? Are you very confident

of that, somewhat confident, not so confident, or not confident at all?

Q25. Do you think that standardized tests do or do not measure the things about your child's public school education that are most important to you personally? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

Q26. In addition to being assessed on their academic performance, do you think students should or should not also be assessed on skills such as being cooperative, respectful of others, and persistent at solving problems?

Q27. How confident are you that standardized tests can do a good job measuring how well students have developed skills such as being cooperative, respectful of others, and persistent at solving problems — are you very confident that standardized tests can do a good job measuring these things, somewhat confident, not so confident, or not confident at all?

Q28. In addition to being held accountable for student test scores on academic skills, do you think public schools should or should not also be held accountable for student test scores on these other skills?



Follow
us at
pdkintl

The results on school quality are illustrative. Eight in 10 Americans see the extent to which schools help students develop interpersonal skills — such as cooperation, respect, and persistence — as extremely or very important in school quality. As many say the same about schools offering technology and engineering classes to help students prepare for careers in those fields.

Three-quarters see the opportunity to take advanced academic classes as a highly important factor in school quality. And seven in 10 say the same about both extracurricular activities and art and music classes, areas in which many budget-strapped schools cut back.

Compare these to the number who see student performance on standardized tests as highly important: 42%. That's 28 to 40 points fewer than say the same about art and music classes, extracurriculars, advanced academics, career-focused technology and engineering classes, and the development of students' interpersonal skills.

The single most important item was computed by adding those who picked just one item as extremely important with those who picked multiple items as extremely important and then were asked to pick the top one. The result: Thirty-six percent rate helping students learn interpersonal skills as the single most important item in school quality, followed by having technology and engineering classes, 25%. Last on the list, again, is student performance on standardized tests, at just 6%.



Follow
us on
Twitter
@pdkintl

In statistical modeling, lacking confidence in standardized tests is a predictor of rating them as less important in school quality. As noted, just 19% are very confident in these tests, 39% are somewhat confident, while four in 10 express little or no confidence in them.

Confidence is lower in the ability of standardized tests to measure students' interpersonal skills; just 39% are very or somewhat confident in this. (There's a pronounced racial/ethnic difference — 60% of Hispanics and 54% of blacks are confident that standardized tests can measure interpersonal skills, vs. 32% of whites.) Even so, 84% overall say such testing should be undertaken, and 66% say schools should be held accountable for the scores (peaking among men, noncollege graduates, lower-income adults, and Hispanics). These results suggest that accountability is in demand, even if the measurement is imperfect.

A deeper dive

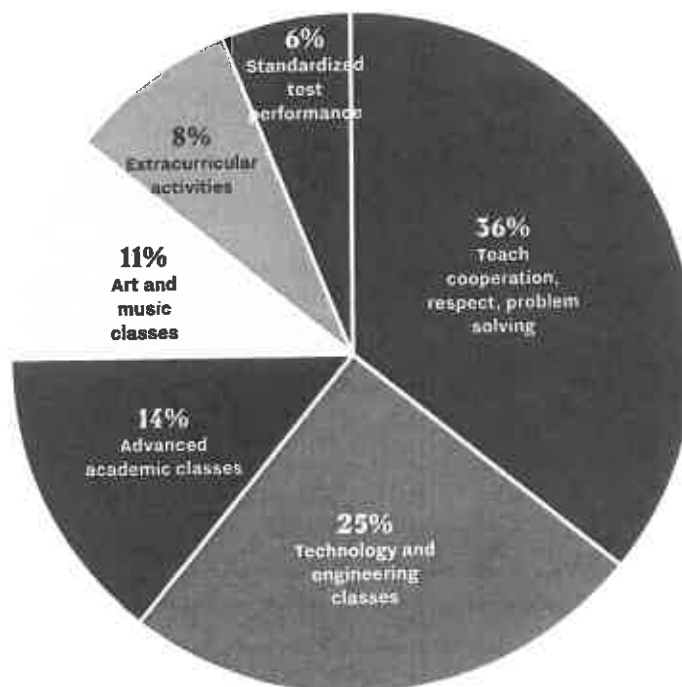
Some groups are more apt than others to rate standardized tests as an important marker of school quality; these include nonwhites, noncollege graduates, conservatives, and those with household incomes of less than \$50,000 a year.

Considering other indicators of school quality:

- Blacks are more likely than whites to rate each of four

Most important factor in school quality

National totals, 2017



Aspects of school quality

National totals, 2017

	Extremely/very important %	Somewhat important %	Not so/not at all important %
Interpersonal skills	82	12	4
Technology & engineering classes	82	15	2
Advanced academic classes	76	19	2
Art & music classes	71	23	5
Extracurricular activities	70	25	4
Standardized tests	42	31	24

Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

metrics as highly important; in addition to standardized tests, these are extracurricular activities, advanced academic classes, and technology and engineering classes. Hispanics, for their part, are most apt to rate developing interpersonal skills as highly important in school quality, though it's high across the board — 89% of Hispanics and 80% of whites and blacks alike.

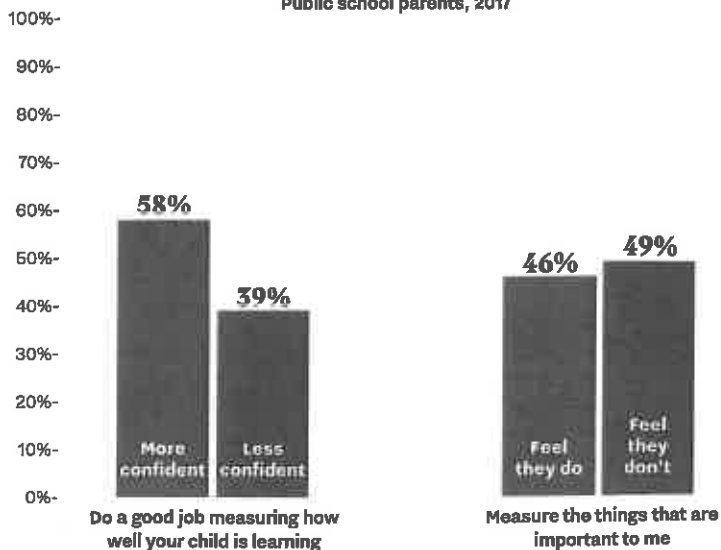
- Women, Democrats, and liberals are more likely than their counterparts to see helping students learn interpersonal skills as highly important, and to see art and music classes as highly important to school quality. Liberals (84%) also are more apt than conservatives (77%) or moderates (70%) to see advanced academic classes as highly important.

Confidence in standardized tests, for its part, is tied to how well people grade public schools nationally; 70% of those who give the schools an A or a B are very or somewhat confident vs. 39% of those who give the schools a D or an F. It's similar, but less pronounced, with local school grades.

In statistical modeling, confidence in standardized tests is most strongly predicted by the grade one gives the local public schools as well as by seeing tests as an important factor in school quality.

What standardized tests measure

Public school parents, 2017



Grading the public schools

The survey offers this good news for public schools: They're most popular by far among those who know them best.

That conclusion stems from some of the PDK survey's most long-standing questions. Sixty-two percent of public school parents give the public schools in their community an A or B grade, compared with far fewer nonparents (45%). When parents grade their own child's public school, A or B grades go even higher, to 71%. (Twenty-two percent overall have a child in a public school.)

Forty-nine percent give the schools in their own community A or B grades. That includes 15% A's, the highest on record in surveys asking this question since 1974 when the response was 18%. While not significantly different from the past few years, it's advanced from 9% in 2007, a six-point gain in local school ratings in the past decade.

About one-quarter (24%) give public schools nationally an A or B (with no difference between parents and all adults). The 25-point gap between ratings of schools in one's own community and schools nationally is consistent with more than three decades of PDK poll results.

There's no contradiction in the gap. Awareness of

a few poor schools can diminish the ratings of all schools together, driving down scores nationally while leaving local scores far better.

Local schools are less well-rated in more densely populated areas. In the 10 most concentrated counties covered in the survey, 36% give their local schools an A or B grade. That rises to 44% in the next 40 counties by population density and 50% in all other, less-densely populated counties. (Similarly, just 46% in the most densely populated counties say their state evaluates local schools effectively, rising to 53% in the next tier of counties and 59% in those more sparsely populated.)

Differences by socioeconomic status persist. Americans with household incomes of \$100,000 or more are significantly more likely than those with lower incomes to give high marks to their community's schools (60% vs. 46%). And parents in the top income category are even more positive about their own child's school, with 84% awarding A or B grades; the same applies to parents who are college graduates, a close correlate of income, also at 84%.

Biggest problem

Since 1969, the poll's first question has been about the biggest problems facing the local public schools. As has been the case since 2002, the most common answers referred to lack of funding, cited by 22%

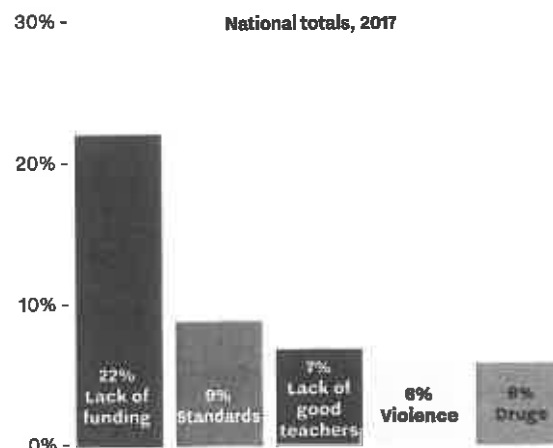


Follow us at [pdkintl](#)

THE QUESTIONS

- Q29.** What do you think are the biggest problems facing schools in your community?
- Q30.** Students are often given the grades of A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves in your community were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here — A, B, C, D, or Fail?
- Q31.** How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally — A, B, C, D, or Fail?
- Q32.** Using the A, B, C, D, Fail scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

Biggest problems facing community schools



The number of Americans who give their community's public schools an A grade is its highest in more than 40 years of PDK polling.

this year. But that's down from an average of 34% from 2009 to 2014, in the aftermath of the Great Recession.

In this open-response question, participants are able to volunteer anything they consider a problem facing their community's schools. So, while 22% may seem small, when compared to responses on many other questions in this poll, having this many respondents name the same problem is substantial.

There continues to be a wide margin between financial concerns and other issues, with all other answers in the single digits, led by items such as educational quality and standards, teacher quality, school violence, and drug use.

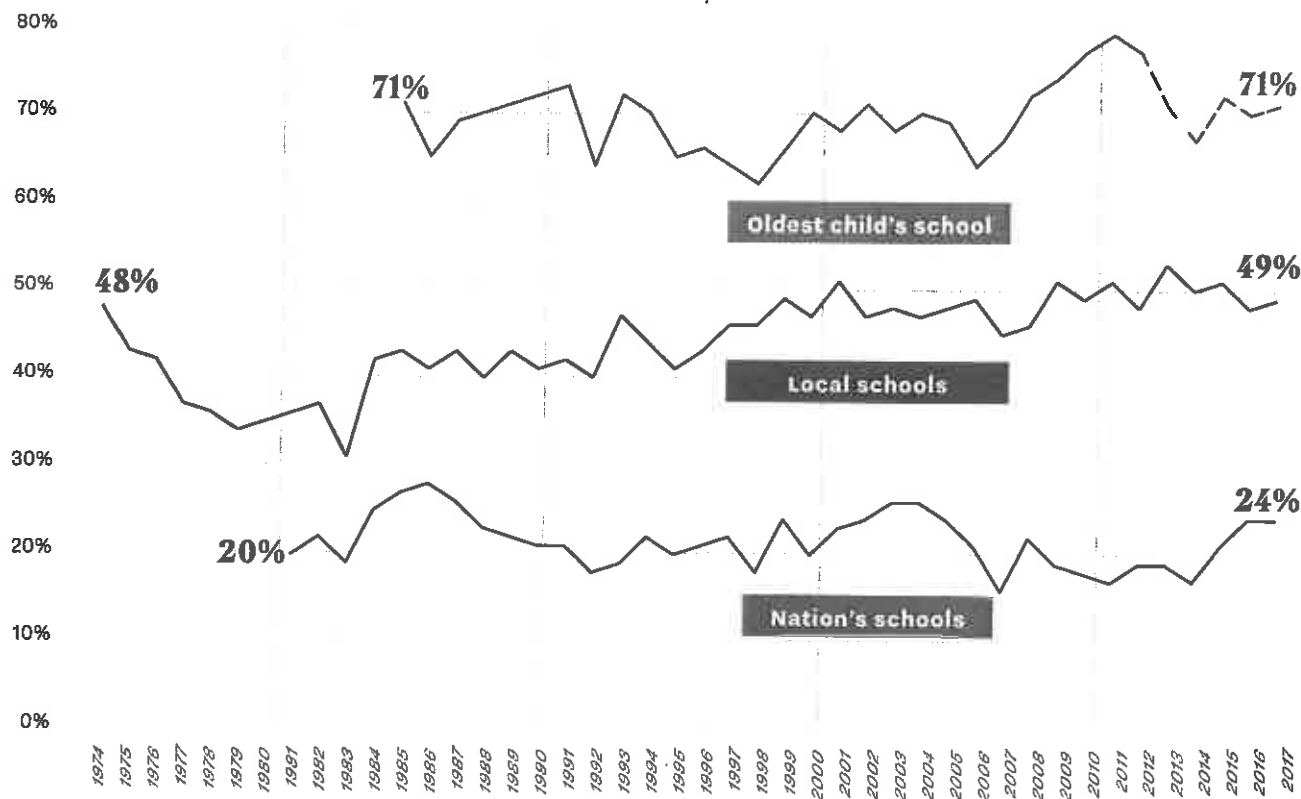
Funding is not a problem exclusive to less well-regarded schools. Twenty percent of those who give A grades to schools in their community cite funding as a top problem, as do 26% of those who give B's and 23% of those who give their schools C's and D's.

Seeing funding as a top problem peaks among college graduates, Democrats, liberals, and those with



A and B grades for public schools

National totals, 1974-2017



\$100,000+ incomes, with about one-third of each group citing it as a big issue. Those without a college degree, Republicans, conservatives, and lower earners are less likely to cite it.

Failing schools

When it comes to underperforming schools, Americans made clear in last year's PDK poll that they would rather see a school stay open and improve than start from scratch — 84% vs. 14%, with fairly consistent results across groups.

But who's responsible for that decision? In this year's study, 48% say the local school district should decide what to do with a school that has had failing test scores for a number of years, rather than the state education agency (32%) or the governor (15%).

Support for keeping decision-making power local

— a common feature of public attitudes — is higher among public school parents than nonparents (53% vs. 47%). Fifty-two percent of both liberals and conservatives prefer local decisions.

Nonwhites, those without college degrees, those with lower incomes, and adults younger than 50 are more likely than their counterparts to support giving the power to the governor, with the largest gap by income. Just 5% of those who make \$100,000 or more say the governor should make the decision, compared with 20% of those earning less than \$50,000.

As for state control, statistical modeling shows that having a child in public school and saying that extra-curriculars and advanced academics are important aspects of school quality are all negatively associated with preferring that the state education agency make decisions about failing schools.

WHAT AMERICANS SAY ABOUT . . .

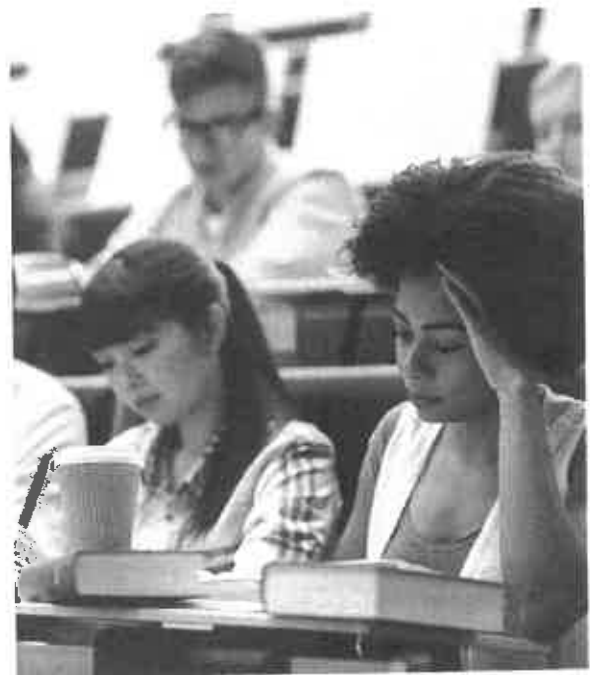
Expecting children to attend college

Most public school parents (61%) expect their child to attend college full time, while 22% expect a mix of part-time study and part-time work, and 7% expect their child to seek a full-time job after high school. These expectations match parents' own preferences.

That 61% figure looks quite reasonable: The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported last spring that about six in 10 2016 high school graduates were enrolled full time in colleges and universities in fall of that year.

But going to college doesn't necessarily mean attending a four-year college. Fewer than half of public school parents (47%) expect their child to enroll in a four-year college full time. An additional 14% expect their child to enroll in a two-year college or a vocational-technical school, or they're unsure what they'll do.

Further, only one-third of the 22% of public school parents who expect their child to work part time and study part time expect that their child will be enrolled in a four-year college. Another one-third say it'll be a two-year college, 14% say vocational-technical, and as many are unsure.

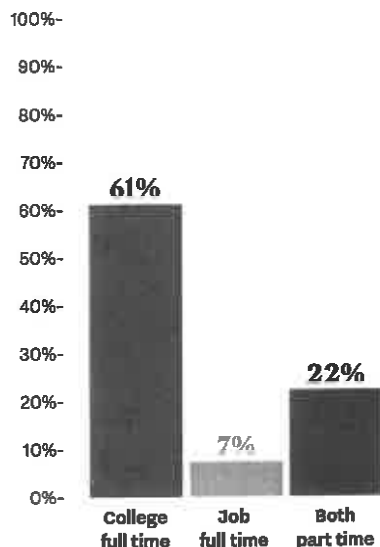


THE QUESTION

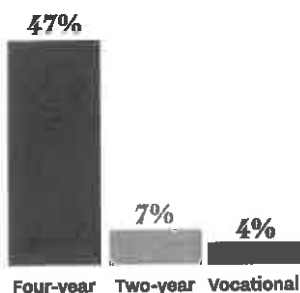
Q33. What do you think your oldest child in public school is most likely to do after high school: Go to college full time, look for a full-time job, look for part-time work and study part time, or something else?

Expectations for oldest child after high school

Public school parents, 2017



Broken down by college type



A deeper dive

Socioeconomic status is a major factor in expectations for postsecondary education. Seventy-seven percent of college-educated public school parents say their child will attend college full time, compared with 52% without a college degree. Thirty-six percent of parents without a college degree instead expect their child to work and study part time, or work full time vs. just 12% of college-educated parents.

Means also are a critical component. Expectations for full-time college attendance rises with income, from 47% among public school parents with household incomes less than \$50,000 to 66% among those in the \$50,000 to \$100,000 bracket and 80% in \$100,000+ households. By contrast, 41% in the lower-income range expect their child to work and study part time or work full time vs. 23% in the middle bracket and 10% in top-income households.

Expectations also differ by race and ethnicity. Sixty-four percent of white public school parents expect their child to attend college full time, compared with 57% of blacks and 47% of Hispanics. Among Hispanic parents, just as many (48%) expect their child to work and take college classes at the same time or to work full time (38% and 10%, respectively).

There are other gaps in these expectations. More suburban public school parents anticipate that their child will go to a four-year college full time (57%) than parents who live in urban areas (45%) or rural areas (38%). Public school parents of girls are more likely to say their child will go to college full time than are parents of boys (67% vs. 55%).



Follow us at pdkintl

Expectations of public school parents

Public school parents, 2017

	Full-time enrollment in college, any type %	Full-time enrollment in college 4-year %
All	61	47
Responses by demographic group		
EDUCATION		
College graduates	77	70
Nongraduates	52	35
HOUSEHOLD INCOME		
<\$50K	47	28
\$50K-\$100K	66	54
\$100K+	80	70
RACE/ETHNICITY		
Whites	64	53
Blacks	57	40
Hispanics	47	31
TYPE OF COMMUNITY		
Urban	59	45
Suburban	66	57
Rural	61	38
GENDER OF CHILD		
Parents of girls	67	55
Parents of boys	55	39
Responses by comparison to other questions		
Q30. LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS GRADE		
A	70	59
B	62	48
C or lower	54	41

At pdkpoll.org

- Join the conversation: post comments
- Download a PDF of this report
- Link to the PDK poll archives (requires member log-in)
- Follow links to news coverage and national commentary
- Read commentaries from leading educators

