2020 PDK Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

pdkpoll.org | #pdkpoll
Public School Priorities in a Political Year
From the CEO

This year, as usual, we began to design the PDK poll in January, when we convened meetings with the advisory group tasked with helping us define our themes and topics. In February, once we had our topics in hand — including a focus on Americans’ current attitudes toward charter schools, testing, and the importance of public education to this year’s presidential election — we wrote and revised our survey questions, and in March we took the poll into the field.
Introduction

Six in 10 adults and 7 in 10 public school parents call public education highly important in their vote for president this fall. While they express broad support for an increased focus on educational priorities, ranging from teacher retention and college tuition to anti-discrimination efforts and preK programs, support for expanded efforts falls far shorter in one area: charter schools.

Main areas covered

- Political attitudes and policy priorities
- Testing
- Problems facing the public schools
- Substance abuse
- Charter schools and school vouchers
- Diversity
- Approaches to reading and literacy
WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Political attitudes and policy priorities
Would like to see the administration in Washington focus more on...

- Attracting and retaining good teachers: 85%
- College affordability: 77%
- Protecting students from discrimination: 68%
- Availability of public school preK programs: 61%
- Expansion of charter schools: 38%

PDK poll, 2020
Would like to see the administration in Washington focus more on…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Adults</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Efforts to attract and retain good teachers</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College affordability</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting students from discrimination in their schools</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The availability of public school preK programs</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expansion of charter schools</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PDK poll, 2020
Key points

• Pre-Covid and pre-BLM

• Extensive partisan divide, esp. Re: approval of Trump’s performance
  • 45% approve v. 53% disapprove
  • 86% GOP approval v. 50% Independent and 11% of Dems
  • Disapproval numbers for Obama (43% Gallup) and Bush (45% ABC/WAPO) were lower at same point in their terms

• Some are local and state decisions/initiatives, others are federal
WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Testing
### Appropriate to use test results...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To determine whether a student should be eligible to enroll in a special academic program</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To determine whether a student should be promoted to the next grade or graduate from high school</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As an important factor in teacher evaluations</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As the main factor in determining how well one school compares with others</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As an important factor in determining how much financial support the district receives from the state</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key points

• Tests aren't going anywhere, just part of the landscape

• This year will be unlike any other

• Unknown future of testing means we need to come back to this regularly
Problems facing the public schools
Key points

• Open-ended, three options

• Money, money, money, but not as important as in recent recession years (19% this year, 36% in 2010)

• Bullying is up

• Vaping/smoking/substance abuse is up
WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Substance abuse
Substance abuse problems in community public schools

- E-cigarettes/vaping: 22% Crisis, 43% Serious, 33% Less than that
- Opioids: 24% Crisis, 30% Serious, 44% Less than that
- Marijuana: 15% Crisis, 33% Serious, 50% Less than that
- Alcohol: 13% Crisis, 40% Serious, 46% Less than that

PDK poll, 2020
Key points

• Demographic and regional differences

• Slight majority of parents have confidence that schools know how to address it
WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Charter schools and school vouchers
Would you support a voucher program to partly pay for...?

Among all adults
- Private school tuition: 53% Support, 46% Oppose
- Religious school tuition: 48% Support, 52% Oppose

Among parents
- Private school tuition: 56% Support, 44% Oppose
- Religious school tuition: 50% Support, 50% Oppose

PDK poll, 2020
Key points

• Partisan and demographic differences

• Four in 10 support adding charter schools, even at expense of public schools

• Opposition is higher than recent and more intense
Diversity
Key points

• Parents and public are mostly split on supporting special programs that reduce diversity (racial and economic), with substantial demographic differences:

"A special program that has the effect of reducing ethnic and racial diversity is supported by 24% of Black and 38% of Latinx respondents, vs. 53% of whites. Further, it’s backed by 36% of those with household incomes less than $50,000, vs. 55% of those with incomes $100,000 or higher."
WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Approaches to reading and literacy
Most effective method for...

- Phonics
- Whole language
- Balanced approach

- Teaching reading: 72%
- Teaching literacy: 66%

PDK poll, 2020
Key points

• Demographic and regional differences

• Americans don’t read enough...

"All told, 23% of adults describe themselves as avid readers, 37% as regular readers, 26% as occasional readers, and 13% as not much of a reader."
WHAT AMERICANS SAID

Survey methodology
Key points

Gary Langer and Associates administered the 2020 PDK Poll. The 2020 Phi Delta Kappa survey was conducted using the nationally representative Ipsos KnowledgePanel®, in which participants are randomly recruited via address-based sampling to participate in survey research projects by responding to questionnaires online. Households without internet connections are provided with a web-enabled device and free internet service.

The survey was designed to include approximately 1,000 adults in the general population. Field work was conducted March 13-23, 2020. After initial invitations, reminder emails were sent on the third day of the field period. Out of 1,755 panel members invited to participate, completed, qualified surveys were provided by 1,060. Participants completed the survey in a median time of 8 minutes.
Our World Has Changed; Student Voice is Needed to Help Transform Education
Only 36.15% of classroom teachers and 28.77% of district administrators express concern about students’ ability to learn in a distance environment vs. 57.46% of students on the same question.

Only 9.23% of teachers and 8.22% of district administrators expressed the loss of extra curriculars as the largest concern, however, 45.18% of students expressed that as their largest concern.

There are more urgent issues than the issue of Teacher Diversity, but Diversity is no less important and yet only 26.58% of district administrators are emphasizing diversity more than in previous years.
NEW! Student Voice Rapid Response

Survey Brief #5
• 1,000 responses in 24-hrs, 1496 respondents in the first 72 hrs.
• 365 Students
• 333 Classroom Teachers
• 180 Principals
• 86 Superintendents
• 532 Other (including retired and Higher Ed)

Student Voice Rapid Response
• 1,000 Students recruited
• Minimum 300 responses
• 24-hour response, 48-hour analysis
• Are there questions that you would like asked?
Find the full 2020 PDK poll report, this PowerPoint, all of the charts, and more

pdkpoll.org