

Highlights of the 2012 PDK/Gallup Poll

What Americans said about the public schools

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS



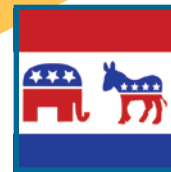
Children of illegal immigrants should not get free public education, school lunches, or other benefits.

FINANCES



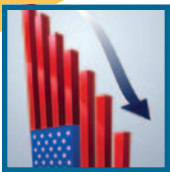
The lack of financial support for public schools is a bigger problem than discipline and drugs. Overwhelmingly, we believe “my child is safe at school.”

POLITICS



Even more of us support Barack Obama today than four years ago — but fewer of us are undecided this year, and we like Republican Mitt Romney a lot more than we liked John McCain at the same time four years ago.

EDUCATION VS BUDGET



We believe Democrats are more interested than Republicans in improving education, but not by much. Balancing the federal budget is more important than improving education.

TEACHER EVALUATION



We're divided on whether student test scores should be part of a teacher's evaluation.

BULLYING



Schools should be involved in disciplining children for bullying, even if the bullying occurs outside the school day and/or over the Internet.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT



Closing achievement gaps and improving urban public schools are priorities for most of us — and most of us are willing to pay more taxes to achieve that goal.

GRADING SCHOOLS



We're split down the middle on whether to give good or bad grades to the public schools in our own community — but most of us didn't vote in an election that affected our local schools.

CONFIDENCE IN TEACHERS



Not many would give A's or B's to the public schools nationally, but most of us have trust and confidence in public school teachers. And most of us believe we know at least one public school teacher “very well!”

STANDARDS



Common core standards will make the U.S. more competitive, improve schools in our communities, and provide more consistency between districts within a state and between states. High-quality standards won't hurt our chances of closing achievement gaps.

Read the entire poll on your iPad. Search for Phi Delta Kappan in the App Store.



The 2012 PDK/Gallup poll results are available at www.pdkpoll.org.



**The 44th annual
Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll
of the Public's Attitudes
Toward the Public Schools**

Public education in the United States: **A nation divided**

By William J. Bushaw and Shane J. Lopez

In a time of sharp differences in the broader political spectrum, the public's attitudes on education reflect those gaps, but also indicate many hopeful points of consensus.

Deep and important divisions are roiling America in this election year, and education is not immune to those divides. Results from the 44th annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools show that Americans have a number of conflicting and hardening viewpoints in their appraisal of and preferences for directing, managing, and investing in the schools:

- We are divided on whether teachers should be evaluated based on student standardized test scores.
- We are divided on whether parents should receive vouchers to help pay for their children to attend private schools.

WILLIAM J. BUSHAW is executive director of PDK International, Arlington, Va. **SHANE J. LOPEZ** is senior scientist in residence, Gallup, Omaha, Neb.

- We are divided on whether the children of immigrants who entered this country illegally should receive a free public education.
- We are divided on whether high school graduates are ready for college.
- We are even divided in how we perceive our schools, assigning the schools our children attend the highest grades ever while showing little confidence in the nation's schools as a whole.
- And we are certainly divided on which political party and which presidential candidate can more positively influence public education in America.

Simultaneously and perhaps ironically, we agree on other important issues:

- We agree that teachers should be rigorously screened and prepared, at least to the level of other professions such as engineering, business, law, and medicine.

- We agree that we have trust and confidence in our teachers.
- We agree that the common core standards can have a positive affect on public education.
- We agree that neither high school dropouts nor high school graduates are ready for the world of work.
- We agree that we must close the achievement gap and that we can do this without lowering standards.
- We agree that we must support urban schools.

The annual PDK/Gallup poll is a scientifically based survey of 1,002 Americans 18 years and older. The poll is unique and significant because its longitudi-

nal data documents important changes in American opinions about education over time. Although the PDK/Gallup poll revisits many questions asked in previous polls, we also turn to a panel of advisers each year to help us identify emerging issues. Among this year’s new issues are teacher evaluation and preparation, bullying, parent trigger laws, and common core standards.

As in the past, every question asked is reported in this article, and all questions are listed verbatim as they were asked of the American public during a telephone poll conducted in May and June 2012. While we present our interpretations of the findings, we encourage readers to decide for themselves if the responses support our analysis. Please join us on Facebook and at LinkedIn to continue the conversation.

The biggest problem facing schools

Intentionally, the first question we have asked Americans in every PDK/Gallup poll is to tell us what they think is the biggest problem facing the public schools in their communities. The question is open-ended — no prompts are provided — and it’s always asked first so that no other question will affect the response. The response to this question documents the single most significant shift in American public opinion regarding their schools.

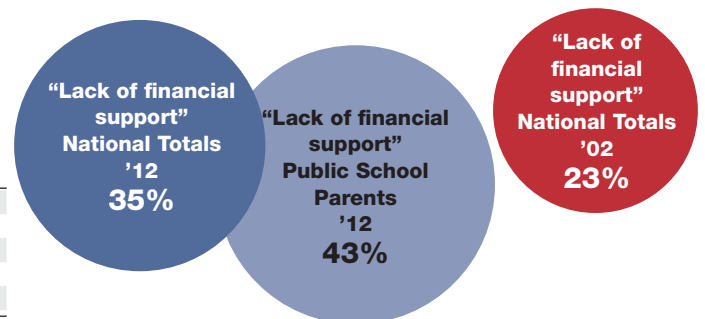


FINDINGS

Going back 10 years to 2002, we combined the responses that include discipline concerns, such as fighting, gang violence, and drugs. In 2002, these were the biggest problems identified by 39% of Americans. Today, just 10 years later, only 14% of Americans mentioned concerns about fighting, drugs, and poor discipline. This year, as in the last few years, **lack of funding was by far the most common single response Americans cited as the biggest challenge facing schools in their communities.** Parents were even more unified that lack of funding was the No. 1 challenge facing schools.

TABLE 1. What do you think are the biggest problems that the public schools of your community must deal with?

	National Totals		Public School Parents
	'12 %	'02 %	'12 %
Lack of financial support	35	23	43
Lack of discipline	8	17	3
Overcrowded schools	5	17	6
Fighting/gang violence	4	9	5
Drugs	2	13	2



Common core standards

Attempts to create national education standards in the U.S. had stalled until the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers undertook an effort to create voluntary standards with control vested at the state rather than federal level. Educators, policy makers, and philanthropists have embraced the Common Core State Standards that currently are constructed only for mathematics and English language arts. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have adopted them. We decided to measure the public's support for these standards.

FINDINGS

Most Americans believe the common core standards will allow U.S. schools to compete globally, and **three of four Americans believe the common core standards will provide more consistency in the quality of education** between school districts and states.

Half of those polled believe the common core standards will improve the quality of education in their community's schools but a significant number (40%) believe the standards may not have much effect.

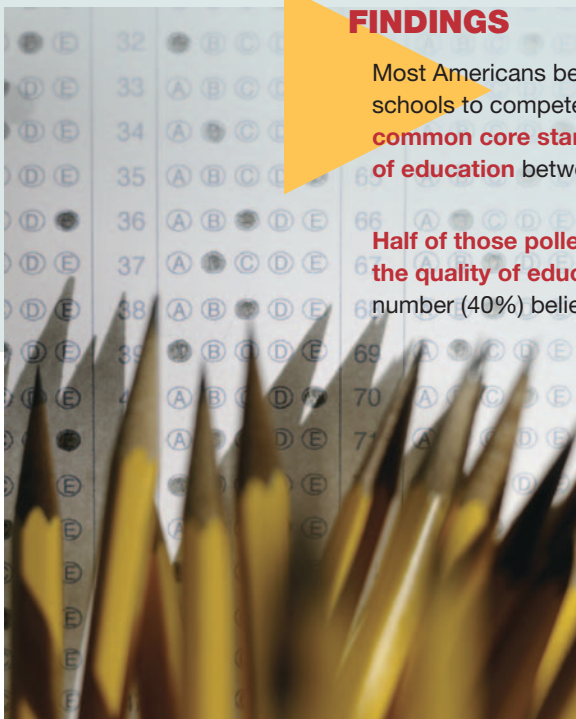


TABLE 4. Do you believe common core standards would improve the quality of education in your community, decrease the quality of education in your community, or have no effect?

	National Totals '12 %	Rep. '12 %	Dem. '12 %	Ind. '12 %
Improve the quality of education	50	46	60	43
Decrease the quality of education	8	6	5	12
Have no effect	40	44	33	43
Don't know/refused	2	3	2	2

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

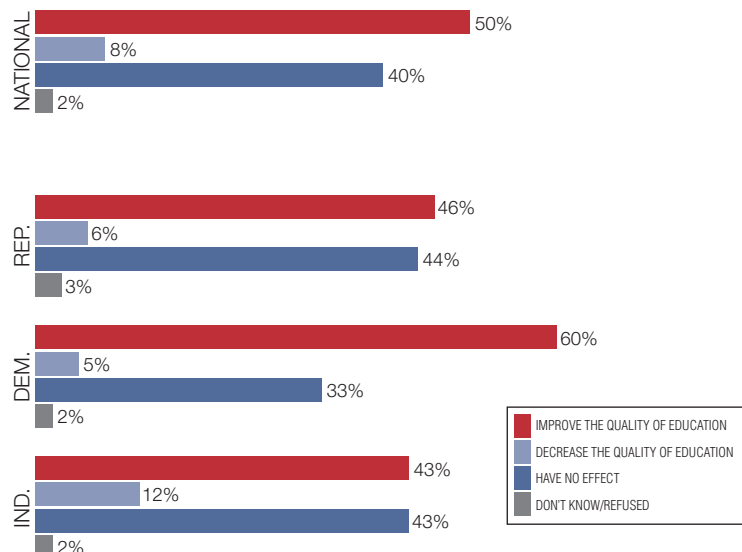
TABLE 2. Do you believe common core standards would help make education in the United States more competitive globally, less competitive globally, or have no effect?

	National Totals '12 %	Rep. '12 %	Dem. '12 %	Ind. '12 %
More competitive	53	44	65	50
Less competitive	7	5	5	9
Have no effect	37	43	29	39
Don't know/refused	4	8	2	2

TABLE 3. Some educators believe that common core standards would provide more consistency in the quality of education between school districts and between states. Do you believe that having common core standards would provide more consistency in the quality of education between school districts and states?

	National Totals '12 %	Rep. '12 %	Dem. '12 %	Ind. '12 %
Yes	75	73	82	70
No	23	25	16	28
Don't know/refused	2	2	2	2

Effect of Common Core Standards



Immigration, the achievement gap, & urban schools

The nation's urban schools, especially New York City, Los Angeles, Washington, and Chicago, routinely capture headlines, and this influences how Americans feel about public education in the U.S. In this year's poll, we included questions about urban education that we had asked Americans before. We also asked Americans their opinions about the achievement gap between white, black, and Hispanic students. We also asked if they believed that there were significant differences in quality between school districts. Finally, we asked Americans if they favor assisting the children of immigrants who are in the United States illegally.

FINDINGS

Ninety-seven percent believe it's very or somewhat important to improve the nation's urban schools, indicating a strong continuing commitment, and almost two of three Americans said they would be willing to pay more taxes to provide funds to improve the quality of the nation's urban schools. However, there was a clear difference of opinion between Republicans (41% in favor) versus Democrats (80% in favor) on the taxation question.

Most Americans oppose providing free public education and other benefits to children of immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally. This, too, follows party lines, with Democrats indicating support on this question. Interestingly, Americans living in the West were evenly divided on this question (48% approved vs. 52% opposed), while Midwesterners were more opposed (29% approved vs. 70% opposed). It's also important to note that while Americans remain opposed, the opposition is significantly lower than when we last asked the question in 1995.

Seventy percent of Americans believe the quality of education delivered by school districts in their state differs either a great deal or quite a lot. This perception is 11 percentage points higher than when we last asked the question in 2001.

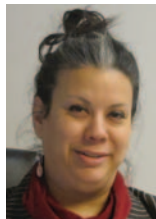
Americans overwhelmingly believe that it is important to close the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students. At the same time, 84% of Americans believe this gap can be narrowed while maintaining high standards for all children.



LOURDES FONSECA

COMMENTARY

Connect the dots



This year's PDK/Gallup poll shows that 70% of Americans believe there is a great deal of variance from school district to school district. That might seem like a high percentage, but I'm surprised it's not higher. In Connecticut, where the academic achievement gap is the largest in the nation, the disparities between suburban districts and urban districts are astounding. As an urban parent and the mother of two young men, each of whom graduated from high school unprepared for college, I know firsthand about the lack of quality education available to urban students. As I've visited numerous schools throughout the state, I've been blown away by the resources and the warmth of the environments in those schools. Urban parents throughout the country have experienced the same dynamic I've seen here: White-collar workers commute into the city for jobs but wouldn't dream of sending their kids to urban schools. As a result, those who can't afford to leave are left in low-performing urban schools and are often the most disenfranchised and voiceless citizens.

What America needs is a stronger way to connect the interests of surrounding towns with the interests of the city, to really encourage people to care. It can't just be those representing the city making noise and advocating. That hasn't worked. We either find a way to make those connections or our cities will rot, jobs will move elsewhere, and people will have to care. Why wait until we hit rock bottom?

LOURDES FONSECA is community programs coordinator for Achieve Hartford!, Hartford, Conn.

TABLE 5. There is a recognized academic achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students, with white students consistently outperforming black and Hispanic students. **How important do you think it is to close this gap – very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all?**

	National Totals	
	'12 %	'06 %
Very/somewhat important	89	88
Not too/not important at all	11	10
Don't know/refused	1	2

TABLE 6. Do you believe that the achievement gap can be narrowed substantially while maintaining high standards for all children or not?

	National Totals	
	'12 %	'06 %
Yes	84	81
No	15	17
Don't know/refused	1	2

TABLE 7. Just your impression, how much would you say the quality of the education provided by the public schools in your state differs from school district to school district — a great deal, quite a lot, not too much, or not at all?

	National Totals	
	'12 %	'01 %
A great deal/quite a lot	70	59
Not too much/not at all	28	35
Don't know/refused	3	6

TABLE 8. How important do you think it is to improve the nation's urban schools? Would you say very important, fairly important, not very important, or not important at all?

	National Totals	
	'12 %	'98 %
Very/fairly important	97	96
Not very/not important at all	3	2
Don't know/refused	0	2

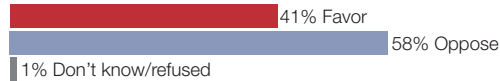
TABLE 9. Would you be willing or unwilling to pay more taxes to provide funds to improve the quality of the nation's urban public schools?

	National Totals	
	'12 %	'98 %
Willing	62	66
Unwilling	37	30
Don't know/refused	0	4

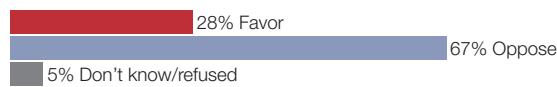
Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 10. Are you in favor of or opposed to providing free public education, school lunches, and other benefits to children of immigrants who are in the United States illegally?

National totals 2012



National totals 1995



Readiness for the future

Education pays — the more education we have, the higher our wages and the lower our chances of being unemployed. Educators share this fact with students of all ages as they try to get them ready for the future. But, does the public believe education adequately prepares students for a future in college and work?

FINDINGS

Almost all parents of school-aged children are confident their children will graduate from high school, and two of three believe they will ultimately land a good job. This optimism does not seem to be affected or informed by dropout or unemployment rates.

Parents give schools high marks for making schools safe places for students and for recognizing when children do good work in class. (Nine of 10 parents also believe they recognize their children for their good schoolwork.) They're less likely to feel that teachers are using real-world examples in the classroom or that teachers are allowing students to do what they do best every day.

But the hard work of teachers, parents, and students doesn't always mean students are ready for the future. **Fewer than one of 10 believe a high school dropout is ready for the world of work.** High school graduates fare only slightly better; about one of five say high school graduates are prepared for the workplace. And one-third believe high school graduates are ready for college. Parents of school-aged children and their counterparts with no children in school agree on these points.

College graduation is where Americans set the bar for readiness for work. **Half of Americans believe a college graduate is ready for the world of work.** Interestingly, one in five Americans doesn't share that view. Generally, parents of school-aged children are more optimistic about college graduates' readiness than are others.

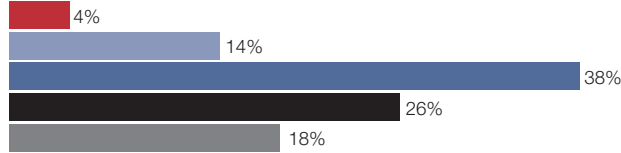


TABLES 11A-D. Next are some questions about students and their future. On a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

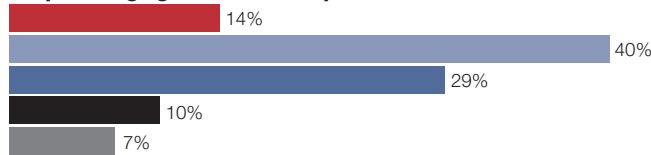
A. Today's high school dropout is ready for the world of work.



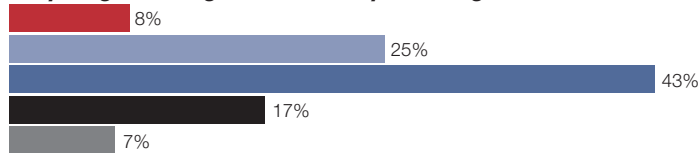
B. Today's high school graduate is ready for the world of work.



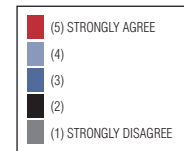
C. Today's college graduate is ready for the world of work.



D. Today's high school graduate is ready for college.



National totals '12



KEVIN HUFFMAN

COMMENTARY

Sophisticated public understands education



I am struck by the level of nuance in the public's understanding of our education system. In many ways, freed from the political blinders that hinder discussion in the policy community, parents and the public have a better grasp on what is and is not working. It's up to us to listen to them and offer them more voice and choice in education.

Americans know improvement is possible and necessary. The public recognizes that our schools are not where they need to be, and a growing majority recognizes the disparities that exist from school to school. Yet more than eight in 10 believe schools can close the achievement gap while maintaining high standards for all students.

Most Americans know a public school teacher well, and more than 70% say they have trust and confidence in teachers. At the same time, they also hold teachers to high expectations and believe training should be more rigorous. Over half favor requirements that teacher evaluations factor in student performance.

Unlike so many in the education policy world, parents and the general public seem capable of holding nuanced perspectives that recognize the challenges in education, but remain optimistic about the possibilities. We need to do more to grow opportunities for parents and the public to engage in building a stronger education system.

KEVIN HUFFMAN is Tennessee Department of Education Commissioner, Nashville, Tenn.

TABLES 12-18. For the following questions, please use a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree. You may use any number between 1 and 5.

	National Totals (Parents only) '12 %					
	Strongly Agree		Strongly Disagree		Don't know/refused	
	5	4	3	4	1	
TABLE 12. I know my child will graduate from high school.	91	5	2	0	0	2
TABLE 13. I know my child will find a good job after he or she graduates.	38	28	23	7	3	2
TABLE 14. My child's teachers make schoolwork relevant with real-world examples.	27	36	28	4	2	3
TABLE 15. At school, my child has the opportunity to do what he or she does best every day.	27	36	26	8	1	2
TABLE 16. In the last seven days, a teacher has given my child recognition or praise for doing good schoolwork.	57	15	7	10	7	5
TABLE 17. In the last seven days, I have given my child recognition or praise for doing good schoolwork.	75	17	2	1	3	2
TABLE 18. I feel that my child is safe at school.	57	27	12	2	1	2

Preparing and evaluating teachers

Teacher evaluation is one of the most daunting challenges facing state and local educators; incorporating student achievement results into new evaluation systems is presenting the greatest challenge. We asked Americans whether they support such a system and, if so, how much student scores should count.

We also asked Americans if teacher preparation programs should be more rigorous, and then we asked them to compare preparation programs for teachers with other professions like engineering, business, law, and medicine. We then asked Americans to share words they use to describe teachers who had the most positive influence on their lives. These questions help us create a profile of what Americans desire in their K-12 teachers.

FINDINGS

Americans are evenly divided on whether states should require that teacher evaluations include how well a teacher's students perform on standardized tests, and this finding is consistent across all demographic groups. Clearly, American opinion on this doesn't match the massive effort under way in many states and school districts to do so. Of the 52% who favor including students' performance on standardized tests in teacher evaluations, almost half said this should constitute between one-third and two-thirds of the teacher's evaluation.



Americans support rigorous entrance requirements into college-based teacher preparation programs. At least three of four Americans believe that entrance requirements into teacher preparation programs should be as rigorous as or more selective than engineering, business, pre-law, and pre-medicine. Further, two of three Americans believe increasing the rigor of college teacher preparation programs would produce more effective teachers.

Over 40% of Americans describe the teacher who had the most positive influence in their lives with words such as caring, compassionate, motivating, and inspiring; while just 17% of Americans thought intelligent, knowledgeable, persistent, hard-working, and demanding were words that describe the teacher who had the strongest influence on them.

For the third year in a row, **three of four Americans say they have trust and confidence in the men and women who teach children** in the public schools.

TABLE 19. Do you have trust and confidence in the men and women who are teaching children in the public schools?

	National Totals		
	'12 %	'11 %	'10 %
Yes	71	71	71
No	27	27	27
Don't know/refused	2	2	2

TABLE 20. Thinking about training teachers, should the entrance requirements into college teacher preparation programs be more rigorous, less rigorous, or should they be kept the same as they are now?

	National Totals '12 %
More rigorous	57
Less rigorous	2
Kept the same	37
Don't know/refused	4

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 21. In your opinion, if the entrance requirements into a college teacher preparation program were more rigorous, would more effective teachers graduate from that college?

	National Totals '12 %
Yes	67
No	29
Don't know/refused	4

BARNIE PHILIP JONES

COMMENTARY

Ask parents how to grade schools



One of the biggest challenges faced by K-12 public education is how to objectively evaluate student academic progress and the effectiveness of individual schools and teachers. In Florida, we've struggled with this question and developed the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in which schools receive an A, B, C, D, or F depending on student results on the FCAT. This year, FCAT was criticized for changes in

its grading criteria and for the responses to those criticisms, which have left parents upset that FCAT testing is unreliable and arbitrary.

In this year's PDK/Gallup poll, parents are divided on whether to give the public schools in their community an A or B (48%) or a C, D, or F (48%). Nationally, only 19% gave schools an A or B. But, when asked to rate their oldest child's school, 77% of parents gave that school an A or a B.

Involvement and understanding what the school actually was doing for their child mattered to parents. When parents of children in public schools were asked whether their child's teacher made schoolwork relevant, 63% said yes. The same percentage (63%) said their child had the opportunity to do what he or she does "best" every day at school. A large 74% of parents favorably agreed that their child had been recognized or praised in the last seven days. There were 71% of all parents who answered that they had trust and confidence in their child's teachers.

The bottom line is that parents are looking for teachers and schools that will encourage and nurture their child to achieve to the best of his or her abilities. Those are the teachers and the schools that should receive an A or B rating.

BARNIE PHILIP JONES is president of the Hillsborough Education Foundation, Tampa, Fla.

TABLES 22A-D. In your opinion, should the entrance requirements into college teacher preparation programs be more selective, less selective, or should they be the same as the entrance requirements into the following college programs?

	National Totals '12 %			
	Business	Pre-law	Engineering	Pre-med
More selective	38	33	29	33
Less selective	5	15	15	24
Same as	55	50	55	42
Don't know/refused	2	2	2	1

TABLE 23. Some states require that teacher evaluations include how well a teacher's students perform on standardized tests. Do you favor or oppose this requirement?

	National Totals '12 %
Favor	52
Oppose	47
Don't know/refused	1

TABLE 24. In your opinion, what percentage of a teacher's evaluation should be based on how well his or her students perform on standardized tests – less than one-third, between one-third and two-thirds, or more than two-thirds?

	National Totals '12 %	Adults favoring including student test scores in teacher evaluations '12 %
Less than one-third	35	14
One-third to two-thirds	40	48
More than two-thirds	23	35
Don't know/refused	2	1

TABLE 25. Please think about the teacher who has had the most positive influence in your life. Thinking about that teacher, please tell me three words or phrases that best describe how that teacher made a difference.

National Totals '12 (Responses in order of frequency of mentions)	National Totals '10
Caring	Caring
Encouraging	Encouraging
Attentive/believed in me	Interesting
Strict/tough/discipline	Personable
Challenging/demanding	Good/quality teacher/teaching
Good/great teacher	Helpful/dedicated/strict
Committed/dedicated	Motivating

Politics and education

Since this is a presidential election year, we would be remiss if we didn't ask Americans their opinions about the President's performance, about the two major political parties and their candidates for president and, in particular, about the federal budget as it relates to education. These questions gauge how important education issues rank in comparison to the economy in the run up to this year's presidential election.

FINDINGS

This year, the rating of President Obama's performance in support of public schools declined slightly from last year but was still improved over his ratings in 2010. While respondents who identified themselves as Democrats rated him higher than last year, Republicans rated him significantly lower, and independent voters rated him lower, too.

Overall, Democrats hold an edge as the political party that is more interested in improving education. However, independent voters are evenly divided on this question.

Shifting from political parties to presidential candidates, President Obama held a slight lead over Republican Mitt Romney as the leader who would strengthen public schools. Not surprising, declared Democrats supported Obama, and declared Republicans supported Romney, but declared independent voters favored Romney over Obama when asked about public education.

In 1996, when the U.S. economy was at full tilt, we asked Americans whether it was more important to balance the federal budget or improve the quality of education. Back then, almost two of three Americans said improve education. When asked that same question this year, we learned that **Americans have reversed their opinion, with 60% saying it's more important to balance the federal budget.** Could this be a harbinger that economic issues will be first in the minds of Americans as we approach the 2012 election, and that education issues may not play a significant role?

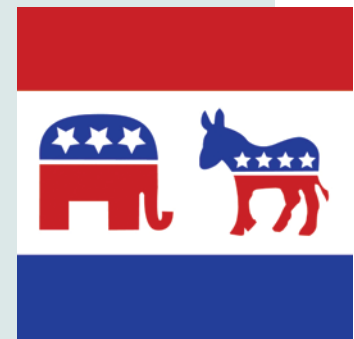


TABLE 26. President Barack Obama has been in office for over three years. **How would you grade his performance in support of public schools using the A, B, C, D, Fail scale?**

	National Totals				Rep. '12 %	Dem. '12 %	Ind. '12 %
	'12 %	'11 %	'10 %	'09 %			
A & B	37	41	34	45	7	71	27
A	10	11	7	12	0	24	5
B	27	30	27	33	7	47	23
C	25	25	26	26	28	15	33
D	17	14	18	11	26	8	19
Fail	17	15	15	10	35	4	17
Don't know/refused	4	5	7	8	4	3	4

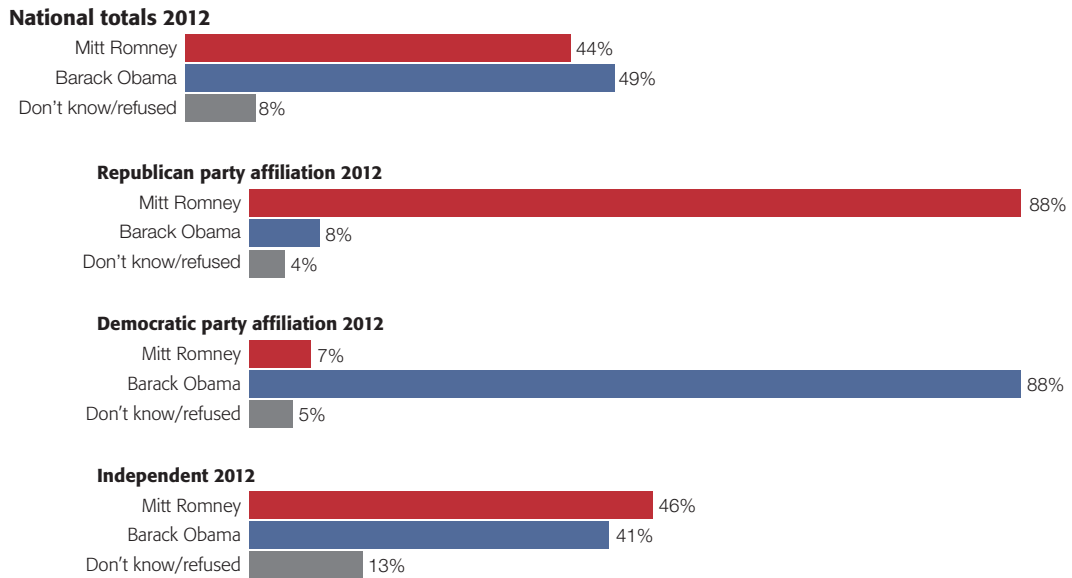
TABLE 27. In your opinion, which of the two major political parties is more interested in improving public education in this country – the Democratic Party or the Republican Party?

	'12 %	National Totals				Rep. '12 %	Dem. '12 %	Ind. '12 %
		'08 %	'04 %	'00 %	'96 %			
Dem. Party	50	44	42	41	44	11	90	41
Rep. Party	38	27	35	29	27	80	3	40
No difference volunteered					15			
Don't know/refused	13	29	23	30	14	9	7	19

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

We asked Americans their opinions about the two major political parties and their candidates for president.

TABLE 28. Suppose you were voting solely on the basis of a desire to strengthen the public schools. Who would you vote for in the presidential election this November – Mitt Romney or Barack Obama?



RAMON GONZALEZ

COMMENTARY

Public support requires investment



As principal of a Title I secondary school in the South Bronx, it's heartening to see that Americans still believe in the importance of improving urban schools and closing the achievement gap facing students of color. However, Americans are still wary of paying more in taxes to affect these improvements, especially for children whose parents are illegal immigrants.

School leaders haven't done enough to make the public aware of the effect of their support. An educated public is our greatest benefactor. We need to make our budgets transparent, become more media savvy, develop partnerships with community stakeholders, and demonstrate our effectiveness.

New York City has been at the forefront of ensuring that school budgets and action plans are available to the public online, but we must do more. Each school should offer open community workshops to build a tangible understanding of our needs and expenditures. At my school, we've used media and local campaigns with our school leadership team to make the community aware of our initiatives to close the achievement gap, including a Summer Bridge Arts Institute, a career day for community business leaders, and an after-school program that incorporates academics, arts enrichment, and athletics. We conduct home visits and celebrations to invest in our families. We invite universities to conduct research in our school to measure and improve student achievement — and then we share the results. We've found that we must demonstrate our investment in the community in order to ask the community to invest in us.

RAMON GONZALEZ is principal of M.S. 223, a public middle school in the South Bronx in New York City.

National totals 2008



National totals 2004



National totals 2000



TABLE 29. In your opinion, which is more important for the federal government to do in the next five years – balance the federal budget or improve the quality of the education system in the nation?

	National Totals		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	'12 %	'96 %	'12 %	'12 %	'12 %
Balance the federal budget	60	25	83	37	65
Improve the quality of education system	38	64	15	63	33
Equally important	9				
Don't know/refused	2	2	2	0	2

Grading the schools

For several years, we have posed three related questions on school quality. Using letter grades A to Fail, we ask Americans to grade the public schools in their community, grade the public schools nationally, and — if they are parents — to grade the school that their oldest child attends. Americans have been surprisingly consistent when assigning grades to schools in their community, but less so with regard to the nation's schools and schools their children attend.

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

FINDINGS

This year, as we have seen for several years, almost half of Americans give the schools in their community either an A or B. Democrats are slightly more favorable about their schools than Republicans, but the difference falls within the sampling error. Midwesterners like their schools more (56% gave A's and B's); Westerners like their schools less (38% gave A's and B's). Public school parents rate the schools in their community significantly higher (63% gave A's and B's) than adults who don't have children in school (43% gave A's and B's).

Americans are consistent when grading the nation's schools with fewer than two of 10 assigning a grade of either A or B. In fact, **almost 50% of Americans assigned a mediocre grade of C to the nation's schools.** Only Americans under age 40 are more optimistic about the nation's schools, with 23% assigning grades of A or B.

The last of the three-question sequence asks parents to grade the school their oldest child attends. With this question, **we continue to see an increase in the percentage of public school parents who assign either an A or B** — up 6 percentage points from 10 years ago and 13 percentage points from 20 years ago.

Each year, we document the schism between public opinion on local schools as compared to the nation's schools. Further evidence is documented in an independent poll conducted by Gallup that measures confidence in a variety of American institutions. In that annual poll, the military is rated the highest while public schools are in the middle but moving downward with a significant five percentage point drop this year, confirming that **Americans are losing confidence in their schools.** In case you're wondering, Congress has securely captured the lowest rating of any American institution.

TABLE 30. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves in your community were graded in the same way. **What grade would you give the public schools here — A, B, C, D, or Fail?**

	National Totals				
	'12 %	'07 %	'02 %	'97 %	'92 %
A & B	48	45	47	46	40
A	12	9	10	10	9
B	36	36	37	36	31
C	31	34	34	32	33
D	13	14	10	11	12
Fail	4	5	3	6	5
Don't know/refused	4	2	6	5	10

TABLE 31. Using the A, B, C, D, and Fail scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

	Public School Parents				
	'12 %	'07 %	'02 %	'97 %	'92 %
A & B	77	67	71	64	64
A	37	19	27	26	22
B	40	48	44	38	42
C	16	24	20	23	24
D	6	5	6	7	6
Fail	0	3	2	4	4
Don't know/refused	1	1	1	2	2

TABLE 32. How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? **What grade would you give the public schools nationally — A, B, C, D, or Fail?**

	National Totals				
	'12 %	'07 %	'02 %	'97 %	'92 %
A & B	19	16	24	22	18
A	1	2	2	2	2
B	18	14	22	20	16
C	47	57	47	48	48
D	23	18	13	15	18
Fail	7	5	3	6	4
Don't know/refused	4	4	13	9	12

SARAH NICHOLAS

COMMENTARY

Schools closest to us look the best



When asked to grade public schools A, B, C, D, or Fail, a majority of adults rated the school their child attends high, their surrounding areas slightly lower, and the nation as a whole the lowest of all. Why do they rank each kind of school so differently?

About 80% said they knew a public school teacher personally. I imagine that many see how hard these teachers work and how much they dedicate their lives to the job in their community and so they don't blame them for problems at schools. Having never been around the other schools or seen those teachers at work, that's an easier place to see problems.

Americans seem to agree that we need to improve education for children. But that will require students and adults who are willing to stand up for the changes that need to be made. If we like the schools in our own backyards, what do we have to do to make sure that children everywhere have access to the same kind of good schools?

SARAH NICHOLAS is president of the Future Educators Association™. She is a freshman at Brigham Young University, Salt Lake City, Utah, where she is majoring in secondary math education.



Student dropouts

President Obama threw down the gauntlet during his 2012 State of the Union address when he said, "So, tonight, I am proposing that every state — every state — requires that all students stay in high school until they graduate or turn 18." While his proposal met with bipartisan applause from Congress, we were curious to know whether Americans support raising the age of compulsory school attendance to 18 and, further, to get their reaction to a proposal that some policy makers have offered linking graduation with the issuance of a driver's license.

FINDINGS

In 1972, fewer than half of Americans thought students should be required to attend school until they reach age 18. Forty years later, that percentage has increased to **almost two of three Americans who believe students should remain in school at least until they're 18 years old.**

On the other hand, **Americans are split on a proposal that students should be required to graduate from high school in order to receive a license to drive a car.**

TABLE 33. In each state, children are required to go to school until they reach a certain age. **If you were the one to decide, what would be the age in this state?**

Responses outside the range of ages 14 to 19 not reported.	National Totals	
	'12 %	'72 %
14 or 15 years	2	3
16 years	15	28
17 years	17	11
18 years	63	42
19 years	--	8

TABLE 34. In your opinion, should students be required to graduate from high school in order to be issued a license to drive a car?

	National Totals '12 %	Public School Parents '12 %
Yes	47	47
No	53	52
Don't know/refused	0	1

Connection to the public schools

Knowing that only about a quarter of American adults have school-age children, we were curious to know how connected Americans are to their community's schools. Do they visit schools? Do they volunteer at schools? Do they vote in school elections? Do they know a teacher well?

FINDINGS

Over half of Americans said they visited a public school in the last 12 months, but this is strongly correlated to whether they have children in school. Ninety-five percent of public school parents indicate that they had visited the school, but only 38% of Americans without children had been in a school building in the past 12 months.

Only about one of four Americans said they volunteered in schools, while 42% said they voted in an election that affected the community schools in the last 12 months. Finally, three of four Americans indicated that they know a public school teacher very well. Again, the percentage is higher for parents with children in school.

TABLE 35. In the last 12 months, have you voted in an election that has affected your community's schools?

	National Totals '12 %	Public School Parents '12 %
Yes	42	53
No	56	47
Don't know/refused	2	0

TABLE 36. In the last 12 months, have you visited any public school?

	National Totals '12 %	Public School Parents '12 %
Yes	55	95
No	45	5

TABLE 37. In the last 12 months, have you volunteered at any public school?

	National Totals '12 %	Public School Parents '12 %
Yes	27	58
No	73	42

TABLE 38. Do you know at least one public school teacher very well?

	National Totals '12 %	Public School Parents '12 %
Yes	76	87
No	24	13
Don't know/refused	0	0

Share your opinion!

How would you have answered questions in this year's PDK/Gallup poll? Visit PDK's Facebook page to have your say.

www.facebook.com/pdkintl

Choice, charters, vouchers, & the parent option

Just when we think we have identified a trend, we are confronted with information suggesting otherwise. As we have for the last decade, we included questions on charter schools and private school vouchers, and we were surprised by the responses to both. Further, we added a new question on what's termed the parent trigger law. California and other states have enacted legislation allowing parents to petition to remove the leadership and staff at a failing school. We wanted to know if Americans support this legislation.

FINDINGS

For almost 10 years, we have documented Americans' increasing support for charter schools, peaking last year with 70% in favor. For the first time, **support for charter schools declined, down to 66% this year.** In the past, support for charter schools has been apolitical, but this year we noted that Republicans were more supportive (80%) than Democrats (54%).

Last year, we documented the lowest level of support for private school vouchers with only 34% in favor. However, **this year's approval rating jumped 10 percentage points to 44%.**

Seventy percent of Americans favor giving parents whose children attend a failing school the option of mounting a petition drive requesting that the teachers and principal be removed. This has greater support among Republican (76%) and independent (75%) voters than among Democrats (61%).

REBECCA MIELIWOCKI

COMMENTARY

Americans feel good about teachers



What a wonderful shot in the arm this year's survey results are for the American schoolteacher. The core truth is that Americans are confident in their child's teachers and proud of our educational system. They see the best educators as caring, attentive, and demanding professionals. They want us to have the freedom to create relevant, rigorous, and engaging lessons for students and to have our effectiveness measured fairly through both classroom observations and student scores on standardized tests. Americans want teachers held to high standards from the moment we enter a preparation program to our last day in the classroom, and they want us to improve how we prepare young people for the rigors of college and their careers. These are all good things. Just like teachers themselves, Americans want to see schools and the teaching profession elevated and strengthened.

The great news is that kids are learning more than ever before from teachers who are better trained than at any time in history. Walk into most classrooms in America, and you'll see tremendous things happening. Yet, the persistent negative messages about public schools and teachers remain. If we hope to attract the best and the brightest into the profession and keep them there, we've got to put an end to this. I, for one, will do my part to share the good news. American educators are hard at work, we care desperately about the future of our students, we want high standards, we are on a quest to be better every day, and we are so proud to have the opportunity to teach your children. I hope you'll help me spread the word.

REBECCA MIELIWOCKI is 2012 National Teacher of the Year. She teaches 7th-grade English at Luther Burbank Middle School, Burbank, Calif.

TABLE 39. As you may know, charter schools operate under a charter or contract that frees them from many of the state regulations imposed on public schools and permits them to operate independently. **Do you favor or oppose the idea of charter schools?**

	National Totals				
	'12 %	'11 %	'10 %	'09 %	'08 %
Favor	66	70	68	64	51
Oppose	30	27	28	33	35
Don't know/refused	4	3	4	3	14

TABLE 40. Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?

	National Totals	
	'12 %	'11 %
Favor	44	34
Oppose	55	65
Don't know/refused	1	1

TABLE 41. Some states are considering laws that allow parents to petition to remove the leadership and staff at failing schools. **Do you favor or oppose such laws in your own state?**

	National Totals '12 %	Public School Parents '12 %
Favor	70	76
Oppose	28	22
Don't know/refused	2	2

Bullying

Bullying is in the news with tragic stories of harassment in Iowa, Montana, and New Jersey, among other places. While we believe bullying is an important topic to explore in the poll, we hesitated. We worried that a few questions could not properly capture the toxicity that bullying imparts in our workplaces, cyber communities, and schools. In the end, we decided it was too important to ignore. We began by asking Americans if they had been bullied or if they had bullied others, and then we asked a couple of questions on how schools should respond to bullying, both inside and outside the school building.

FINDINGS

Almost one of two American adults said they had been bullied by another student when they were in school. When asked if they had bullied others, the percentages dropped precipitously, with only 16% of Americans indicating that they had bullied other students. In both questions, the percentage of “yes” responses was higher for Americans under age 40.

Three of four Americans believe that bullying prevention should be part of a school’s curriculum, and slightly more than half felt that schools should investigate and discipline students even when bullying occurred outside of school, including what occurs over the Internet.

TABLE 42. When you were a student in school, were you bullied by another student?

	National Totals '12 %
Yes	45
No	55
Don't know/refused	0

TABLE 43. When you were a student in school, did you bully another student?

	National Totals '12 %
Yes	16
No	84
Don't know/refused	0

ANATOMY OF AN ANNUAL POLL

What steps do PDK/Gallup poll co-directors **Shane Lopez** and **Bill Bushaw** follow in developing this poll each year? They, the PDK and Gallup staff, put in hours and hours of work. This is the nutshell version:

- January** Solicit issues, topics, and questions for the poll from policy makers and educators.
- February** Convene an advisory committee to consider suggestions, select topics, and frame questions.
- March** Finalize poll topics and search the PDK/Gallup poll archives to determine if similar questions have been asked in the past. Draft preliminary wording for new questions.
- April** Assemble and review a draft survey instrument to ensure that question items are written correctly and are free of any ordering bias. Conduct test interviews.
- May** Fine-tune the final survey questionnaire for interviewers. Administer telephone interviews and collect data. Match sample and weight to reflect U.S. census population parameters.
- June** Review and analyze data.
- July** Write about results for an article in the September issue of *Kappan*.
- August** Release results to media, PDK members, U.S. Congress, school district superintendents, state education commissioners, and other policy makers.
- September** Publish complete poll report in the September issue of *Kappan* and post online at www.pdkintl.org, www.gallup.com/poll/1612/education.aspx, and www.gallupstudentpoll.com.

TABLE 44. In your opinion, should bullying prevention be part of the school’s curriculum?

	National Totals '12 %
Yes	78
No	22
Don't know/refused	0

TABLE 45. In your opinion, should schools investigate and discipline students involved in bullying incidents outside of school, including bullying that occurs over the Internet?

	National Totals '12 %
Yes	58
No	41
Don't know/refused	1

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

What to do now?

You have reviewed the findings, read the questions exactly as they were asked, and considered the tabulations of their answers. What do you think? Are we a nation divided with little hope of resolving our differences? Or are we a nation that can agree to disagree on some issues while seeking common ground on others?

Americans told us again this year that **our nation needs high-quality teachers who are caring and intelligent, hard-working and compassionate**. Working together, can we build upon these beliefs to create teacher preparation programs in our colleges and universities that are as rigorous as they are for other professions, while producing educators with the knowledge, skills, and empathy they will need to succeed?

While some Americans are withholding judgment, **most believe the common core standards developed by governors and state education commissioners can make U.S. education more competitive globally** and can create a more consistent education experience in school districts across the nation. Can educators undertake the demanding job of changing what and how they teach to align to these standards? Can policy makers provide an environment that encourages educators to change while recognizing that it may take several years to measure the success of this effort?

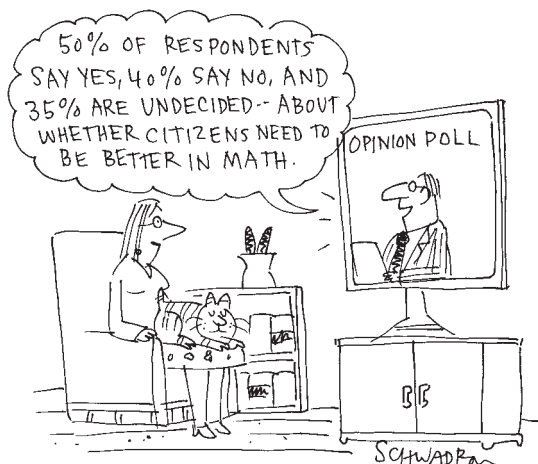
While there have been pockets of innovation, many schools function as they did 50 years ago. Some children respond to traditional teaching approaches; increasingly, others don't. Some children are prepared for college; many aren't. **Americans agree that we must close the achievement gap, and they believe it can be done without lowering standards**. Americans agree that high school dropouts aren't prepared for work and that high school graduates are neither prepared for work nor college. Although we are divided on many issues, can we agree to redesign our schools to better engage more children? Can our ultimate goal be to help more students find success in school and graduate ready for a career or for college?

We confess that as coauthors of this poll, **we are optimists**. We believe we will attract and keep high-quality teachers who are rigorously prepared and that we can create a stronger curriculum, more engaging instructional approaches, and better techniques to assess student learning. We believe we will increase the number of students who graduate from high school and that they will be better prepared for college and careers. And we believe we will steadily close the achievement gap, providing opportunities for all young Americans to be successful.

Come to think of it, many of these changes are already under way, and according to these poll findings, these efforts have the complete support of the American public.

SAMPLE DESIGN AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Findings for the 2012 PDK/Gallup poll are based on 1,002 completed interviews. Gallup administered the survey from May 7 to June 10, 2012, with a national sample of adults age 18 and older drawn from the Gallup Panel. The Gallup Panel is a proprietary, probability-based longitudinal panel of U.S. households who have been selected using random digit dialing (RDD) sampling methods ensuring the inclusion of households with listed, unlisted, and cellular telephone numbers. Gallup sampled a national cross-section of households to yield a representative survey across all segments of the population in telephone-owning households. Gallup used a four-call design to complete and interview each intended respondent. The obtained sample was weighted to be representative of U.S. adults nationwide.



For findings based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is 4 percentage points; in the case of subsamples, the margin of error is higher. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE*

Adults	%
No children in school	67
Public school parents	27
Nonpublic school parents	4
Age	%
Over 40	67
40 and under	32
Gender	%
Male	49
Female	51
Region	%
East	18
Midwest	23
South	36
West	23
Political Party	%
Republican	28
Democrat	36
Independent	35
Undesignated	1
Education	%
Total college	62
Total high school	38

*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to weighted samples and rounding.

PDK ARCHIVES AND DATABASE

Copies of all PDK/Gallup polls are available to PDK members free at www.pdkintl.org. Nonmembers can buy previous polls for \$4.95 each.

PDK members also may access the PDK/Gallup poll archive by logging in to PDK at www.pdkintl.org. The Gallup poll archive includes more than 800 questions — organized by topic — asked of Americans since the first PDK/Gallup poll in 1969. Multiple-year results are provided when the same question was used in subsequent polls.

ADVISORY PANEL

Poll codirectors **William J. Bushaw** and **Shane Lopez** assembled a panel of experts in education to select the topics asked in the 2012 PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. PDK International and Gallup express their appreciation for the guidance provided by these panel members.

Kathy Andreson, president, PDK International

Barnett Berry, founder and president, Center for Teaching Quality

Kate Berseth, executive vice president, EF Education First Ltd.

Kimberly Oliver Burnim, former National Teacher of the Year, Broad Acres Elementary School, Silver Spring, Md.

Virginia Edwards, president, Educational Projects in Education

Karen Gallagher, dean, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California

M. René Islas, director, Center for Results, Learning Forward

John Jackson, president and CEO, Schott Foundation

A. Richardson Love, program manager for education, MetLife Foundation

Wendy Puriefoy, president, Public Education Network

Connie Rath, dean, Gallup University

Johnny Taylor, president, Thurgood Marshall College Fund

Ron Thorpe, president, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

Rob Weil, director, AFT Field Services

Cheryl Williams, executive director, Learning First Alliance

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Special thanks to PDK staffer Melanie Keller for her assistance with this year's poll.