



AMERICA'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS EDUCATION REFORM: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2013

Power and Options

The American People Want Power and They Want Options. A plurality of Americans says that parents should have more power over their child's education, including access to information and data about their child's school.

- Support for accountability in public schools has reached new highs: 62% favor performance pay to financially award teachers for student performance and an astounding 86% believe that school systems should have the ability to fire poorly performing teachers.

These are large, tri-partisan majorities for each of these options, yet teachers unions stand in the way of 1) good policy that 2) benefits students and 3) has the overwhelming support of the American people.

In addition to sustained support for alternatives to their assigned public schools, these data show a growing appetite for bringing educators in line with employees in other industries: those who excel are rewarded;

- Respondents favored performance pay for teachers by a 2 to 1 margin (62% to 31%).
- Men (66%) and middle-aged Americans ages 35-54 (67%) are the most supportive of performance pay.
- Support for performance pay is highest in rural communities (67%) and lowest in urban centers (58%);
- A majority of Americans know that most schools cannot fire a poorly performing teacher (37% said they could, 54% said they could not)—but in a separate question an astounding 86% of Americans think that schools SHOULD be able to do so.
- 46% of adults say that parents need more say over where their child goes to school.

Choice Remains the Most Important Value

Charter schools enjoy broad support across many demographic lines. A closer look shows that support for charter schools is consistent across gender, age, and regional breakdowns. The way we

all think about public schools is changing, and in a generation, will likely not look anything like what has been the norm for over 100 years. This also paves the way for new innovations like digital/blended learning.

- 78% of adults supported charter schools in CER's 2005 poll, and a similarly high 73% support charter schools today. These figures are the latest in an extensive series of polls that show widespread support of charter schools and charter school expansion, particularly among minority communities.
- 72% of African-Americans support charter schools, as well as 76% of Hispanics.
- 72% of Americans have a favorable opinion of the term "parent choice", and 74% have a favorable opinion of the term "school choice", with fewer than 1-out-of-5 having a negative opinion of those terms.

Their State Legislators are NOT Listening to Them

The real battle over education policy is at the state legislative level. Most outrage about education policy (for instance, from conservatives) focuses on the very existence of the Department of Education, and federal policies like Common Core. However, most adults know that the state and local governments have far more responsibility, and they disapprove of the job their state legislature is doing on education. Washington may be the perennial punching bag on education, but for solutions, reformers should focus their attention on the statehouses.

- 41% said that they would be likely to contact their state legislator if they were trying to change things about education, meaning a plurality of Americans appreciate the integral role state policies play in delivering meaningful reforms to improve schools.
- For years, many state politicians' response to taking responsibility for their constituents' public schools has resembled the "5 Ds of Dodgeball": Dodge, Duck, Dip, Dive, and Dodge. The predictable response from many in state government is to point the finger at Washington and blame the feds.
- Only 24% of adults give state legislatures "excellent" (4%) or "good" (20%) marks for their job performance on school issues. A third—34%—say they're doing a "fair" job, while a plurality—35%—denounce them "poor" (Note to state legislatures: in school, that would be an "F.").
- While those that say that their school doesn't work well for their children are negative on state legislators, so are those that say the opposite. Almost two-thirds (65%) of those that say their local school works "completely" for their child say their state legislature is doing a fair or poor job on school issues.

Overall, Americans want power, access to data, school choice and an organization that promotes those goals

- 50% of the highest-earning income bracket say that their public schools work well “completely”, compared to only 30% for those in the lowest-earning income bracket, all the more reason to redouble our efforts to introduce substantive reforms that reverse failing trends of the past.
- A whopping 56%-majority would investigate switching schools if their child faced academic struggles.
- When “the child expresses an interest in changing schools because he [or she] is not challenged”, an unmistakable 71% expressed willingness to move their child in this case (vs. 25% who were not likely).
- Under-performing schools propel 67% of adults to seek out public school alternatives for their children, while just 28% opt to stand pat.

“Digital learning” receives high favorability from nearly all demographics.

- Those favorable toward charter schools are also more favorable toward “digital learning” as well as 70% of those favoring charters also showed favorability toward “digital learning.”

Blended Learning a Popular Approach.

- In general, men and women supported “blended learning” by 63% and 60% respectively, while dads and moms are favorable toward the term at 58% and 56% respectively.

Fewer Americans are having fewer children.

- The role of non-parents continues in education is essential. In this survey, only 24% of adults surveyed reported that they have children. This tracks with The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention report last month that the birth rate in the United States has reached another new low, at 63 births per 1,000 women, down from 69 in 2007 and 118 in 1960.
- As the ratio of parents versus non-parents shrinks, it remains imperative to recognize and non-parents as stakeholders in education. Schools affect the growth of the economy and property values (which in turn impact everything from business growth to tax rates), the quality and productivity of the workforce and the overall quality of life for all. Plus, everyone – parent and non-parent alike – cares about kids.