

## 2017 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

### Georgia edition

# In Georgia, broader support for local control, diversity, school choice

*Georgians align with others nationally across many issues in education, including school quality, job skills, and programs that provide students with after-school care and health support.*

**G**eorgians are more likely than Americans overall to prefer local control of failing public schools, a hot-button issue in a state where voters rejected state-level control of such schools last year. Public school parents in the state, moreover, don't think standardized tests measure what's important in their child's learning — one of the key tools used by the state to identify failing schools.

Other differences emerge in a statewide Phi Delta Kappa poll of views toward public education in Georgia. Interest in private schools — including the use of vouchers for tuition support — is higher than in the nation as a whole. And parents in Georgia are more attuned than those nationally to racial and ethnic diversity.

But there also are large areas of agreement in Georgia and nationally across many issues in education, including school quality, job skills, and wraparound programs providing students with after-school care and health support.

The Georgia survey accompanies the national version of the 2017 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, now in its 49th year, and another 2017 statewide PDK poll, in New York. The state polls in New York and Georgia were made possible with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Among the most notable differences in attitudes on education between Georgians and others surveyed:

- Of special relevance in Georgia, more state residents say local school districts should retain the authority to deal with failing schools (57% vs. 48% nationally).
- Georgians divide evenly on using public funds to help pay private school tuition (48% in favor, 47% opposed). Nationally, by contrast, Americans oppose such vouchers by 13 percentage points. That said, in a more detailed question that also mentions public funding for religious schools, opposition in Georgia is consistent with its level in the country overall.
- General preference for traditional public schools is lower in Georgia. Forty-three percent of public school parents say they'd pick a traditional public school if offered tuition support for a private or religious school, compared with 54% nationally. If public funds covered all tuition, 45% say they'd pick a private school, compared with just 28% in the United States overall.  
Still, if only half of tuition were covered, most Georgia public school parents (67%) say they'd stick with public school. It's similar nationally at 72%.
- Atlantans rate their local schools more negatively than other Georgians, a big-city phenomenon across the country.
- Parents in Georgia are particularly apt to value racial and ethnic diversity in public schools; 71% say it's highly important, compared with 55% nationally. Interest in sending one's own child to a more racially diverse school also is higher in Georgia (82% vs. 70% nationally).

- Though support for teaching job and career skills is high across the country, a clear majority of Georgians say there should more of these kinds of classes than there are now (62% vs. a narrow majority in the nation as a whole, 51%).

Many of these gaps, especially those on vouchers and diversity, are explained largely by the state’s demographic makeup. Three in 10 adults in the state survey (31%) are black, compared with 13% nationally. In another difference, 7% in Georgia are Hispanic, compared with 16% nationally.

Georgia also differs in terms of urban concentration. Nationally, 35% live in major urban areas, 41% in suburbs. Georgia’s population is less urban (25%) and more suburban (51%). Small city and rural populations are the same (24%).

These differences inform some gaps in attitudes on education policy. Still, as mentioned, in most cases views are parallel in Georgia and the country as a whole, including assessments of local and national schools; the importance of most factors in school quality, including the relative unimportance of standardized tests; support for encouraging and evaluating students’ interpersonal skills and providing job skills education; and backing for providing wraparound services.

The Georgia survey was based on a random, representative, statewide sample of 633 adults, interviewed by cell or landline telephone, in English or Spanish, in May and June 2017. It accompanies the national PDK poll of 1,588 adults and a survey of 628 adults in New York, each reported separately. Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y., produced the 2017 surveys for PDK.

**WHAT GEORGIANS SAY ABOUT . . .**

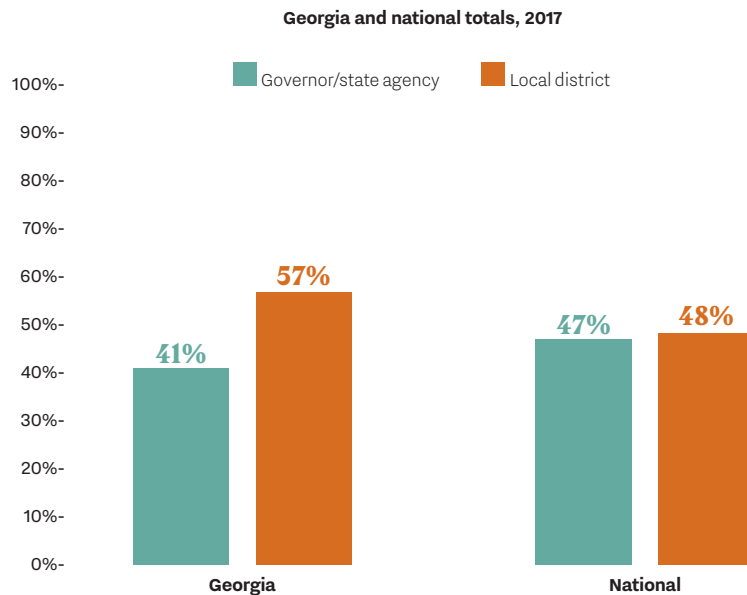
## Failing schools

As noted, 57% in Georgia say local districts should have control in dealing with failing schools, compared with 48% nationally. Georgians are a bit less apt to say control should reside with the state education agency or the governor (41% vs. 47% nationally). This greater preference for local solutions in Georgia is broadly based rather than concentrated in any particular demographic group.

This issue has been in the spotlight in Georgia, where Gov. Nathan Deal in 2015 proposed having the state take control of failing schools through a special superintendent, an amendment that was rejected 60% to 40% in the November 2016 election. As elsewhere, the debate in Georgia on fixing troubled schools continues.



## Who should fix failing schools?



**WHAT GEORGIANS SAY ABOUT...**

## Using public money to support private schools

Georgians stand out in their relative openness to using public funds to help pay private school tuition. While Americans overall oppose this idea (52% vs. 39%), adults in Georgia split essentially evenly (48% favor, 47% oppose). Opposition has outpaced support nationally by 6 or more percentage points in PDK surveys back to 1993.

The gap between views in Georgia and the nation on this question arises primarily due to differences among Democrats, those without a college degree, and those less well-off. Nationally, Democrats oppose private school vouchers by 58% to 31% compared with 48% to 47% in Georgia. Further, those with no college degree and with household incomes less than \$50,000 annually oppose such vouchers by 10-point margins nationally but support them by 11 and 13 points, respectively, in Georgia.

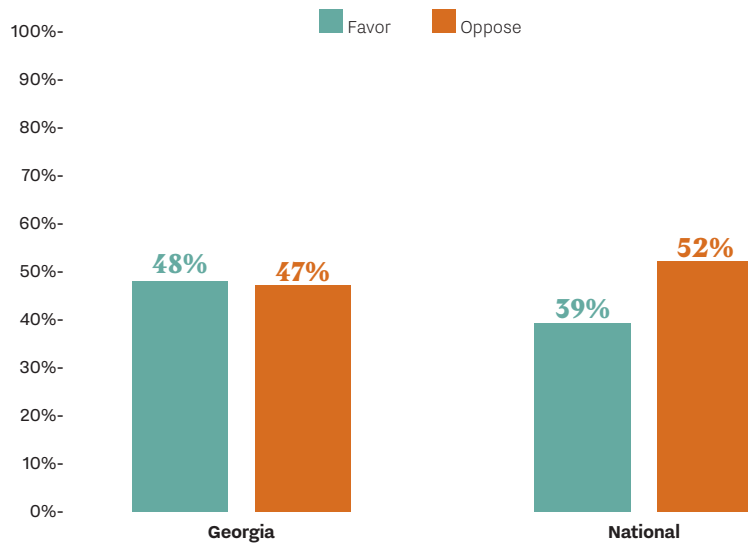
Allegiance to traditional public schools is lower among parents in Georgia than in the country overall. If cost and location were not issues, just 27% of Georgians would pick a traditional public school, compared with 34% of Americans. Instead, more Georgians would send their children to private or religious schools (54% vs. 45% nationally). (The rest would pick a publicly funded charter school, similar to Americans overall.)

Further, if offered public funds for tuition, 45% of public school parents in Georgia say they would send their child to a private school, many more than the 28% nationally who say they would do so. (Twelve percent nationally and in Georgia would choose a religious school.) Notably, three-quarters of public school parents in Georgia say there are private schools in their area, 11 points higher than among all Americans.

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## Allow students to attend private school at public expense

Georgia and national totals, 2017



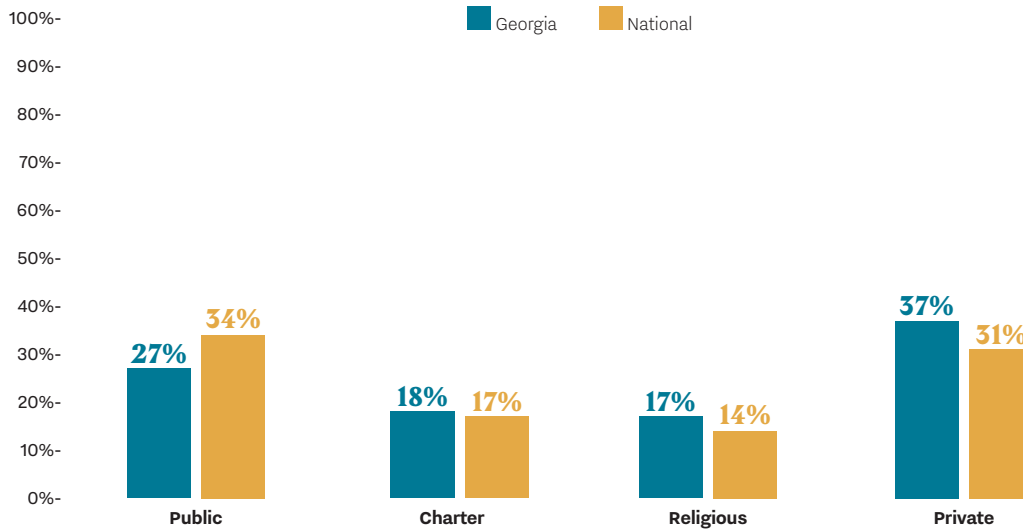
Public school parents in Georgia remain more apt to say they'd send their child to a private or religious school even if public funding pays no more than half the tuition (30% vs. 21% nationally), although in all cases most then would stay in a public school (67% in Georgia, 72% nationally).

A new question this year provides more information on vouchers, specifying that public, private, or religious schools would be eligible. In this case, Georgians oppose vouchers by 59% to 37%, similar to Americans overall (61% to 34%).

Nationally, opposition to vouchers rises among all non-Christians when religious schools are mentioned. In Georgia, this occurs among non-Catholics. Additionally, when only private schools are mentioned, blacks in Georgia support vouch-

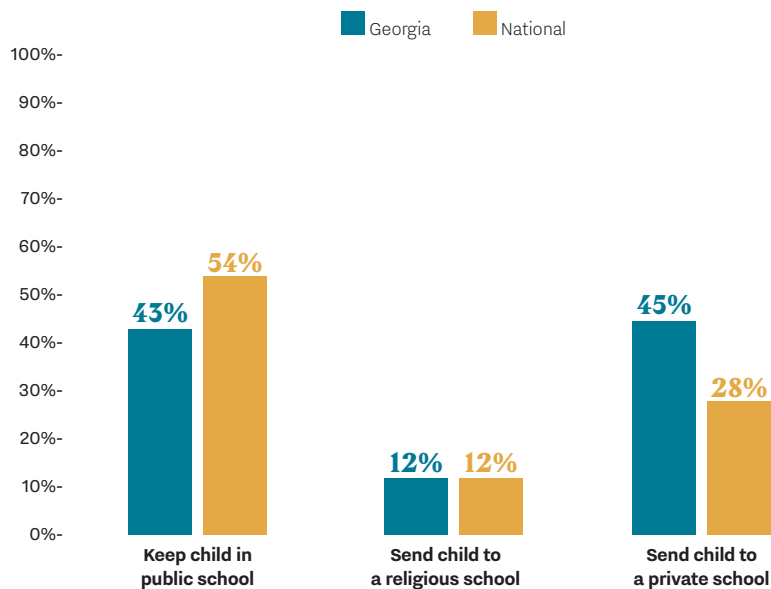
## Where would you send your child . . . if cost and location were not an issue?

Parents of school-age children, 2017



## Where would you send your child . . . if public funds were available for private/ religious schools?

Public school parents, 2017



ers by 53% to 43%; when religious schools are included, they shift to 59% opposed and 39% in support. Predictors of support for vouchers include giving local schools lower grades and saying vouchers will improve public schools.

Opposition to vouchers among Georgians reaches nearly two-thirds (similar to national results) given counterarguments that vouchers could improve public schools by increasing competitiveness or could harm public schools by reducing their funding.

As is the case nationally, most Georgians don't say vouchers would make public schools worse. Just 28% hold this view, compared with 39% who say public schools would be better off and 31% who say vouchers would make no difference in the quality of public schools.

### **WHAT GEORGIANS SAY ABOUT...**

## **Preparing students for life after high school**

Georgians support a greater focus on job and career training in schools especially strongly. Nearly nine in 10 say public high schools should offer such classes even if it means those students spend less time on academics, exceeding the also-high level of support among Americans overall (82%).

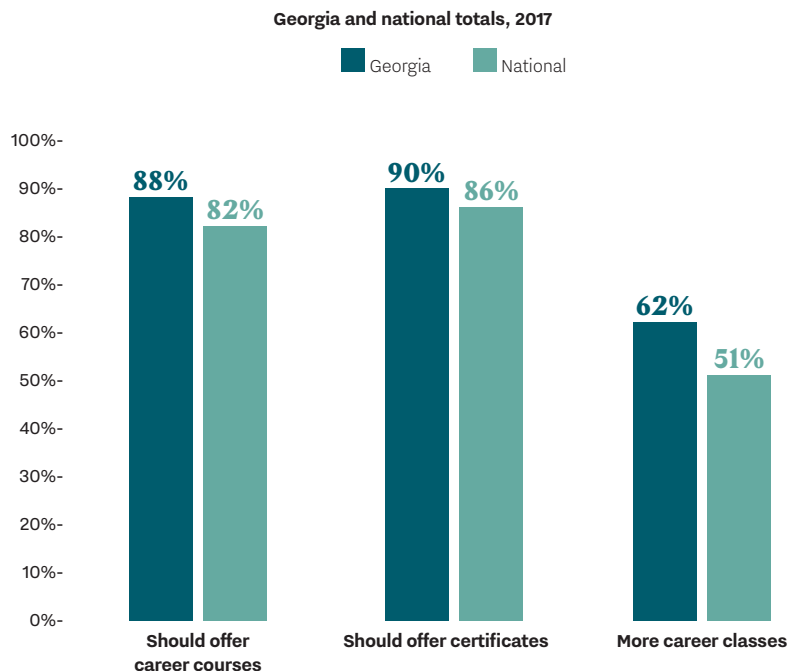
Nine in 10 Georgians also want schools to offer certificates or licenses for specific fields, similar to the national level; seven in 10 Georgians strongly support this, compared with 60% nationally. And 62% of Georgians want to see more job classes in general, compared with just 27% who say there are enough and 3% who want fewer. Fewer Americans overall, but still a majority (51%) support expanding these programs, while 34% feel otherwise.

In terms of college aspirations, there's somewhat of a gap in Georgia: Seventy percent of public school parents would prefer their child go to college full time compared with 62% who expect that to happen. Nationally, these numbers are identical — 61% in both cases.

Some of those who expect their child to attend college full time say it will be a community or vocational college. Fifty-two percent of public school parents in Georgia expect their child to attend a four-year college full time; it's similar, 47%, nationally.



## **Support for teaching job/career skills classes**



**WHAT GEORGIANS SAY ABOUT...**

## Valuing diversity in public schools

Parents in Georgia are notably more apt than Americans overall to see racial and ethnic diversity in public schools as extremely or very important (71% vs. 55%). Forty-five percent call it extremely important vs. just 28% nationally.

Like parents nationally, majorities of parents in Georgia say racial and ethnic diversity makes the learning environment better for both white (52%) and black and Hispanic students (57%).

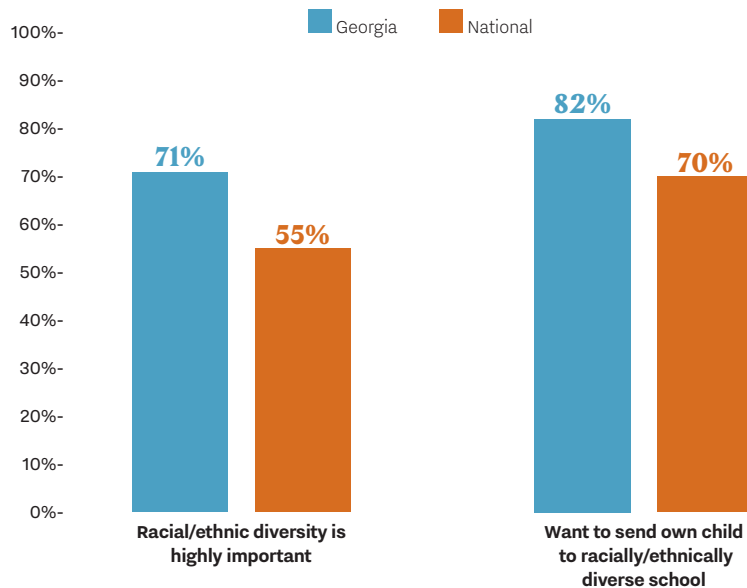
Interest in sending one's own child to a more racially diverse school is higher among parents in Georgia than nationally (82% vs. 70%). And reflecting the fact that black parents in Georgia are more strongly attuned to racial diversity than whites, 53% of black parents in the state say they'd send their children to a more diverse school even if it were a longer ride away, compared with 30% of white parents.

Parents in Georgia also are more apt to see economic diversity as important — 61% vs. 45% nationally, though there's less of a gap in the number calling it "extremely" important (34% vs. 26%). Further, Georgia parents are more apt than parents overall to say economic diversity improves the learning environment for students from poor families (57% vs. 48%), chiefly because of a difference in the lower-income bracket (54% of those with incomes less than \$50,000 in Georgia vs. 39% nationally). In contrast, parents in Georgia and in the country overall are similarly less apt to say economic diversity helps students from middle- and higher-income families.

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## Importance of racial/ethnic diversity

Parents of school-age children, 2017



**WHAT GEORGIANS SAY ABOUT...**

## Standardized tests and measuring school quality

Among six aspects of school quality, student performance on standardized tests ranks lowest in importance as a contributor to school quality in Georgia and the nation as a whole. Just 41% in Georgia say it's highly important, including only 18% who say it's extremely important. It's nearly the same in the country overall.

Twice as many Georgians, eight in 10 or more, say technology and engineering classes, advanced academic classes, and helping students learn skills such as cooperation, respect, and persistence are highly important to school quality. Seven in 10 say art and music classes, as well as extracurricular activities, are highly important. Again, these results mirror those among Americans in general.

Interpersonal skills and technology/engineering classes are named most often as the single most important factors in school quality (by 28% and 23% of Georgians, respectively). Advanced academic classes, art/music classes, and standardized test scores are cited by an additional 16%, 14%, and 12%, respectively. Extracurricular activities are named least often as a singularly important aspect of school quality (by 7%).

Compared to Americans overall, Georgians are 7 points less apt to rate interpersonal skills as singularly important to school quality, and 6 points more apt to say this about standardized tests.

There are few differences across Georgia groups in these results, save one: Nearly half of Atlanta residents say advanced academic courses are extremely important to school quality, compared with 27% in the rest of the state.

Beyond relative comparisons of importance, Georgians, like most Americans, are not enthusiastic about the merits of standardized tests. Fifty-seven percent of public school parents say these tests do a good job measuring learning — fewer than might be expected — and just 44% say they measure important aspects of their child’s education. Only 16% and 17% strongly hold these views.

The data suggest particular skepticism in Atlanta, where strong confidence in these tests is in the low single digits, compared with 18% in the Atlanta suburbs and 21% in the rest of the state. The sample size is quite small, so the result is merely suggestive; however, it’s possible that the high-profile test cheating scandal in the city’s public schools several years ago has contributed to a particular lack of confidence in these tests in Atlanta.

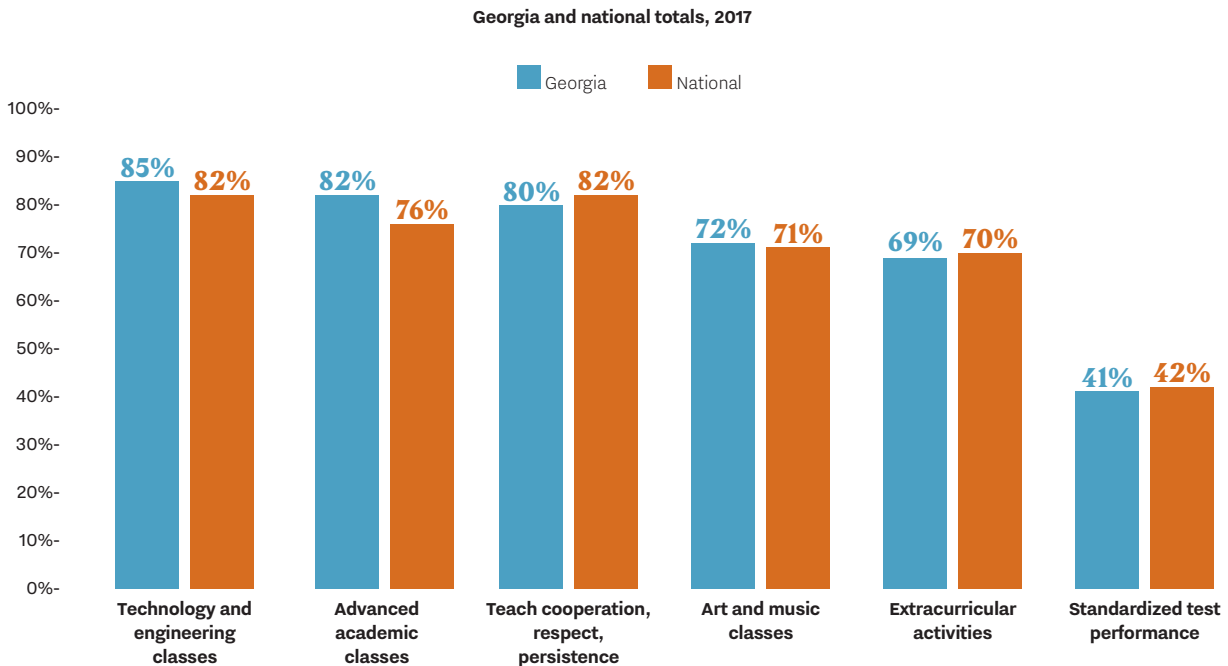
In contrast to lukewarm feelings about standardized tests, 85% of Georgians (like 84% of Americans overall) say students should be assessed on skills such as cooperation, respect, and persistence. Two-thirds in Georgia (67%) say schools should also be accountable for student performance on these skills, similar to the country overall.

At the same time, 63% of Georgians lack confidence that standardized tests are able to measure these different skills, compared with 34% who are very or somewhat confident. This 29-point confidence deficit is greater in Georgia than among Americans overall, 18 points.

**WHAT GEORGIANS SAY ABOUT...**

## Aspects of school quality

Percent calling each aspect extremely/very important



# Grading the public schools

The pattern in Georgia for grading schools is a familiar one — better ratings with greater proximity and familiarity. The vast majority of parents in Georgia (71%), give either an A or a B grade to the school their child attends, similar to the country overall (72%).

A and B ratings fall to 49% for schools in the local community and to just 26% in the nation as a whole. The same pattern has been seen in national Phi Delta Kappa polling dating to the mid-80s.

While grades for the nation’s public schools and the school one’s own child attends don’t vary by region within Georgia, evaluations of local schools diverge considerably. Just 36% of Atlanta residents give the public schools in their community an A or B rating, compared with 57% of Atlanta suburb residents and 47% of those who live in other parts of the state.

This is a big-city phenomenon; there’s a similar gap in New York City vs. the rest of that state. And nationally, local schools are rated least well in the nation’s most densely populated counties, with ratings improving as population density decreases.

Statistical modeling shows that political ideology, having a child in public school, and saying standardized tests are important in school quality all are significant predictors of higher local school grades in Georgia. Living in Atlanta is a significant predictor of lower grades.

Most Georgians (58%) say the state does a good job evaluating its schools, but only one in 10 says it does a very good job, results that again are nearly identical to those of Americans overall. Fewer Atlanta residents say their state does a good job evaluating its schools (47%) compared with those in the Atlanta suburbs and elsewhere in the state (61%) — another similarity with New York, and also evident in big cities vs. less densely populated counties across the country.

In an open-ended question about the biggest problems facing public schools, a lack of money and financial support are most-cited in Georgia (by 19%), the same as nationally. Others mentioned by 10% or more include lack of discipline and behavior of children (13%), low teacher quality (12%), low quality of education (11%), and lack of support or interest from parents (10%). Among all Americans, mentions of these all are in the single digits.

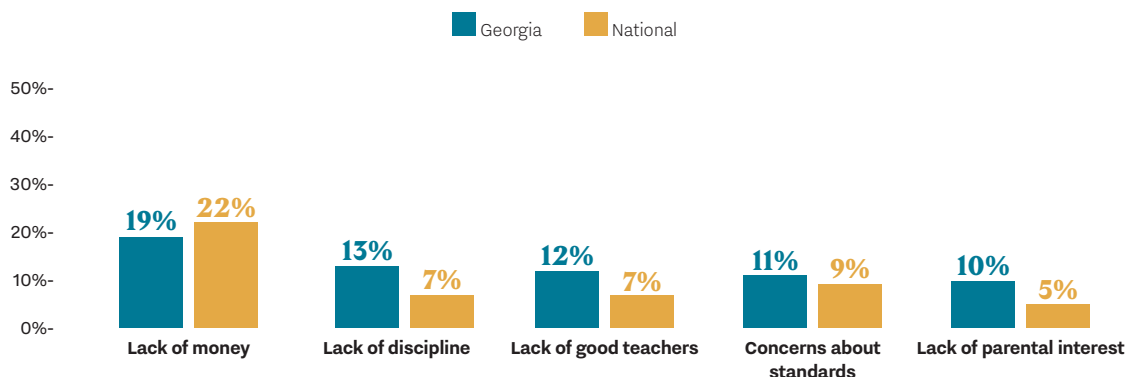
## Grading the local public schools

Georgia, New York, and national totals, 2017

	A-B grades %
<b>GEORGIA</b>	
Atlanta	36
Atlanta suburbs	57
Rest of Georgia	47
<b>NEW YORK</b>	
New York City	37
New York City suburbs	59
Rest of New York	59
<b>NATIONAL</b>	
10 highest-density counties	36
Next 40	44
Rest of the nation	50

# Top problems facing schools

Georgia and national totals, 2017





**WHAT GEORGIANS SAY ABOUT...**

# Wrapping support around children who need it

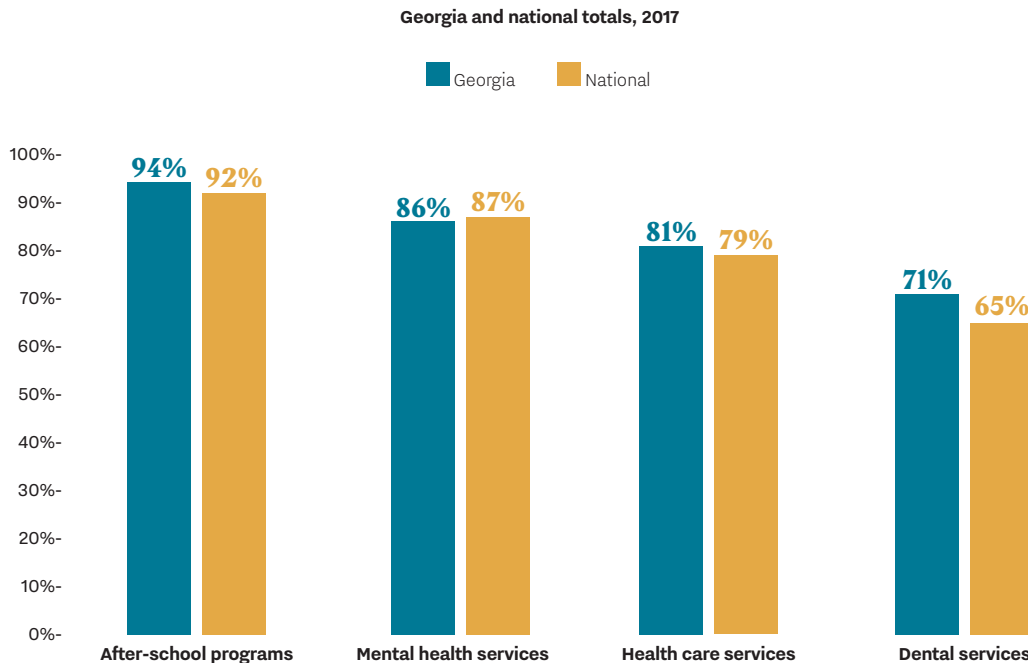
Finally, just like nationally, there's broad backing in Georgia for public schools offering wraparound support services for students who don't have access to them elsewhere. Tops are after-school programs (backed by a nearly unanimous 94%) and mental health services (86%), followed by health care (81%) and dental care (71%).

Three-quarters of Georgians, moreover, say public schools are justified asking for additional public funding to offer such services, the same as nationally — demonstrating broad willingness to pay for services when they're deemed necessary.

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## Support for wraparound services

Percent calling support for each aspect extremely/very important



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### Methodology

The Georgia PDK poll is based on telephone interviews of 633 adult state residents May 4-June 4, 2017, including 371 parents of school-age children and 364 parents of public school children. Oversampled groups were weighted to their correct share of the population.

Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish, 412 via cell phones and 221 via landlines. The sample was drawn from state interviews across six waves of the SSRS Omnibus survey, recontact of Georgia respondents from previous Omnibus surveys (with propensity weighting to adjust for nonresponse) and state-level random-digit dialing.

Results of the Georgia survey have a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 5.5 percentage points for all adults and 7.5 points for parents of school-age children and public school parents alike. These include the survey's design effect due to weighting.

Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y., designed, managed, and analyzed the survey for PDK International.

Topline data, the complete methodology statement, and the questionnaire for this survey are available at [pdkpoll.org](http://pdkpoll.org).