

# 2018 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

## School security results

### Arming teachers trails other school security measures preferred by parents

*The annual PDK poll finds that parents lack strong confidence that schools can protect their children against school shootings but favor armed police, mental health screenings, and metal detectors more than arming teachers to protect their children.*

Security concerns run high after a year marked by horrific school shootings, with just 27% of K-12 parents in the 50th annual PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools expressing strong confidence that their school could deter an attack like those that have wrenched communities across the nation.

Reaching for solutions, parents overwhelmingly support mental health screening of all students, armed police in the schools, and metal detectors at entrances. Support for allowing teachers and other school staff to carry guns is much lower — 67% of parents prefer not to have their child in a classroom where the teacher is armed, and 63% generally oppose allowing teachers and staff to carry guns. Still, that shifts to an even split if rigorous training and screening are provided.

Regardless, most parents don't believe that armed staff would make their child safer at school — just 26% say so vs. 36% who say students would be less safe. The rest see no difference.

These results are from a new random-sample national survey on issues in public education by Phi Delta Kappa International, the association of professional educators ([pdkinternational.org](http://pdkinternational.org)). The survey has been conducted annually since 1969, first as the PDK/Gallup Poll, and since 2016 as the PDK Poll, produced for the association by Langer Research Associates.

This year's study was conducted among 1,042 adults, including an oversample to 515 parents of school-age children, via the GfK KnowledgePanel®, in which survey panelists are randomly recruited and provided with internet access to complete surveys online.

Most of the study's results are being held for their traditional back-to-school release in late August. But after a school year that included two of the top five deadliest K-12 school shootings in U.S. history, PDK is electing to make results on school security available now as a contribution to the public discourse on this critical issue.

A total of 72% of parents in the national survey are less than extremely or very confident in their school's security. Forty-one percent are "somewhat" confident — a weak result where student lives are concerned — and 31% are less confident than that.

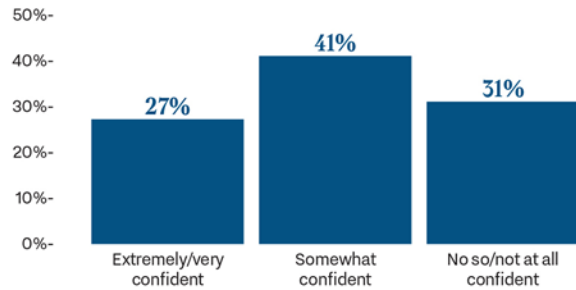
One in three parents, moreover, fears for their child's physical safety in school, up sharply to a level last seen two decades ago.

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## Confidence in security against school shootings

Among K-12 parents, 2018



PDK poll, 2018

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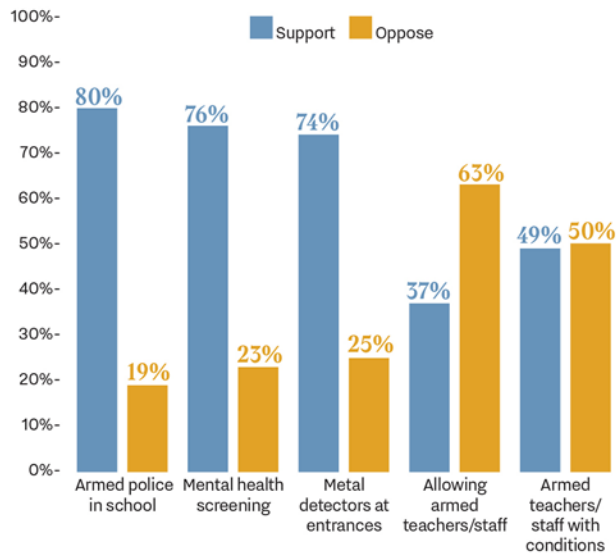
Eighty percent of parents support armed police in the schools, 76% endorse mental health screening of all students, and 74% support placing metal detectors at school entrances — all far higher than support for arming teachers and staff. Indeed, parents oppose allowing teachers and school staff to carry guns 63% to 37%. But support for allowing armed teachers and staff rises to 49% if training and screening programs are in place.

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## School security proposals

Among K-12 parents, 2018



PDK poll, 2018

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Further, when faced with a choice of spending money on armed guards in school or on mental health services for students, the public overwhelmingly prioritizes mental health services — 76% to 23% among all Americans and 71% to 28% among school parents.

Rather spend money on:	All adults	K-12 parents
Mental health services for students	76%	71%
Armed guards in school	23%	28%

Broadly, the survey finds opportunities for progress, with consensus across political lines relating to enhanced security and, most prominently, mental health screening and services. Views on arming teachers or other school staff, by contrast, are sharply partisan. Republicans are more amenable to the idea, particularly when training and screening are included, while most Democrats remain opposed, half strongly so.

Differences, partisan and otherwise, also are apparent in evaluating current security. Security is less of a concern for wealthier, white, and well-educated adults. Lower-income, less-educated, minority, and urban parents are more likely to fear for their child’s safety at school and have less confidence in their school’s ability to deter shooters.

### *Safety at school*

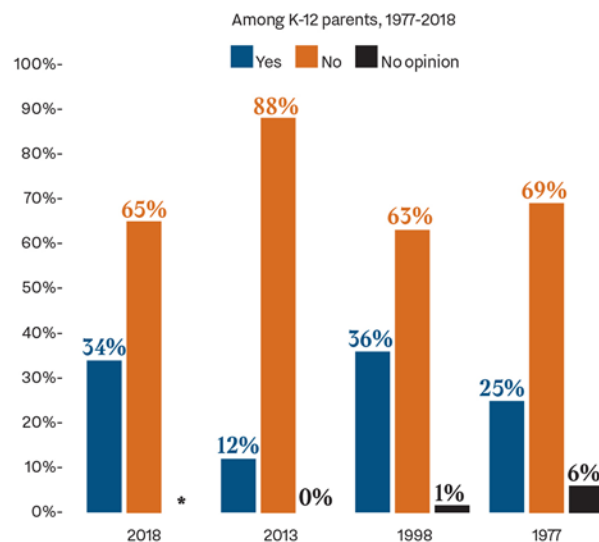
Thirty-four percent of parents fear for their child’s physical safety at school. As noted, that’s one in three, a disturbing number to express such a fundamental concern. It’s been this high before in a PDK survey 20 years ago but represents a steep increase from 2013 when just 12% said they were fearful. (Two school shootings in Arkansas and Oregon in spring 1998 attracted widespread media coverage, including one that was, at the time, the second deadliest at a K-12 school in U.S. history.)

Differences among groups are stark. Fears for a child’s safety at school are twice as high among parents with less than \$50,000 in household income compared with those making \$100,000 or more, 48% vs. 24%. Fear also tops 40% among urban parents, nonwhites, and those without college degrees. And Democrats and liberals are 20 and 16 points more likely than Republicans and conservatives to say they’re fearful for their child’s safety.

Additionally, women are more apt than men to say they fear for their child’s safety at school, 40% vs. 27%. Women typically are more apt than men to report such feelings.

Partisanship also comes into play in views of school security against shooters. Forty-four percent of Republican parents are extremely or very confident in their school’s

## Is your child safe at school?



\* Results were less than 0.5%

Gallup conducted the PDK polls in 1977, 1998, and 2013; Langer Research Associates conducted the 2018 poll.

**PDK poll, 2018**

safety, compared with 25% of Democrats and 20% of independents. Confidence is higher among suburban and rural parents as well, 31% vs. 20% among those in urban areas.

### *Arming teachers and staff*

There's especially strong partisanship in attitudes on guns in schools. Fifty-seven percent of Republican parents support allowing teachers or other school employees to carry guns vs. 39% of independents and just 17% of Democrats.

Gun ownership is another dividing line; among those with a functioning gun at home, 55% support arming teachers and staff vs. 26% of those in households without a gun. There's a racial/ethnic aspect as well, with support ranging from 44% of white parents to 27% of nonwhites.

Differences are similar when moving out of the abstract to ask whether parents want their child in a classroom with a gun-carrying teacher. Fifty-seven percent of Republicans prefer an armed teacher; 29% of independents and 10% of Democrats agree. Fifty-two percent of parents in gun-owning households favor the idea as do 46% of rural residents, 44% of conservatives, and 40% of whites. Those compare with 20% in non-gun households, three in 10 in cities and suburbs, one-third of moderates, and 12% of liberals, and two in 10 nonwhites. Eighty-two percent of blacks and 83% of Hispanic parents would prefer that their oldest child be in a classroom with a teacher who does not carry a gun; 57% of white parents also would prefer a non-gun-carrying teacher.

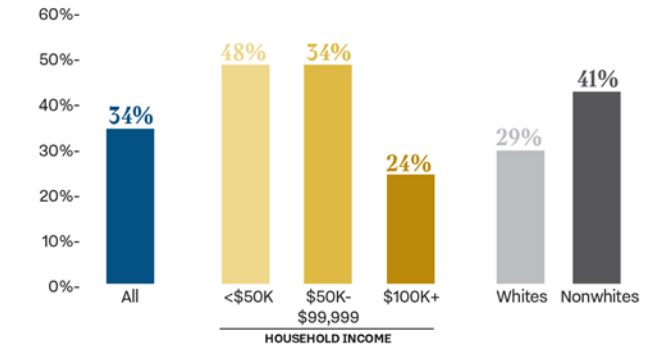
As noted, results shift when conditions are placed on allowing teachers or school staff to carry a gun at school, including "80 hours of training on the use of force, weapons proficiency, legal issues and first aid; and approval by the school board and local law enforcement." Such systems are in place in some states, including Texas and South Dakota, and, newly, Florida, in the wake of the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland. Given these requirements, support among parents of school-age children for allowing school employees to carry guns jumps 12 percentage points to split evenly, 49% vs. 50%. Still, those who are strongly opposed outnumber strong supporters, 33% vs. 20%. (Without conditions, strong opponents are more dominant, 45% vs. 13%.)

Change occurs across demographic groups but most sharply among Republicans, with a 19-point gain to 76% support for armed teachers or staff — roughly matching the 70% support among gun-owning households. (About half of Republicans live in a household with a gun, compared with 39% of independents and 24% of Democrats, according to this survey.) Support also gains 13 points among independents, to 52%, and 12% among Democrats, albeit just to 29%.

Among supporters of arming teachers and staff, two-thirds also back paying bonuses to those who carry guns in school, including one-quarter who strongly support such a policy. Computed among all parents, 34% both support allowing teachers and staff to carry guns in school when training and screening are in place and paying them a bonus to do so.

## Fear for child's safety at school

Among K-12 parents, 2018



PDK poll, 2018

Ultimately, parents are divided on whether additional armed personnel will make school safer for their child or not, albeit with more skeptical than supportive. Thirty-six percent think that letting teachers or staff carry guns will make their child less safe, 26% more safe, while 37% think it won't make much difference in their child's safety.

### *Additional measures*

While other initiatives garner wide support, there's variation in the extent and strength of sentiment. Ninety-two percent of Republicans support armed police in the school, for example, and 57% do so strongly. That compares with 75% of Democrats and 73% of independents, four in 10 strongly. Strong support for police in schools is 19 points higher among those without college degrees than those with them, 55% vs. 36% and 18 points higher among Southerners compared with those living elsewhere, 60% vs. 42%.

Metal detectors are a more popular option among non-college-educated, nonwhite, and lower-income parents, with eight in 10 or more backing them, half or more doing so strongly. More Democrats support metal detectors than independents, 80% vs. 63%; Republicans fall in between at 75%.

Mental health screening of all students, by contrast, is supported by three-quarters to eight in 10 of nearly all groups. Hispanic parents stand out as particularly strong advocates, with 62% strongly for it, compared with three in 10 blacks and whites alike.

Some public schools have already moved toward implementing policies in these areas. According to a report in March by the National Center for Education Statistics, in the 2015-16 school year, half of public schools provided staff training on recognizing students with potential mental health issues or tendencies to exhibit violent behavior, and about one-third of high schools had a law enforcement officer present on campus during all school hours. Just 6% of high schools required students to pass through metal detectors every day when entering school.

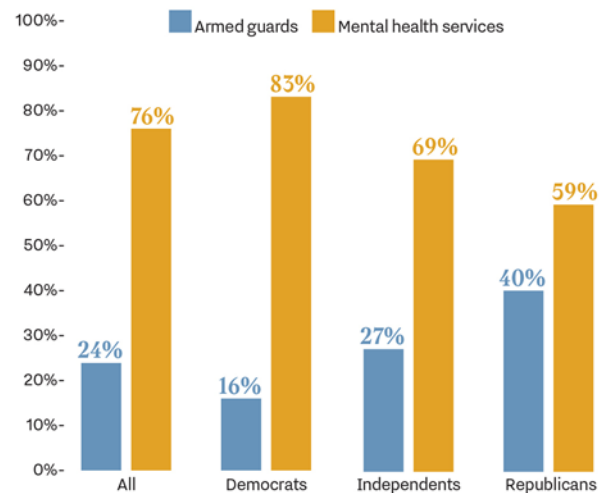
### *Spending preference*

Preference to spend money on mental health services for students rather than on armed guards in the schools is high regardless of support for assigned officers. It's another result that's heavily influenced by political inclinations: Democratic parents are 24 points more likely than Republicans to favor mental health screening over guards, 83% vs. 59%. (Still, majorities in both groups.) The gap between liberals and conservatives is nearly identical.

Preference to fund mental health screening instead of guards is lower among whites than nonwhites, with one exception — 91% of white women with college degrees hold

## School spending preferences

Among K-12 parents, 2018



PDK poll, 2018

this view, slightly more even than all nonwhites. This declines to 58% of white men without college degrees. (These results are among all adults, not just parents, for adequate sample sizes.)

**Schools should spend money on...**

	<b>Mental health screening</b>	<b>Armed guards</b>
White women, college degree	91%	9%
White men, college degree	76%	23%
White women, no degree	71%	28%
White men, no degree	58%	41%

*Methodology*

The 2018 Phi Delta Kappa survey was conducted May 1-21, 2018, among a random national sample of 1,042 adults, including an oversample to 515 K-12 parents. Results have a margin of sampling error of 3.9 points for the full sample and 5.5 points for the sample of parents, the focus of this report, including design effects. Error margins are larger for subgroups.

On May 18, during the closing days of the survey’s field period, eight students and two teachers were killed in a school shooting at Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas. All but 18 of the respondents, including nine parents, completed the survey before this event.

The survey was produced for PDK by Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y., with sampling and data collection by GfK Custom Research via its probability-based online KnowledgePanel®.

National responses to the school security questions follow. Each column reflects the percentage responses to questions. \* = <0.5%. Questions 1-29 and 38-44 have been held for release at a later date.

**30. [IF HAS CHILD IN SCHOOL] Thinking again about your [oldest] child in K-12, when [he is/she is/they are] at school, do you fear for [his/her/their] physical safety?**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
5/21/18	34	65	*
5/31/13 ^	12	88	0
6/23/98	36	63	1
5/2/77	25	69	6

^ 2013 and previous: PDK/Gallup poll

**31. [IF HAS CHILD IN SCHOOL] How confident are you that there is sufficient security against a shooting attack at [his/her/their] school?**

		<b>----More confident----</b>			<b>----Less confident----</b>			
<b>NET</b>		<b>Extremely confident</b>	<b>Very confident</b>	<b>Somewhat confident</b>	<b>NET</b>	<b>Not so</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Skipped</b>
5/21/18	27	7	21	41	31	20	11	*

32. [IF HAS CHILD IN SCHOOL] Would or do you support or oppose the following at [his/her/their] school?

5/21/18 – Summary Table

	NET	---- Support ----		NET	---- Oppose ----		Skip
		Strongly	Somewhat		Somewhat	Strongly	
a. Having one or more armed police officers on duty whenever school is in session	80	48	32	19	14	5	1
b. Having metal detectors at all school entrances	74	39	35	25	18	7	1
c. Allowing teachers or other school staff to carry guns in school	37	13	24	63	18	45	1
d. Screening all students for mental health problems	76	39	38	23	17	6	1

33. [IF HAS CHILD IN SCHOOL] Some programs require teachers or school staff to undergo special training in order to be permitted to carry a gun at school. An example is 80 hours of training in the use of force, weapons proficiency, legal issues, and first aid; and approval by the school board and local law enforcement. If these conditions were in place, would you support or oppose allowing teachers and other school staff to carry guns in school?

	NET	---- Support ----		NET	---- Oppose ----		Skip
		Strongly	Somewhat		Somewhat	Strongly	
5/21/18	49	20	29	50	17	33	1

34. [IF SUPPORT ALLOWING TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF TO CARRY GUNS] Would you support or oppose paying a bonus to teachers and other school staff who carry guns in school?

	NET	---- Support ----		NET	---- Oppose ----		Skip
		Strongly	Somewhat		Somewhat	Strongly	
5/21/18	66	25	41	33	25	8	1

35. [IF HAS CHILD IN SCHOOL] Would you prefer to have your [oldest] child (in K-12) in a classroom with a teacher who (carries) a gun or in a classroom with a teacher who (does not carry) a gun?

	Teacher who carries a gun	Teacher who does not carry a gun	Skipped
5/21/18	31	67	2

36. [IF HAS CHILD IN SCHOOL] If you knew that teachers or other school staff at [his/her/their] school carried guns during the school day, would you feel that [he was/she was/they were] (more) safe, (less) safe, or about the same?

	More safe	Less safe	About the same	Skipped
5/21/18	26	36	37	1

37. If you had to choose, which of these would you rather have schools spend money on – (mental health services for students) OR (armed guards in school)

	Mental health services for students in school	Armed guards	Skipped
5/21/18			
All	76	24	*
Parents	71	28	1