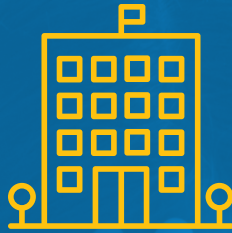


51st Annual

PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

*A supplement to Kappan magazine | September 2019*



# Frustration

— IN THE —

# SCHOOLS

Teachers speak out on pay,  
funding, and feeling valued

**PDK** Poll



# Frustration in the schools

Teachers speak out on pay, funding, and feeling valued.

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Allison De Jong, *research associate*



The 2019 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public School was produced with support from the PDK Educational Foundation and Carnegie Corporation of New York. We gratefully acknowledge their support for this significant work.

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FRUSTRATION IN THE SCHOOLS

# Broad discontent leads half of teachers to consider quitting their jobs

Parents and teachers align in their view that a lack of funding is hurting public schools.

Frustrated by poor pay and underfunded schools, half of public school teachers nationally have seriously considered leaving the profession in the past few years — and majorities in the 2019 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools say that given the opportunity, they'd vote to strike.

Were it to happen, large majorities of parents and the general public say they'd lend support.

In other results, Americans continue to express their concern about the lack of financial support for the public schools, naming this as the biggest problem facing their local schools for the 18th consecutive year. Sixty percent say schools have too little money, with even a majority of more affluent Americans saying the public schools in their community are

underfunded. Although they're not ready to raise taxes to solve this problem, Americans are ready to vote for candidates who will support greater funding for public schools. They also support using revenue from state lotteries, legal recreational marijuana, and sports gambling to beef up school coffers.

Most parents and teachers also want schools to require students to study civics and say public schools should offer Bible studies classes as electives. They also see mediation and counseling as more effective than detention and suspension when dealing with misbehaving students.

Now in its 51st year, the PDK poll includes a random national sample of public school teachers for the first time since 2000, adding their voices to those of parents and the general public

on crucial issues in public education. Results paint a portrait of broad teacher discontent:

- **60% of teachers say they're unfairly paid**, and 55% say they'd vote to go on strike for higher pay. Among those earning less than \$45,000 annually — more than 1 in 4 teachers — support for a pay strike jumps to 67%.
- Pay isn't the only concern. **Seventy-five percent of teachers say the schools in their community are underfunded**. Fifty-eight percent say they'd vote to strike for higher funding for school programs, and 52% say they'd vote to strike for greater teacher say in academic policies on standards, testing, and the curriculum.
- Parents and the public overall stand with them; **74% of parents and 71% of all adults say they would support a strike by teachers in their community for higher pay**. Even more — 83% of parents and 79% of all adults — say they'd support teachers striking for a greater voice in academic policies. Similarly high percentages of teachers say they would support teachers in their own communities if they went on strike for any of these reasons.
- As noted, **half of teachers also say they've seriously considered leaving the profession in recent years**. That rises to 62% among teachers who feel undervalued by their community, who say their pay is unfair, or who earn less than \$45,000 annually. Having considered quitting also peaks among high school teachers, at 61% vs. 48% in the lower grades.

- **A majority of teachers — 55% — would not want their child to follow them into the profession**, chiefly citing inadequate pay and benefits, job stress, and feeling disrespected or undervalued. The result matches a PDK poll finding in 2018 in which a nearly identical 54% of all adults said they wouldn't want their child to become a public school teacher, a majority for the first time since the PDK poll began asking the question in 1969. Poor pay and benefits topped the list of reasons.

This year's survey finds many other shared views among teachers, parents, and the general public but also some sharp differences. Most strikingly, while 29% of parents see pressure to do well on tests as a problem, this soars to 50% among teachers.

Teachers also are especially likely to say the public schools in their community are underfunded, although this view is held by majorities across these groups — 75% of teachers, 61% of parents, and 60% of all adults.

In another gap, teachers are more apt than parents or the general public to identify teaching citizenship, as opposed to academics or workforce preparation, as the chief aim of public education. A plurality of teachers — 45% — sees preparing students to be good citizens as the schools' main goal, compared with 28% of parents and 25% of all adults. (Teachers also are especially apt to favor requiring students to take a civics course.)

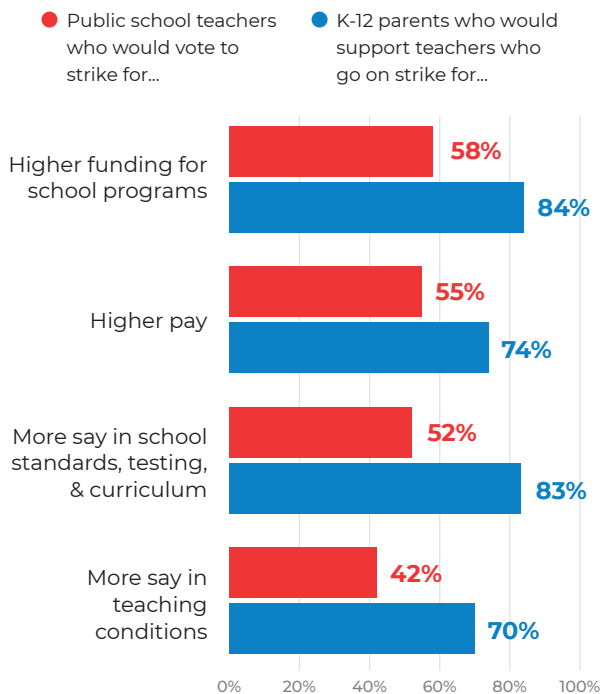
Parents and the general public instead give top priority to preparing students academically. That said, there's broad preference across groups for both job and academic preparation, not just one or the other.

Teachers and parents also part ways, to some extent, when it comes to state-issued report cards on school quality. Just half of teachers say these reports accurately represent the quality of schools; that rises to 64% among parents. (Like teachers, the general public also is more skeptical but also much less familiar with these report cards.)

Supported by grants from the PDK Educational Foundation and Carnegie Corporation of New York, the national survey was produced for PDK International, the professional association for educators, by Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y. Interviews were conducted April 12-27, 2019, among a random national sample of 2,389 adults age 18 and up, including oversamples to a total of 1,083 parents of school-age children and 556 public school teachers. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish via the probability-based Ipsos KnowledgePanel®, in which participants are randomly recruited via address-based sampling to take surveys online.

This year's PDK study also includes a qualitative component: Fifteen public school teachers and 15 public school parents from across the country participated in a five-day online

### Support for a teachers strike



PDK poll, 2019

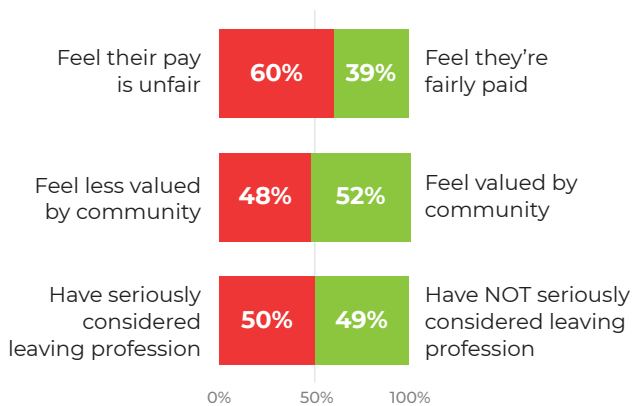
forum, answering open-ended questions on the survey's topics and responding to one another's comments. Results from this strand of the research are presented on the PDK poll website, [pdkpoll.org](http://pdkpoll.org).

The study is wide-ranging, covering issues including school discipline; state-issued school report cards and other means of assessing school quality; school funding; civics, values, and religious studies in the curriculum; and attitudes toward workforce development classes. All are detailed in the sections that follow.

The survey also includes the PDK poll's traditional letter grades for the public schools locally and nationally, with a positive result: This year, 76% of parents give an A or B grade to their own child's school, up from 70% last year. ■

### Teachers' concerns

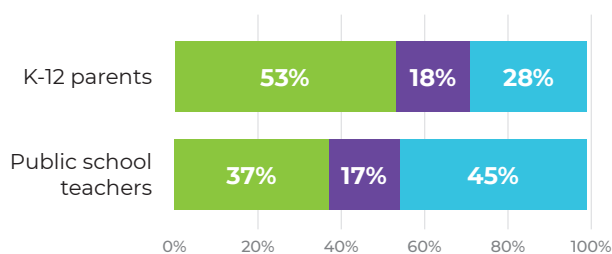
Public school teachers, 2019



PDK poll, 2019

### Main goal of public school education is to prepare students...

● Academically ● For work ● To be good citizens



PDK poll, 2019

## The Questions

Q If public school teachers in your community went on strike for higher pay, would you support them or oppose them?

Q Would you support or oppose teachers in your community striking, not for higher pay, but for any of these reasons? Higher funding for school programs? More say in teaching conditions, such as the calendar and schedules? More say in school standards, testing, and the school curriculum?

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

Q Just thinking about these, which of these should be the main purpose of the public schools — to educate students in core subject areas, to prepare students for jobs, or both equally?

### To Teachers

Q If there was a vote in your school district on whether or not to go on strike for higher pay, what would you do? Vote to strike? Vote against a strike?

Q Would you vote for or against a strike that was not for higher pay but for any of these reasons — higher funding for school programs; more say in teaching conditions, such as the calendar and schedules; and more say in school standards, testing, and the school curriculum?

*Recruiting and retaining good teachers and staff is of the utmost importance. They are the people who are with our kids day in and day out. They are rearing our children along with us. You wouldn't want just anybody to be part of your village. Our school district rarely retains good teachers. Who would stay when they're not being paid a livable wage?*

Deanna, 42, Latinx mother of two in rural Colorado

# Do teachers feel valued by their communities?

Public school teachers' views that they are underpaid and their schools underfunded tie in with a broader concern over the way teachers say they feel valued by their communities. Only about half — 52% — say their community values them a great deal or a good amount, including just 10% who say they feel they're valued a great deal. Among the rest, 31% feel valued "just some," and 16% feel less valued than that — a little or not at all.

Feeling valued as a teacher relates to feeling fairly paid. Among teachers who say their pay is fair, 68% say they feel their communities value them a great deal or a good amount; this falls to 42% of those who say their pay is unfair.

There are regional differences — 60% of teachers in the Northeast say they are fairly paid vs. just 3 in 10 in the South and Midwest alike. (Teachers in the West fall in the middle, with 47% feeling fairly paid.) Tenure also is a factor: Half

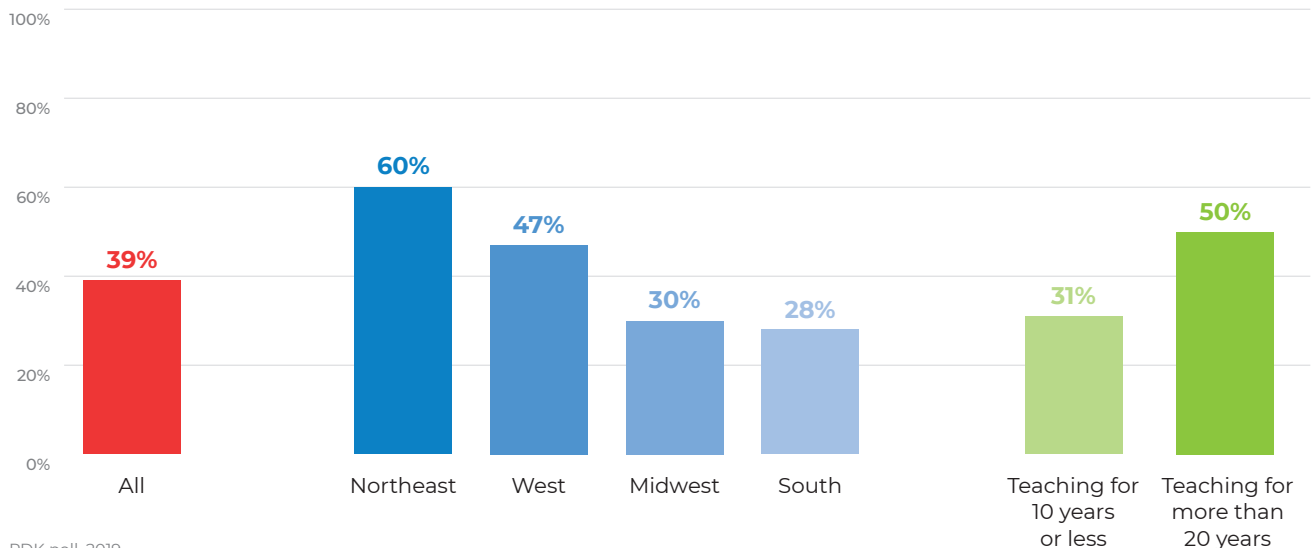
## The Questions

### To Teachers

- Q How much, if at all, do you feel that your community values you as a teacher?
- Q Do you feel that you are fairly paid or that your pay is unfair?
- Q In the past few years, have you seriously considered leaving the teaching profession, or is this not something you have seriously considered?
- Q What's the main reason you seriously considered leaving your job?
- Q Would you like your child to become a teacher or not?
- Q Why you would not like your child to become a teacher?

## Feeling fairly paid

Public school teachers, 2019



PDK poll, 2019

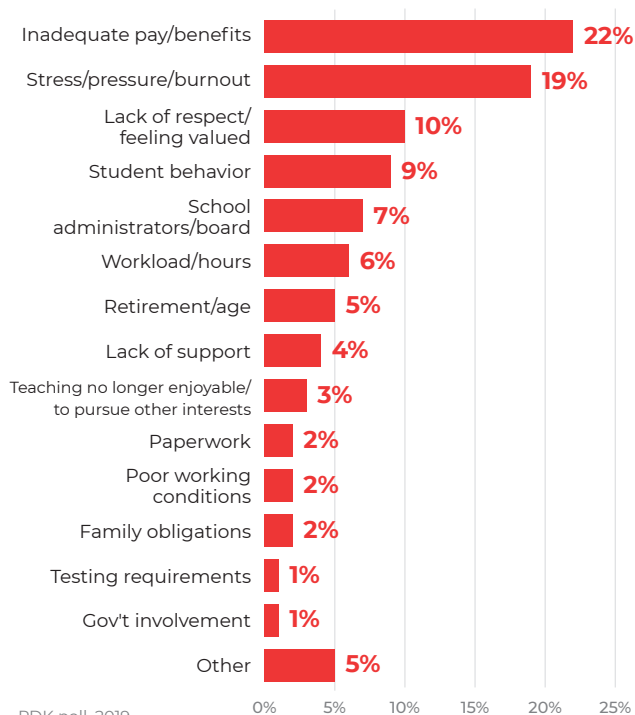
of those who've been teaching for more than 20 years feel fairly paid, compared with 31% of those with a decade or less experience. An almost identical pattern emerges by age, with half of teachers age 50 and older feeling fairly paid vs. only 34% of younger teachers (age 22 to 49).

Feeling valued — or not — has consequences: Teachers who feel less valued are more likely to support striking for higher pay — 62% vs. 49%. They're also less likely to give an A grade to the school where they work or to their community's schools. And, as noted, 62% of teachers who feel undervalued by their community have seriously considered leaving the profession in recent years, as have 62% of those who say their pay is unfair.

Low pay isn't the only motivator for teachers who have considered leaving the profession. While 22% cite pay and benefits as the main reason, about as many — 19% — cite stress, pressure, or burnout. Ten percent report a lack of respect or of feeling valued. Illustrative of other pressures, 60% of those who say their school's discipline is not strict enough have considered leaving, compared with 33% who say discipline is "about right."

Views on school funding also are associated with considering leaving the profession — 54% of teachers who say the public schools in their community have too little money have seriously considered leaving vs. 39% of those who say their schools are adequately funded. ■

### Reasons teachers have considered leaving the profession



PDK poll, 2019

## Why I would quit teaching

Verbatim comments from teachers randomly sampled in the 2019 PDK poll on why they've seriously considered leaving the profession:

*"I have a master's degree and more than 25 years' experience and am making less than I was making 10 years ago but am putting in many more hours now."*

*"Low pay and high stress."*

*"After working in my profession for five years, my annual income is \$30,000 before taxes. I will never be able to own my own home at this rate."*

*"Lack of respect, evaluations that are not in my control based on the behavior of children, pay freezes for over five years, low pay carrying over into retirement, unable to pay for living expenses, administrative disrespect for teachers publicly and privately, defiant and belligerent students returned to the classroom after egregious behavior."*

*"Teachers' pay is low, no respect from parents, and too much testing and pressure from the state to get the students to pass the state test."*

*"Lack of respect from students and parents, and the lack of pay."*

*"Too much work and too little pay and respect as a profession."*

*"The behavior problems are getting worse and worse. It is getting harder and harder to teach!"*

*"The lack of respect from society along with the increasing amount of bureaucratic nonsense that I am required to waste time on."*

*"I work 55 hours a week, have 12 years' experience, and make \$43K. I worry and stress daily about my classroom prep work and kids. I am a fool to do this job."*

*"Tired of being treated like dirt."*

*"Lack of teacher autonomy with regards to making professional decisions regarding curriculum use in the general education classroom."*

*"I am not just considering it. I am getting out. There is no support. We are asked to do too much for too little money. We are treated like trash by administrators, students, parents, and the district."*

*"I would be valued better elsewhere."*

More comments from public schools teachers are available at [pdkpoll.org](http://pdkpoll.org).

# Teachers: A demographic profile

Public school teachers differ from the general public on a variety of demographic as well as attitudinal measures — education, gender, age, and income among them. At the same time, they look similar on political measures when compared with their closest cohort, employed college graduates.

There's a wide gender gap. Seventy-six percent of public school teachers are women while 24% are men. That compares with a 52%-48% split in the general adult population.

Education marks the sharpest difference. Ninety-two percent of teachers have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 33% of the general public. Indeed, 58% of teachers have a master's degree or higher vs. just 15% of all adults.

Teachers have higher annual household incomes than the public at large but lower incomes than a more comparable group, employed adults with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Teachers look like other employed college graduates

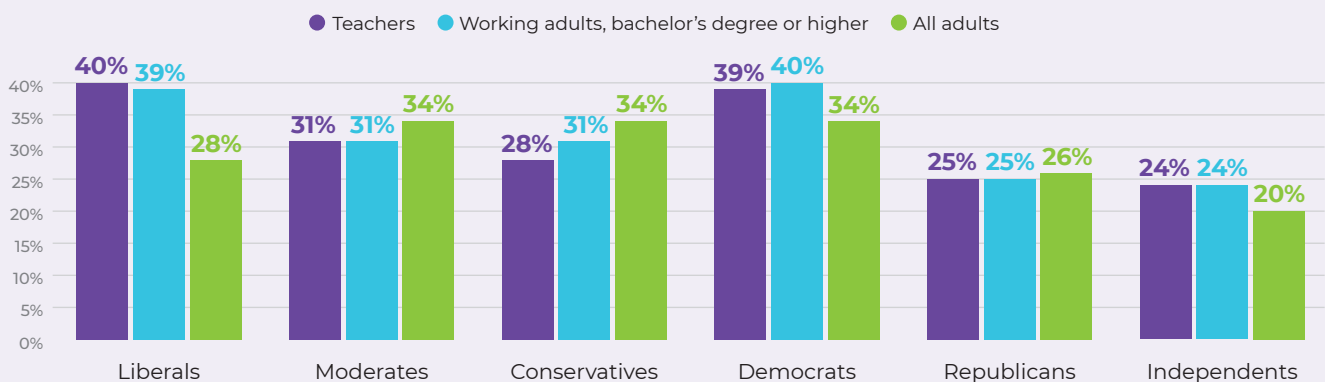
ideologically and politically. Forty percent of teachers say they're liberals, 31% moderates, and 28% conservatives; it's a similar 39%-31%-31% among working college graduates. (Adults without a college degree are less apt to be liberals.)

Politically, 39% of teachers identify themselves as Democrats, 25% as Republicans, and 24% as independents (and an additional 10% have no preference). That's again similar to college graduates who are employed.

Among other comparisons:

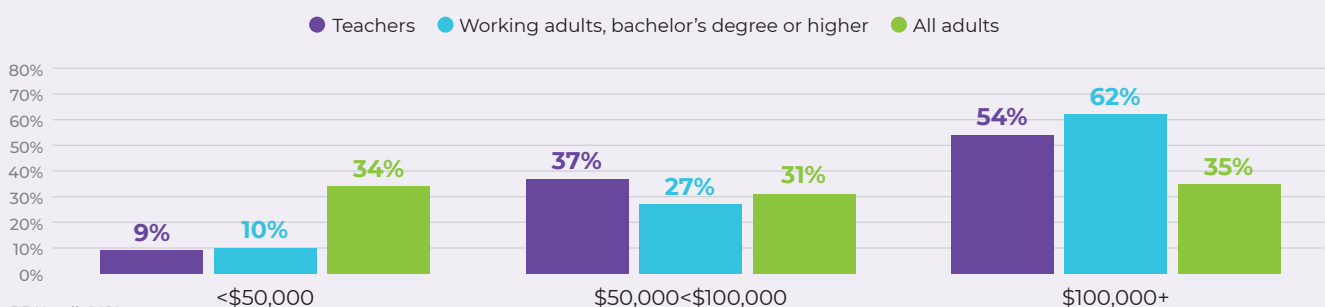
- 76% of teachers are White, compared with 64% of all adults.
- 64% of teachers are married, compared with 53% of the general public.
- 37% of teachers are evangelical Christians, almost exactly matching the figure for all adults — 36%.

## Ideology and party identification



PDK poll, 2019

## Annual household income



PDK poll, 2019





WHAT AMERICANS SAID

# How do you assess school quality?

The potential for large numbers of teachers to leave the profession poses a challenge to schools on a variety of fronts. One of those is how parents assess school quality — because more parents cite teachers and staff as the key ingredient than any other factor.

In an open-ended question, 24% of K-12 parents cite teachers and staff as the main factor in evaluating the quality of their child’s school, with all other responses in single digits. The answer holds across student grade levels. It peaks — at 31% — among Asian-American parents, a low-incidence population that was oversampled for this study.

Turning to student performance, a **nearly unanimous 94% of teachers say the better way to assess a school’s quality is to look at the improvement its students show over time**, rather than the percentage of students who pass a standardized state test at any given time. Broad, albeit less overwhelming, majorities of parents and all adults agree — 77% and 75%, respectively. (It was 81% and 80% of all adults when last asked in PDK polls in 2006 and 2008.)

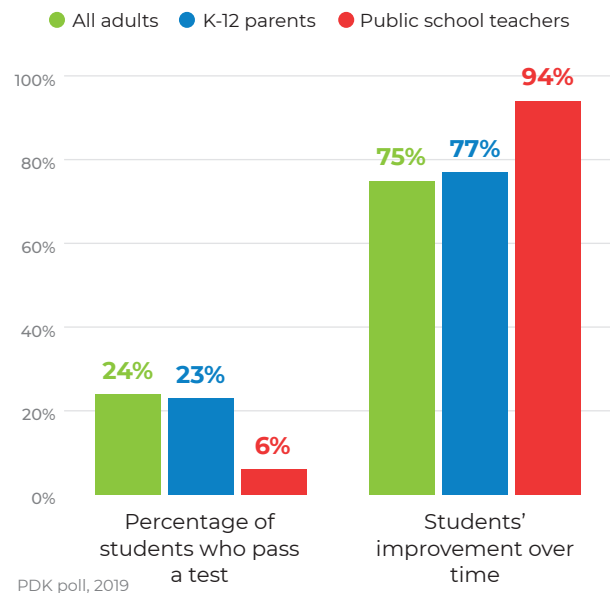
There are some differences among groups, including on the basis of race and ethnicity. Focus on onetime test scores peaks among Latinx parents (38%) and Asian-American parents (32%). Those compare with 22% among Black parents and 16% among White parents. Regardless, majorities across the board say student improvement over time matters more.

There’s no clear single source of information parents rely on in assessing the quality of their child’s school. A plurality (39%) says they find their child’s report card most helpful for this purpose, but 23% rely more on state-issued report cards on the local schools, 21% on their child’s state standardized test scores, and 15% on evaluations from other parents.

Again there’s a racial and ethnic difference, with reliance on state standardized tests to assess school quality lowest among White parents (14%), compared with 30% among non-White parents, including similar levels among Black, Latinx, and Asian-American parents.

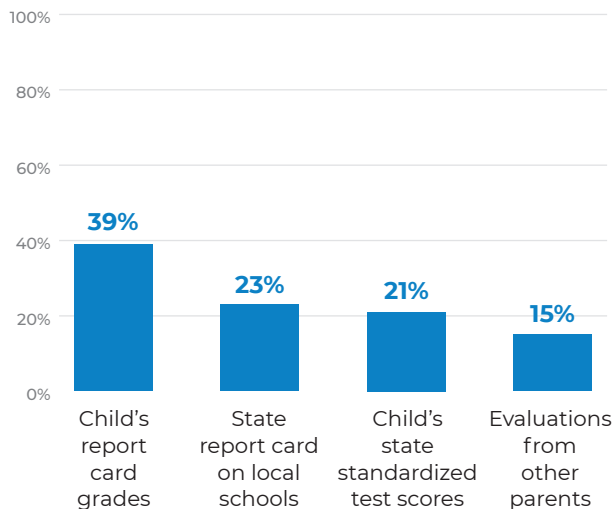
## Best way to measure school performance

National totals, 2019



## How parents assess school quality

K-12 parents, 2019



PDK poll, 2019

There are gaps in awareness, use, and perceptions of state-issued school report cards. A broad 81% of teachers say their state issues school report cards; that falls sharply to 52% of parents and 39% of all adults. Instead, 43% of parents and 56% of the general public simply don't know whether their state issues these reports. Parents who rate their child's school negatively (with a C, D, or Fail grade) are least likely to be aware of whether state-issued school report cards are available.

Among those who say their state has issued a report card for their local schools, majorities of teachers and parents alike say they have read it — 73% and 66%, respectively, vs. 51% of all adults. Most parents and teachers say they did so within the past year, and, across groups, 7 in 10 or more say the school report cards were easy to find and easy to understand.

*I listen to other parents, and, more importantly, I listen to my kids and what they're excited about as well as their complaints, if any. You can walk around the school and tell a lot by what you see and hear. The teachers and school culture tell a lot. I look at the (state) report cards every semester, and they're not very telling.*

Autumn, 39, White mother of three in a Michigan suburb

Majorities who read the state-issued school report cards also found them helpful, albeit with a large difference between teachers — 62% found them helpful — and parents (82%) and the general public (77%).

As noted, teachers overall divide evenly on whether state-issued school report cards do or do not accurately represent school quality — 50% vs. 48%. The general public similarly divides —

## The Questions

Q What's the most important factor to you in evaluating the quality of your oldest child's school?

Q One way to measure a school's performance is to base it on the percentage of students passing the test mandated by the state. Another way is to measure the improvement students in the school made during the year. In your opinion, which is the best way to measure the school's performance — the percentage passing the test or the improvement shown by the students?

Q Which one of these is most helpful to you in evaluating the quality of your child's school — state report cards on the local schools, your child's report card grades, your child's scores on state standardized tests, or evaluations from other parents?

Q As far as you are aware, does your state issue a report card on the local public schools there or not?

Q Have you ever read the state report card for your local public schools or not?

Q When did you last read the report card for your local public schools?

Q Did you find the report card for your local public schools . . . easy to find or difficult to find? Easy to understand or difficult to understand? Helpful or not helpful?

Q How confident are you that state report cards on the quality of local public schools accurately represent the quality of those schools?

46% vs. 52% — while parents see the state report cards much more positively — 64% vs. 36%. Confidence peaks among Latinx parents (77%) vs. lows of 57% among Black parents and 59% among White parents.

Confidence grows, moreover, when looking just at those who report actually having read these report cards. Teachers in this group say by 62% vs. 37% that they accurately represent school quality, while teachers who have not read the report cards are divided, 47% vs. 52%. Parents who've read the report cards also respond more positively to them than those who have not, by 12 percentage points (82% vs. 70%), all adults, by 11 points (74% vs. 63%). ■

# Does religious study belong in public schools?

A recent trend toward including Bible studies in public high schools wins majority support in the 2019 PDK poll, with the provision that Bible studies should be an elective, not a requirement. Support is higher for including comparative religion classes, also as an elective.

Specifically, among all adults, 58% say schools should offer Bible studies as an elective, and 6% say Bible studies should be required, totaling 64% who favor Bible classes in one of these formats. Sixty-eight percent of parents say the same, as do 58% of teachers.

Support for Bible studies in the public schools peaks at 82% among evangelical Christians, 78% of Republicans, and 76% of conservatives, compared with 51% of Democrats and 43% of liberals. (It's 59% among independents and 67% among moderates.) Among Democrats, there's a racial and ethnic division — 67% of Black Democrats support Bible studies, compared with 52% of Latinx Democrats and 45% of White Democrats. Support also is 10 points higher in rural areas than in cities or suburbs — 72% vs. 62%.

About 4 in 10 Americans — 38% — express concern that Bible studies may improperly promote Judeo-Christian religious beliefs. This concern is shared by majorities of liberals (58%) and Democrats (55%), compared with 28% of evangelicals,

## The Questions

Q Do you think public school students should be required to take a class in each of these subjects in order to graduate from high school; these classes should be offered as an elective but should not be required; or these classes should not be offered? Civics, which covers topics such as citizenship, democracy, and the role of government in society; comparative religions; and Bible studies?

Q How concerned, if at all, are you about each of the following: Civics class might include political content that you disagree with; Bible studies classes might improperly promote Judeo-Christian religious beliefs; comparative religion classes might improperly encourage students to change their religious beliefs?

one-quarter of conservatives, and about 2 in 10 Republicans. Support for offering Bible studies, naturally, plummets among those who are especially concerned that they might improperly promote Judeo-Christian beliefs.

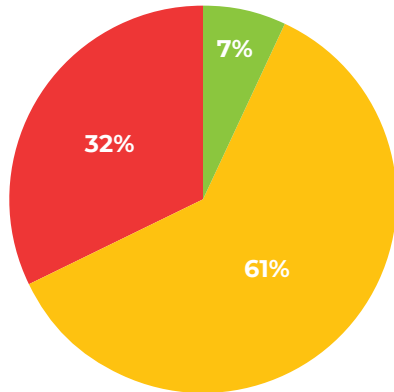
**More people favor offering comparative religion classes** (again with single digits saying they should be required) — 77% of all adults and 76% of parents, rising to 87% of teachers. Support for comparative religion classes is high across groups, including 81% among evangelical Christians, and with no meaningful political or ideological gaps. Support ranges from 71% of those who haven't gone beyond high school to 86% of Americans with a postgraduate degree.



## Bible studies in the public schools

K-12 parents, 2019

- Should be required
- Should be offered
- Should not be offered



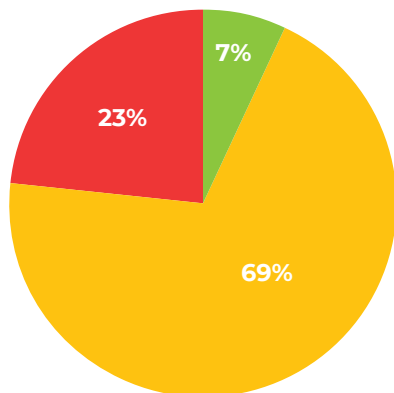
PDK poll, 2019

About one-quarter of adults and parents overall express concerns that comparative religion classes might lead students to question their family's faith or to change their religious beliefs. Concerns about ill effects of comparative religion classes are lowest among teachers, expressed by about 1 in 7. They are highest among evangelical adults; 37% are concerned these classes could lead to students questioning their family's faith, and 35% say they could lead students to change their religious beliefs. The same concern is repeated by evangelical Christian parents, with 34% saying they are concerned these classes could lead to students questioning their family's faith, and 33% saying they could lead students to change their religious beliefs. ■

## Comparative religion classes in the public schools

K-12 parents, 2019

- Should be required
- Should be offered
- Should not be offered



PDK poll, 2019

## WHAT AMERICANS SAID

# Should students study civics?

A nearly unanimous 97% of Americans say public schools should be teaching civics, including 70% saying it should be required. According to a 2018 report by *Education Week*, only eight states require students to enroll in a yearlong civics or government course in high school; 27 others require a semester-long course.

In line with their focus on citizenship more generally, 81% of teachers say students should be required to take a civics class. This declines to 60% among parents, ranging from 73% of parents who have a college degree to 53% of those who don't.

A minority of parents (29%) expresses concern that civics classes might include political content that they disagree with. Just 16% of teachers share that concern. Among all adults, this concern peaks among conservatives, evangelical Christians (both at 37%), and Republicans (35%), compared with Democrats (22%) and liberals (17%).

*I don't want my child attending a school where they're told America is the best and never does anything wrong because that simply isn't true. But teaching students to be proud of being an American and ways they can honor their country or support their fellow Americans is important.*

Robin, 49, White mother of a high school student in urban Pennsylvania

Results on civics are buttressed by another finding: Parents (78%), all adults (79%), and teachers (85%) say schools should teach values as well as factual information. Adults age 65 and older (89%) are especially keen on this approach, and moderates (85%) and conservatives (80%) are more likely than liberals (69%) to support this idea. Those who want to see schools focus on core academics are less inclined to favor teaching values (64%).

The level of support for teaching values exceeds the number who say it would be possible to get people in their community to agree on a basic set of values that should be taught. Sixty-one percent of all adults say this kind of agreement is possible, down from 69% when this question was asked in 1993. (Results are similar among parents and teachers.)

## The Questions

Q Do you think public school students should be required to take a class in each of these subjects in order to graduate from high school; these classes should be offered as an elective but should not be required; or these classes should not be offered? Civics, which covers topics such as citizenship, democracy and the role of government in society; comparative religions; and Bible studies?

Q How concerned, if at all, are you about each of the following: Civics class might include political content that you disagree with; Bible studies classes might improperly promote Judeo-Christian religious beliefs; comparative religion classes might improperly encourage students to change their religious beliefs?

Q Do you think it would be possible or not possible to get people in your community to agree on a set of basic values, such as honesty and patriotism, that would be taught in the local public schools?

Q Which of these would you prefer your local public schools to do — teach values as well as factual information or only teach factual information and not values?

Q If your local public schools taught values, do you think they should or should not cover each of these topics — honesty, civility, acceptance of others with different sexual orientations, acceptance of others with different religions, patriotism, and respect for authority?

Agreement on some items might, in fact, be easier to achieve. Eighty-seven percent to 97% of all adults say public school classes on values should cover honesty, civility, respect for authority, and acceptance of people of different religions. Eighty-one percent say patriotism should be included, and 74% favor including acceptance of people of different sexual orientations.

Politics are a factor. Ninety-two percent of liberals and 90% of Democrats say teaching values should include acceptance

of others with different sexual orientations, compared with 55% of Republicans and 53% of conservatives. (It's 82% among moderates and 77% among political independents.)

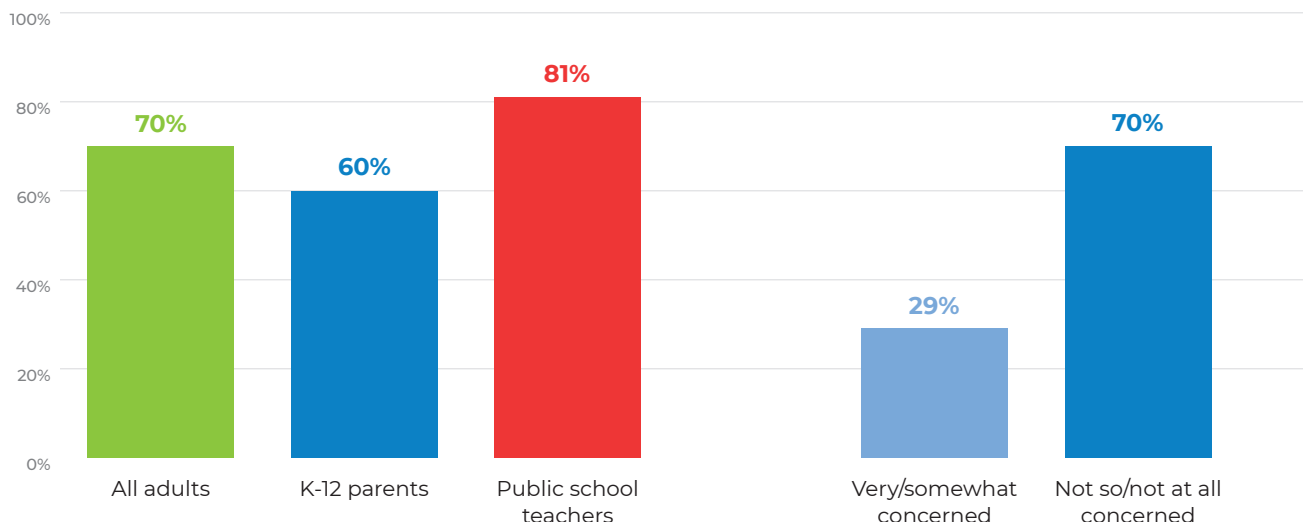
In contrast, 94% of Republicans and 90% of conservatives say schools should cover patriotism, as do 73% of Democrats and 66% of liberals. There's also an age gap on this question; 92% of adults age 65 and older support teaching patriotism vs. 72% of those younger than age 40 — although these are big majorities in both cases. ■

## Views on teaching civics in the public schools

National totals, 2019

Civics class should be required

K-12 parents concerned class might include political content they disagree with



PDK poll, 2019

# How much should schools focus on workforce preparation?

Parents and adults (each 53%) agree that academics should be the focus of a public school education while teachers say the main goal should be preparing students to be good citizens (45%) or preparing them academically (37%).

Just about 2 in 10 parents, teachers, and all adults alike say that preparing students for work should be the public schools' main goal. Preference for work preparation is higher among Republicans, conservatives, rural residents, and Whites than their counterparts. Asian-American parents and public school teachers are most focused on citizenship, and Democrats are 9 points more apt than Republicans and independents to prioritize academics.

Another question, though, makes clear that learning job skills is a broadly shared goal nonetheless: Seventy-five percent of parents, 77% of all adults, and 82% of teachers say schools should prepare students both for jobs and academically. Only 15% of parents and all adults and 8% of teachers say core academics alone should be the priority.

*Very few students will ever care to know how to graph a parabola, but everyone will need to know how to do their taxes. Don't require trigonometry but require basic tax preparation.*

Lindsey, 41, mixed race mother of five in Oregon suburb

Indeed, given a choice of job skills classes, advanced academic classes, or arts or music classes, a plurality of parents (45%) say they'd want their child to take a job skills class in high school. Thirty-seven percent select advanced academics; 18% choose arts or music.

Parents who are college graduates are more likely to prefer advanced academics for their child, 44% vs. 33% among nongraduates, and nongraduates are more likely to pick job skills classes, 51% vs. 34%. Preference for advanced academics

## The Questions

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

Q Just thinking about these, which of these should be the main purpose of the public schools — to educate students in core subject areas, to prepare students for jobs, or both equally?

Q Say that in high school your child had a choice of one of three elective classes. Which subject would you prefer he or she take — a job skills class, an advanced academic class, or an arts or music class?

Q If job skills classes were available in each of these subjects, which are the top three that you would encourage your child to take — culinary arts/cooking; communications and graphic design; cosmetology (hairstyling, cosmetics, nails); health/medical; building trades (carpentry, electrical, plumbing, HVAC); drafting/engineering; computer programming/coding and web development; automotive repair, technology, and refinishing; or information technology (IT) hardware and systems?

Q Some high school classes are required for all public school students. Others are elective, meaning students can decide which to take. Do you think it's a good idea or a bad idea to let students who do not plan to go to college skip some required academic classes so they can take more job skills classes instead?

Q What do you expect your oldest child to do after high school? Get a full-time job, go to a four-year college full time, go to a two-year college full time, go to a four-year college part time and work part time, go to a two-year college part time and work part time, attend a vocational school, or join the military?

also is considerably higher among Asian-American (49%) and Latinx (46%) parents, compared with Whites and Blacks, both 33%.

What job skills classes? Asked to pick three subjects they'd want their child to take out of a list of nine options, parents by substantial margins favor computer programming, 54%, health/medical studies, 49%, and information technology hardware and systems, 45%.

These are followed by drafting/engineering, 33%, building trades, 27%, communications and graphic design, 22%, culinary arts, 19%, automotive repair, technology, and refinishing, 17%, and cosmetology, 6%.

Some traditional gender roles apply. Parents picking classes for a daughter are twice as likely to prefer arts or music classes as electives than those choosing for a son, 24% to 12%. Within job skills choices, parents are vastly more apt to prefer health/medical classes for their daughters than for their sons (63% vs. 35%) as well as 9 to 11 points more likely to select culinary arts and cosmetology classes for their daughters. Conversely, parents are more than twice as likely to pick building trades for their sons as for their daughters (38% vs. 15%) as well as more likely to choose automotive work (by 19 points) and drafting/engineering (by 10 points) for their sons. That said, there's no difference in preference for computer programming.

The survey also finds majority support for allowing students

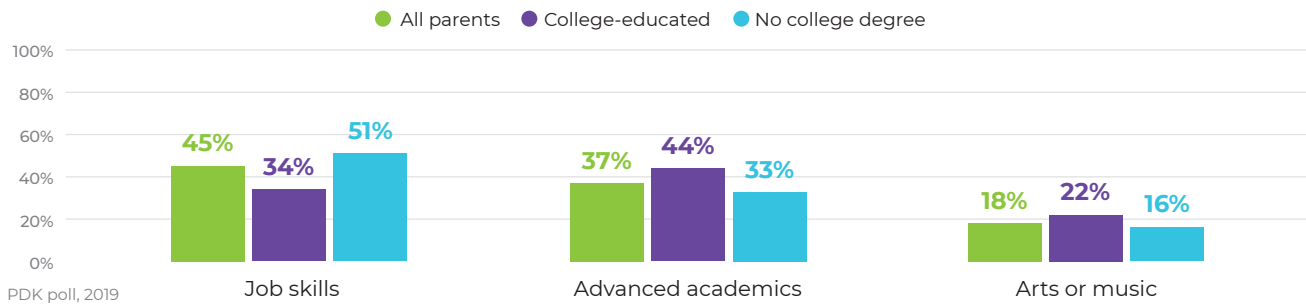
who don't plan to go to college to skip required academic classes in order to take more job skills classes. About two-thirds of all adults and parents alike and 73% of teachers favor this approach. Logically, support peaks, at 83%, among Americans who say workforce preparation should be the schools' main goal.

In all, 57% of parents expect their child to go to a four-year college full time after high school and an additional 12% expect them to attend a four-year college part time. Fourteen percent expect their child to attend a two-year college, and 7% expect them to work full time.

These expectations correspond with views on the main goal of school. Among parents who expect their child to attend a four-year college full time, 60% say the goal should be to prepare students academically. Among those who don't expect their child to attend postsecondary school, this falls to 33%. ■

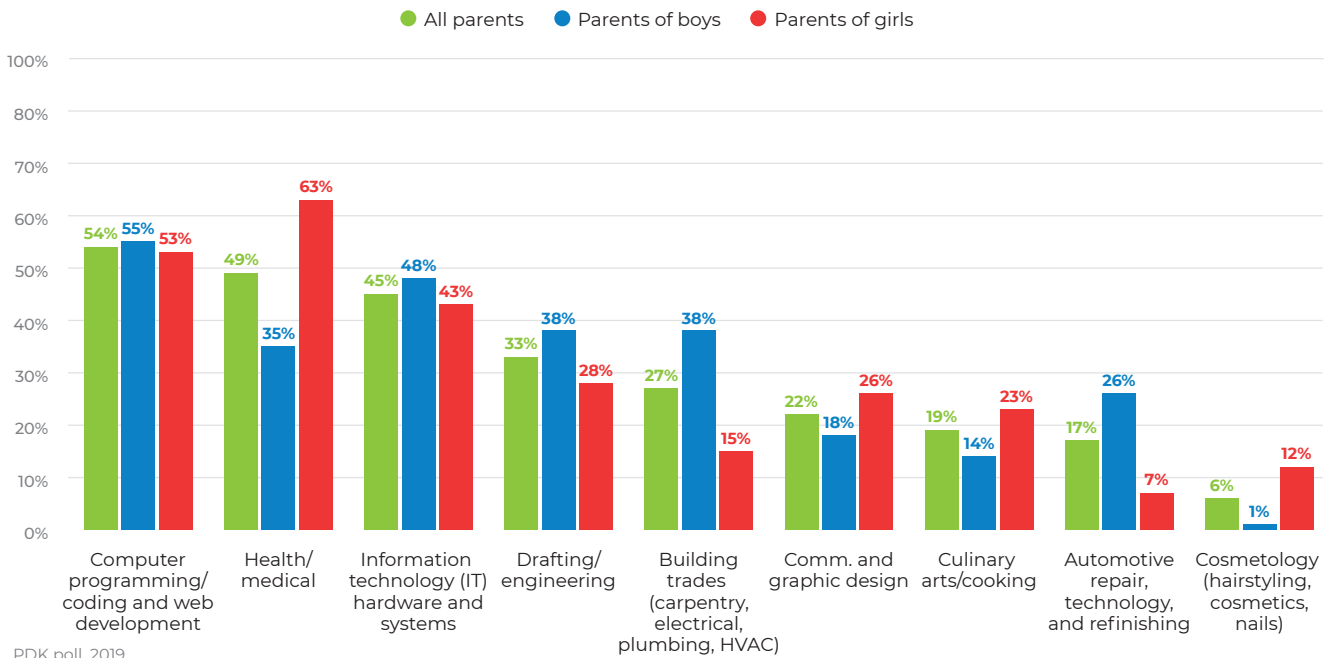
### Which elective subject would you prefer your child take in high school?

K-12 parents, 2019



### Preferred job-skills classes for your child in high school (top 3 accepted)

K-12 parents, 2019



# Are schools adequately funded?

Six in 10 parents and all adults, and 75% of teachers, say their community's schools have too little money. Blacks especially say so — 73%, compared with 57% of Whites. It's a view that's much more prevalent among Democrats than Republicans (72% vs. 45%) and liberals compared with conservatives (75% vs. 42%). (Sixty-four percent of moderates and 57% of independents also say their schools are underfunded.)

Even among the best-off Americans, those in \$100,000-plus households, 54% see their schools as underfunded. But that rises to 64% of those with incomes less than \$50,000.

Further, in an open-ended question, 25% of all adults say **inadequate financial support is the biggest problem facing the public schools today**. It's far and away the top-cited problem, with all other responses in the single digits. Among teachers, even more — 36% — call lack of funding the schools' biggest problem.

This is the 18th straight year in which lack of funding has led the PDK poll's biggest-problem list. That's largely a shift from the 1970s and early 1980s when discipline was seen as the schools' top problem, supplanted by concerns about drugs in the mid-1980s to 1990 and a mix of these issues in the 1990s.

The shifts over time are striking. In the first PDK poll in 1969, 26% called discipline the schools' top problem, compared with 6% today. At its peak in 1990, 38% called drugs the main problem vs. just 3% today. And in the aftermath of the Great Recession, in 2010 and 2011 alike, 36% called school funding the biggest problem. That's stayed high; today's 25% compares with a prerecession average of 16%.

It follows that about two-thirds of parents and all adults, rising to 85% of teachers, say they're more apt to support a candidate for political office who favors increased school funding. Forty-one percent of all adults call a candidate's position on school funding highly important to them; that rises to 55% of parents and jumps to 75% of teachers. That said, many fewer in each group say it's "extremely" important, potentially limiting its effect on voting.

There are, again, strong political differences. Democrats overwhelmingly say they're more likely to back a candidate who supports additional funding (80%), compared with independents (60%) and Republicans (43%). (In all cases,



most of the rest say they'd support a candidate who wants to maintain current funding rather than making cuts.) Democrats (53%) also are more apt than independents (38%) or Republicans (30%) to see a candidate's position on the issue as highly important.

These patterns largely hold up for parents, but teachers of all political stripes are more likely than non-teachers to back higher school funding and to see it as important.

Supporting higher funding doesn't necessarily mean supporting higher taxes. Given a choice, 7 in 10 or more parents and all adults say they'd rather see cuts in other government-funded programs rather than raise taxes to provide more school funding. Sixty-one percent of teachers agree.

*Using lotteries for educational funding is a great justifiable use of the taxes. Finally, a way gambling is useful!*

Kyle, 33, White father of a 1st grader in an upstate New York suburb

A potential tax increase is generally unpopular, with the notable exception of liberals, among whom 47% find it preferable to making cuts. Conservatives (13%) and Republicans (13%) are the least likely to favor tax increases for schools.

That said, there is one popular revenue source and two more possible. About 9 in 10 parents, teachers, and all adults support using revenue from state lotteries for public schools. About three-quarters of all adults favor using taxes on legal recreational marijuana and 80% favor using taxes on sports gambling as school funding sources. About half of parents (49%), all adults (52%), and teachers (53%) support legal recreational marijuana in their state, and about 6 in 10 support legal sports gambling — 58% of parents, 59% of all adults, and 63% of teachers.

Funding matters in terms of perceptions of school quality. Among people who say their community's schools' funding is about right, 60% give those schools an A or B grade. That falls to 38% of those who say their schools have too little funding and 30% of the few who say their schools are overfunded.



# The Questions

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

Q In your opinion, is the quality of the public schools related to the amount of money spent on students in these schools, or not?

Q What do you think of the funding level for public schools in your community — schools have the right amount of money, too much money, or too little money?

Q Which kind of candidate for political office are you most likely to support — one who supports increased funding for public schools, decreased funding for public schools, or maintaining the current level of funding for public schools?

Q How important to you is a candidate's position on public school funding?

Q If funding for public schools were increased, how should the money be raised — through higher taxes or from cuts in other government-funded programs?

Q Do you support or oppose using proceeds from state lotteries as a source of funding for public schools?

Q Do you support or oppose each of these in your state — legal recreational marijuana? Legal sports gambling?

Q If legal, would you support or oppose using a portion of state taxes generated from these activities to increase funding for the public schools? Taxes on legal recreational marijuana? Taxes on legal sports gambling?

Still, not everyone connects funding to school quality. Sixty percent of adults, 62% of parents, and 68% of teachers say the quality of the public schools is related to the amount of money spent on students in these schools. That means that about 4 in 10 parents and adults generally and one-third of teachers don't share this view.

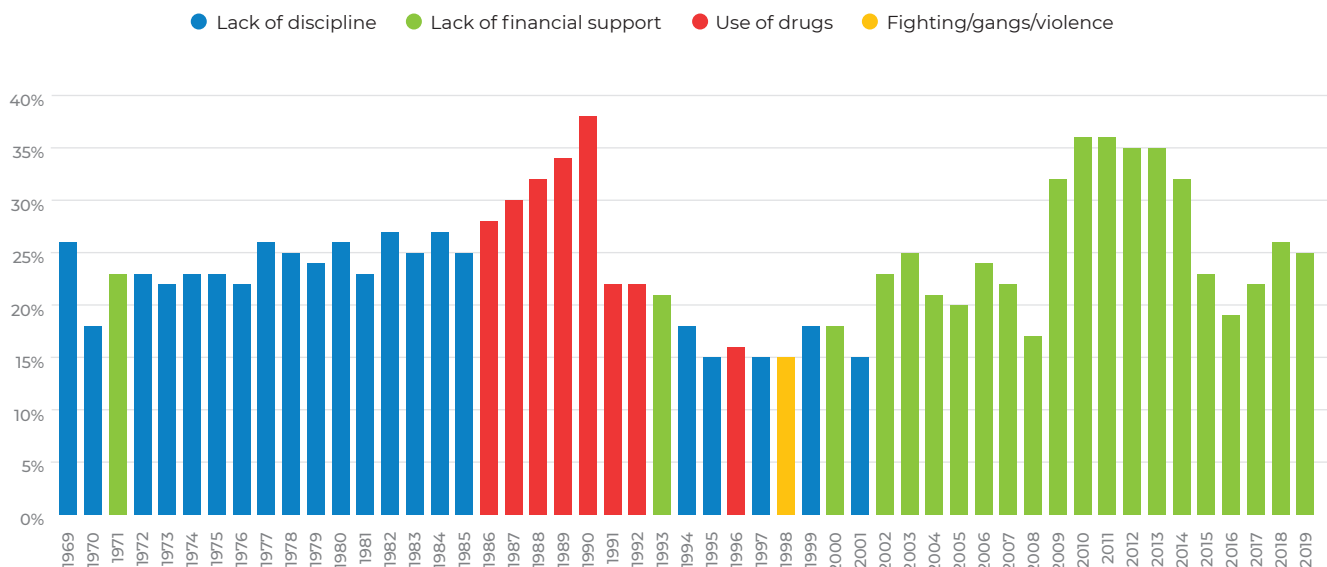
Again, political dispositions inform these attitudes. About three-quarters of Democrats and liberals see a relationship

between money spent on students and school quality vs. 48% of Republicans and 46% of conservatives. Also, more educated Americans and those younger than age 50 are more likely than their counterparts to say there is a connection between school funding and school quality.

That said, views that funding and school quality are linked have risen, from 50% among all adults in the 1998 PDK poll to today's 60%. ■

## Biggest problem facing public schools

National totals, 1969-2019



Gallup produced the PDK polls from 1969 to 2015. Langer Research Associates has produced the PDK poll since 2016, including the 2019 poll.

# How should public schools handle discipline?

When it comes to school discipline, support for zero tolerance is less than it seems, mediation wins substantial support — and trust in school administrators is less than complete.

There's been a change in views over the years: In the first PDK poll in 1969, 45% of public school parents said school discipline was not strict enough. Today, slightly more say so (51%), and fewer say discipline is “about right” — 52% then, 45% now.

Among public school teachers, 64% say discipline in their own school is not strict enough. Forty-three percent say it's about right.

Views on discipline matter in school ratings. Those who say school discipline is about right are nearly twice as likely to give their community's schools an A or B grade than those who say discipline isn't strict enough (67% vs. 36%).

Zero tolerance has broad support — 71% or slightly higher among parents, teachers, and all adults — when the policy is described as punishment for certain violations of drug and weapons policies. But when a common school situation is presented — a student who accidentally brings a folding knife to school in a backpack — half or more say they'd oppose applying a zero tolerance policy that would require automatic suspension or expulsion. (See question on K19.) Fifty-two percent of parents, 55% of all adults, and 57% of teachers say automatic suspension or expulsion should not occur in a case like this.

There's a racial gap in response to this question. If a student accidentally brings in a folding knife that's classified as a weapon, 52% of non-White parents favor automatic suspension, slightly more than White parents (44%). Among all adults, 57% of non-Whites favor automatic suspension, compared with 38% of Whites.

Racial differences also appear in parents' trust in their school to administer discipline fairly. Fifty-nine percent of all parents trust their child's school in this regard — but that falls to 40% among Black parents. Instead, 60% of Black parents distrust their child's school when it comes to discipline. Notably, 15% of

Americans who are Black say they've had a child suspended or expelled from school, compared with 7% of Whites.

In any case, trust is not deep. Just 14% of all parents express “a lot” of trust in their school to handle discipline. Among teachers, moreover, just a narrow majority (53%) trust the school where they teach to handle discipline fairly.

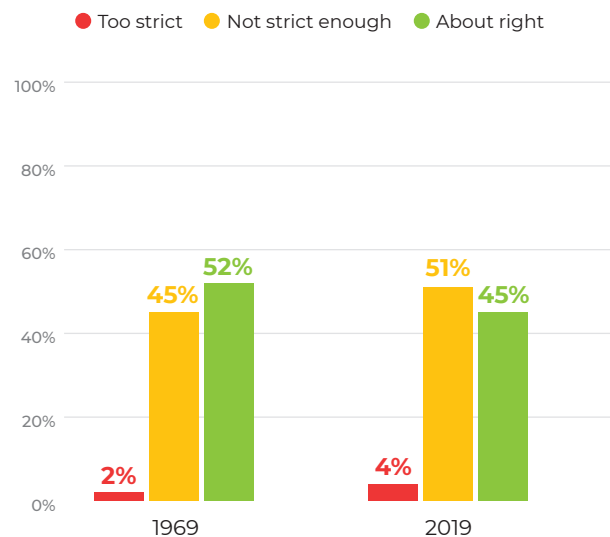
There is a potentially promising alternative: mediation, in which the student who misbehaved and the student he or she mistreated meet together with a trained mediator to discuss the situation. Among all adults, 60% see this approach as effective, rising to 69% of parents and 72% of teachers. Moreover, two-thirds or more of parents, teachers, and all adults see mediation or counseling as more effective than detention or suspension in dealing with student misbehavior.

The biggest gaps in views of which approach is more effective are partisan and ideological. Mediation is favored over detention or suspension by 79% of Democrats vs. 52% of Republicans (it's 64% among independents) and by 82% of liberals vs. 53% of conservatives (it's 67% among moderates).

Many schools have school-based police officers, raising another challenge: Which misbehaviors should be police matters and which should remain out of police hands? Attitudes are clear: Large majorities of parents, teachers, and all adults (78% to 93%) say bringing a weapon or drugs to school, distributing drugs in school, or a sexual assault in school all should be police matters. By contrast, about three-quarters say the school principal should handle in-school fights between students.

## Views on school discipline

K-12 parents, 1969 and 2019



PDK poll, 2019

## The Questions

Q How do you feel about the discipline in the local schools (to teachers: at the school where you teach) — is it too strict, not strict enough, or just about right?

Q Do you trust your child’s school (to teachers: at the school where you teach) to administer discipline fairly, or not?

Q In handling discipline issues, some schools use mediation, in which the student who misbehaved and the student he or she mistreated meet together with a trained mediator to discuss the situation. How effective do you think this is at preventing the misbehavior from happening again?

Q Which of these do you think is the more effective way of dealing with misbehavior by students — detention or suspension OR behavioral counseling or mediation?

Q Some schools have a zero tolerance policy, in which students who violate rules regarding weapons, drugs, and some kinds of assaults are automatically suspended or expelled. Supporters say this means all offenders are treated equally. Opponents say these rules don’t take individual circumstances into account. What’s your opinion — do you support or oppose zero tolerance policies?

Q Imagine a student has a folding knife in his or her backpack, classified by the school as a weapon, that he or she brought to school accidentally. Would you support or oppose automatic suspension or expulsion in a case like this?

Q For schools that have school-based police officers, who should handle each of these situations — the police officer or the school’s principal?

- a. Two high school students are caught fighting at school
- b. One high school student sexually assaults another at school
- c. A student of any age brings a weapon to school
- d. A student of any age brings illegal drugs to school
- e. A student of any age distributes illegal drugs on school property

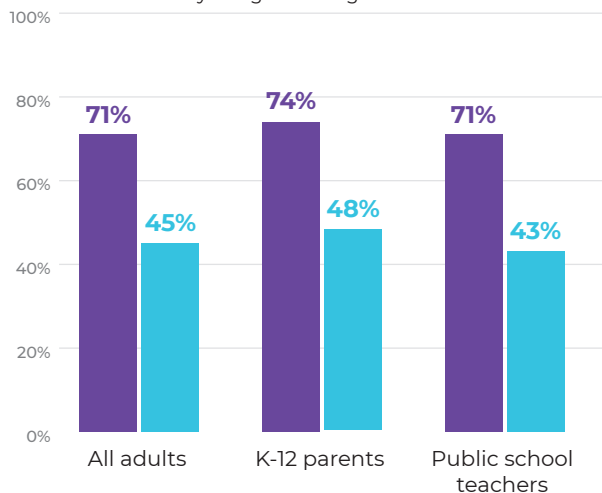
Q Do you think schools should or should not be involved in disciplining young people who engage in these activities?

- a. Drinking or using drugs on the weekends
- b. Cyberbullying
- c. Sexual assault outside of school
- d. Other criminal activity outside of school

### Zero tolerance . . . or not?

National totals, 2019

- Support zero tolerance
- Support automatic suspension/expulsion if student accidentally brings a folding knife to school

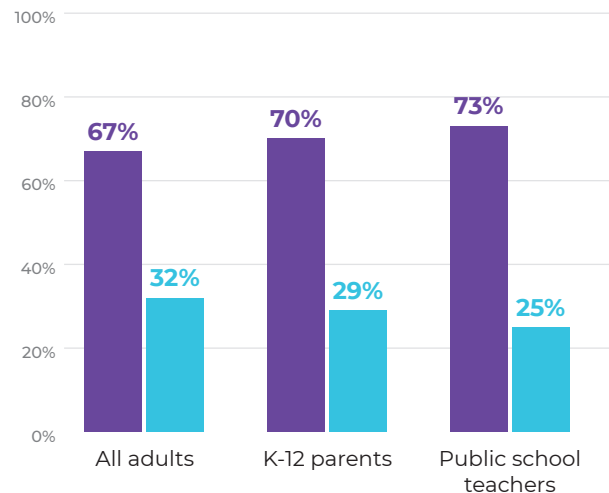


PDK poll, 2019

### Mediation vs. detention or suspension

National totals, 2019

- See mediation/counseling as more effective
- See detention or suspension as more effective



PDK poll, 2019

A next question is the extent to which schools should be involved in disciplining students for activities that take place outside of school. Generally, majorities say schools should not be involved in cases of weekend drinking or drug use, sexual assault outside of school, or other criminal activities outside of school. However, a substantial minority of parents

(44%) say schools should be involved in disciplining students for sexual assault outside of school. And large majorities of parents, teachers, and all adults (75% to 83%) say schools should be involved in disciplining students who engage in another form of wrongdoing, one that's not location-specific — cyberbullying. ■

*School discipline is too lenient because of political correctness that has now invaded the schools, along with government intrusion into the public schools. The teacher has very little control regarding classroom discipline. It has become a huge problem for the teacher and the students in the room who are being cheated out of academic learning time. The fear factor for lawsuits, the cry for discrimination and political correctness is starting to erode the entire school climate in many buildings. The fear factor is huge and is playing a very large role in what can be done to control unruly students.*

Jean, 60, mixed race high school teacher in suburban Delaware

#### WHAT AMERICANS SAID

## How do you rate school problems and pressures?

The PDK poll asked parents to rate problems and pressures in the school their child or oldest child attends, and teachers to rate the same challenges at the school where they work. As mentioned in the introduction to this report, **50% of teachers see pressure to do well on tests as a major problem or a problem, compared with 29% of K-12 parents.** That's higher among male than female teachers (62% vs. 46%) but high across the board among teachers compared with parents. (Teachers may be reporting pressure on them, while parents likely focus on the level of pressure on students.)

Test pressure is a particular concern among Latinx parents (42%); as noted, Latinx also are most apt to focus on test performance as a sign of school quality. Test pressure also is more likely to be seen as a problem by high school parents (35%) than those with children in lower grades (25%).

Both parents and teachers point to the pressure to conform as a problem in schools; however, teachers (37%) are more likely than parents (30%) to describe it as a problem. In addition, teachers are more likely than parents to perceive verbal

harassment (34% vs. 27%) and cyberbullying (31% vs. 23%) as problems at school.

There's general agreement on other issues. One-quarter of parents and teachers alike see physical bullying as a problem and about 2 in 10 say the same about pressure to try alcohol or drugs or to smoke or use e-cigarettes.

Although the 2018 PDK poll revealed that parents had little confidence that their child's school could protect against a school shooting, only 16% of parents this year named safety and security as a big problem at their child's school; 13% of teachers agreed.

In addition, a majority of teachers and parents play down the incidence of racism, religious bias, and bias against gay, lesbian, or transgender students. Of the problems suggested to parents, these three came near the bottom of their lists of problems (along with safety and sexual harassment). ■

### The Question

Q As far as you are aware, how big a problem is each of these at your oldest child's school (to teachers: at the school where you teach) — pressure to get good test scores, the physical safety and security of students overall, physical bullying, cyberbullying, verbal harassment, sexual harassment, pressure to try alcohol or drugs, pressure to smoke or use electronic cigarettes/"vape," pressure to "fit in" or conform, racism, religious bias, and bias against gay, lesbian, and/or transgender students.

# How would you grade the public schools?

The PDK poll continues its long-standing tradition of asking the public to grade the public schools nationally and locally. Customary dichotomies emerge: Just 19% of Americans give the nation's schools an A or B grade, while many more give an A or B to their local schools — 44% (still less than half and down from a high of 53% six years ago).

Among K-12 parents, more (60%) rate their community's schools positively, and 76% give their own child's school an A or B grade, up a slight 6 points from last year.

There's a conceptual reason for these differences: Even a few subpar schools across the nation or in one's community are enough to bring down the aggregate national and community scores — even if one's own school is a strong one.

Public school teachers are new to the equation this year, and they generally respond like parents in these ratings. Twenty-eight percent of teachers grade the nation's schools A or B (as do 25% of parents). Fifty-nine percent of teachers give an A or B to their community's schools (essentially the same as parents). And 70% of teachers give an A or B grade to the school where they work.

School ratings differ among groups, particularly at the local level. While, as mentioned, 60% of K-12 parents give their local schools an A or B grade, that falls to 40% among nonparents.

There are differences within the parent population, as well. Seventy-three percent of Asian-American parents give their community's schools an A or B grade compared with 48% of Black parents (with White and Latinx parents in the middle). Higher-income and more-educated parents rate their community's schools especially highly; these parents likely live in communities that are better able to provide their schools with financial support. Among parents with \$100,000-plus household incomes, 68% give their local schools an A or B grade vs. 52% among those with incomes less than \$50,000. It's also 68% among parents who are college graduates vs. 55% among nongraduates.

School ratings coincide with other perceptions. Ratings for a community's schools soar, for example, among parents who say these schools handle discipline well and are appropriately funded.

## 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?

**Q** How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally?

**Q** Using the A, B, C, D, Fail scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends (to teachers: the school where you work)?

**Q** Some children like to go to school on most days while others not so much. What about your oldest child in K-12 — how much does he or she like to go to school on most days?

These patterns are repeated when parents assess their own child's school. (Those with more than one child were asked about their oldest in K-12.) Higher-income parents are 16 points more likely than those in the under-\$50,000 bracket to give their child's school an A or B, 85% vs. 69%. It's 87% among college graduates vs. 70% among nongraduates. And 85% of Asian-American parents give their child's school an A or B, compared with 65% of Blacks, with Whites and Latinx roughly in the middle.

There's also a difference by location; 81% of suburban parents give their child's school an A or B, compared with 70% of urban parents. (It's 76% among parents in rural areas.) There's also a gap by grade: Eighty-two percent of parents whose oldest child is in grades K-5 give the school an A or B, dropping to 67% of those whose oldest is in grades 6-8. It recovers slightly to 76% among parents of high schoolers.

There are gaps, as well, among public school teachers in rating the school where they work. Seventy-three percent of women give their school an A or B; for male teachers, it's 61%. It's 73% among White teachers vs. 59% among those of another race or ethnicity. Seventy-seven percent of teachers who feel more valued by their community award an A or B to the school where they work compared with 62% of those who feel less valued. There are no significant differences by other factors such as teacher pay, tenure, grade, school size, and location.

Given the concept that schools should engage young learners, another, indirect way to assess them is to see if students like to go there. The results align: Seventy-two percent of parents say their child likes to attend school, which is very similar to the number who grade their schools A or B. That said, there's room for improvement: Twenty-eight percent say their child likes school "a lot" while an additional 44% say they like it — but "mostly."

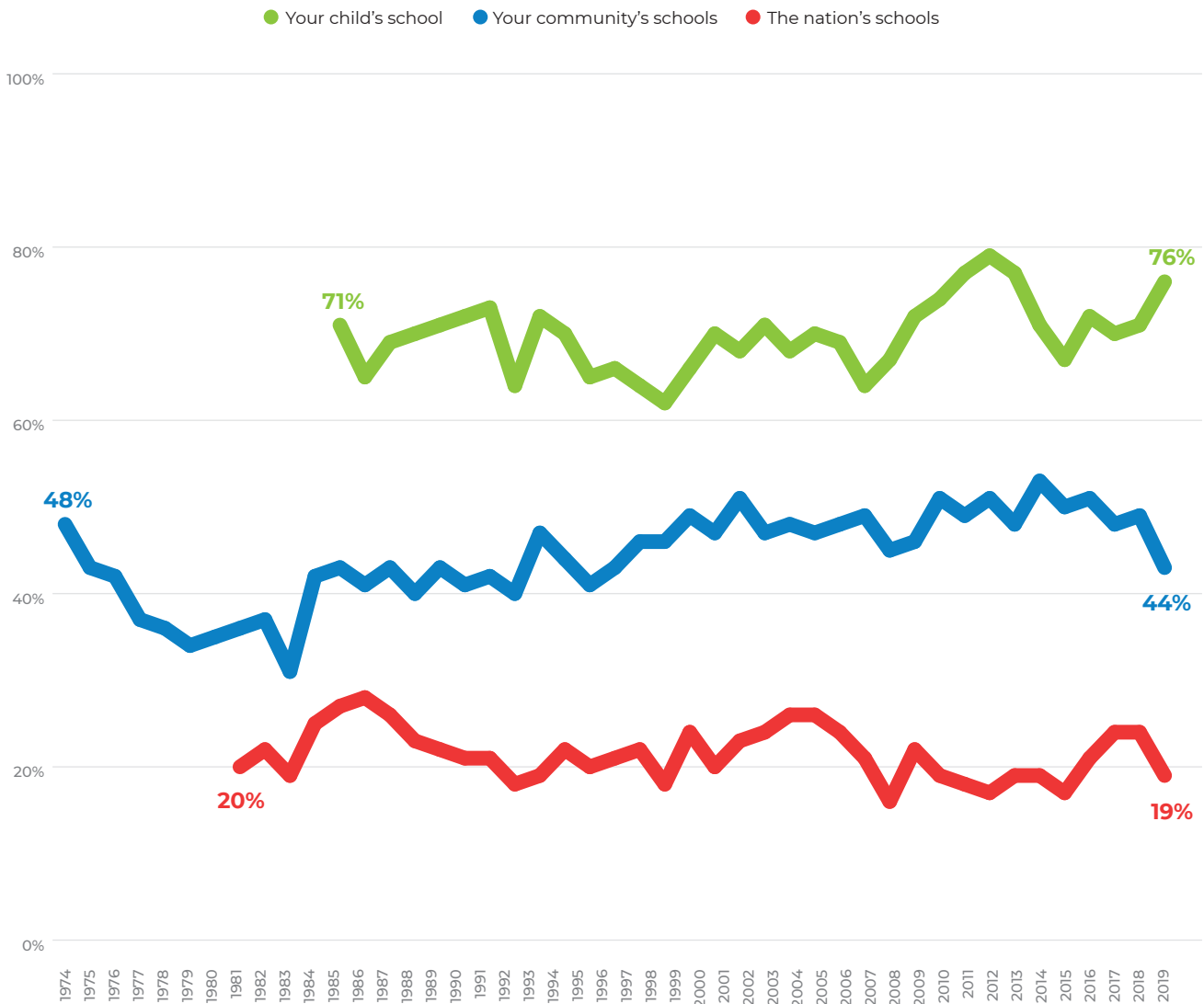
Among parent groups, Asian-Americans (85%), those whose oldest child is in K-5 (81%), and college graduates (80%) are

most apt to say their child likes to go to school. Liking school is a reported 10 points higher for girls than for boys, 77% vs. 67%. Liking school is lowest among those in middle school (grades 6-8), 62%, and those who are Black, 60% — a result reflecting Black parents' broader dissatisfaction with their child's school.

Indeed, student engagement is strongly related to how parents assess their child's school. Among parents who say their child likes to go to school, 85% grade that school an A or B. That plummets to 53% among those who say their child is neutral about school or dislikes it. ■

### % A or B grades

National totals, 1974-2019



Gallup produced the PDK polls from 1969 to 2015. Langer Research Associates has produced the PDK poll since 2016, including the 2019 poll.

## Online focus groups

In addition to the traditional PDK poll of Americans, this year, PDK convened two online focus groups — one with K-12 public school parents, one with public school teachers — in April. PDK Poll Director Joan Richardson facilitated these discussions, which enabled us to learn more about why Americans responded as they did to questions on the PDK poll. A few of those comments are included in the supplement; dozens more are published at [pdkpoll.org](http://pdkpoll.org).

The age and demographic information of the parents and teachers has been preserved, but their names have been changed.

We gratefully acknowledge support from Carnegie Corporation of New York, which enabled us to add this feature and the teacher sample to the 2019 PDK poll.

## Methodology

The 2019 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools was designed, managed, and analyzed, and this report written, by Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y.

Interviews were conducted April 12-27, 2019, among a random national sample of 2,389 adults age 18 and up, including oversamples to a total of 1,083 parents of school-age children and 556 public school teachers. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish via the probability-based Ipsos KnowledgePanel®, in which participants are randomly recruited via address-based sampling to take surveys online.

See a full description of the survey methodology at [pdkpoll.org/methodology](http://pdkpoll.org/methodology). Topline results are available at [pdkpoll.org/resources](http://pdkpoll.org/resources).

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[pdkpoll.org/resources](https://pdkpoll.org/resources)

## Event



Join a national conversation about the 2019 PDK poll results on Tuesday, Sept. 24, either by attending the live event at Towson University or by following the livestream.

[pdkpoll.org/event](https://pdkpoll.org/event)

## Archive



Answer your research questions by exploring the PDK Poll Question Archive, available only to PDK members.

[pdkpoll.org/resources](https://pdkpoll.org/resources)

## Slides



Use our PowerPoint slides when you present PDK poll results to your classes or to interested citizens in your community.

[pdkpoll.org/resources](https://pdkpoll.org/resources)

## Timeline



In your classes, refer to the PDK poll timeline, which shows what was going on in the United States each year and what questions we asked Americans about public education.

[pdkpoll.org/timeline](https://pdkpoll.org/timeline)

## [pdkpoll.org](https://pdkpoll.org)



Your one-stop shop for everything related to the PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools.

# PDKPoll