

THE 48TH ANNUAL

PDK Poll

of the Public's Attitudes
Toward the Public Schools

2016

A supplement to *Kappan* magazine
September 2016

A photograph of three children sitting and reading books. The child on the left is a girl with brown hair, wearing a striped shirt and polka-dot pants, holding a yellow book. The child in the middle is a boy with short dark hair, wearing a grey t-shirt and jeans, holding a green book. The child on the right is a girl with dark hair, wearing a light blue polo shirt and jeans, holding a blue book. They are all looking down at their books. The background is a close-up of the stars on an American flag.

Why school?

Americans speak out on
education goals, standards,
priorities, and funding



WHY SCHOOL?

THE 48th ANNUAL PDK POLL OF THE PUBLIC'S ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Americans don't agree on the basic purpose of a public school education.

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Just one-quarter of Americans give the public schools overall A's or B's, half as many as say the same about their local schools.

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Americans overwhelmingly prefer trying to improve failing schools than closing them.

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Public school parents say recent changes in standards have changed what's being taught in their child's classroom.

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Parents who give A's and B's to their local schools report good communication between them and their child's school.

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How was the poll conducted?

Methodology K31

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Why school?

Work? Citizenship? Academics?

Americans don't agree on overall purpose of education.

In a year marked by so many divisions, the newest PDK poll on education shows that Americans don't agree on the most basic question about the very purpose of a public school education. Is it to prepare students for work? To prepare them for citizenship? Or to prepare them academically?

Less than half (45%) of adult Americans say preparing students academically is the main goal of a public school education, and just one-third feel that way strongly. Other Americans split between saying the main purpose of public schools is to prepare students for work (25%) and for citizenship (26%).



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In a related result — perhaps reflecting the economic uncertainty of recent years — the survey finds a heavy tilt in preferences away from more high-level academics and toward more classes focused on work skills. By a broad 68% to 21%, Americans say having their local public schools focus more on career-technical or skills-based classes is better than focusing on more honors or advanced academic classes.

Differing views of the overarching purpose of public education influence attitudes toward public schools more broadly. Local schools are better rated by those focused on academics, for example, and do less well among those who see their chief aim as preparing students for work.

“There’s a real question today about education’s return on investment. While we know that a college degree is essential in today’s economy, parents and the public want to see a clearer connection between the public school system and the world of work. Policy makers and leaders need to understand what their publics want from their schools,” said Joshua P. Starr, CEO of PDK International.

These findings come as part of the 48th Annual PDK Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, which queried American adults on a range of challenges facing schools and communities, including educational goals, standards, priorities, and funding. The survey is based on a random, representative, 50-state sample of 1,221 adults interviewed by cell or landline telephone, in English or Spanish, in April and May 2016. Previously the PDK/Gallup poll, the survey now is produced for PDK International by Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y. For details about the methodology of the 2016 poll, please see p. K31.

Other major findings of the 2016 poll include:

- Parents who give A’s and B’s to their local schools report that the schools communicate more effectively with them, give them frequent opportunities to visit and offer input, and are interested in what they have to say.
- By the most lopsided result in the survey, the public by 84% to 14% says that when a public school has been failing for several years, the best response is to keep the school open and try to improve it rather than closing the school. But if a failing school is kept open, then, by a 2-to-1 margin, Americans say re-

Navigating the American divide

Americans don’t agree on the purpose of public education, but they like their local schools, especially when they believe educators listen to their concerns.

By Joshua P. Starr



The Bush-Obama era of nationalist education policy essentially ended with the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act. Public education is a state function, and the U.S. Department of Education is supposed to be a regulator, policy maker, and distributor of funds. But

from No Child Left Behind through Race to the Top, the past two administrations have stepped beyond their traditional roles to dictate interventions and influence decisions at the local level.

Our 48th annual PDK Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools shows that overall the American public isn’t completely satisfied with the direction set over the past 16 years. The poll results offer some insight that should not only be heeded by the next administration but could be used by the two presidential candidates to align their policies to the interests of their constituents.

An age-old question in education is what is the purpose of school. One of my favorite authors, James Baldwin, said in his “Talk to Teachers” (1963), that the purpose of school is to “ask questions of the universe and learn to live with those questions.” Thomas Jefferson, the earliest champion of American public schools and a proponent of a decentralized system of locally run schools, believed public education was essential for a democratic citizenry. Horace Mann believed in common schools that promoted social harmony; John Dewey believed education was about teaching one to think critically.

Today’s perspectives are no different from those

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throughout our history; the American public does not agree on a single purpose for public education. The past 16 years have seen an over-reliance on student achievement on state standardized test scores as a measure of success. Whether Presidents Bush and Obama intended for standardized tests to be the *de jure* purpose of public education, they certainly have become the *de facto* purpose, as most school systems are organized to promote success on these measures. Previous PDK polls measured the American public's attitudes about standardized tests and the Department of Education's agenda. This year's results go deeper and show how the public feels about the purpose of school itself.

Despite the recent emphasis on academic achievement (with state standardized test scores serving as the measure), less than half (45%) of poll respondents believe that preparing students academically is the main goal of a public school education. The remainder split between saying that public education should prepare students either for work or good citizenship. With the right curriculum and pedagogy, these purposes don't have to be mutually exclusive. This tells me

leadership and faculty replaced. The public wants to know what accountability looks like for employees, as contracts and labor laws can cause it be opaque.

Reformers at all levels have contributed to the disruption that's created in communities by efforts to close failing schools. To ensure a more cohesive vision of education, school leaders must address the significant divide on this issue.

Our new president and administration need to be prepared to tackle the underlying question of why we have public schools. While the national agenda should ensure equity and access, what other role do we want the federal government to play in education? To what extent should the president and his/her education secretary dictate what's being taught at the local level? Since most school funds come from local taxes, how much say should the local community have about the standards they want their children to reach?

One of Miles' laws of management states, "where you stand is where you sit." Clearly, the 2016 PDK poll results show that the federal government and local residents aren't sitting at the same table. The school

When asked whether a failing school should be closed or improved, there is a 70-point divide between those who want to see closures (14%) and those who want to see it stay open (84%).

that the standards and test-based reforms of the past 16 years have addressed only part of what the public wants. Given that our system is designed to be locally controlled, how should states, local school boards, and school system leaders think about what comes next?

This year, we asked about support for increasing taxes to support schools and learned that support depends on satisfaction with the local schools. Satisfaction is higher among the public school parents who feel most engaged by their local school leaders. This is a seemingly obvious result: The more I come into contact with someone or something, the better I understand them and will potentially support them. This finding ought to cause many school leaders to evaluate their efforts to truly engage their communities, not just before millage requests but throughout the year.

Another important finding in this year's poll results is the public's view about how to respond when a school is failing. This finding, perhaps more than any other, exemplifies the divide between the reform agenda of the past 16 years and the actual desires of the American public. When asked whether a failing school should be closed or improved, there is a 70-point divide between those who want to see closure (14%) and those who want to see it stay open (84%). If decreased enrollment isn't driving a school consolidation and closing effort, school system leaders and policy makers should pay heed to what the public actually wants regarding failing schools. While remaining open is preferred, the public also wants the

system leader is faced with managing up — toward the standards set by the federal government — while also managing out so that s/he enacts policies and programs that meet the community's interests.

As superintendent, I shared the desire of local business groups to do more to connect the worlds of school and work. As I began rolling out the incremental plan to do so, I had to explain that the only academics I was accountable for were whether students passed state standardized tests. The district used additional measures, such as AP, IB, and SAT scores to measure our progress, and we'd started measuring student engagement, hope, and well-being. But the bottom line was how many students passed the state standardized tests. Since funding had been essentially flat for years, there was no new money to quickly implement the career-technical education programs we both wanted. It was a sobering but essential conversation that led to increased understanding between the business leaders and me.

Local system leaders face a very complex undertaking in responding to their local context plus state and federal laws and regulations. Leaders are wise to remember that they are stewards of their community's values, as manifested by the election of local school board members, and that the community will be there much longer than the leader. To build community support for change, school leaders can't neglect the demands of federal and state accountability, but leaders must remember that they serve their communities first.



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placing administrators and teachers is preferable to giving the school more resources and support staff.

- A majority of Americans opposes (59% to 37%) allowing public school parents to excuse their children from taking standardized tests. Opposition from blacks is even greater, at 67% opposed.
- Most public school parents (56%) say that new standards are changing what's being taught in their child's school, although one-third says there has been no change.
- For the 15th consecutive year, Americans say lack of funding is the No. 1 problem confronting local schools.
- More Americans support (53%) than oppose (45%) raising property taxes to improve

public schools, but there is broad skepticism (47%) that higher spending would result in school improvements. If taxes are raised, there's little consensus on how the money should best be spent. A plurality (34%) says it should go to teachers but divides on whether that means more teachers or higher teacher pay.

The survey's results overall provide essential insights for educators, policy makers, parents, and the public at large. In addition to delving into attitudes and ratings on key issues, the results dig deeper into underlying sentiments and views among varying population groups. They also reveal strategies for winning greater support for public education in terms of funding and parental engagement alike — key factors in efforts to keep public education vital, effective, and responsive to the concerns of parents and the public.



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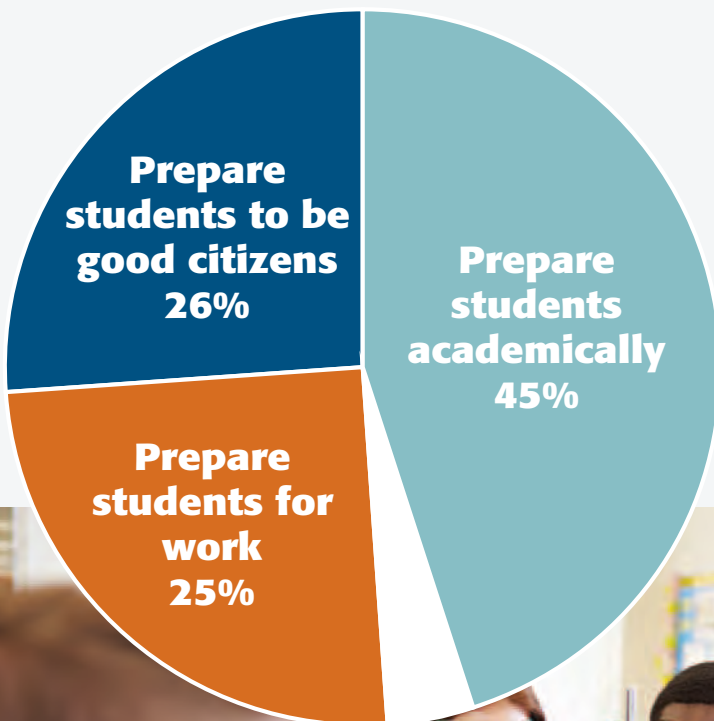
The purpose of education

THE QUESTION

Q. What do you think should be the main goal of a public school education: to prepare students academically, to prepare them for work, or to prepare them to be good citizens?

Main goal of public education

National totals, 2016



Fewer than half of Americans (45%) view the main goal of public education as preparing students academically; the rest split between a focus on preparing students for work (25%) or preparing them to be good citizens (26%).

These differing priorities relate to how Americans rate their local public schools. Those who say public schools should mainly prepare students for work are less positive in their views; 42% in this group give their schools top marks vs. 53% of those who say the main objective is preparing children academically.

Putting a priority on academics peaks at 56% among parents with at least one child in public school, compared with four in 10 of those who don't have a school-age child. Half of those between ages 30 and 64 pick academics, compared with 37% of both younger and older Americans, who instead are more likely to emphasize citizenship.

These different priorities for public schooling also are correlated with ideology and political partisanship.

Fifty percent of conservatives emphasize academics vs. 43% of moderates and 40% of liberals. Liberals instead are more likely (33%) than moderates (24%) and conservatives (22%) to say schools should focus on building citizenship. Republicans are less apt than others to value a role for citizenship instruction in public schools. Rural residents (30%) are more likely than urban dwellers (22%) to see the school's main goal as preparing students for work. Urban residents (47%) are slightly more likely than rural residents (39%) to see the main goal as preparing students academically.



WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Grading the schools

Just one-quarter of Americans give the public schools in the country overall an A or B grade, half as many as say the same about their local public schools (48%). Ratings go higher, moreover, among public school parents when asked about their child's school. This long-standing disjuncture, evident in PDK polls across the past five decades, likely reflects the differing standards used in these assessments: Failing

schools in other locales reflect poorly on the school system nationally without affecting evaluations of one's own local schools.

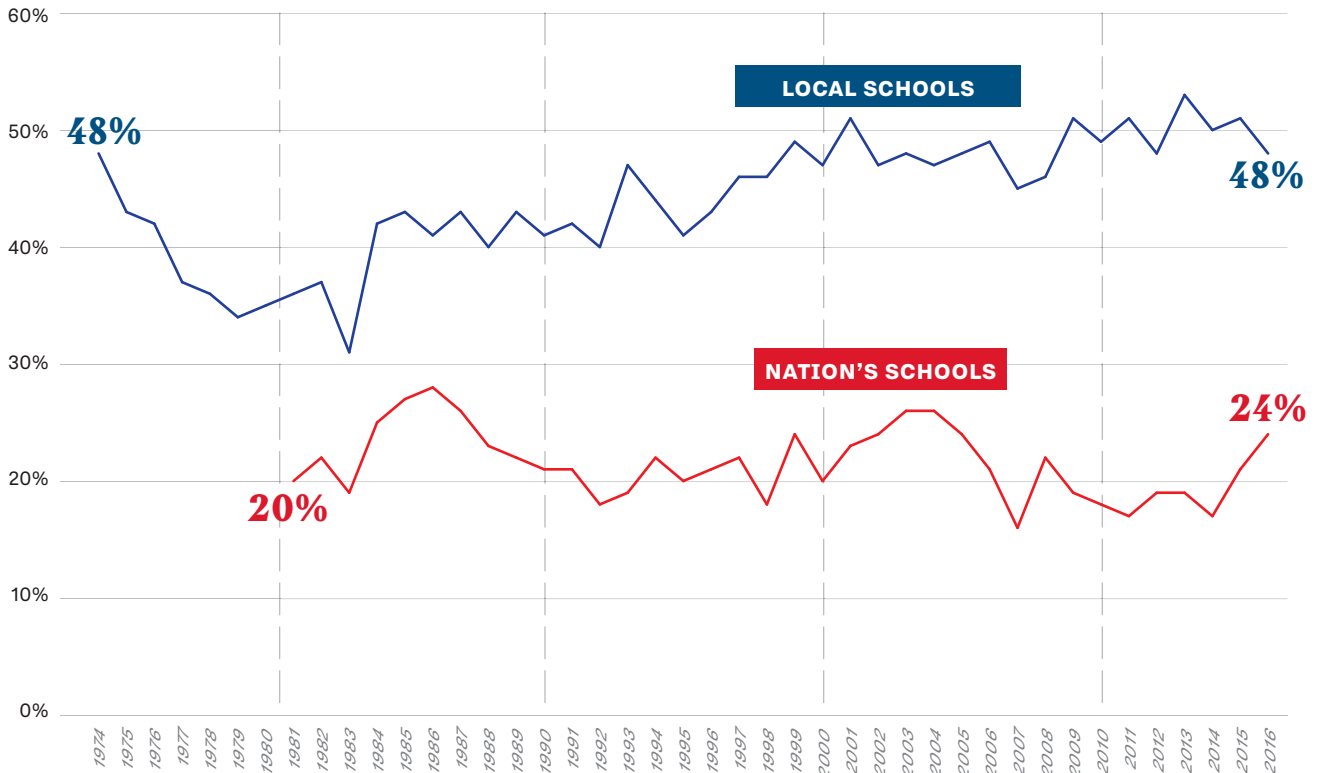
Regardless, the share of Americans giving positive grades to the nation's public schools is up 7 percentage points since 2014 while grades for local public schools have remained steady in recent years. The gap between the two is its smallest since 2008.

THE QUESTIONS

- Q.** 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?
- Q.** 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?
- Q.** Using the A, B, C, D, Fail scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

A and B grades for public schools

National totals, 1969-2016



National assessments differ by ideological preferences, age, and race/ethnicity. Public schools in the nation as a whole get A or B grades from nearly three in 10 liberals and moderates vs. 19% of conservatives; from one-third of Americans younger than 40, nearly double the number among those age 50 and older; and 40% of Hispanics vs. about two in 10 whites and blacks alike.

Local school evaluations, for their part, are especially related to socioeconomic status. Fifty-seven percent of Americans with household incomes exceeding \$100,000 per year give their local public schools an A or B, compared with 42% of those making less than \$50,000 per year. Blacks are 13 points less likely than whites or Hispanics to give high marks to their local schools.

While national and local grades differ, there is a relationship between them. Those giving top grades to their local public schools are more than twice as likely as others to grade the nation's schools positively as well, indicating a more general affinity toward public schools overall.

Being a parent of a child in public school also matters: Six in 10 Americans with at least one child in a public school give their local schools an A or B, compared with 44% of all others.

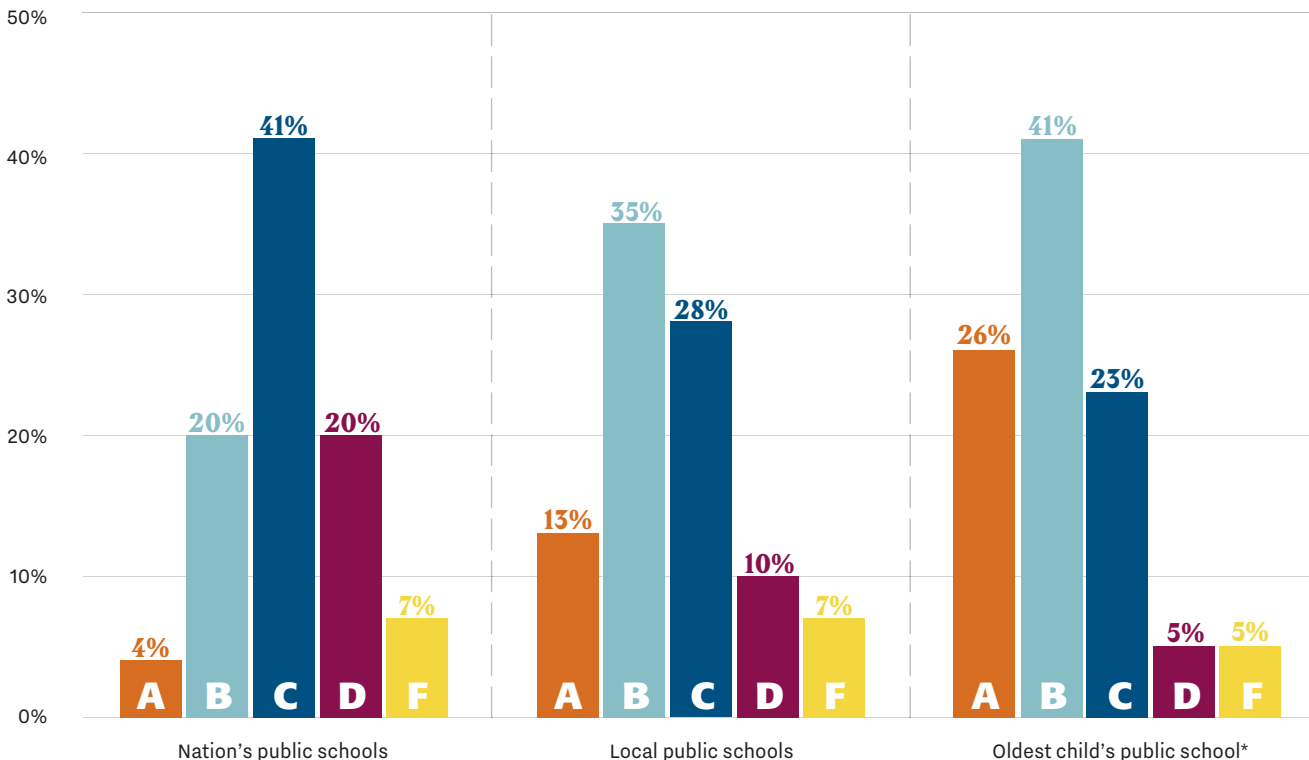
Statistical analyses of the strongest independent correlates of local and national grades confirm many of these



distinctions. Aside from the strong effect of local school grades, marks for the nation's schools are best predicted by age, ideology, and Hispanic ethnicity. Local school grades, for their part, are related primarily to household income and having a child in public school. Parents' ratings of their child's own public schools are linked most closely to how effectively their school communicates with them and invites their input.

Grades by school type

National totals, 2016



* Asked just of public school parents.

WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Goals for public schools

Americans vary somewhat on whether certain objectives are important for public schools and how well their local schools have done in achieving those goals.

At the top end, more than half (52%) say it's extremely important for schools to help students develop good work habits; at the bottom of the scale, 35% say the same about preparing students to work successfully in groups. Top priority for other objectives tested in the survey range from 42% to 48%; these items include preparing students to think critically across subject areas, fostering good citizenship, and giving students factual information in each subject area. Adding those who call each of these very if not extremely important produces overwhelming majorities for each objective.

But many fewer think their public schools are highly successful at accomplishing these goals. Indeed, just three in 10 say their local public schools do an excellent or very good job meeting the top-rated objective, helping students develop good work habits.

Local public schools are rated best at giving students factual information in subject areas, but

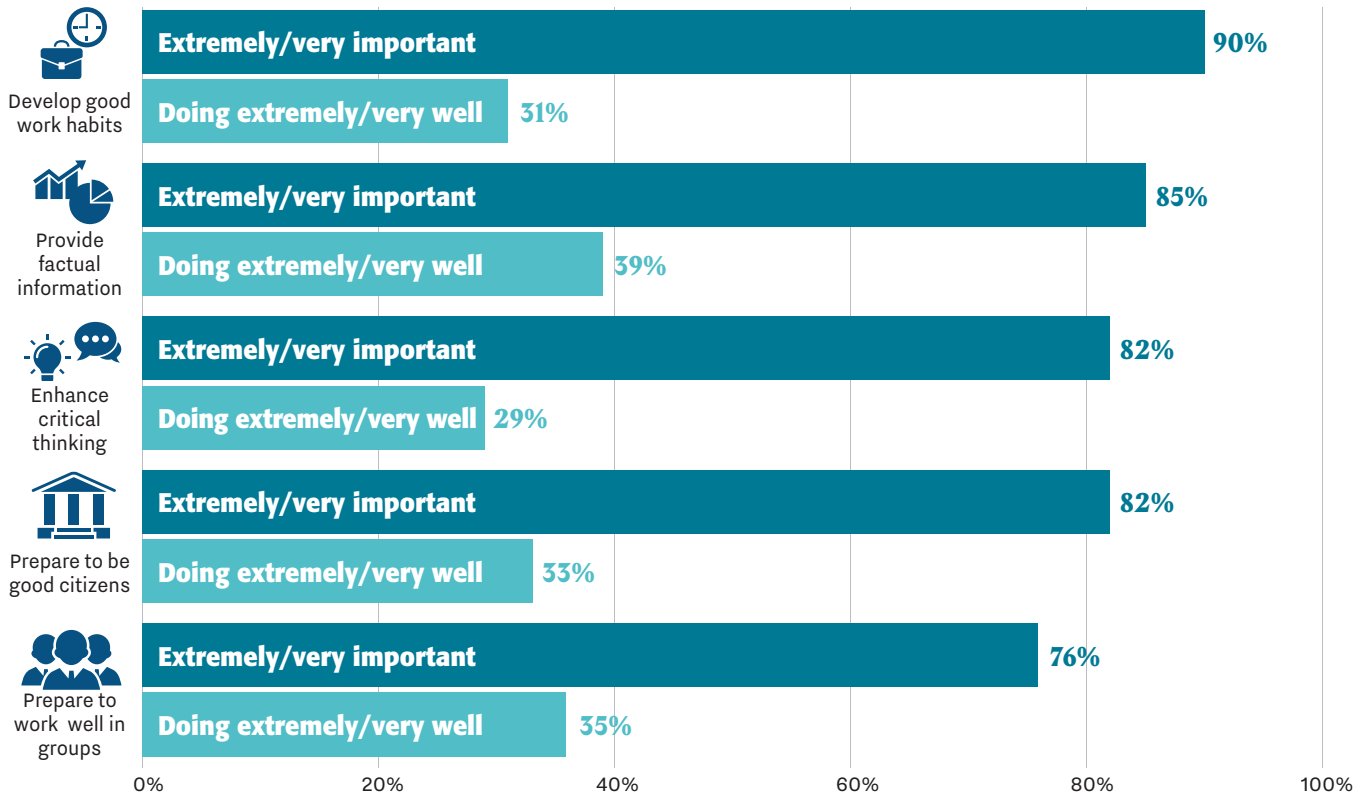
even here, only 39% think they're doing extremely or very well. The public divides on how well schools are preparing students to think critically (29%), be good citizens (33%), and work well in groups (35%).

These importance and performance ratings vary across groups. Seniors are least likely to view nearly all of these goals as extremely important; most under age 30 do think they're extremely important. For example, only one-third of seniors see fostering critical thinking and providing factual information across subject areas as extremely important, compared with half of 18- to 29-year-olds. At the same time, seniors are more likely than younger adults to rate local schools highly on achieving some of these goals, including preparing students to be good citizens and helping them develop good work habits.

Among other gaps, blacks are more likely than whites, and especially Hispanics, to see most of these goals as extremely important. **The largest racial/ethnic divide is on the importance of preparing students to be good citizens;** blacks are 20 points more likely than Hispanics and 14 points more likely than whites to view this as

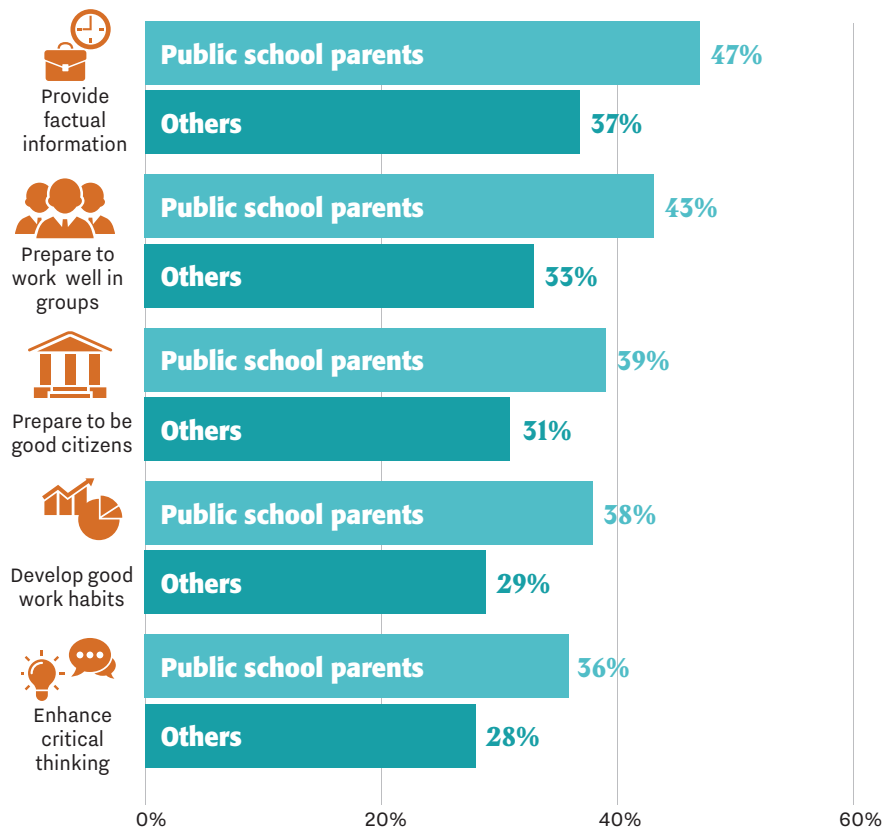
Local public schools and key objectives

National totals, 2016



Evaluations of public schools, parents vs. others

Percent saying local public schools are doing extremely or very well



THE QUESTIONS

Q. How important do you think it is for schools to:

- Prepare students to think critically across subject areas?
- Provide students with factual information in each subject area?
- Prepare students to be good citizens?
- Prepare students to work successfully in groups?
- Help students develop good work habits?

Q. How well do you think the public schools in your community do each of those things?

extremely important. Fifty-seven percent of blacks do so, making citizenship their single most important school objective. Whites and Hispanics, instead, are most likely to see developing good work habits as extremely important.

Evaluations of school performance show different patterns, with Hispanics most apt to rate their local schools positively on accomplishing these items. Even though Hispanics place less importance on fostering good citizenship, for example, 44% think the public schools are doing very or extremely well on this front, compared with whites (31%) and blacks (27%).

Parents don't vary from other Americans in the importance they place on these objectives. But — as with overall school grades — parents with at least one child in public school say their local public schools are doing a better job on them. In the biggest difference, **43% of these parents say the schools are doing extremely or very well in preparing students to work successfully in groups vs. 29% of those who've never had school-age children.**

More-educated Americans, for their part, place more importance on fostering critical thinking but also are more negative about school performance in this area: 54% see it as extremely important, but just 26% think schools are doing it extremely or very well, a 28-point gap. Among those without a college degree, by contrast, many fewer (38%) see this as extremely important, and 31% think it's being well-handled, just a 7-point gap. (Those with degrees also place greater importance on providing factual information but don't evaluate performance on it differently.)

In other groups, Americans with annual household incomes exceeding \$50,000 rate their local public schools worse than those with lower incomes in two areas: preparing students to work well in groups and to develop good work habits. In the only political difference, independents (40%) and Democrats (34%) are more apt than Republicans (26%) to see preparing students to work successfully in groups as extremely important.

Unsurprisingly, local school grades are strongly related to evaluations of their performance on these metrics. In a statistical analysis that also controlled for demographics and basic political orientations, ratings of how well local public schools are seen to foster critical thinking, prepare students to be good citizens, and provide students with factual information proved to be the strongest predictors of school grades overall.

WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Standards for learning

Fewer than half of Americans (46%) say the educational standards in the public schools in their community are about right, while nearly as many (43%) say expectations for students are too low. Few (7%) think standards are too high.

Beyond expectations is the question of relevance. Fewer than three in 10 adults (27%) think educational standards effectively address the things students need to succeed in their adult lives, including just 9% who think they do this extremely well. Four in 10 take the middle position, saying school standards address what's needed somewhat well, leaving three in 10 who think the standards are not so or not at all relevant to later success.

Notably, even among those who feel the educational standards in their local schools are about right (rather than too high or too low), fewer than half think these standards address what's needed for adult success. That falls to just 9% of adults who call standards too low.

Men (48%) are more likely than women (38%) to see educational standards as too low and more apt to feel that they don't prepare students well for their adult lives (men, 33% vs. women, 26%). There are racial/ethnic differences, with whites (44%) and blacks (46%) more likely than Hispanics (34%) to feel that the standards are too low. Hispanics (38%) also are more likely to think that standards prepare students for adult success, compared with whites (25%) and blacks (27%).

Seeing standards as too low peaks at 52% of adults with annual household incomes exceeding \$100,000, compared with 38% of those earning less than \$50,000. Partisanship comes into play as well; half of Republicans and 44% of conservatives think standards are too low, compared with Democrats (39%) and liberals (37%).

Fifty percent of urban residents call education standards in their local schools too low compared with 39% of suburban and 36% of rural residents.

Core beliefs about the purpose of public education also come into views of the local schools' educational standards. Americans who think the main goal of public education should be to prepare students for work are most skeptical of current standards; half think they're too low, and just two in 10 think they prepare students well for adult success.

Public school parents don't differ from others in their views about the appropriateness of educational standards, but they are 12 points more likely to think these standards prepare students extremely or very well for adulthood (37% vs. 25%). That said, parents of older public school students (in grades 9-12) are 13 points more likely than parents of younger children to think standards are too low (43% vs. 30%) and 12 points less likely to think they prepare students well for later success (30% vs. 42%).

THE QUESTIONS

- Q. Thinking about the public schools in your community, in your opinion, do you think the educational standards for what students should learn are too high, too low, or about right?
- Q. How well do you think these educational standards address the things students need to succeed in their adult lives?

Are standards preparing students to succeed?

National totals, 2016

Educational standards are ...

Too high
7%

About right
46%

Too low
43%

Standards prepare students for success ...

Extremely/
very well
27%

Somewhat well
40%

Not so well/
not at all well
30%

WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Charter schools & standards

There's essentially an even split on whether charter schools should meet the same educational standards as other public schools (48%) or set their own standards (46%).

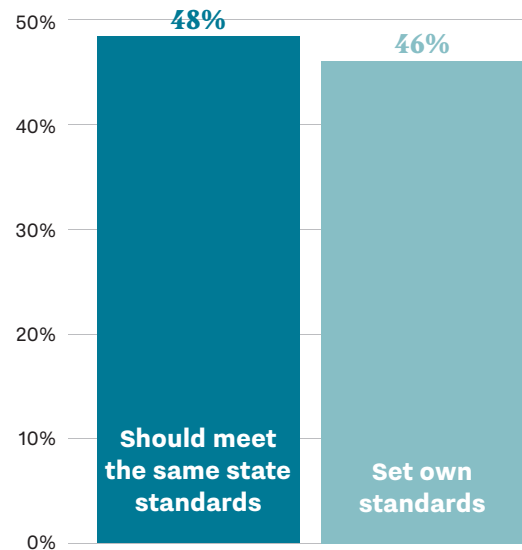
On this topic, political differences reassert themselves: 58% of Democrats say charter schools should meet the same standards as other public schools, while nearly as many Republicans (57%) say charter schools should be able to set their own standards.

Younger Americans, ages 18-29, are 20 points more likely than seniors to support allowing charter schools to set their own standards, and Hispanics are 10 points less apt than whites to say that charter schools should meet the same standards as public ones. There's no difference on the issue between public school parents and others.

Negative perceptions of local and national public schools are related to greater support for charter school autonomy. Majorities of those giving their local public schools a C or lower favor allowing charter schools to set their own standards, while majorities of those giving them an A or B prefer that charter schools meet the same standards. Consistent with this, those who see public school standards as too low are more willing to grant greater charter school autonomy.

Charters and state learning standards

National totals, 2016



THE QUESTION

Q. Charter schools are public schools that are run without many of the state regulations placed on other public schools. Do you think it's better for charter schools to meet the same educational standards as other public schools or to set their own educational standards?

WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Taxes & local schools

Though down from its peak in 2010 and 2011 alike, 2016 marks the 15th consecutive year that a plurality of Americans has cited a lack of money or financial support as the top problem facing the nation's public schools, mentioned by 19% in an open-response question. Many are willing to address the issue: **By a 53% to 45% margin, Americans support raising local property taxes to help improve their community's public schools.**

Overall school ratings are one particularly important factor, although in a way that may be unhelpful to those focused on improving troubled public schools. Six in 10 of those who give their local public schools an A grade support increased taxes, almost double the share of those who give the schools an F. Schools perceived as most in need of improvement, then, are least likely to receive community support for funding increases.

This outcome is based largely on views of whether the money will be well spent, by far the best independent predictor of support for local tax increases. A statistical analysis finds that **better school evaluations affect both willingness to support higher property taxes and confidence that these taxes actually would lead to substantive improvements. Both pieces matter:**

- Support for increased taxes reaches 70% among Americans who think that, if taxes are raised to try to improve local public schools, the schools will get better. Those who are less confident in a good outcome are only half as likely to support tax increases.
- Among those giving their local public schools an A grade, two-thirds are confident that increased funding would help. Critically, that plummets to 17% among those who give their schools a failing grade.

Political partisanship and ideology also are key factors. Liberals and Democrats are significantly more likely than conservatives and Republicans to believe tax money for schools will be well-spent and thus to support tax increases. In the widest gap, 70% of liberal Democrats support increased taxes, and 66% are confident they'd help, compared with 41% and 35%, respectively, of conservative Republicans.

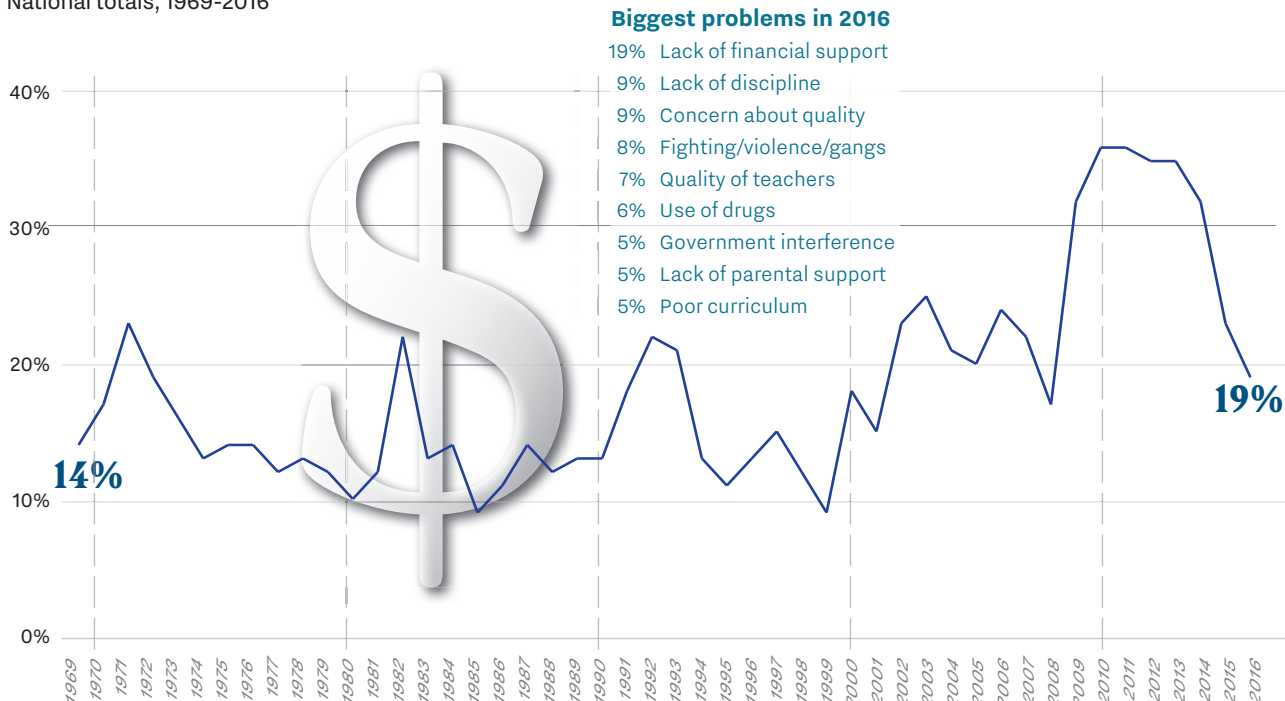
Skepticism on this point also is eight points higher among parents who have at least one child in public school than among those who never have had school-age children.

THE QUESTION

Q. What do you think are the biggest problems facing the public schools in your community?

Lack of financial support schools' top problem

National totals, 1969-2016



Support for raising taxes declines among those most likely to be affected by them directly. It's lower among homeowners than renters (50% to 58%), lower in the Northeast vs. the Midwest (48% vs. 59%), and lower among older vs. younger adults, peaking at 68% among those ages 18-29.

Among other groups, support for higher taxes is 12 points higher among Hispanics than among blacks (with whites in between) and 7 points higher among college graduates than nongraduates. Support is also significantly higher among urban residents relative to those in suburbia (58% vs. 50%). All of these hold up as predictors in statistical models.

WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Spending money to improve schools

If taxes were raised to improve local public schools, 34% of Americans, in an open-ended question, say they would want the money targeted toward teachers, including 18% who support hiring more teachers and

14% who'd raise teacher salaries. Six percent favor bringing in more learning specialists or counselors.

Among other preferences, 17% support spending money on supplies or technology, and an equal num-

Support for increased property taxes

National totals, 2016



THE QUESTIONS

- Q.** Would you support or oppose raising local property taxes to try to improve the public schools in your community?
- Q.** If taxes were raised, how confident are you that the increased funding would improve the public schools in your community?

ber would spend the money on classes and extracurriculars. Eight percent would spend on infrastructure improvements and building new schools.

Preference for hiring more teachers peaks among seniors (25%), people in \$100,000-plus households

(23%), whites (22%), Republicans (22%), and college graduates (22%). Liberals are eight points more likely than conservatives to want to use the money to pay teachers more, while nonwhites favor building schools and buying books.

THE QUESTION

Q. If taxes are raised to try to improve your local public schools, what's the number one thing the money should be spent on?

Priorities for increased funding

National totals, 2016



WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Opting out of testing

Most Americans oppose allowing students to opt out of standardized state tests (59% to 37%). That includes public school parents, though in this group the division is closer (55% to 43%).

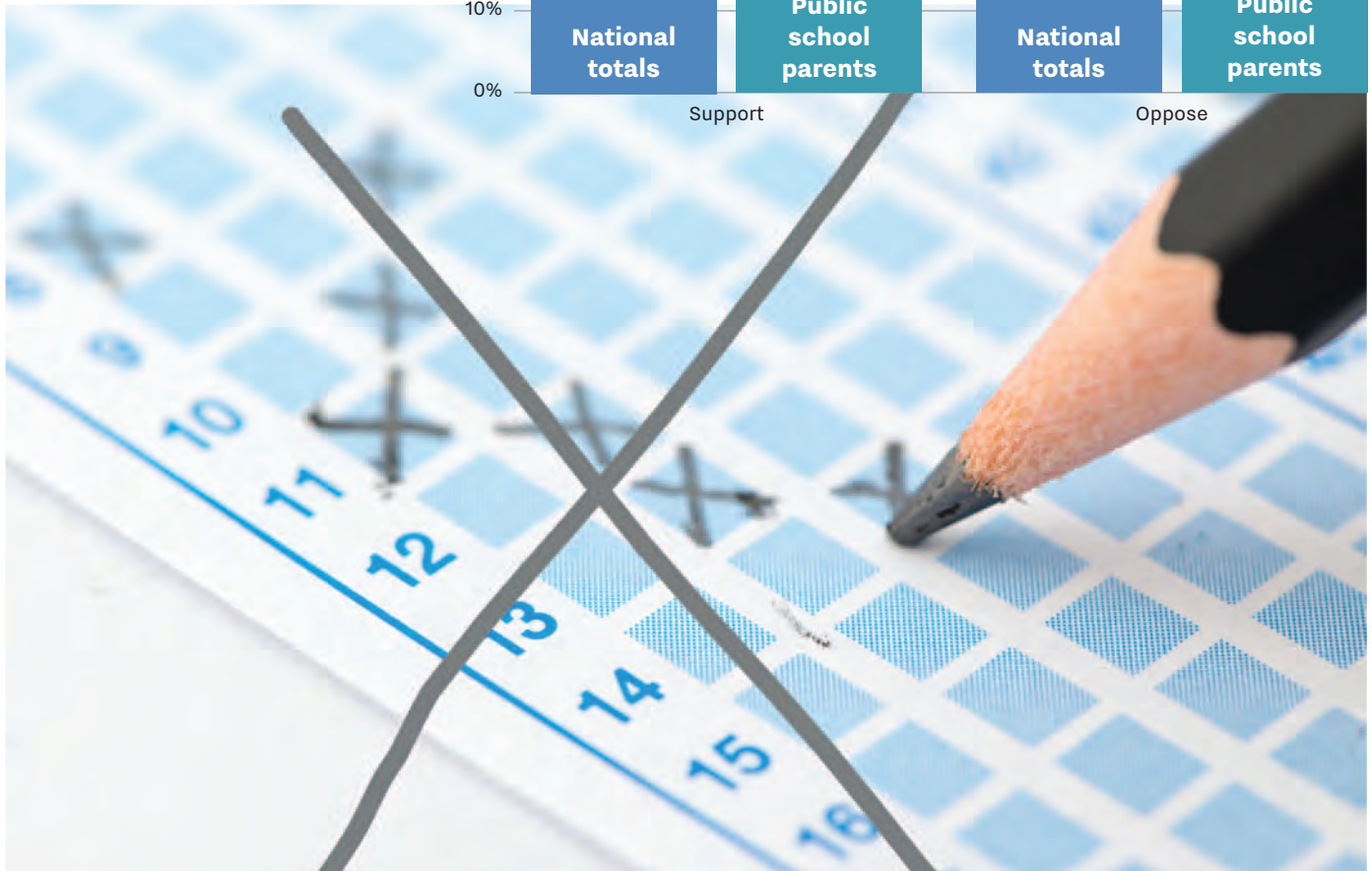
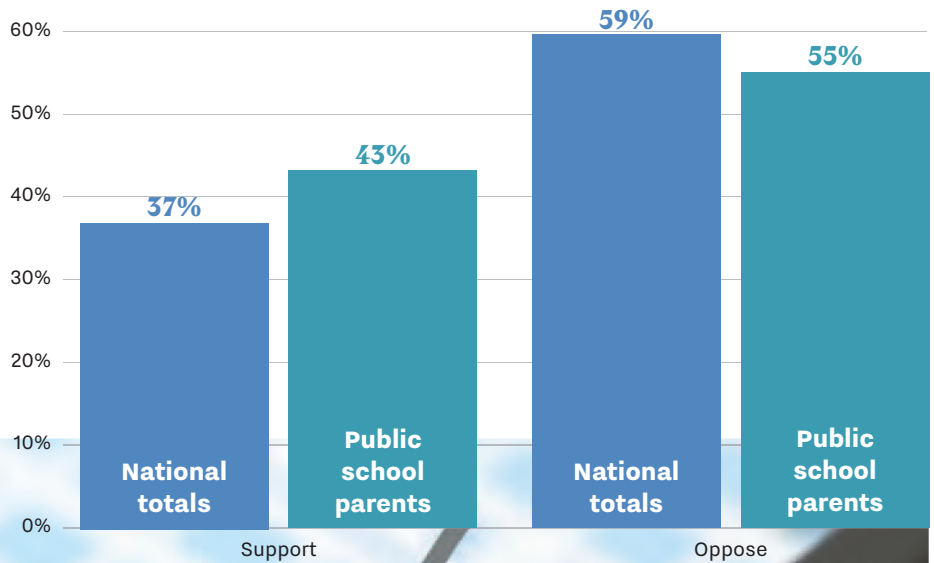
This view crosscuts traditional political groupings. More than four in 10 liberals and strong conservatives alike support allowing parents to excuse their children from taking tests; opposition peaks among moderates and those who are somewhat conservative. Beyond ideology, opposition to testing opt-out peaks among seniors (68%) and blacks (67%).

THE QUESTION

Q. Thinking about testing, do you support or oppose allowing public school parents to excuse their children from taking standardized state tests?

Opting out of standardized testing

National totals, 2016



WHAT AMERICANS SAID

School improvement priorities

Americans chose between a variety of possible strategies for improving the public schools. Among the results:

- **Support for offering more career-technical or skills-based classes (68%) far exceeds preference for more honors or advanced academic classes (21%),** including 51% who strongly prefer more vocational classes.
- In a much narrower division, the barest majority (51%) prefers smaller classes but with less enrichment and support services to larger classes with more such services (40%).
- Presented with these competing choices, a similar margin prefers raising teachers' salaries (50%) to hiring more teachers (40%).
- The public splits evenly (43% to 43%) between a preference for more use of technology and less traditional teaching vs. more traditional teaching without new technology.

Socioeconomic status relates to several of these preferences. **Greater desire for career-technical classes, in particular, is driven strongly by those with less formal education and lower incomes.** Nearly three-quarters of those without a college degree, or who earn less than \$100,000 a year, prefer more career-based classes vs. only small majorities of college graduates and

higher-income earners. Higher-income Americans also are 10 points more apt to prefer new technology to traditional instruction, compared with those making less than \$50,000 a year.

Preference for vocational classes also is higher among those who view the main goal of public schools as preparing students for work or to be good citizens. Eighty-four percent and 74% in these groups, respectively, prefer more career-technical or skills-based classes vs. 59% of those focused on academics. Given their greater orientation toward academics, parents with at least one child in public school are 9 points more apt than other adults to prefer more honors courses.

Hispanics are slightly more likely than whites and blacks to prefer honors classes to skills-based classes, although majorities in all three groups favor skills-based classes over honors. Nearly six in 10 Hispanics prefer larger classes with more support services, compared with 36% and 37% of whites and blacks. (Though the sample size is small, this view peaks among respondents interviewed in Spanish, possibly reflecting interest in English-as-a-second-language support.)

Younger and middle-aged Americans are more likely to prefer larger classes and more honors classes, compared with those over age 50. And 18- to 29-year-olds are 13 points more likely than those age 50 and older to prefer raising teachers' salaries to hiring more teachers.

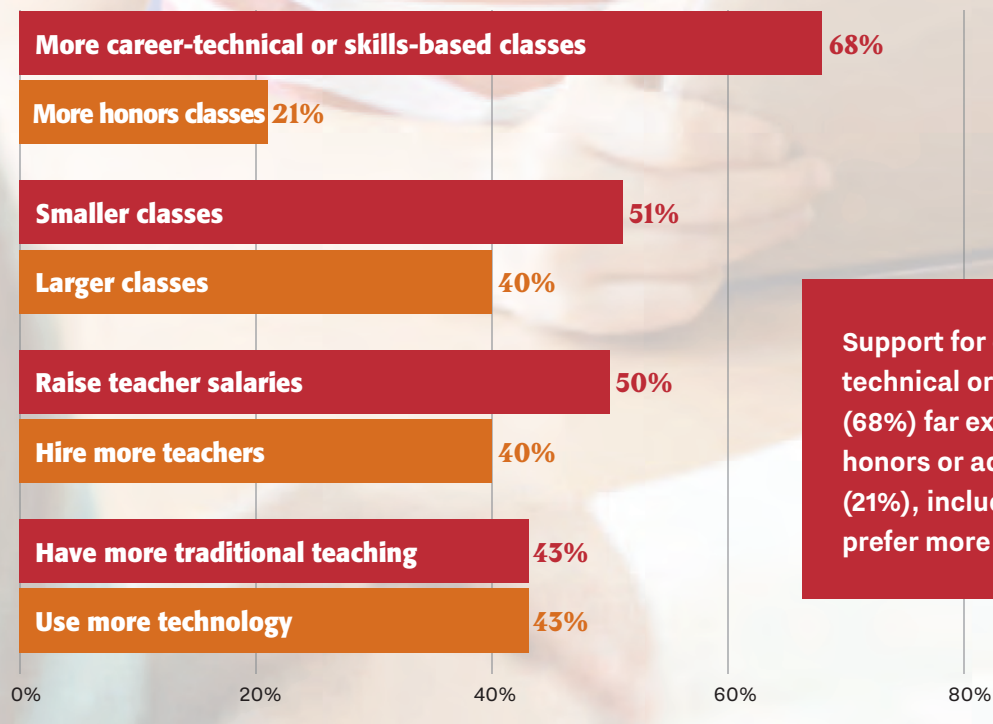
THE QUESTIONS

Q. If you had to choose, do you think it's better for the public schools in your community to:

- Have larger classes but with more enrichment and learning support services OR have smaller classes but with less enrichment and learning support services?
- Have more honors or advanced academic classes OR have more career-technical or skills-based classes?
- Have more traditional teaching and less use of technology OR have more use of technology and less traditional teaching?
- Raise teachers' salaries OR hire more teachers?

Support for school improvement alternatives

National totals, 2016



Support for offering more career-technical or skills-based classes (68%) far exceeds preference for more honors or advanced academic classes (21%), including 51% who strongly prefer more vocational classes.

WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Improving struggling schools

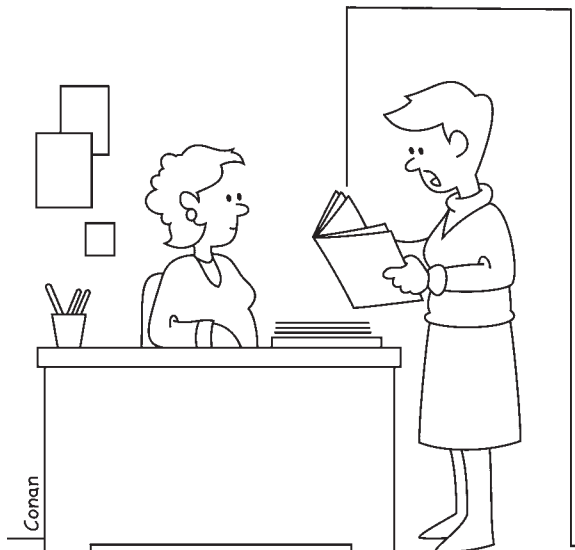
Americans overwhelmingly prefer trying to improve failing public schools than closing them; the 70-point margin on this question is the largest of any in the survey. That said, those who give their local public schools failing grades are twice as likely as those who give them an A to say closing schools would be more appropriate, 26% to 13%.

If a failing school is closed, there's sharp disagreement about what to do next. Americans split (48% to 47%) between sending affected students to other schools or opening a new school in its place.

Majorities of those under age 40, nonwhites (particularly Hispanics), and liberals prefer opening a new school, while seniors, whites, and moderates prefer redistributing students. Support for opening a new school is particularly low in the Midwest, just 37%. Urban residents are more likely to want to keep the faculty of a failing school and spend more on resources (39%) than suburbanites and rural residents (29%).

If, on the other hand, a failing school is kept open, a substantial 62% say its administration and faculty should be replaced rather than retaining them and increasing spending on resources and support staff.

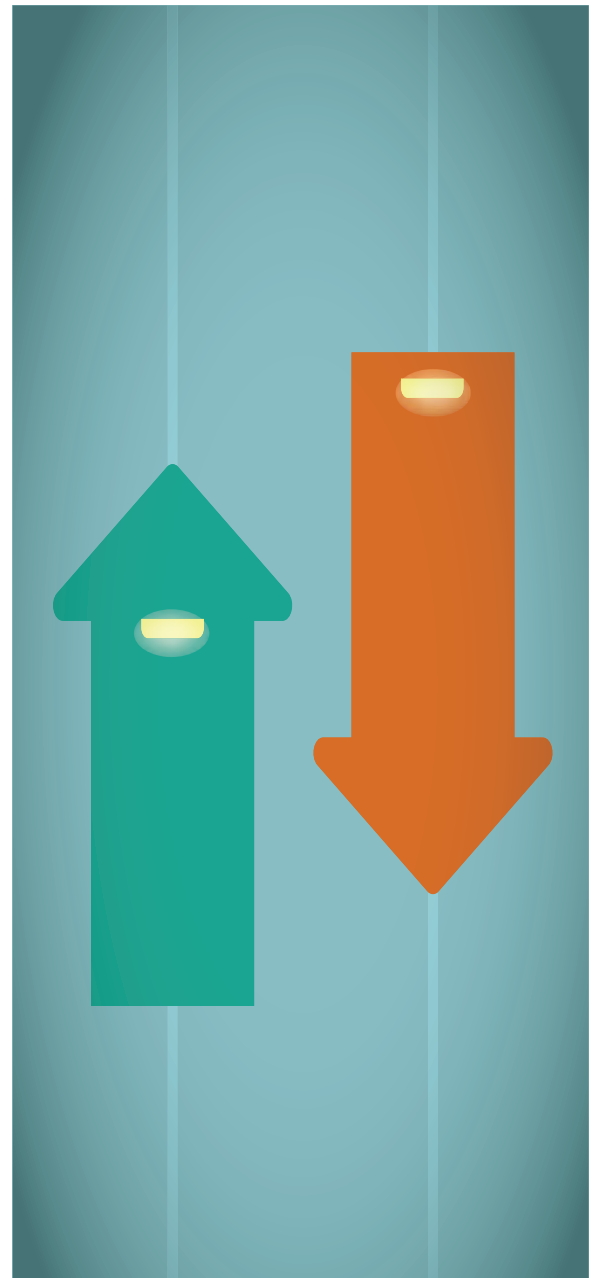
This view peaks among those who give their local schools an F grade (78%) and among strong conservatives (70%). It's also higher among those who are dubious that additional tax money would be well spent.



“Public opinion appears to be split between those who support the public school system and those who can afford private schools.”

By contrast, liberal Democrats are least likely to favor replacement; they split (48% to 48%) on the two alternatives. Fewer public school parents, but nearly four in 10, say they'd want to keep current administrators and faculty, compared with three in 10 other Americans.

Finally, those who see academics as the schools' main job are 11 points more likely to want to remove existing employees of failing schools than those who think fostering good citizenship is the schools' most important objective.

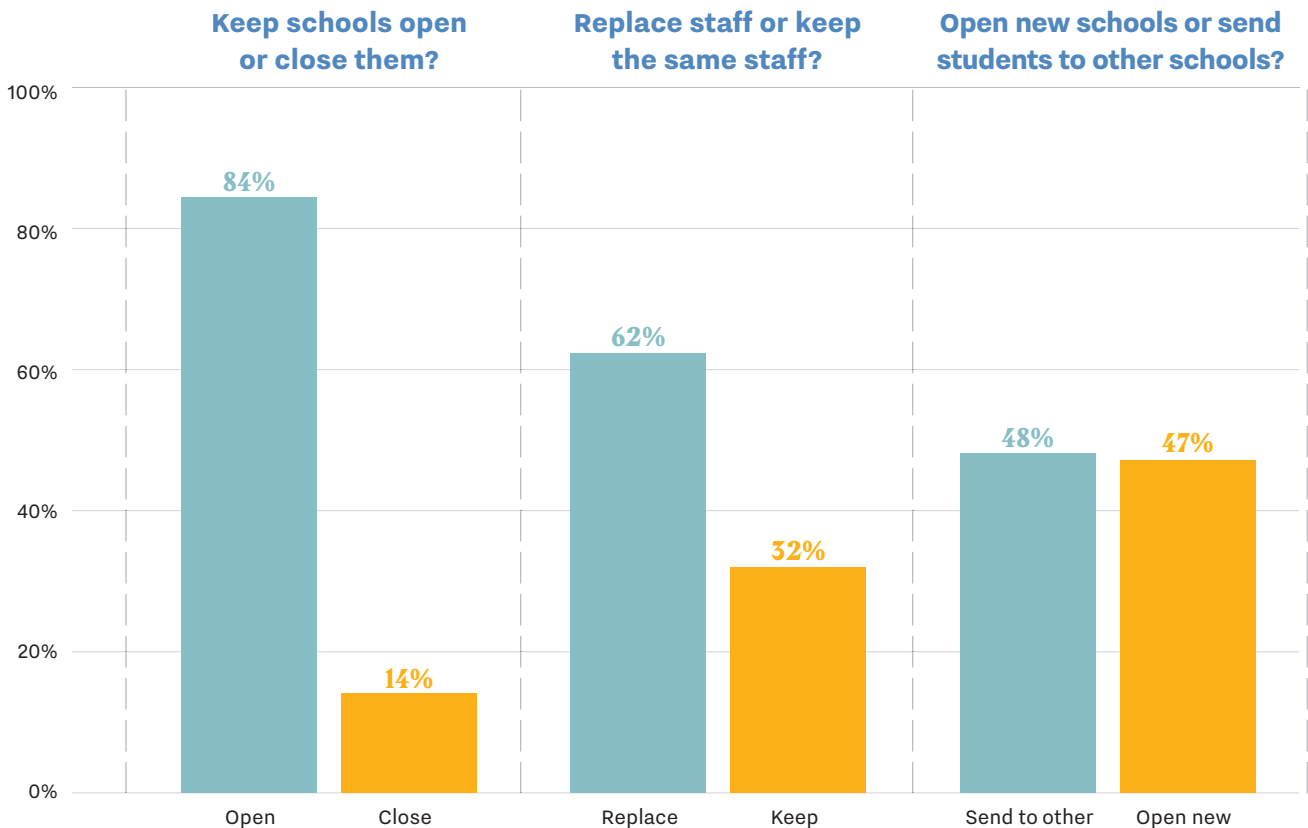


THE QUESTIONS

- Q. Thinking about all public schools in general, what do you think is the best approach for dealing with a public school that has been failing for a number of years — close it down or keep it open and try to improve it?
- Q. If a failing public school is kept **open**, which of these do you think is the best approach — replace its administrators and faculty or keep its administrators and faculty and spend more on its resources and support staff?
- Q. If a failing public school is **closed**, which of these do you think is the best approach — open a new school in its place or send the students to other schools in the area?

Alternatives for dealing with failing schools

National totals, 2016



WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Standards & student learning

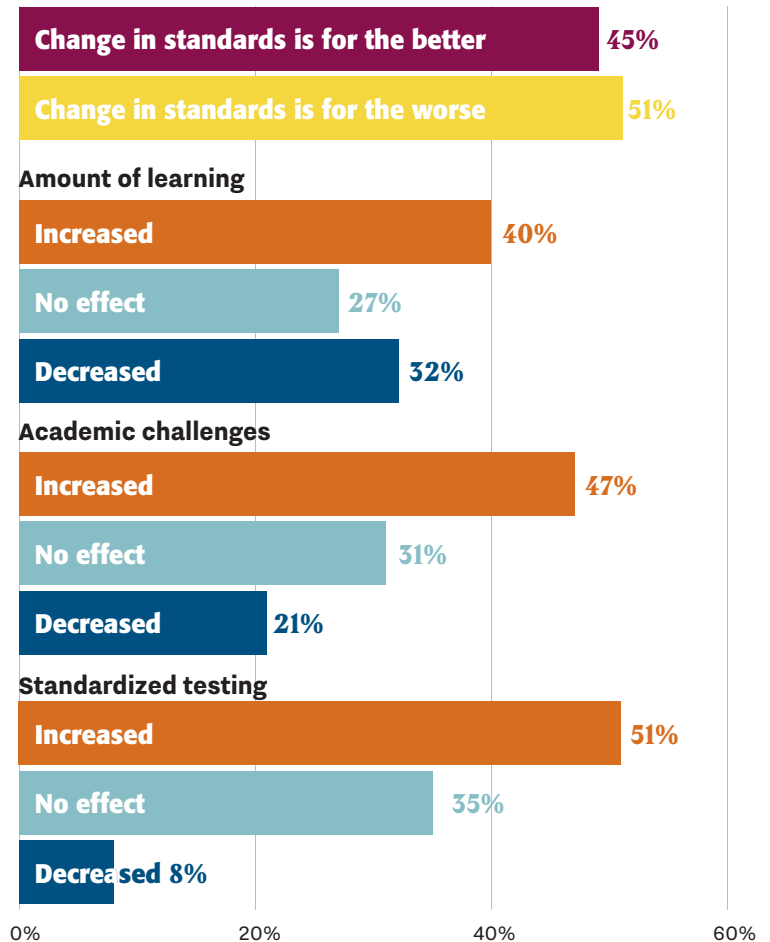
Just more than half of public school parents (56%) say recent changes in educational standards have changed what's being taught in their child's classroom, while about one-third (31%) say new standards have not influenced what's being taught. (Most of the rest, 13%, express no opinion.)

Among those who say their child's school has made a change, reviews are mixed:

- There's a split between those who believe new standards have been for the better (45%) and those who believe standards have made things worse (51%).
- More public school parents say the change has increased how much their child is learning in school (40%) than say it's had no effect (27%); one-third say their child's learning has declined.
- Just fewer than half (47%) say new standards have increased how much their child is challenged academically, but about as many see either no effect (31%) or say the new standards have decreased how challenging school is for their child (21%).
- Half also say new standards have increased the amount of time their child spends taking standardized tests, and 43% say their children have more homework because of standards. Only small percentages say testing (8%) and homework (15%) have decreased.

Perceptions of changing school standards

Public school parents who say standards have changed, 2016



THE QUESTIONS

- Q. In recent years, many states have adopted a new set of educational standards for what students should learn. As far as you're aware, has the use of these new standards changed what's being taught in your oldest child's school or not?
- Q. In your opinion, has this change been for the better or for the worse?
- Q. Specifically, do you think these new standards have increased, decreased, or had no effect on:
 - How much your oldest/this child is learning in school?
 - The amount of time your oldest/this child spends taking standardized tests?
 - The amount of homework your oldest/this child has?
 - How much your oldest/this child is challenged academically?

WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Parents grade the schools

Two-thirds of public school parents give their child's school an A (26%) or B (41%) grade, far better than Americans overall grade their local public schools or the schools nationally. Still, there is cause for concern: One-third of these parents assign their child's school a lower grade, including 23% a C, 5% a D, and 5% a failing grade.

Responses to the poll suggest ways that schools can address this. The single biggest differentiator of grades is the extent to which parents are satisfied with the school's efforts to keep them informed about how their child is doing. Parents who are extremely or very satisfied with the school's communication are nearly three times as

those who are less satisfied to give their child's school an A (35% vs. 12%).

Offering ample opportunities for parents to provide input is nearly as critical. Parents who feel their child's school offers such opportunities very or somewhat often are 29 percentage points more likely to give that school an A or B than are parents with less frequent opportunities to provide feedback.

Other factors associated with the school-parent relationship also produce large distinctions in school grades:

- School ratings are higher among public school parents who say they're frequently invited to visit their child's school and see what's going on. About eight in 10 in this group give their schools an A or B grade. That falls sharply to 50% among parents who report less frequent opportunities to visit.
- Parents who feel their child's school is extremely or very interested in what they have to say are 15 points more likely than others to grade that school A or B, 75% vs. 60%.

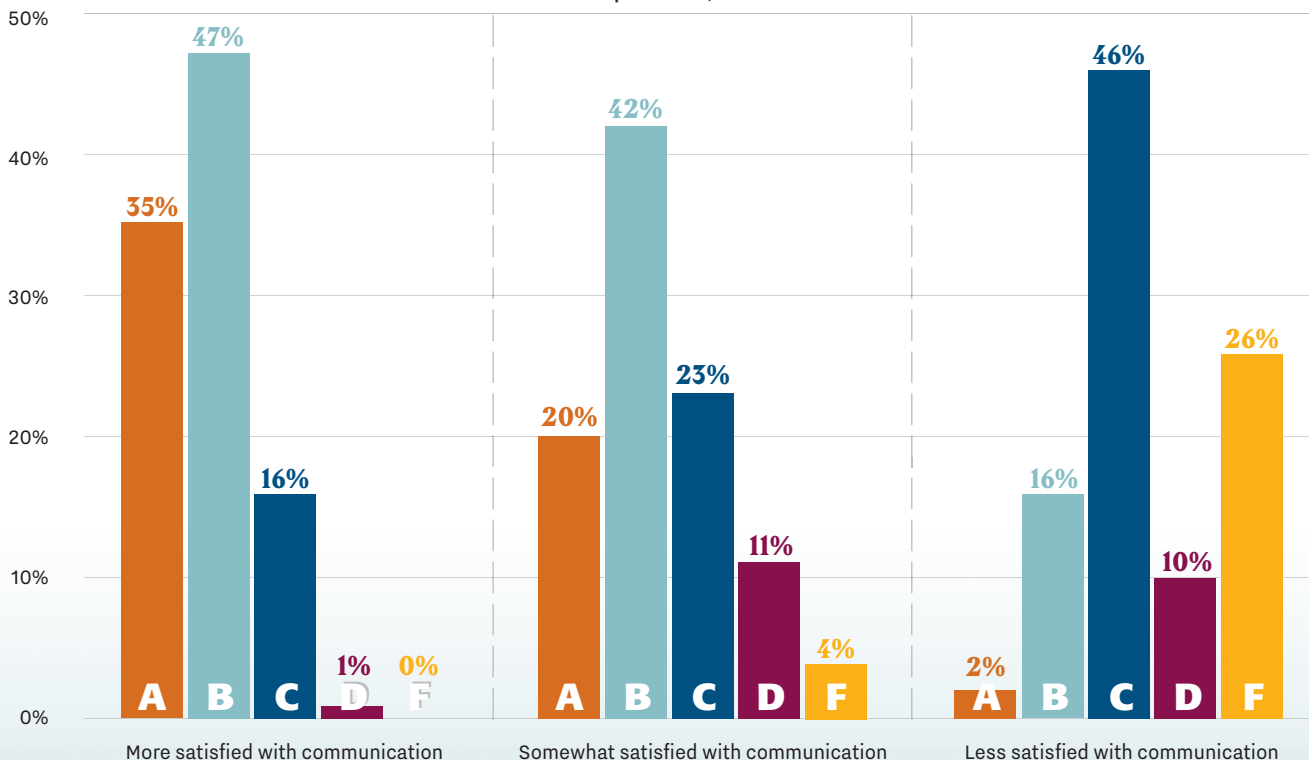
A statistical model evaluating the strongest independent correlates of parents' evaluations of their child's school finds that the first two factors — satisfaction with a school's

THE QUESTION

Q. How satisfied are you with the school's efforts to keep you informed about how your/this child is doing in school?

School grades by satisfaction with communication

Public school parents, 2016



communication and having frequent opportunities to offer input — are two of the strongest predictors of school grades. When these are in place, the other two items — visiting and thinking the school is interested in what parents have to say — aren't independently significant.

Other potential factors, among those available in the survey, are not borne out. Parents grade their child's school similarly regardless of the parent's gender, age, and race. In one slight demographic difference, college-educated parents are 10 points more likely than those without a college degree to say their child's school deserves an A (33% to 23%). However, education is not a statistically significant independent predictor of grades in the model.

Negative views of educational standards also are more common among parents who report a less collaborative relationship with their child's school. For example:

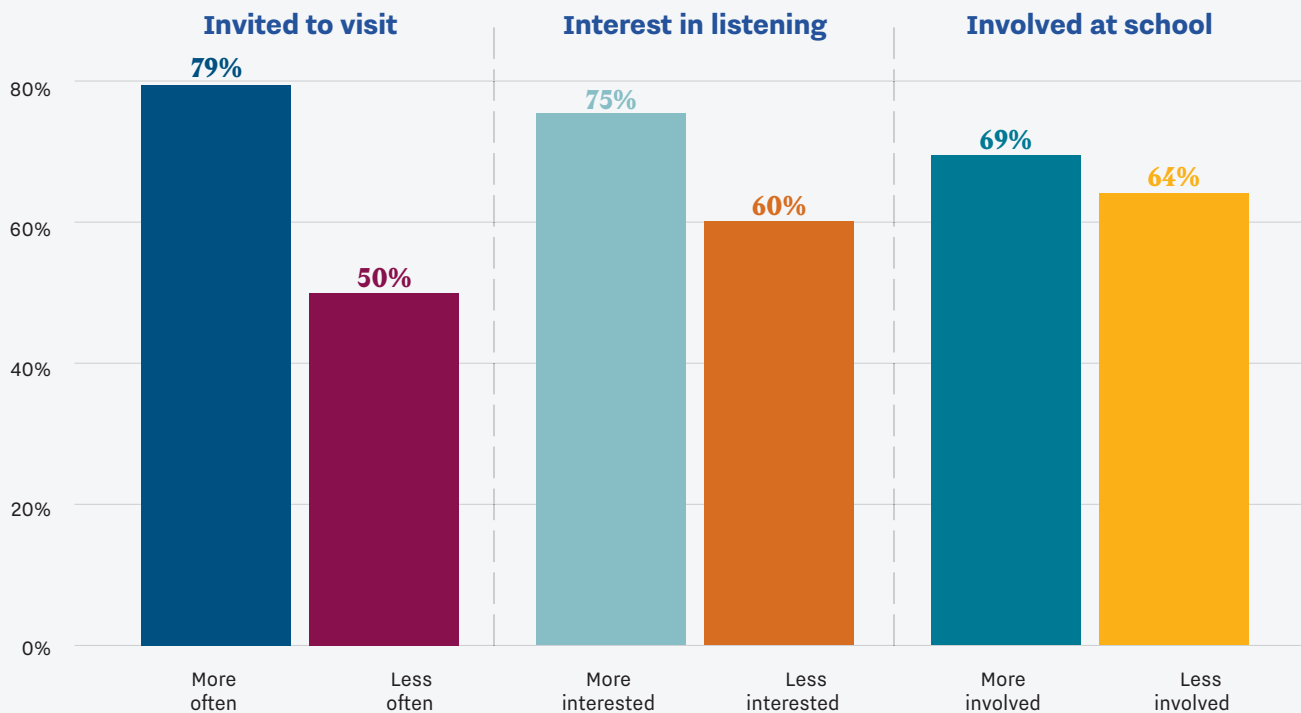
- Nearly half of parents with less opportunity to provide

feedback to their child's school think school standards are too low, compared with 22% of parents who have more such opportunities. Parents with more opportunities to voice their opinion are more than twice as likely to think school standards prepare students well for their adult lives (52% to 24%).

- Similarly, parents who report that their child's school is highly interested in hearing what they have to say are 24 points less likely to think the standards are too low (22% to 46%). Sixty percent in this group also think the standards do a good job of addressing the things students need to succeed, compared with just two in 10 other parents.
- Among parents whose school infrequently invites them to visit, 47% say standards are too low, and 35% think students aren't adequately prepared to succeed. These fall to 28% and 18%, respectively, for parents who are invited frequently to visit school.

A+B grades by satisfaction with interactions

Public school parents, 2016



THE QUESTIONS

- Q. How often does his/her school offer opportunities for parents to visit and see what's going on?
- Q. How interested do you feel your child's school is in hearing what you have to say about how things are done there?
- Q. How involved, if at all, do you personally feel with your oldest child's school?

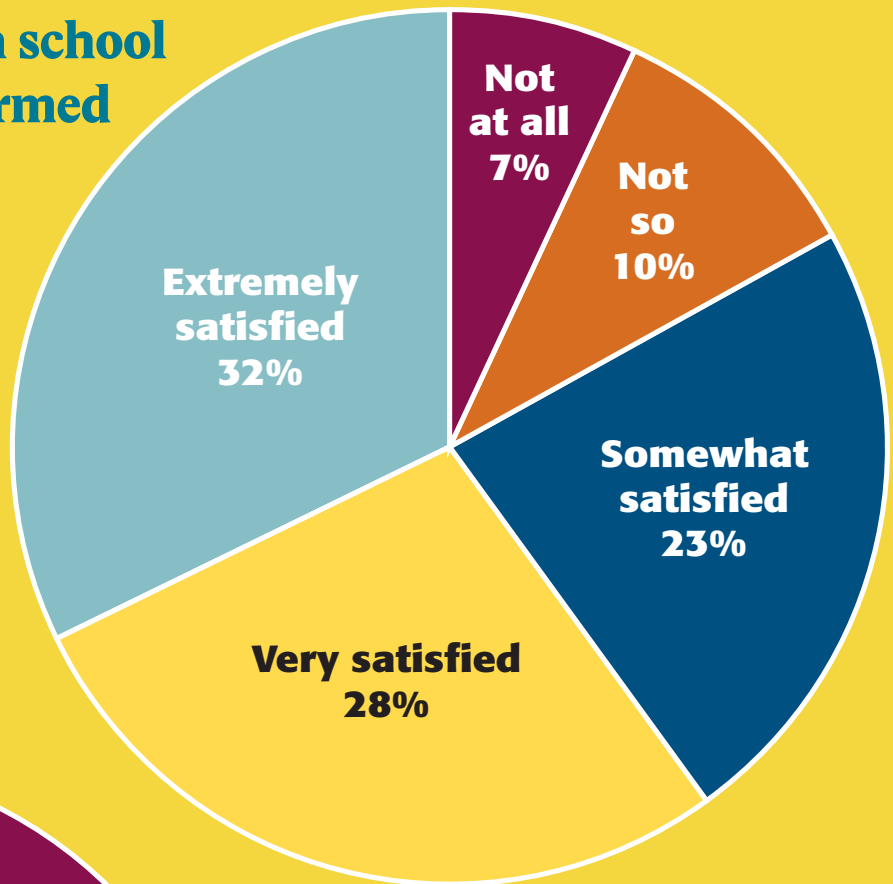
Parents' satisfaction with school efforts to keep them informed

Public school parents, 2016

THE QUESTION

Q. How satisfied are you with the school's efforts to keep you informed about how your/this child is doing in school?

Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

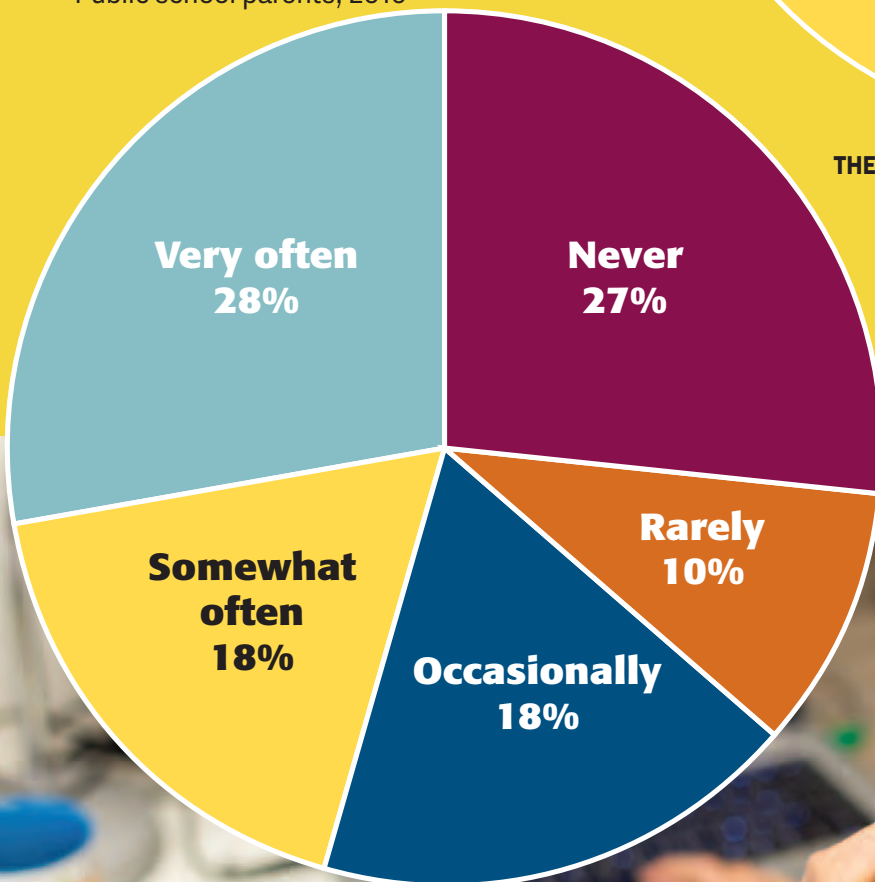


How frequently parents can give input at school

Public school parents, 2016

THE QUESTION

Q. And how often does his/her school give you opportunities to offer your opinions and input about how things are done there?



WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Parents & communication

Given its importance in predicting school grades, educators will want to understand more about how parents feel about communication and collaboration with their child's school. Results show ample room for improvement.

On the plus side, **60% of parents are satisfied with their child's school's efforts to keep them informed, including 32% who say they're extremely satisfied.**

Nearly six in 10 also say the school frequently offers opportunities for parents to visit and see what's going on; about four in 10 say these opportunities are offered very frequently.

Four in 10 parents are less than very satisfied with their school's communication efforts — 23% say they are somewhat satisfied, and 16% are less satisfied than that. Four in 10 say the school only occasionally, if ever, provides opportunities for them to visit. Those parents are a broad 38 points more likely than others to wish they had more visiting opportunities (66% to 28%).

Further, fewer than half of parents (46%) report that their child's school often offers opportunities for them

to provide input on how things are done there. One-quarter of parents say they never have such opportunities; the rest only occasionally or rarely get to offer their views. More than half of parents would like more such opportunities (54%), and that rises to three-quarters of those who only occasionally, rarely, or never get the chance now.

Similarly, just 41% report that their child's school is extremely or very interested in hearing what they have to say. This perception falls to just 22% and 26% among parents who say they have infrequent opportunities to offer input or visit the school.

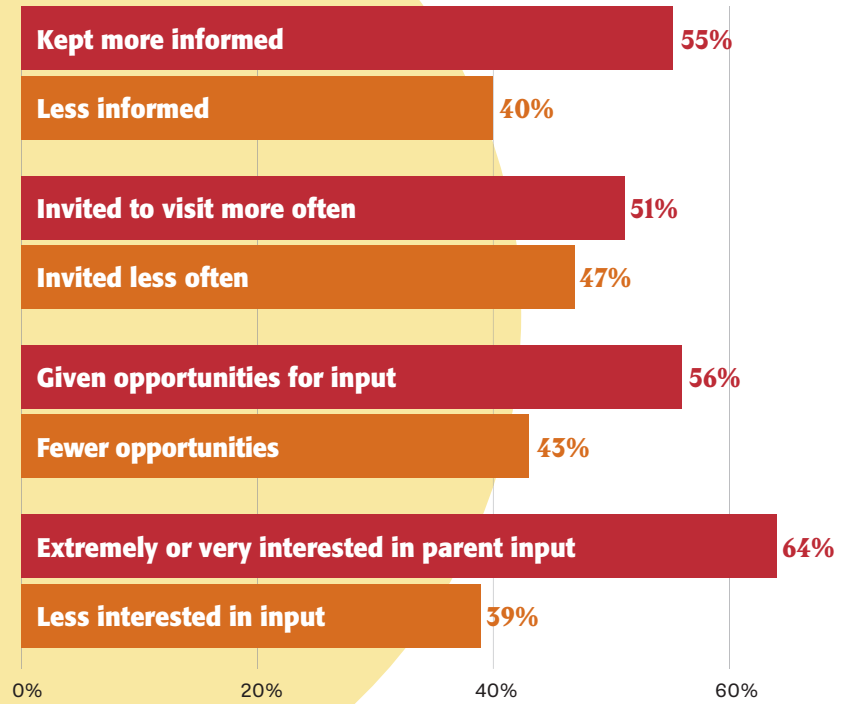
All in all, half of parents feel extremely or very involved with their child's school; an additional 32% feel somewhat involved, with the rest less involved than that.

Not surprisingly, **satisfaction and involvement go hand in hand.** Although the numbers of respondents are small, parents who rate their schools positively on keeping them informed, offering them opportunities to provide input, and showing interest in their input tend to be more apt to feel involved with their child's school overall.



Parents' feeling of involvement

Public school parents, 2016



THE QUESTIONS

- Q. How satisfied are you with the school's efforts to keep you informed about how your/this child is doing in school?
- Q. How often does his/her school offer opportunities for parents to visit and see what's going on?
- Q. Would you like more such opportunities, or are there enough?
- Q. And how often does his/her school give you opportunities to offer your opinions and input about how things are done there?
- Q. Would you like more such opportunities, or are there enough?
- Q. How interested do you feel your child's school is in hearing what you have to say about how things are done there?

WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Homework, tests, & pressure

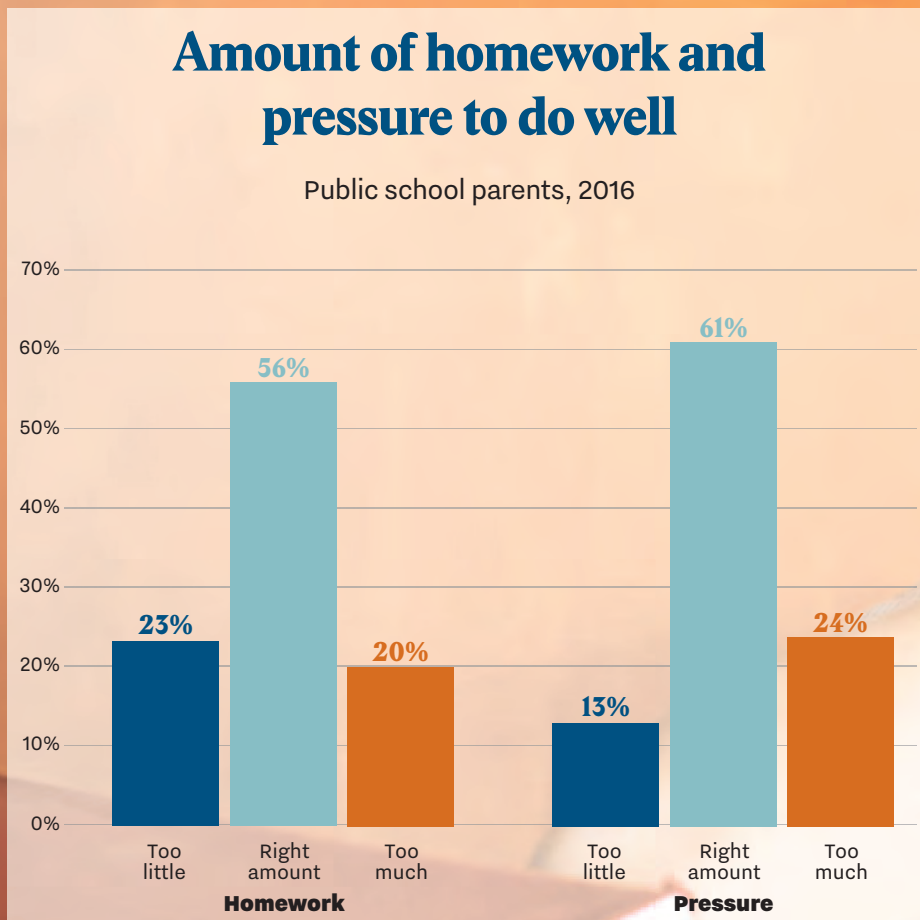
Nearly eight in 10 public school parents say they regularly review their child's graded tests and other schoolwork that's been returned by the teacher, including six in 10 who say they do this very often. Fewer, but still 65%, say they often look at their child's homework before it's turned in, with nearly

half doing so very often. Just 7% say they rarely and 14% say they never look at their child's graded work and homework.

This involvement peaks with younger children, especially in terms of homework. Nearly all parents with children in

THE QUESTIONS

- Q.** Thinking again about your oldest child in school, do you feel that s/he has too much homework, too little, or about the right amount?
- Q.** Do you think your/this child feels too much pressure to do well in school, too little pressure, or about the right amount?



grades K-8 often review that child's graded work and homework. By contrast, seven in 10 high school parents say they frequently review their child's graded work, but fewer than half (45%) report frequently reviewing homework.

Not surprisingly, reviewing homework and graded work are highly related, and both also relate to greater involvement with the school overall. Nearly all parents who say they frequently look at their child's homework also say they frequently review their graded tests (93%), and six in 10 feel very involved with their child's school. Among parents who review their child's work less frequently, those fall to just more than half and three in 10, respectively.

Fifty-six percent of parents say their child has the right amount of homework, while the rest divide as to whether

it's too little (23%) or too much (20%). Similarly, **61% of parents are OK with the amount of pressure they think their child feels to do well in school**, while one-quarter see too much pressure, and 13% say there's too little. The two are related — parents who report their child has too much homework also are more apt to say they face too much pressure.

It makes a difference: In addition to satisfaction with a school's communication efforts and frequent opportunities for input, **the perception that a child is under too much pressure emerges as a marginally significant predictor of school evaluations.** Parents who think their child is under too much pressure to do well grade their child's school less positively.

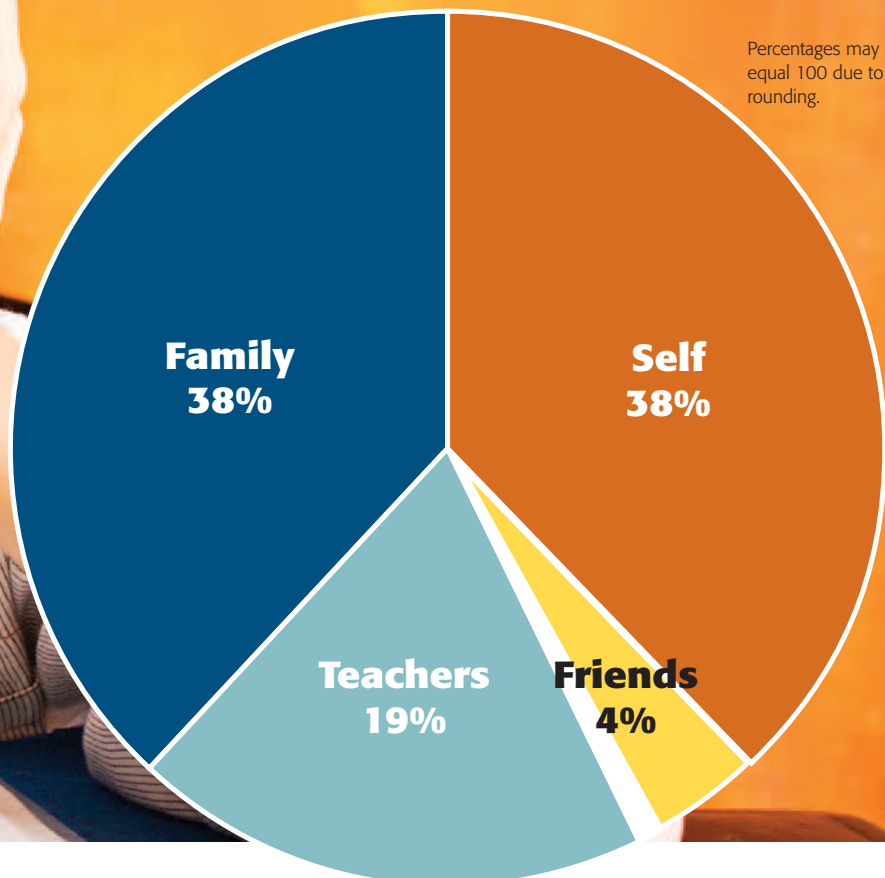


Q. Do you think most of the pressure s/he feels to do well at school comes from:

- His/her teachers?
- Herself/himself?
- You or someone else in your family?
- His/her friends?

Source of oldest child's pressure to do well

Public school parents, 2016



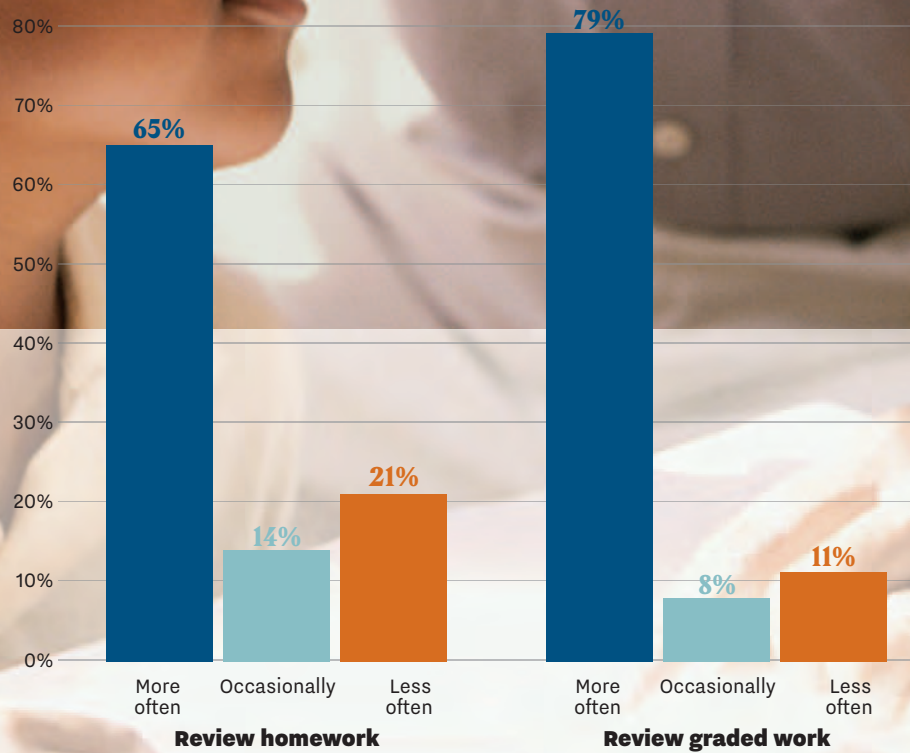
Perceptions of the main source of such pressure vary — most parents think it comes from them or someone in their family (38%) or from the child him or herself (38%). Far fewer think the pressure comes from their child's teachers (19%) or friends (4%).

White parents are 17 points more likely than nonwhites to think their child feels too much pressure (31% to 14%), but they're less apt to feel that they're the cause of it (30% vs. 49%). Instead, they're 17 points more likely to attribute the pressure to their child's teachers (26% to 9%).

Public school parents who report that the primary focus of public school education should be to prepare students academically are less than half as likely as others to say their child has too much homework, 13% vs. 28%. They're also 17 points more likely to say that they or another family member are the main source of academic pressure on their child (44% to 27%).

THE QUESTIONS

- Q.** How often, if at all, do you:
- Look at your oldest child's homework before s/he hands it in?
 - Review your oldest child's graded tests and other schoolwork after it's returned by the teacher?



Parent involvement in school work

Public school parents, 2016

Methodology

The 2016 PDK poll on education was designed, managed, analyzed, and reported by Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y., in consultation with PDK. All results described in this report were tested for statistical significance.

Langer Research Associates is a charter member of the Transparency Initiative of the American Association for Public Opinion Research. The full questionnaire and topline results for this survey are available at pdkpoll.org.

The poll was conducted via the SSRS Omnibus, a national, random-digit-dialed telephone survey conducted by SSRS of Media, Pa.

The SSRS Omnibus consists of about 1,000 random-sample telephone interviews per week, 600 conducted via cell phones and 400 via landline phones, with a minimum of 35 interviews in Spanish. Calls are made Wednesday through Sunday to a fully replicated, stratified, single-stage RDD sample of landline telephone households and randomly generated cell phone numbers designed to represent the adult population of the United States. Phone numbers receive six call attempts in a 10-day period, with a rolling cross-section design that allows the sample to remain active for multiple five-day waves.

Within each landline household, interviewers ask to speak with the youngest adult male or female at home. Cell phone interviews are conducted with the adult answering the phone.

Data are weighted via a multistage process, first correcting for unequal probabilities of selection depending on the number of adults in the household and the nature of telephone service in use, then applying a poststratification adjustment to correct for systematic nonresponse using known demographic parameters. The sample undergoes iterative proportional fitting (“raking”) to match the most recent March Supplement of the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey by age (by gender), education, race/ethnicity, marital status, and census region (by gender). Respondents’ telephone status (cell-phone only, landline only, or mixed user) is included in the rake, based on the most recent estimates from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control’s National Health Interview Survey.

Interviews for the PDK poll were conducted across two waves of the SSRS Omnibus, the first among a random sample of the national population, the second to collect additional interviews of parents of school-age children, blacks, and Hispanics. In all, 1,221 adults were interviewed between April 27 and May 10, 2016, including 305 parents of school-age children, 211 black respondents, and 219 Hispanics. Oversampled groups were weighted to their correct share of the population, including parents overall and by racial/ethnic group.

Results have a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for the full sample, including the design effect. Error margins are larger for subgroups, e.g., 6.5 points for parents of school-age children.

The SSRS Omnibus is used by a wide range of business, media, academic, and foundation clients, including researchers from more than a dozen universities; organizations such as the Kaiser Family Foundation, the National Alliance for Hispanic Health, and the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation; and media outlets including The New York Times, CBS News, and ABC News. For further information, see <http://ssrs.com/research/ssrs-omnibus/>.

Note: *The order of the questions published in this supplement does not reflect the order in which those questions were asked.*

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