

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

New York state edition

New York City residents more critical of local schools

For the most part, New Yorkers share the same concerns and priorities for education as parents across the U.S.

New York City residents are far more critical of their local public schools than are other state residents, repeating a national pattern of big-city residents giving lower grades to their local schools. Elsewhere in the state, though, New York schools do comparatively better. A statewide PDK poll finds that just 37% of New York City residents give an A or B grade to their local public schools. By contrast, 59% in the city's suburbs,* and as many in the rest of the state, give their public schools A's or B's.

Ratings for the city's schools are almost identical to those for big-city schools nationally: Thirty-six percent of residents in the country's 10 most densely populated counties give their local schools A or B grades. The difference is that residents in the rest of New York rate their schools more positively than do Americans who live outside big cities elsewhere.

Other differences emerge: Compared with public school parents nationally, New Yorkers are less sharply critical of standardized tests, less likely to be aware of a charter school in their area, and more apt to expect their children to attend college. That said, for the most part, New Yorkers share the same concerns and priorities as parents across the country.

Those conclusions come from a special New York edition of the 2017 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, in addition to the national version of the PDK poll, and another 2017 statewide PDK poll in Georgia. The state polls in New York and Georgia were made possible with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

There's more consistency in attitudes than there are differences across these surveys, including broad interest in job skills training and efforts to improve students' interpersonal development in public schools, as well as support for traditional academics and for wraparound services. Still, gaps do exist. Among those, comparing New York and the nation:

- 41% of New York public school parents are aware of having access to charter schools in their communities, compared with 52% nationally — a difference that's not apparent in terms of private or religious schools.
- Partly reflecting demographics, more public school parents in New York than nationally expect their child to go to college and that they'll attend a four-year school full time.
- Parents in New York are more likely than parents overall to say it's highly important that public schools in their community have a mix of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. They're also slightly more apt to call economic diversity highly important.
- 25% of public school parents in New York feel strongly that standardized tests measure aspects of their child's education that are most important to them personally, more than say so nationally (17%).
- In terms of school quality, slightly more in New York than nationally say extracurricular activities are highly important (77% vs. 70%).
- New Yorkers are more likely than Americans nationally to cite fighting, violence, and gangs, as well as drugs in school, as the biggest problems facing schools.

** For the purposes of this survey, the New York City suburbs are defined as Westchester, Rockland, Orange, Nassau, Suffolk, Putnam and Dutchess counties.*

Other results in New York echo the 2017 PDK national poll. Notably:

- A vast 87% say public high schools should offer certificate or licensing programs that qualify students for employment in a specific field.
- 81% in the state say public high schools should offer job or career skills classes, even if that means those students spend less time in academic classes.
- 85% see technology and engineering classes as an extremely important or very important element of school quality.
- Just as many (again 85%) also say it's highly important for schools to help students learn interpersonal skills, such as being cooperative, respectful of others, and persistent at solving problems.

The New York survey was based on a random, representative statewide survey of 628 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 633 adults in Georgia, each reported separately. Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y., produced the 2017 surveys for PDK.

WHAT NEW YORKERS SAY ABOUT . . .

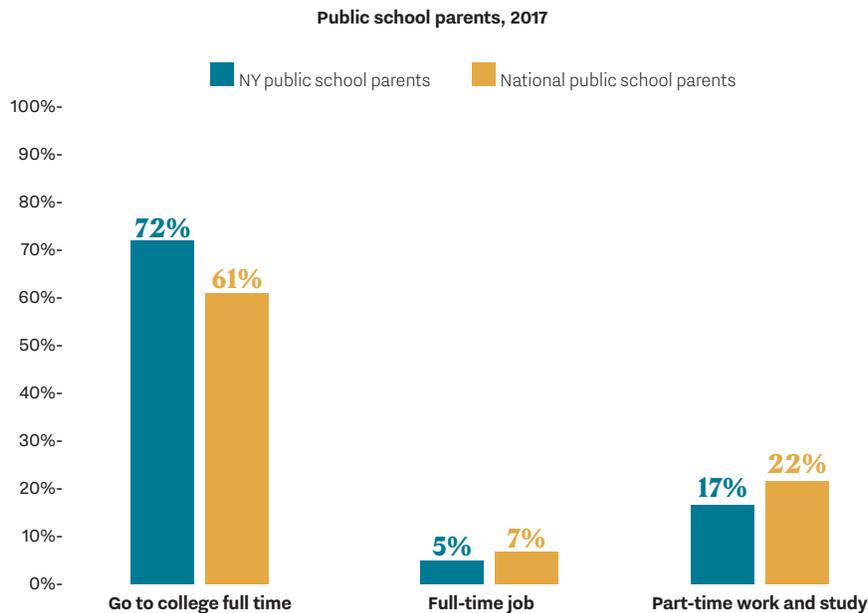
Expecting children to attend college

Seventy-two percent of public school parents in New York expect that their child will go to college, compared with 61% nationally. More in New York than elsewhere also expect their child to attend a four-year institution full time (59% vs. 47% nationally).

Even with the focus on college, 87% of New York residents say public high schools in their community should offer programs in which students can earn a certificate or license that qualifies them for employment in a specific field, with 62% feeling that way strongly.

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Most likely to do after high school



Eighty-one percent also say public high schools should offer job or career skills classes even if that means those students spend less time in academic classes, and 53% say schools should offer more such classes than they do now. These are similar to national levels.

A deeper dive

Support for increased opportunities to learn job skills peaks in New York City, where 60% of residents say public high schools should offer more job or career skills classes than they do now vs. 47% elsewhere in the state. (It's 51% nationally.)

This regional difference relates in part to race. Nonwhites in the state are more apt than whites to support more job or career skills classes by an 18-point margin (64% vs. 46%.) And while upstate New York and the New York City suburbs are majority white (87% and 64%, respectively), New York City is majority nonwhite (62%).

At the same time, New York City residents (along with another group, political liberals) are slightly less likely than their counterparts, upstaters and conservatives, to say schools should offer job or career skills classes even at the expense of academic classes. But it's high regardless — 77% in the first two groups, 88% among their opposites.

WHAT NEW YORKERS SAY ABOUT...

Using public money to support private schools

As is the case nationally, New Yorkers are more likely to oppose than support private school vouchers (51% opposed, 42% support), and this divide increases to 61% to 35% in a more detailed question specifying that vouchers could be used toward religious as well as private school tuition.

Religious preference is a factor — a result that also appears nationally. Among Christians in New York, very little changes from the original question to the one in which religious schools are mentioned (40% support, 53% oppose in the first question; 38% support, 56% oppose in the second). Among non-Christians, by contrast, there's a big jump in opposition (45% support, 47% oppose in the first question; 30% support, 66% oppose in the second).

Opposition to vouchers rises to 70% given countervailing arguments that the system would harm or help the public schools. Still, just 22% say vouchers would make the public schools worse vs. 34% who say they would improve public school quality.

If cost and location were not an issue, 35% of New York public school parents say they'd pick a public school for their child, 30% say they'd opt for a private school, 19% a religious school, and 15% a charter school. In a different question, 53% say they'd keep their children in public school even if offered public funds to send them elsewhere. Twenty-four percent say they'd move to a private school in that scenario; 19% say they'd choose a religious school.

But among those who'd switch, half change their minds if the voucher paid no more than half of private or religious school tuition. Overall, then, if a voucher paid half tuition elsewhere, three-quarters say they would keep their children in public school, while 21% would pay the rest of the tuition for a private or religious school. Again, these results are consonant with national findings.

WHAT NEW YORKERS SAY ABOUT...

Valuing diversity in public schools

Parents in New York are more apt than Americans overall to see racial and ethnic diversity in public schools as highly important (64% vs. 55%). Fifty-three percent in New York also say economic diversity is highly important compared to 45% nationally, but this difference falls short of statistical significance given the sample sizes.

As is the case nationally, while most New York parents express preference for diversity, fewer say it improves the learning environment and a comparatively small percentage say they'd have their child commute farther to get to a more diverse school. Specifically:

- A majority (76%) of New York parents say they'd prefer to send their child to a racially diverse school, and 53% say they feel this way strongly.
- More than half (54%) say racial diversity makes the learning environment better for students, whether the students are white, black, or Hispanic.
- Still, just 24% both say they'd rather their child attend a racially diverse school and that they'd accept a longer commute for it.

A similar pattern emerges on economic diversity, albeit with somewhat lower support:

- 61% say they'd prefer to send their child to an economically diverse school; 41% feel this way strongly.
- About half (52%) say such economic diversity improves the learning environment for students from poor families. This drops a bit for students from middle- (45%) or higher-income families (43%).
- Just two in 10 say they prefer an economically diverse school and are willing to send their child on a longer commute to attend one.

A deeper dive

There are differences among groups in these views, including some that diverge from those in the national study.

•Among Americans overall, Hispanic parents are much less likely than black parents to see racial diversity as highly important. This is not the case in New York; here, the two groups are equally apt to find such diversity highly important (77% for both blacks and Hispanics vs. 52% among whites).

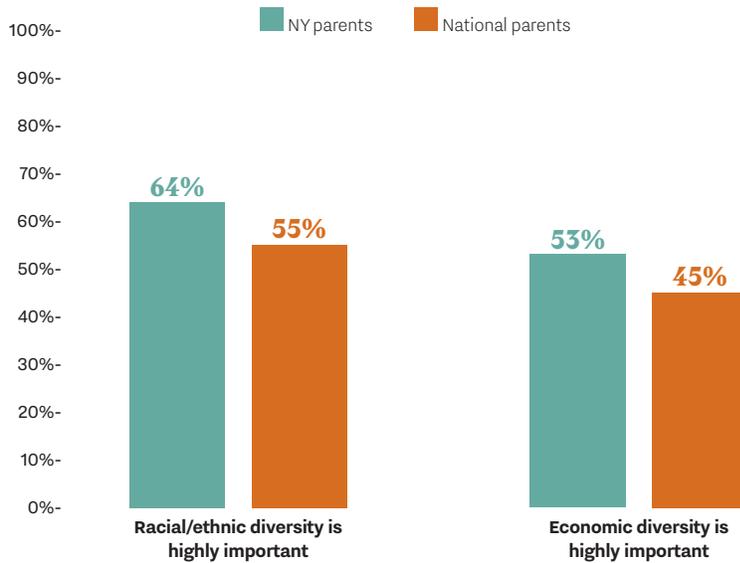
•Hispanics nationally also are much less likely than blacks to say that racial diversity improves the learning environment for white students. Again, New York Hispanics do not differ from blacks on this question.

•Nationally, parents with household incomes less than \$50,000 a year are more apt than those with \$100,000-plus incomes to say economic diversity in the schools is highly important. This pattern doesn't appear in New York. Here 60% with household incomes exceeding \$100,000 rate this as highly important, 23 points higher than higher-income parents nationally.



Preference for diversity

Parents of school-age children, 2017



WHAT NEW YORKERS SAY ABOUT...

Measuring school quality

Though support for standardized tests is tepid across the board, there are differences in emphasis, with somewhat higher marks for these tests on certain metrics in New York.

A majority of New York public school parents are somewhat or very confident (56%) that standardized tests do a good job measuring how well their child is learning, compared with 44% who are less confident. Parents are essentially split (47% to 49%) as to whether these tests measure what they believe is most important about their child's education.

But, as mentioned, New Yorkers give slightly higher marks to standardized tests. While just 24% of New York public school parents are very confident these tests measure how well their child is learning, that compares with 16% in Georgia and 19% nationally. Similarly, 25% in New York strongly feel that tests measure what's important about their child's education vs. 17% nationally.

New Yorkers, further, are more confident than Georgians that standardized tests can measure interpersonal skills such as cooperation, respect, and persistence (42% vs. 34%), with Americans overall between the two (at 39%).

Still, there are no differences between New York, Georgia, and the nation when it comes to how standardized test scores factor into school quality. Just around four in 10 (40% to 42%) say they're extremely or very important, reflecting the overall lack of confidence in such testing compared with other aspects of school quality.

More than twice as many New Yorkers (85%) say helping students learn interpersonal skills is highly important in school quality. Eighty-four percent also say students should be assessed on these skills — and 65% say public schools should be accountable for such scores.

Having technology and engineering classes receives the same high mark in school quality, with 85% rating this as highly important. Other class offerings are considered priorities as well: Having advanced academic classes is seen as highly important by 78% of New Yorkers, and art and music classes by 75%. These match national results.

New Yorkers are, however, more likely to say having extracurricular activities is a highly important factor in school quality (77% vs. 70% nationally). Support for extracurriculars peaks among blacks, liberals, and Democrats, at 91%, 88%, and 87%.

WHAT NEW YORKERS SAY ABOUT...

Wrapping support around children who need it most

New Yorkers, like Americans overall, express broad support for wraparound services. A vast 92% say schools should have after-school programs, including 82% who strongly feel this way.

Mental health services and general health services are high priorities as well, backed by 90% and 80%, respectively; indeed, eight in 10 feel strongly that mental health services should be provided. The lowest priority of the four listed is dental services, still supported by seven in 10 New Yorkers.

Further, 76% say schools are justified in seeking additional public funds to pay for these services. Just 18% say they're not justified. (The rest, 6%, have no opinion.)

Support for health services peaks among nonwhites, single Americans, and those making less than \$50,000 a year — groups for which health care access has been a particular burden — as well as among liberals, Democrats, and New York City residents.

WHAT NEW YORKERS SAY ABOUT...

Grading the schools

In grading schools, one's own child's school does best, local public schools next, and all U.S. public schools much less well, reflecting patterns that have endured over time nationally.

Just 27% of New Yorkers give an A or a B to the public schools nationally; this rises to 50% when considering local public schools and 76% when parents grade their oldest child's school. Slightly more parents in New York than in Georgia give an A grade to their own child's school (39% to 31%). Nationally, the percentage is between the two (35%).

As noted, residents of the downstate suburbs and upstate evaluate their local schools much more positively than those in New York City — 37% A or B grades in the city vs. 59% in the city's suburbs and elsewhere in the state. For comparison, in Georgia, local public schools are rated positively by 36% in Atlanta, compared with 57% in the Atlanta suburbs and 47% in the rest of Georgia. Nationally, it's 36% positive in the 10 most densely populated counties, 44% in the next 40, and 50% in the rest of the country.

At the same time, New York City residents go easier on public schools nationally, with 35% providing an A or B grade vs. 23% upstate and 19% in the suburbs. There are no such differences in rating one's own child's school.



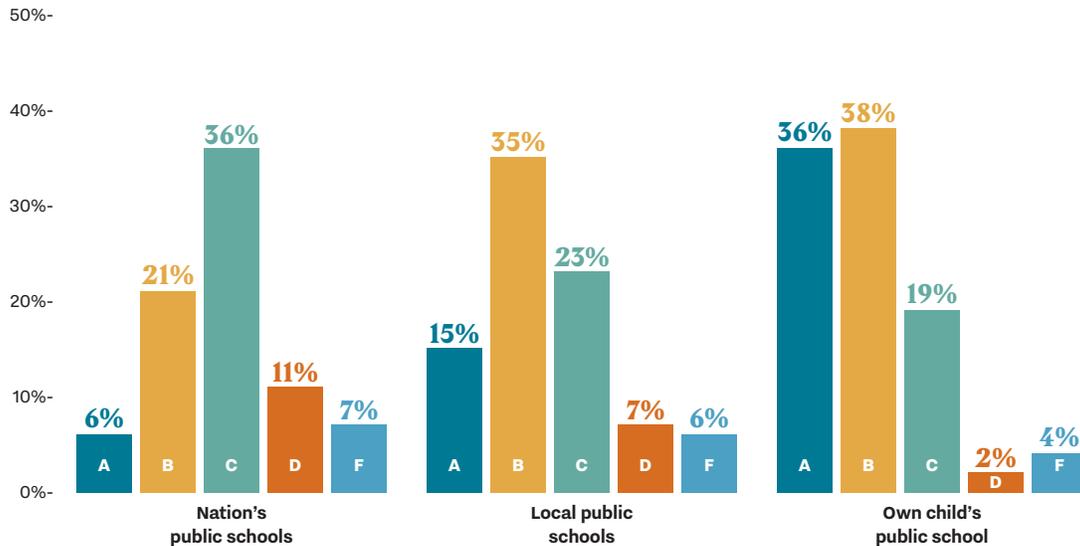
Grading the local public schools

New York, Georgia, and national totals, 2017

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

Grades by school type

New York totals, 2017



Through the lens of race as well as population density, public schools in New York are similarly rated by urban whites and urban nonwhites alike (37% and 38% A or B grades, respectively).

Among other differences, those in the highest income bracket (\$100,000-plus) give their own child's school higher marks than those earning less than \$50,000 (86% vs. 65%). A similar split exists between college graduates and those without college degrees (87% vs. 69%), as well as men and women (85% vs. 69%). These margins echo national results, except the gender difference, which is not apparent on this item nationally.

Biggest problems

Asked the biggest problems facing schools, the most popular answer nationally and among New Yorkers is lack of money or financial support. But the No. 2 and No. 3 problems cited in New York are fighting, violence and gangs, and drugs in school, respectively; each is rated 5 points higher as a problem in New York than by Americans in general.

Drugs are especially apt to be cited upstate (21%) than by residents in New York City (7%) or the city's suburbs (4%). Hispanics are much more apt than whites or blacks to cite gangs, violence, and fighting in schools as a major problem (27% vs. 7% and 12%, respectively).

Failing schools

Higher trust in local schools also is reflected in opinions on what to do about a public school with failing test scores for a number of years. Half of New Yorkers say the local school district should make the decision on what to do, compared with 29% who'd turn it over to a state agency and 13% who'd leave it up to the governor.

In addition to typical preference for local control, this result reflects some skepticism about state oversight. Just 13% say New York state does a very good job evaluating the quality of their local public schools. Still, an additional 45% say the state does this somewhat well.

Methodology

The New York PDK poll is based on telephone interviews of 628 adult state residents May 4-June 10, 2017, including 366 parents of school-age children, 354 parents of public school children, 125 black respondents, and 143 Hispanic respondents. Oversampled groups were weighted to their correct share of the population.

Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish, 362 via cell phones and 266 via landlines. The sample was drawn from state interviews across seven waves of the SSRS Omnibus survey, recontact of New York respondents from previous Omnibus surveys (with propensity weighting to adjust for nonresponse) and state-level random-digit dialing.

Results of the New York survey have a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 5.5 percentage points for all adults and 7.0 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.