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## **Majority of Americans Disapprove of President's Education Policies, Want More Federal Support for Public Schools**

*52nd Annual PDK Poll finds deep partisan divides over charter schools, standardized testing, the value of student diversity, and more.*

**ARLINGTON, VA, Aug. 24, 2020** — The 52nd annual [PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools](#) reveals that as Americans prepare for this November's elections, they are sharply divided along party lines on a number of hot-button issues in education. Overall, however, a large majority of Americans say they want the federal government to take a more active role in supporting efforts to recruit and retain teachers, make college more affordable, and protect students from discrimination, and a majority say they disapprove of President Trump's performance in the area of education policy.

As in previous years, the 2020 poll addresses topics of perennial interest (such as teacher quality, standardized testing, and the biggest challenges facing K-12 education), as well as new and emerging areas of concern (such as students' growing use of e-cigarettes).

Note that this year's PDK Poll was conducted in March 2020, before the widespread outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States. Its results shed light on gradual changes in Americans' beliefs and attitudes about the public schools, rather than revealing immediate reactions to the pandemic. More recently, PDK has sought to capture both educators' and students' perspectives on remote learning, school closures, and the educational challenges associated with COVID-19 by surveying its educator members and participants in Educators Rising, PDK's program for young people who intend to go into teaching. Results of those surveys can be found at <https://pdkintl.org/COVID19-Resources>.

"While school districts face pressure from the Trump administration to open school this fall, the American public also wants the federal government to focus on issues of teacher quality, college affordability, protecting students from discrimination, and early childhood education. There's no doubt that the coronavirus pandemic has thrown public education into a tailspin, but we can't lose sight of what's important to parents and the public in the

**Engaging educators and strengthening schools, so every student thrives.**

long term, and that's having a quality teacher in a great school for every child," said Joshua P. Starr, CEO of PDK International.

Notable findings from this year's poll include:

- There are divided opinions of President Donald Trump's performance on education policy, with 45% of adults approving and a larger number, 53%, disapproving. That includes a vast partisan divide: Eighty-six percent of Republicans approve, dropping to half as many independents and a mere 11% of Democrats. For comparison, in the fourth year of their presidencies, approval ratings for handling education were 49% approving/43% disapproving for Barack Obama in a Gallup poll and a similar 50% approving/45% disapproving for George W. Bush in an ABC News/Washington Post poll. In both cases, percentages of people who disapproved were lower than for Trump in this year's PDK poll.
- Public education is a priority for many. Six in 10 call it extremely or very important in their vote for president this fall, including a quarter who call it extremely important. Importance rises among parents, to 7 in 10, with a third calling it extremely important. There's also a partisan difference on this question, but a smaller one than in attitudes on the president's performance. Seventy percent of Democrats identify education as highly important in their vote, declining to 55% of independents and 51% of Republicans. There are significant demographic differences on this issue as well, with 79% of Black, 71% of Latinx, and 52% of white respondents saying it's a highly important issue.
- About 5 in 10 Republicans and conservatives want a greater focus on the expansion of charter schools, compared with 29% of Democrats and 26% of liberals. Interest peaks at 57% among those who strongly approve of Trump's education policy, vs. 24% among strong disapprovers, and 55% of Latinx vs. 35% of Black and 33% of white respondents. Those without four-year college degrees are more likely to support efforts to expand charter schools, 42% vs. 29%.
- Standardized testing has mixed support, depending on how test results are used. Thirty eight percent of respondents think there's too much emphasis, compared to 52% when we asked this question in 2007. There's a lot of support (83%) for using tests to determine placement in special programs (such as academically selective high schools), although support wanes considerably if such programs have the unintended consequence of increasing racial and/or economic segregation.

"Our nation is sharply divided over public policy issues, yet Americans tend to agree that we need to support our public schools," Starr said. "Right now, we're all struggling to respond to the coronavirus. But even in the midst of the immediate crisis, we can't afford to lose sight of our long-term goals and commitments. Public education is the cornerstone of our democracy, and to keep it that way, we must keep working to recruit and retain high-quality teachers, ensure that all children have equitable access to rich learning opportunities, and provide schools with the funding they need."

Since its founding in 1969, the poll has been sponsored by PDK International and funded by

the PDK Educational Foundation. Langer Research Associates of New York City has produced the PDK poll since 2016.

This year's survey is based on a random representative sample of 1,030 adults, including 206 parents of children in K-12 public schools. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish in March 2020 via the probability-based Ipsos KnowledgePanel®, which randomly recruits participants via address-based sampling to take surveys online.

Founded in 1906, PDK International — the publisher of [Kappan magazine](#) and home of [EducatorsRising](#), a national initiative to cultivate the next generation of teachers — is a global network for education professionals that provides learning opportunities, targeted networking, and relevant research to its members, deepening their expertise and ultimately helping them achieve better results in their work.

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