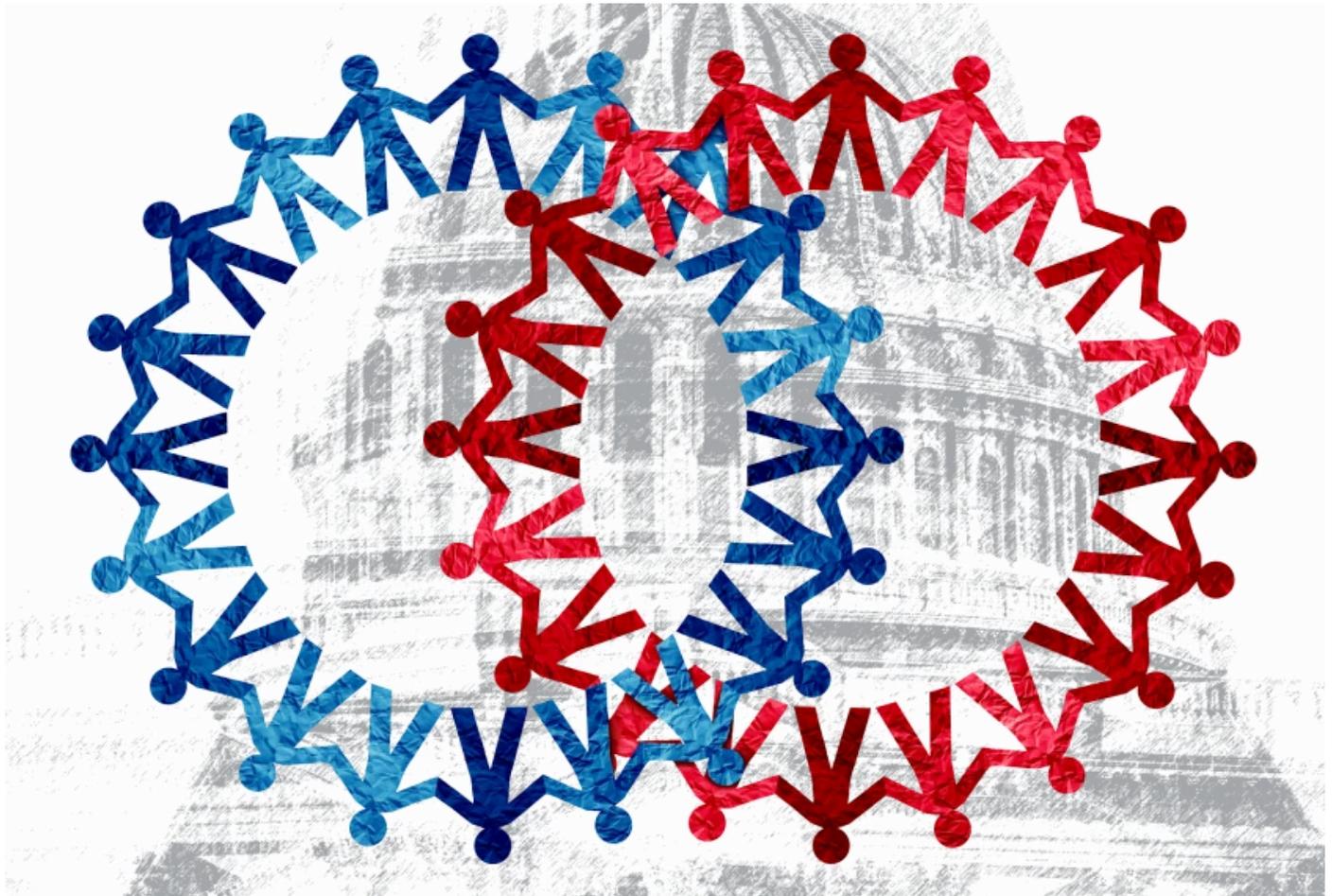


STATES OPINION

Voters Have a Message for Lawmakers About Education: Stop the Blame

Here's what most voters agree on

By Bob Wise & Javaid Siddiqi — February 20, 2025 ⌚ 5 min read



— Collage with iStock/Getty

Bob Wise & Javaid Siddiqi

Bob Wise is a former governor of West Virginia and a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Javaid Siddiqi is the president and CEO of the Hunt Institute and a former Virginia secretary of education.

Investing in our children is a moral choice, not a political one.

That's a sentiment most voters gravitated to about education, according to a survey the Hunt Institute conducted on the 2024 election. Contrast it to the daily tit-for-tat in our news feeds and the rapidity at which the Trump administration and its supporters are calling to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education.

It feels as if politics couldn't be more partisan.

Yet, the Hunt Institute's [Across the Aisle](#) survey of more than 1,300 likely 2024 voters uncovered high levels of agreement across the partisan spectrum—an emphasis placed on improving education over divisiveness. Respondents voluntarily self-selected in the survey online and reflected a mix of ideologies, education level, marital and parental status, and income, among other demographic factors. These likely voters were also invited to participate in focus groups to gather additional insight.

Their message for federal and state lawmakers is clear: Stop the blame. Enough with the contentious partisan displays. Most voters want the same thing for education, so be bold and collaborative, trust the data, and know you have support to make genuine improvements.

For example, voters ranked school safety, literacy, and workforce readiness as higher priorities than school choice—a much more disputed topic in the media—which landed in the bottom tier of education concerns.

In one focus group conducted in conjunction with this survey, teachers expressed the sentiment that elected officials and education leaders are using public education for their own political agendas and spreading misinformation.

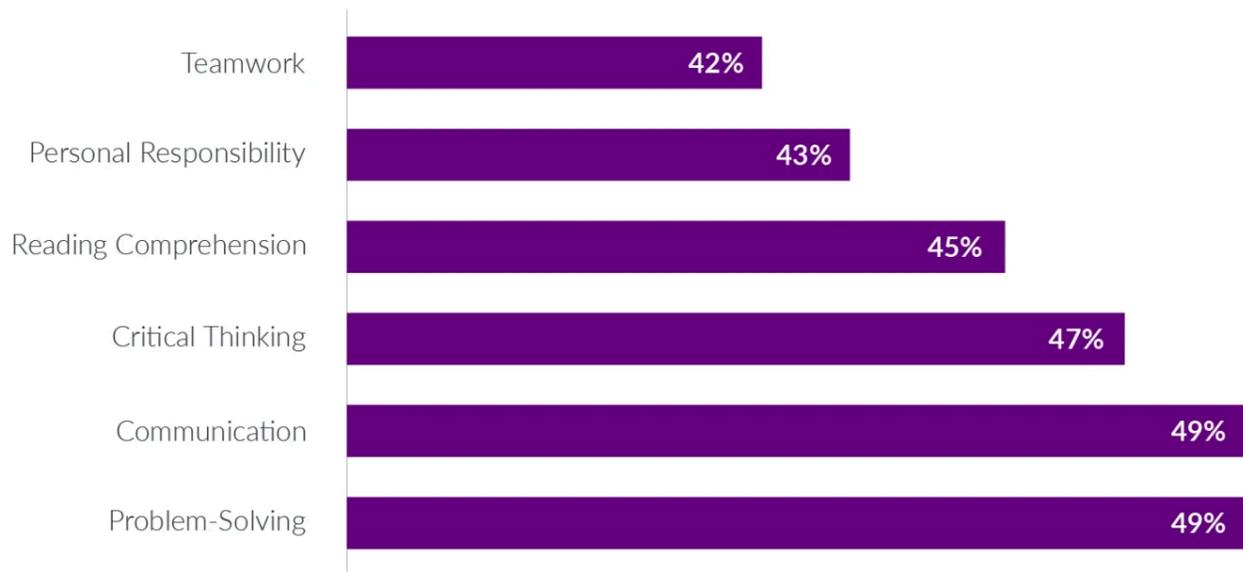
One teacher said, “Both political sides have fumbled the ball with educators.”

Now the major elephant in the room: This year's National Assessment of Educational Progress showed nearly zero evidence that the United States' education system is benefiting our students. Aside from isolated bright spots, particularly in Alabama and Louisiana, performance is still well below pre-pandemic levels across the country

If that doesn't make clear to policymakers the need for a new approach moving forward, one guided by bipartisan collaboration, then what will?

Seventy-five percent of voters agree it is “very important” for K-12 students to get an education that prepares them for a career after high school. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that students need skills to prepare them for the future, including reading, communicating, problem-solving, and working with a team.

Most Important Skills for Workplace Readiness | 2024 Across the Aisle



— The Hunt Institute's “Across the Aisle” survey, 2024

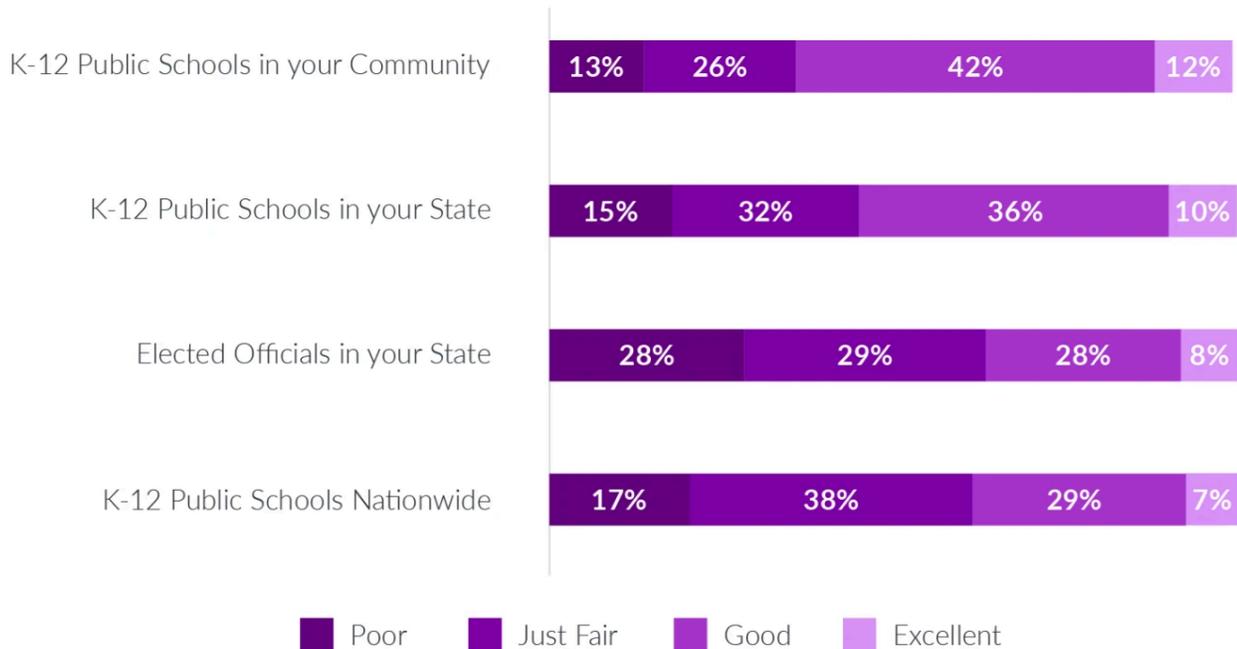
They also stressed the importance of literacy. Since the Hunt Institute began this survey in 2022, 73 percent of Across the Aisle respondents have identified students not reading at grade level as a “very important” issue. Since 2013, when Mississippi became the first state to legislate “science of reading” requirements, state leaders have increasingly prioritized that issue. As of 2024, [40 states](#) have implemented similar laws regarding evidence-based literacy practices.

Although voters tend to believe their local schools are doing well, they’re skeptical about the performance of public schools nationally. Politicians that ran for office in 2024 did not help this perception by largely ignoring education as a top issue.

Elected officials and candidates running for office must directly communicate their top education priorities and align their agendas with the public interest and community need. Introducing ballot initiatives, like [the Kentucky school choice measure](#), can enhance voter buy-in, reduce polarization, and align policy discussions with community values and democratic involvement.

The bottom line: Make clear statements to the media, make available your education agenda, establish task forces, hold listening sessions, and above all, work for your constituents.

How Would You Rate the Job of Each of the Following when it comes to Education Today? | 2024 Across the Aisle



— The Hunt Institute's "Across the Aisle" survey, 2024

Let's bring it all together: Voters see public schools as community resources that can enable students to become critical thinkers and allow them to follow their dreams. To support schools in meeting this expectation, education leaders and policymakers at all levels must consider these evidence-based practices foundational to improving outcomes across the country:

Hire and support high-quality teachers.

Voters want top-notch educators. They believe educators deserve adequate resources. In fact, 91 percent of survey respondents say every teacher should have the development and support needed to do an outstanding job. Even more, teacher certification has long been strongly correlated with student achievement in math and reading.

Best practices look different across the country. Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs, a Democrat, secured a \$2 million grant expansion of the Arizona New Teacher Support Program. The Teach Kentucky initiative provides grants to students who commit to serving as full-time teachers in

subjects with shortages or low-income communities. And Tennessee established a grow-your-own competitive grant program, selecting participants to train as paid educational assistants, pair with teacher mentors, and receive the resources to complete a residency for a bachelor's degree or one-year program.

Prioritize personalized learning.

Across the Aisle's first-ever survey three years ago found that 81 percent of likely voters supported an investment in the individual needs of students. For example, more than two-thirds of voters support giving public school teachers classroom resources for personalized learning, up-to-date textbooks, and technology.

Districts need to provide guidelines on how schools can use AI to implement personalized learning tactics. At least 11 states have developed guidance for using AI in their school districts, and Arkansas, Georgia, and South Carolina offer courses for students to learn how to use the technology.

One parent said in a focus group, "My son was really interested in seeing what a real atom looked like, because you can use this AI technology to give them real hands-on experiences that they may not normally get."

Emphasize real-world skills.

Seventy percent of respondents strongly supported real-world skills being integrated into curricula, such as financial literacy, computer literacy, and workforce readiness. In 2024, likely voters were not confident that students are learning basic skills, and more than half of the respondents were much more likely to support someone with a stated commitment to ensuring that "today's students can compete in the global economy of tomorrow."

The Hunt Institute's research shows would-be voters believe the path forward includes investing in schools, creating safe learning environments, and supporting high-quality academics who prepare students for long-term success.

The bottom line: We all want the same thing in matters of education. Policymakers must cut through the noise of our fractured media landscape. Work together. Trust the data.

Our students and our future are on the line.

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