

The 50th annual **PDK** Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

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# Teaching:

## Respect but dwindling appeal





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The 50th annual

# PDK Poll

of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

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# Teaching: Respect but dwindling appeal

**Americans trust and support teachers, but they draw the line at wanting their own children to join a profession they see as undervalued and low-paid.**

**T**wo-thirds of Americans say teachers are underpaid, and an overwhelming 78% of public school parents say they would support teachers in their community if they went on strike for more pay, according to the 2018 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools.

Even as most Americans continue to say they have high trust and confidence in teachers, a majority also say they don't want their own children to become teachers, most often citing poor pay and benefits as the primary reason for their reluctance.

These findings are part of the 50th annual PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, which queried U.S. adults about a range of issues confronting education, including teacher pay and the teaching profession, school security, options for improving the public schools, perceptions of opportunities for different groups of children, college affordability, the value of a college degree, and school schedules. The survey is based on a random representative sample of 1,042 adults with an oversample to 515 parents of school-age children in May 2018. Langer Research Associates of New York



City produced the poll for PDK International using the GfK KnowledgePanel®, in which participants are randomly recruited via address-based sampling and invited to participate in surveys online. Full details about the poll’s methodology are available at [pdkpoll.org/methodology](http://pdkpoll.org/methodology).

Earlier, PDK released responses to a series of school security questions. An abbreviated version of those results is included in this supplement.

*78% of public school parents say they would support teachers in their community if they went on strike for more pay.*

Among key findings in this report are the remarkable support for improving teacher salaries — and record-high compunctions about entering the profession, in part given poor pay. Two-thirds of Americans say teacher pay in their community is too low; just 6% say it’s too high. An overwhelming 73% say they would support teachers in their community if they went on strike for higher salaries, including about 6 in 10 Republicans.

As things stand, 54% of Americans say they would not want their child to become a public school teacher, a majority for the first time in a question initially asked in 1969. Poor pay and benefits are at the top of the list of reasons why, cited by 3 in 10 of those who’d rather not see their child go into teaching. In a related result, funding remains the most commonly cited problem facing the public schools, a result that’s been consistent since the early 2000s.

Among other notable results:

**School security.** Arming teachers trails other school security measures supported by parents. Parents lack strong confidence that schools can protect their children against a school shooting but favor armed police, mental health screenings, and metal detectors more than arming teachers to protect their children.

**School improvement.** Nearly 8 in 10 Americans prefer reforming the existing public school system rather than finding an alternative approach — more than in any year since the question was first asked two decades ago. There’s no difference closer to home: 78% say they’d rather reform than replace the local school system.

**Spending and funding.** The public supports spending more on students who need extra support (60%) rather than spending the same amount on every student (39%). But they divide evenly on where the funds should come from: Half favor raising taxes to

accommodate the additional need; half say the schools should spend less on students who require fewer resources, with sharp partisan and ideological differences. In a separate question and for the 19th consecutive year, Americans have named the lack of funding as the biggest problem facing their local schools.

**Then and now.** Fifty-five percent say students today receive a worse education than what they experienced when they were students. U.S. adults see job preparation as particularly weak, but they also identify some areas — such as college prep, encouraging critical thinking, and providing a good education for all — where today’s students are receiving a better education than they did.

**Opportunities and expectations.** The public says a child’s education opportunities vary based on family income, racial or ethnic group, and urbanicity. Lower-income, rural, and black and Hispanic students are underserved compared with their counterparts, they say. Many Americans also say schools expect less from these students.

**College affordability.** The poll finds broad support for proposals to make college more affordable. Seventy-five percent of Americans are in favor of free tuition for community college — up sharply in just the past few years — while 68% support increasing federal funding to help students pay tuition at four-year colleges. Currently, only about half of K-12 parents say they’re at least somewhat likely to be able to pay for college — and among those making less than \$50,000 a year, that falls to just one-third.

**The value of a degree.** Hand in hand with support for tuition assistance, the public sees value in educational attainment. Eighty-two percent see a four-year degree as good preparation for a good-paying job — though only 22% say it’s “very” good preparation. That view rises sharply for graduate degrees.

**School hours.** On a topic that’s been debated across the generations, high school parents are largely satisfied with their child’s current school schedule. But it could be better: More than half say current start and end times are off their ideal by at least 30 minutes — generally, too early.

**School grades.** The public schools continue to suffer from an image deficit. Among those who know them best, parents of current students, 70% give their oldest child’s school an A or B grade. Among the public more broadly, by contrast, only four in 10 give their local schools an A or B. In results that are typical across the years, far fewer give top grades to the public schools nationally, just 19%.

The report that follows delves into each of these topics in greater detail, evaluating results of related questions and differences among groups. More complete results for each category are available at [pdkpoll.org](http://pdkpoll.org).

**WHAT AMERICANS SAID . . .**

# Are we paying teachers what they're worth?



After several high-profile teacher strikes in the past year, the 2018 PDK poll finds broad support for higher teacher pay. Two-thirds say teacher salaries are too low, a new high in data since the first PDK poll in 1969. This result was confirmed by separately measuring reactions to a starting salary of \$39,000 — the national average for public school teachers, according to the National Education Association. Again, 65% say it's too low.

Majorities across groups say teachers in their communities are paid too little, ranging from 85% of blacks to 55% of conservatives and rural residents. Views that teacher pay is “about right” peak at about one-third of Republicans and conservatives, those in the Northeast or Midwest, rural residents, seniors, and adults with no more than a high school diploma.

Few say teachers are overpaid. Just 6% of all adults say teacher salaries are too high, peaking at 19% of Northeasterners and dropping to single digits in other regions. (National Education Association data indicate that starting salaries are highest in the Northeast, on average \$42,300, and lowest in the Midwest, on average \$36,000.)

One's financial situation strongly influences views on a starting salary for teachers. Four in 10 of those with household incomes of \$50,000 or less say a starting salary of \$39,000 is

“about right,” but only one-quarter of those with \$100,000-plus incomes say it's acceptable.

## **Would you support a teacher strike?**

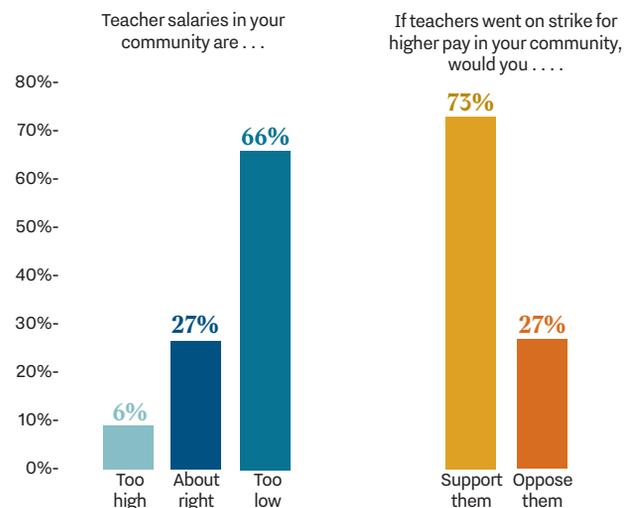
Despite declining union affiliation in general, 73% say they would support public school teachers in their community if they went on strike for higher pay. Even among public school parents — those who would be most directly affected by a strike — 78% say they'd support a teacher walkout.

Regional differences occur here as well. Southerners (78%) are more likely than Northeasterners (67%) or Midwesterners (69%) to say they'd support a teacher strike for higher pay; Westerners fall in between at 74%. Four in 10 Southerners and Westerners say they'd “strongly” support a strike, compared with those living in the Northeast (28%) and Midwest (23%).

Majorities across partisan lines say they'd support teachers striking for higher pay, albeit with wide gaps. Eighty-seven percent of Democrats say they'd back a strike, 49% saying they'd do so strongly. That falls to 57% among Republicans, just two in 10 strongly. Independents fall in between at 71% support, including 24% strongly.

## Teacher pay

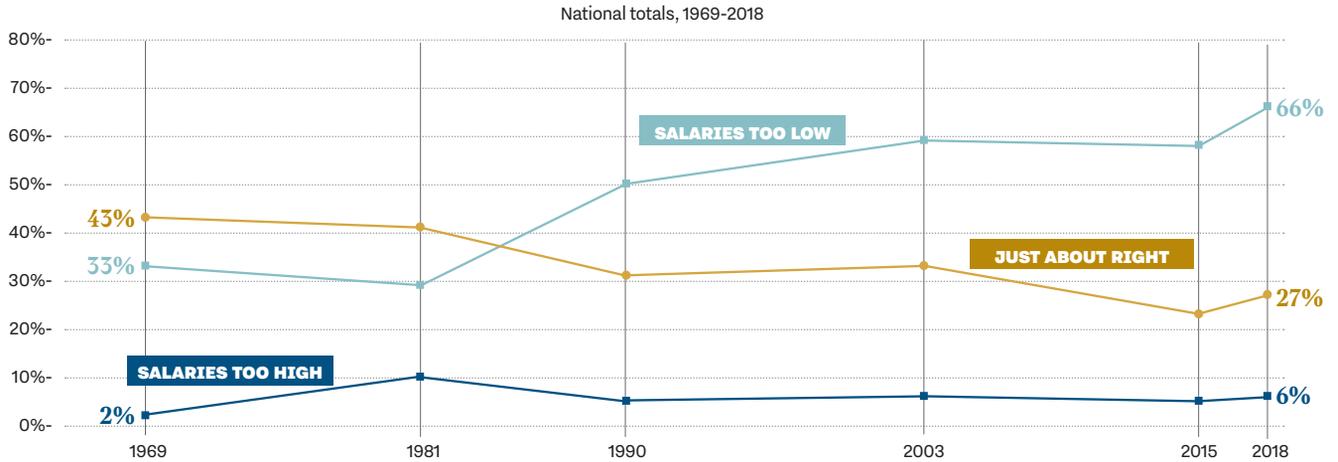
National totals, 2018



**PDK poll, 2018**

*Majorities across groups say teachers in their communities are paid too little.*

# Teacher salaries too high? Too low?

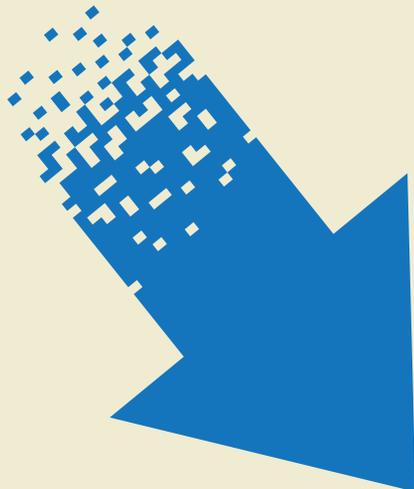


Gallup produced the PDK polls from 1969 to 2015. Langer Research Associates has produced the PDK poll since 2016, including the 2018 poll.

## PDK poll, 2018

### Digging deeper

Teacher salaries also emerge as a prominent issue when we ask Americans to identify the biggest problems facing the public schools. Nine percent specifically mention teacher salaries, and 26% cite funding issues more broadly. Concern about funding is far higher among adults who say teachers are underpaid (32%) than among those who say they are not underpaid (14%).



*Just 6% of all adults say teacher salaries are too high.*

### THE QUESTIONS

- Q1.** Do you think salaries for teachers in your community are too high, too low, or just about right?
- Q2.** Imagine that the average starting salary for a public school teacher in your community was \$39,000 a year. Would you consider that too high, too low, or just about right?
- Q3.** If public school teachers in your community went out on strike for higher pay, would you support them or oppose them?

Learn more and join the conversation at [pdkpoll.org](http://pdkpoll.org)

**WHAT AMERICANS SAID . . .**

# Would you want your child to become a teacher?



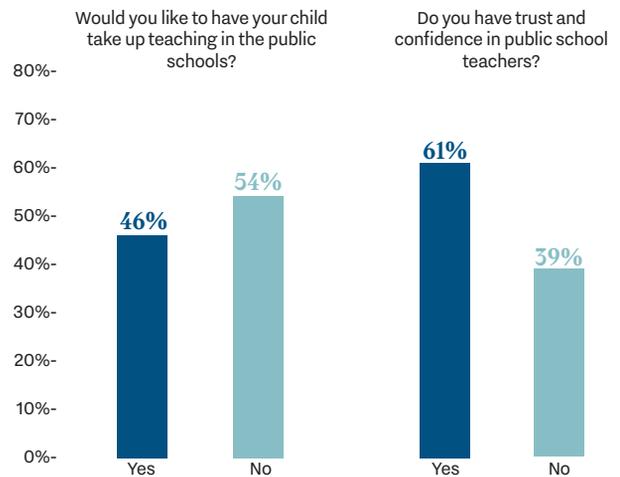
Public school teaching as a career path has lost much of its allure. Fifty-four percent of parents would not like one of their children to take up teaching in the public schools as a career, a majority response to this question for the first time since we began asking the question in 1969. Although 46% would support a teaching career, that's down steeply from 70% in 2009 and from a high of 75% in the first PDK poll in 1969. Support has been lower just once before, by a single percentage point, during a trough in the early 1980s.

Sixty-seven percent of Hispanics would favor their child working as a teacher, declining to 51% of blacks and 40% of whites. Whites with college degrees are essentially split, while those without a degree oppose it — 69% of white men without degrees say they wouldn't want their child to take up teaching, as do 59% of white women with no degree.

Americans may not want their children to become teachers, but most say they have trust and confidence in teachers — 61% — although this leaves four in 10 (39%) who lack such confidence. That's the highest lack of confidence in seven PDK polls since the question was first asked in 2010, though it was similar (35%) in 2014. Parents of school-age children have higher trust than those without children in school, 68% vs. 59%.

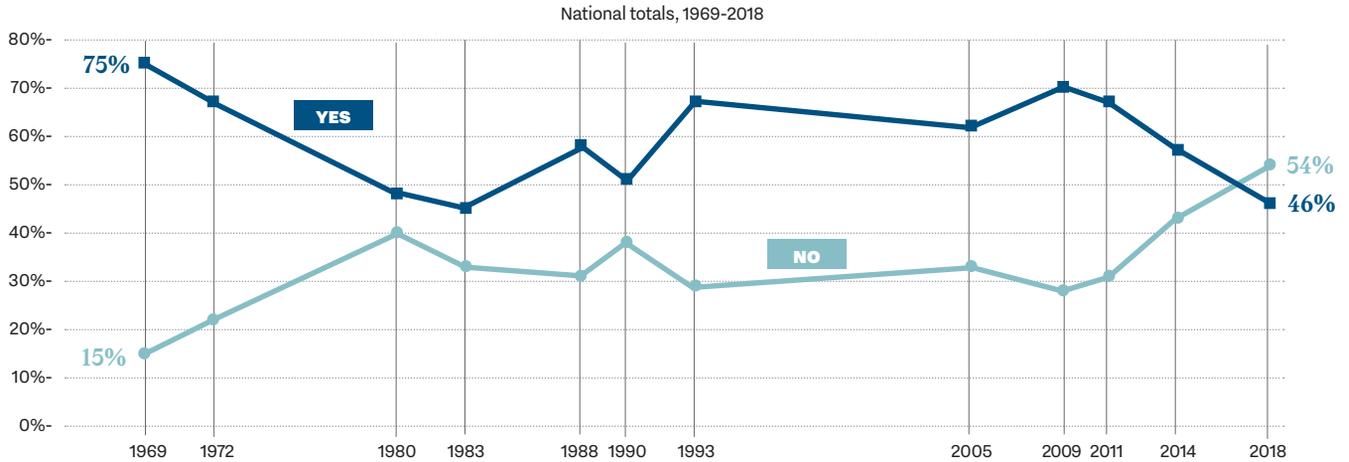
## Views of public school teaching

National totals, 2018



PDK poll, 2018

# Would you like your child to become a teacher?



Gallup produced the PDK polls from 1969 to 2015. Langer Research Associates has produced the PDK poll since 2016, including the 2018 poll.

## PDK poll, 2018

Liberals and white women with college degrees, as well as those who rate public schools highly, are most likely to have trust and confidence in teachers, three-quarters or more of each. This drops to only about half of conservatives, Northeasterners, white men without degrees, and adults who give low grades to the schools.

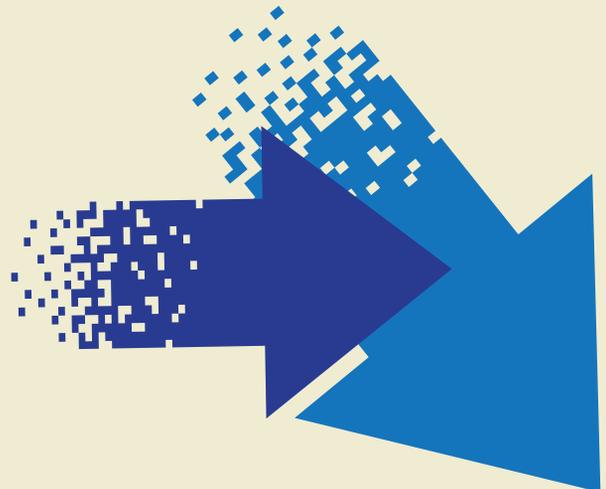
*Public school teaching as a career path has lost much of its allure.*

### THE QUESTIONS

- Q4.** Do you have trust and confidence in the men and women who are teaching children in the public schools?
- Q5.** Would you like to have a child of yours take up teaching in the public schools as a career?
- Q6.** [Asked if the response was no] Why would you not like to have a child of yours take up teaching — what's the main reason?

## Digging deeper

■ ■ ■ Those who think more highly of the public schools are more apt to like the idea of their child becoming a teacher. Among those who give schools nationally an A or B grade, 63% would support a teaching career for a child, compared with 42% of adults who give schools a C or lower.



## Why not go into teaching?

In an open-ended question, the most common responses mention inadequate pay and benefits, followed by student behavior and lack of discipline. Among the sharpest gaps, 41% of Democrats who wouldn't want their child to teach cite poor pay, compared with about one-quarter of Republicans and Independents. Republicans (17%) and Independents (15%) are slightly more likely than Democrats (6%) to mention student behavior as a reason to avoid teaching.

Here are some of the answers said in response to the question: "Why would you not like to have a child of yours take up teaching?"

- Crappy pay.
- It's dangerous being a teacher.
- Low salary, low social respect, and physically exhausting.
- The classes are too large, the pay is awful.
- Poor pay considering all the responsibilities and personal expenses involved.
- Overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated.
- Too much chaos in public schools.
- Teaching seems to be more of a thankless job these days because so many kids are just going through the motions and not committed to learning.
- They are not paid well. In our community, a teacher has a hard time owning a home.
- Their time and effort outside the classroom, plus the emotional toll of investing in individual students, as well as classes in whole, is not reflected in their paychecks.
- Kids are mean.
- Low pay, too political.
- Too much disrespect.
- Too much bureaucracy.
- The teachers get treated like crap if kids aren't up to par on the testing scores. They also don't get paid enough. It's sad we pay more to guys running back and forth on courts and fields than we do to the ones we entrust with our children.
- Because the students run the classroom. The teachers cannot force them to pay attention or do what they want them to do. Students that don't want to pay attention make it hard for the children that want to learn.
- Low income. They would struggle to make ends meet.
- The income is not enough to raise a family.
- The reason there are not always quality teachers in public schools is because of the way they are paid and treated. I would not want my future child to be treated poorly or paid less than they deserve for a job that is as difficult as teaching children.
- It's a thankless job.
- Because the kids these days are rude and disrespectful.
- It's not rewarding enough. It's a very tough job.

## WHAT AMERICANS SAID . . .

# Is your child safe at school?



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.

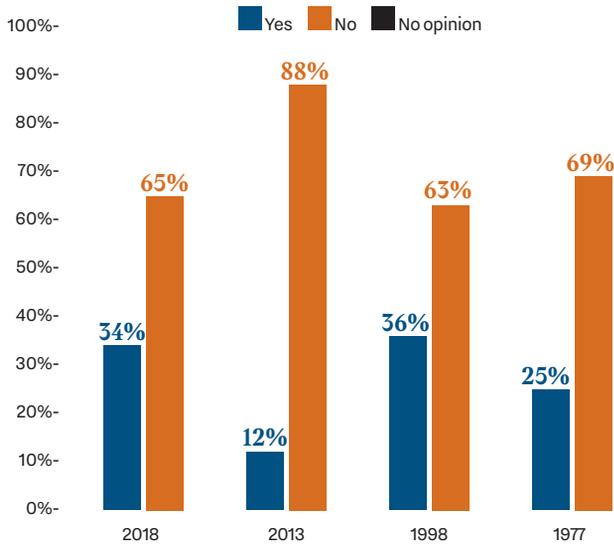
Just 27% of K-12 parents express strong confidence that their school could deter an attack like those that have wrenched communities across the nation. One in 3 parents (34%), moreover, fears for their child's physical safety in school, up sharply to a level last seen two decades ago, a disturbing number 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% were fearful.

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 (48%) compared with those making \$100,000 or more (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.

Reaching for solutions, parents overwhelmingly support armed police in the schools (80%), mental health screening of all students (76%), and metal detectors at entrances (74%). 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

## Do you fear for your child's safety at school?

Parents of school-age children, 1977-2018

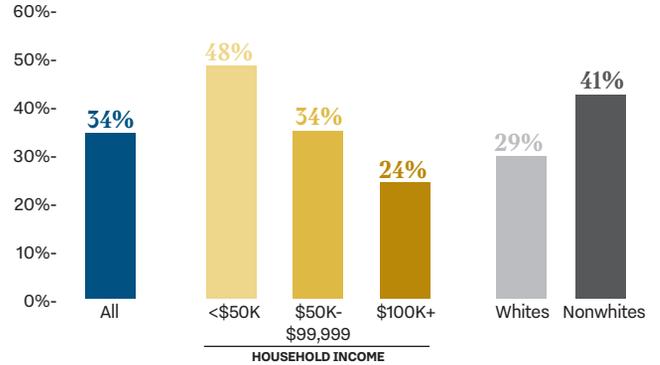


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**PDK poll, 2018**

## Fear for child's safety at school

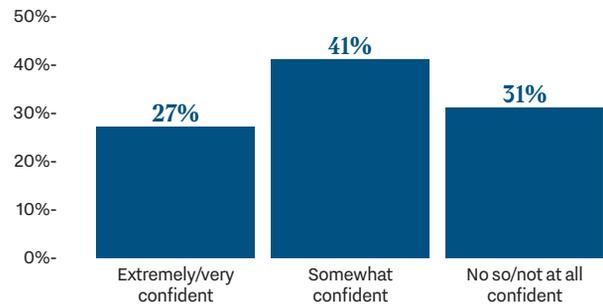
Parents of school-age children, 2018



**PDK poll, 2018**

## Confidence in security against school shootings

Parents of school-age children, 2018



**PDK poll, 2018**

Much more detail about the responses to these questions is available at [pdkpoll.org](http://pdkpoll.org).

— 76% to 23% among all Americans and 71% to 28% among school parents.

Support for allowing teachers and other school staff to carry guns is much lower — 67% of parents don't want their child in a classroom where the teacher is armed, and 65% 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.

A total of 72% 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.

**THE QUESTIONS**

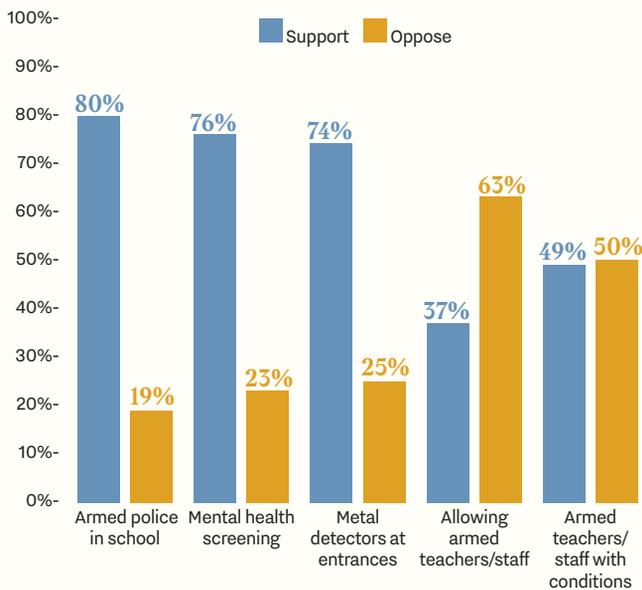
- Q7.** Thinking again about your oldest child in K-12, when he/she is at school, do you fear for your child’s physical safety?
- Q8.** How confident are you that there is sufficient security against a shooting attack at your child’s school?
- Q9.** Would or do you support or oppose the following at your child’s school? Having one or more armed police officers on duty whenever school is in session; having metal detectors at all school entrances; allowing teachers or other school staff to carry guns in school; screening all students for mental health problems.
- Q10.** 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?

- Q11.** Would you support or oppose paying a bonus to teachers and other school staff who carry guns in school?
- Q12.** 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?
- Q13.** If you knew that teachers or other school staff at your child’s school carried guns during the school day, would you feel that they were more safe, less safe, or about the same?
- Q14.** 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?

## School security proposals

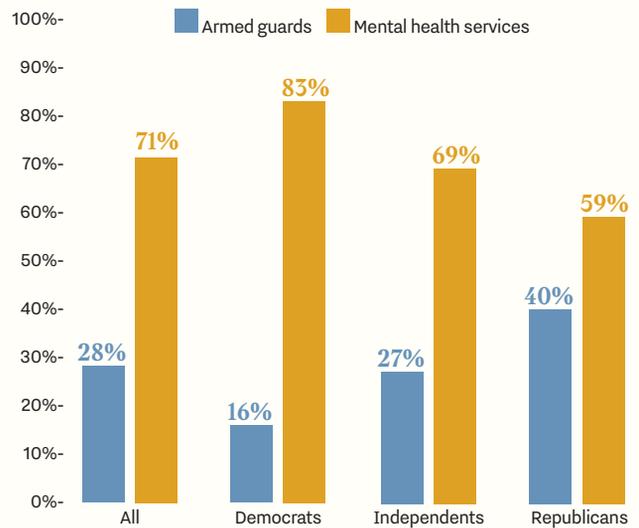
Parents of school-age children, 2018



PDK poll, 2018

## School spending preferences

Parents of school-age children, 2018



PDK poll, 2018

**WHAT AMERICANS SAID . . .**

# Should we improve schools or start from scratch?

Whatever the challenges facing the public schools, Americans want to improve the system — not upend it. Seventy-eight percent — a new high in PDK polls that began asking the question in 1997 — prefer “reforming the public school system” over “finding an alternative” to the existing system. That includes a vast gap in strength of sentiment: Fifty-five percent strongly prefer reforming the system, while just 15% strongly favor replacing it.

Majority preference for reforming rather than remaking the school system holds across groups, although there are differences. Hispanics aren’t as attached to the current system; 65% prefer reform over alternatives vs. 81% of blacks and 79% of whites. Among whites, the preference for reform peaks among white women with college degrees (87%) compared with white men who do not have college degrees (73%), with a 21-point gap in the strength of that sentiment.

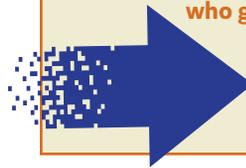
Liberals (83%) and moderates (80%) are more likely than conservatives (69%) to back reform. About one-quarter of conservatives strongly prefers finding alternatives, compared with 1 in 10 liberals and 1 in 8 moderates.

Results are similar when it comes to reforming or reconstituting schools in one’s own community rather than nationally,

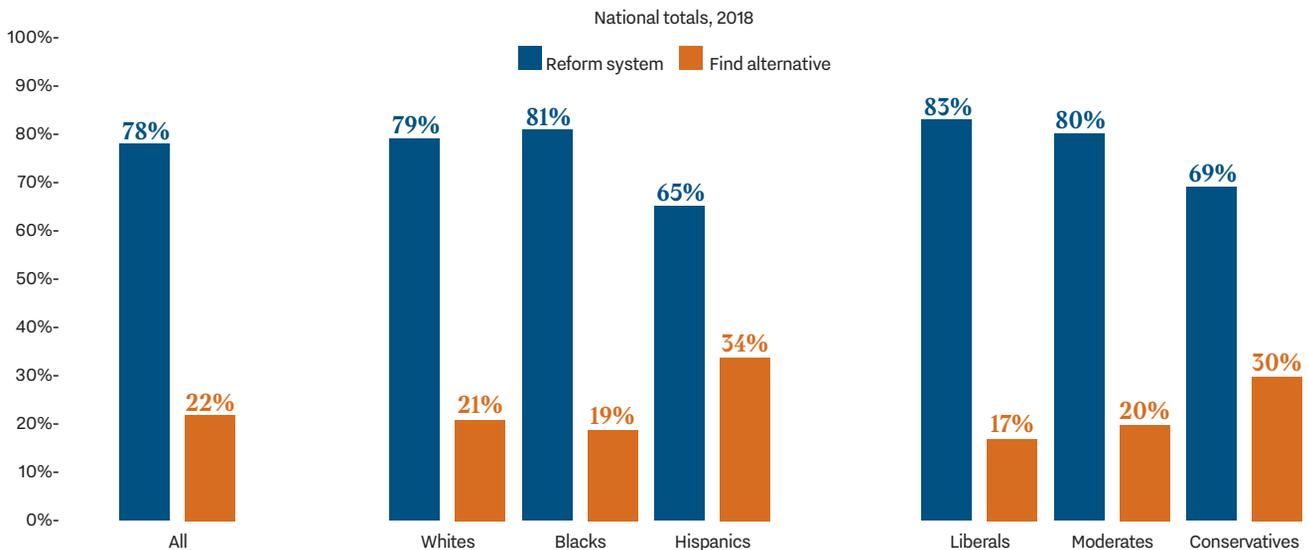
with 78% preferring reform and 21% backing alternatives. Seventy-two percent prefer reform at both levels, compared with just 15% who favor alternatives to the current system in both.

## Digging deeper

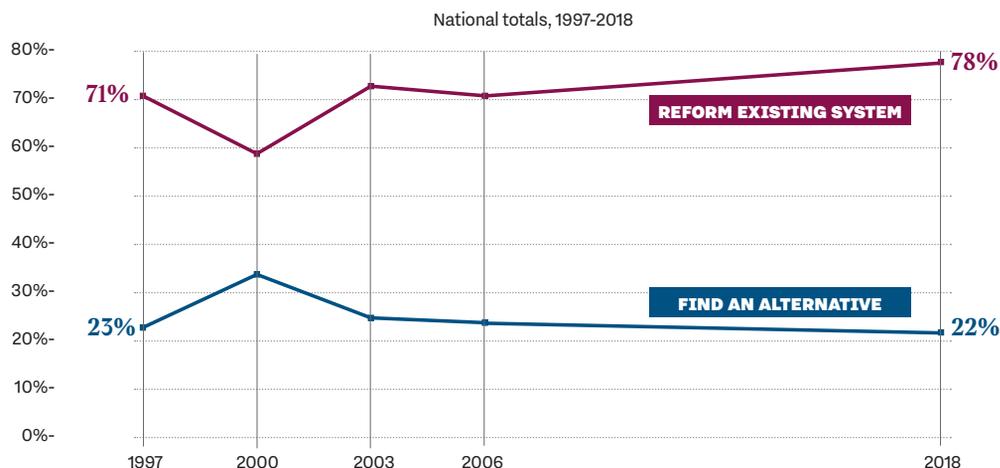
Local impressions make a difference: People who rate their local schools highly (A’s or B’s) are more likely to suggest that schools across the country should be reformed rather than reconstituted, compared with those who give C’s or lower, 86% vs. 73%.



## Reform or replace the public school system?



## Reform or replace, 1997-2018



Gallup produced the PDK polls from 1969 to 2015. Langer Research Associates has produced the PDK poll since 2016, including the 2018 poll. During the Gallup years, the question was phrased: "In order to improve public education in America, some people think the focus should be on reforming the existing public school system. Others believe the focus should be on finding an alternative to the existing public school system. Which approach do you think is preferable – reforming the existing public school system or finding an alternative to the existing public school system?"

### PDK poll, 2018

#### THE QUESTIONS

**Q15.** Which approach do you think is preferable in order to improve public education *in America* – reforming the existing public school system or finding an alternative to the existing public school system?

**Q16.** Which approach do you think is preferable in order to improve public education *in your own community* – reforming the existing public school system or finding an alternative to the existing public school system?

#### WHAT AMERICANS SAID . . .

## Should schools spend more on needier students?

Addressing a long-running debate on spending priorities, the public by a 21-point margin (60% to 39%) prefers having public schools spend more on students who need more support rather than spending the same on all students regardless of their need for support.

However, Americans provide no clear guidance on how to pay for services for students who need extra support: Half favor raising more money through higher taxes; half favor spending less on students with fewer needs.

The political gaps on both questions are very large. Seven in 10 Democrats prefer to spend more on students who need

more support, declining to half of Republicans. Almost two-thirds of Democrats would rather raise taxes than spend less on other students, while about one-third of Republicans would rather spend less. Independents fall in between.

These partisan differences extend to other groups. Democratic-leaning groups such as nonwhites, urbanites, and white women with college degrees are more likely than their counterparts to favor spending more.

Seven in 10 urbanites support spending more, while just more than half of those in suburban or rural areas say the same. Although urban and suburban residents split evenly on

# The public — by a 21-point margin — prefers having public schools spend more on students who need more support.

how to make that extra spending happen, more conservative rural residents prefer spending less on other students (57%) over raising taxes (41%).

## THE QUESTIONS

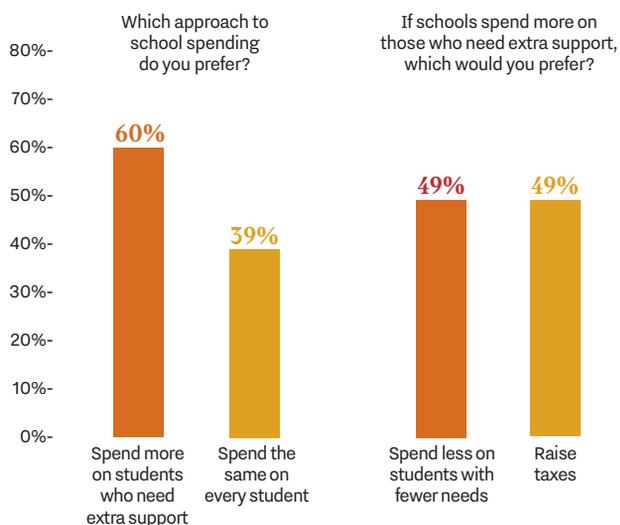
**Q17.** Which approach to school spending do you prefer — spend more money educating students who need extra support or spend the same amount of money on each student regardless of his or her need for support?

**Q18.** If schools were to spend more money on students who need extra support, which of these would you prefer — spend less money on students with fewer needs or raise more money for the schools through taxes?



## School spending by need

National totals, 2018



### School spending by need

National totals, 2018

	Spend more on students who need it %	Raise taxes to pay for it %
<b>All</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Responses by demographic group</b>		
<b>RACE</b>		
Whites	56	46
Nonwhites	67	54
<b>POLITICAL PARTY</b>		
Democrats	69	63
Independents	58	49
Republicans	49	33
<b>POLITICAL LEANING</b>		
Liberals	69	64
Moderates	59	49
Conservatives	51	36
<b>TYPE OF COMMUNITY</b>		
Urban	68	49
Suburban	56	51
Rural	55	41

PDK poll, 2018

PDK poll, 2018

# Do all students have the same opportunities?

The public perceives substantial gaps in educational opportunities and expectations facing student groups. Some are racial or geographic, but the sharpest are income-based: 75% of Americans say public school students in low-income communities have fewer educational opportunities than those in well-off communities, and 55% say schools in low-income areas have lower expectations for their students.

Majorities across groups see fewer opportunities for students in low-income communities. One gap is by education — 86% of college graduates hold this view vs. 70% of adults without a college degree. Among others, Democrats (82%) are more likely than Independents (73%) or Republicans (67%) to see fewer opportunities in low-income areas.

The educational gap in this view extends to expectations. While 68% of college graduates say schools have lower expectations for students in low-income areas vs. those in well-off communities, a smaller share of adults without a college degree — but still 50% — say the same. Those with incomes of \$50,000 or higher (59%) also are more apt to say expectations are lower in lower-income areas than lower-income adults (48%).

## Rural students

Overall, 53% say public school students in rural areas have fewer educational opportunities than those living in towns, suburbs, and cities. Fifty-eight percent of urban dwellers say rural students have fewer educational opportunities; among rural residents themselves, 48% say so.

A majority (56%) say schools hold the same expectations for rural students, but about one-third of Americans say schools have lower expectations for rural students.

## Black and Hispanic students

Overall, 41% say black and Hispanic students alike have fewer opportunities than white students. Blacks and Hispanics themselves are significantly more likely than whites to say that their groups have fewer education opportunities. Nearly three-quarters of blacks say so; it's much lower among Hispanics, but still 51% of Hispanics see fewer opportunities for blacks and Hispanics, compared with 3 in 10 whites.

Further, 50% of all adults say black students face lower expectations from their schools; 45% say the same about Hispanic students.

## Asian students

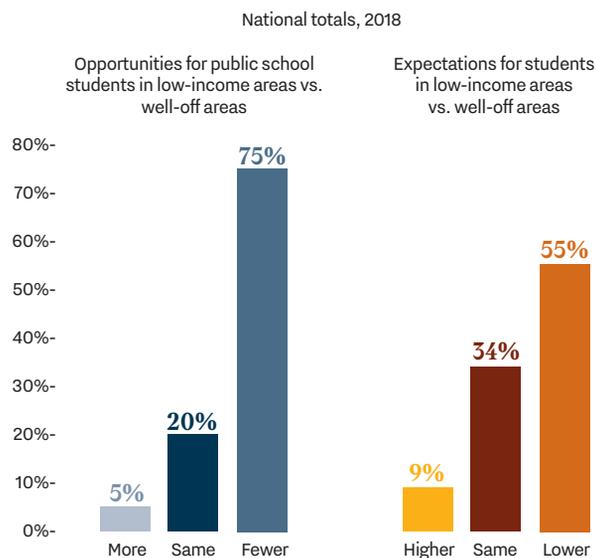
Views on opportunities and expectations differ when it comes to Asian students. Seventy percent of adults say Asian students have the same opportunities as white students, with the rest roughly divided on whether Asians have more or fewer opportunities.

There are racial differences in both directions: Twenty-two percent of nonwhites overall say Asian students have fewer opportunities vs. 7% of whites who hold that view. But 29% of blacks say Asians have more education opportunities than whites, twice the level of whites or Hispanics who say so.

But 37% of Americans say Asian students face higher expectations than white students, not lower ones. The comparative numbers for black and Hispanic students are in the low single digits.

(Results among Asians can't be broken out due to the small sample size of this group.)

## Education in low-income vs. well-off communities



PDk poll, 2018

**THE QUESTIONS**

**Q19.** Compared with public school students in well-off communities, do you think students in low-income communities have more educational opportunities, fewer educational opportunities, or the same educational opportunities?

**Q20.** Compared with public school students in towns, suburbs, and cities, do you think students in rural areas have more educational opportunities, fewer educational opportunities, or the same educational opportunities?

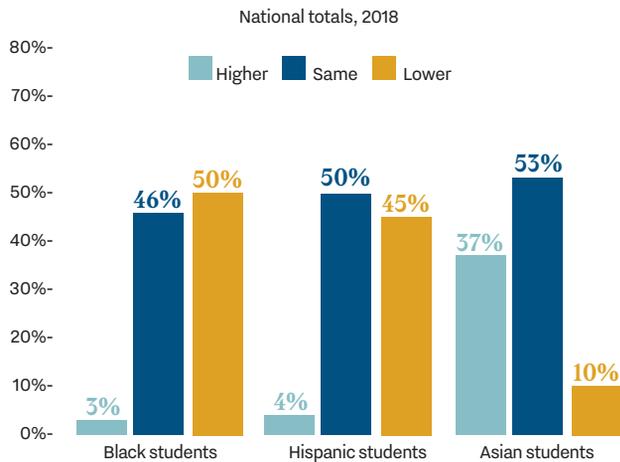
**Q21.** Compared with white students, do you think black students, Hispanic students, and Asian students have more educational opportunities, fewer educational opportunities, or the same educational opportunities?

**Q22.** Schools have certain expectations for their students. Compared with schools in well-off communities, do you think schools in low-income communities have higher expectations for their students, lower expectations, or are expectations the same?

**Q23.** Compared with schools in towns, suburbs, and cities, do you think schools in rural areas have higher expectations for their students, lower expectations, or are expectations the same?

**Q24.** Compared with white students, do you think schools have higher expectations, lower expectations, or are expectations the same for the following students: black students, Hispanic students, and Asian students?

## Expectations compared with white students



PDK poll, 2018

### Digging deeper

■ ■ ■ There's another gap, by age, in views of school expectations for Asian students. Fifty-one percent of those younger than 30 say expectations are higher for Asians than for whites, compared with 33% of adults age 30 and older.



### Education opportunities

National totals, 2018

See fewer education opportunities for students who are . . .

	Low-income %	Rural %	Black %	Hispanic %	Asian %
<b>All</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>13</b>

#### Responses by demographic group

<b>POLITICAL PARTY</b>					
Democrats	82	60	61	61	19
Independents	73	53	39	37	6
Republicans	67	46	19	20	8
<b>POLITICAL LEANING</b>					
Liberals	79	65	63	61	17
Moderates	76	51	43	42	13
Conservatives	70	45	21	22	9
<b>EDUCATION</b>					
College degree	86	68	52	53	8
No college degree	70	46	36	35	15
<b>RACE</b>					
Whites	72	50	32	31	7
Blacks	79	44	72	66	23
Hispanics	76	59	51	51	21
<b>TYPE OF COMMUNITY</b>					
Urban	79	58	52	51	17
Suburban	74	51	42	40	12
Rural	68	48	21	21	5

PDK poll, 2018

# Have schools improved over time?



Fifty-five percent of adults say today's students are receiving a worse education than they did when they were students. That's the most negative result on this question (by 5 points) in the six times the PDK poll has asked it since 1973.

Notably, among those who don't have a school-age child, 57% say children today are getting a worse education than they did; among parents, this declines to 46%. Whites are another more critical group — 60% say schools today are worse, an

opinion shared by 48% of Hispanics and 40% of blacks.

There's a strong link between perceptions of local schools and education quality overall. Those who give their local schools an A or B grade say education is better now than when they were in school, 61% vs. 39%. That's essentially reversed among those assigning lower grades, 32% vs. 68%. The pattern is similar, though much less stark, by high and low grades for schools nationally as opposed to locally.

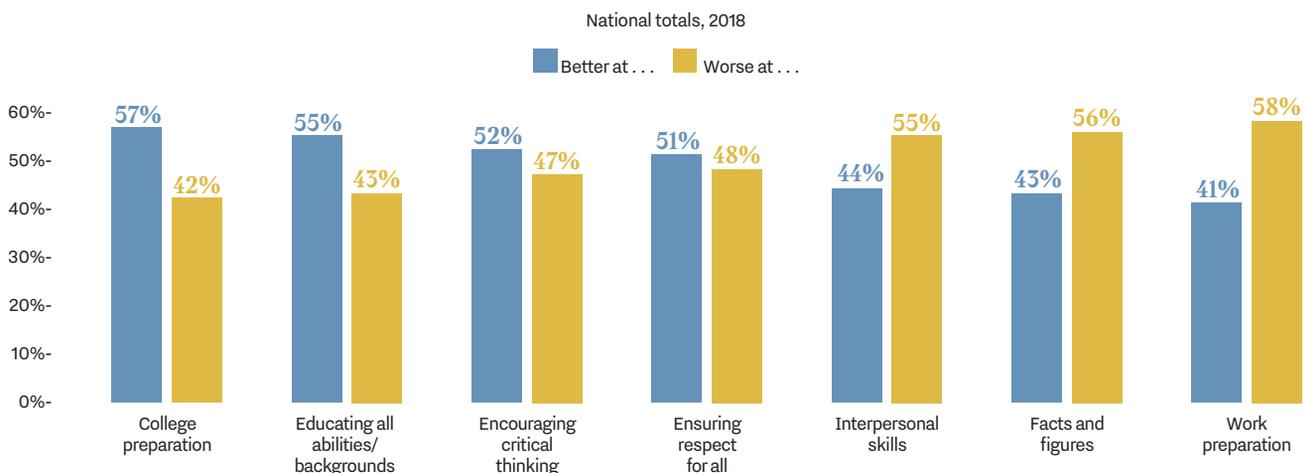
Americans who report living in high- or upper-middle-income communities (55%) are more likely than those who live in middle- to lower-income areas (40%) to say that children today get a better education than they did.

## THE QUESTIONS

**Q25.** As you look on your own elementary and high school education, is it your impression that children today get a better or worse education than you did? Do you think the education that students get today is much (better/worse) than your own elementary and high school education, or somewhat (better/worse)?

**Q26.** Compared with the schools you attended, do you think the public schools in your community today are better or worse at each of the following?

## Public schools today vs. when you attended



PDK poll, 2018

**WHAT AMERICANS SAID . . .**

# Should community college tuition be free?

The public overwhelmingly supports the concept of tuition-free community college, a policy already implemented or proposed in several states and cities. Seventy-five percent of Americans are in favor, compared with 58% when the same question was asked just three years ago.

Moreover, 68% support greater federal assistance with four-year college tuition. That could be because just 19% of parents of K-12 students say it's "very likely" that they will be able to pay for their child's college tuition (an additional 35% call it "somewhat likely").

In all, 6 in 10 Americans favor making community college free and increasing federal funding for four-year college tuition assistance.

Democrats (94%) favor tuition-free community college most strongly, but the concept is also popular among Independents (70%). Republicans are split, 48% vs. 52%. Nonwhites are 21 points more likely than whites to favor the idea, 88% vs. 67%. There are similar patterns on increasing federal tuition support, although support across groups is slightly lower.

Support for these initiatives is only slightly higher among parents of K-12 students than others. Eight in 10 parents of K-12 students favor making community college free but so do

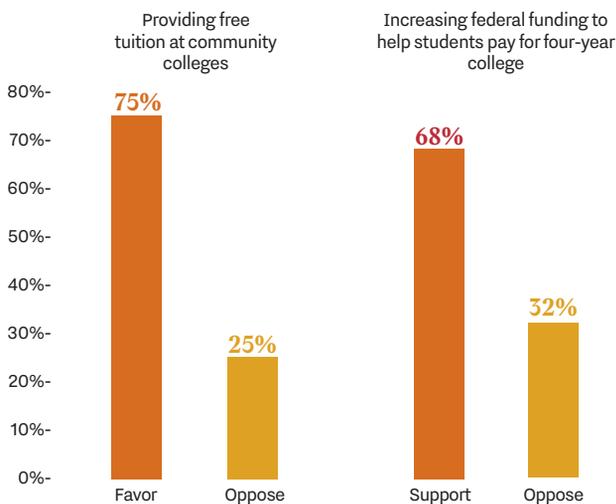
73% of other adults. Three-quarters of parents of K-12 students support increased federal funding for tuition assistance; so do two-thirds of other adults.

Even among the wealthiest parents of school-age children, with \$100,000-plus incomes, nearly 3 in 10 are unsure they'll be able to pay for college — and that soars to two-thirds of those with incomes less than \$50,000. (It's 52% in the middle



## Making college more affordable

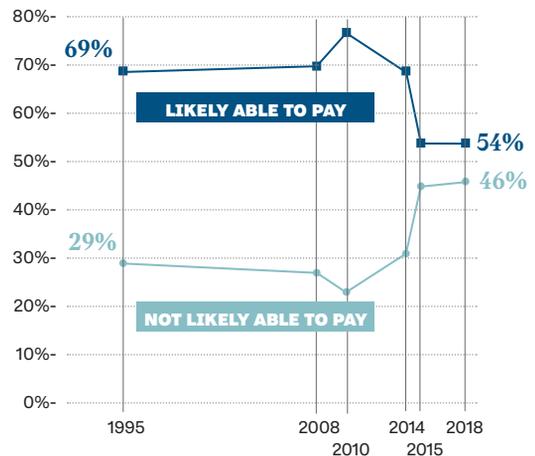
National totals, 2018



PDK poll, 2018

## Ability to pay for college

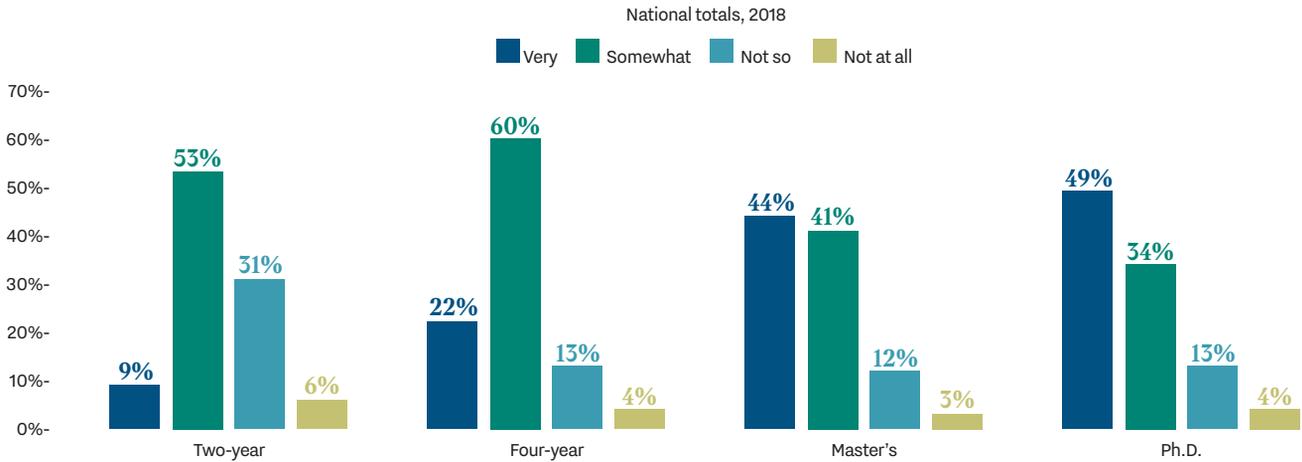
Parents of school-age children, 1995-2018



Gallup produced the PDK polls from 1969 to 2015. Langer Research Associates has produced the PDK poll since 2016, including the 2018 poll.

PDK poll, 2018

# Is a degree good preparation for a good-paying job?



## PDK poll, 2018

(\$50,000 to \$100,000 group.) More than half of adults who don't have college degrees expect challenges paying vs. 28% of college graduates.

### Is a college degree worth the cost?

Many Americans may be uncertain if they can afford college bills, but most are convinced that college degrees are worth the expense. More than 60% say a degree from a two-year community college prepares someone for a good-paying job in today's economy. That rises sharply if it's a four-year college degree, master's degree, or Ph.D. — more than 80% in each case say those prepare students for a good-paying job.

Strength of sentiment differs — just 9% are “very” confident that a community college degree helps get a good job, and 22% say so about a bachelor's. That rises to 44% for a master's degree and 49% for a Ph.D.

Those with four-year degrees or higher are more skeptical about community colleges — 54% see them as good preparation for a good job vs. 65% of those with less education. Still, no more than 1 in 10 in either group says a community college degree will prepare someone very well.

College graduates (92%) are more likely than those without a college degree (81%) to see a postgraduate degree as good preparation. Adults who have postgraduate education are 10 points more likely to see a master's as good preparation than a Ph.D., a difference not seen in other groups.

Another way of looking at the cost-benefit equation is to assess whether a four-year college degree is “a key to future success” or “not worth the cost.” Sixty-one percent overall say it's crucial to future success, and 70% of nonwhites agree.

There's a 20-point gap on this question between those who

have graduated from college and those who have not: 75% of college graduates say the degree is key to future success; 55% of adults who lack college degrees agree. That difference is driven by whites, particularly white men. White men with college degrees are keener on further education: 73% say it's key; 26% say it's not worth the cost. Just 41% of white men without a college degree say it's worth it; 56% say it's not. Majorities of white women say college is key to success, regardless of whether they have a degree.

## THE QUESTIONS

- Q27.** In general, how well do you think each of the following prepares someone for a good-paying job in today's economy? A two-year degree from a community college, a four-year degree from a college or university, a master's degree, or a Ph.D. degree.
- Q28.** Which comes closer to your view: A four-year college degree is a key to future success OR a four-year college degree is not worth the cost?
- Q29.** Political leaders are discussing a proposal that community college should be free for students. Do you favor or oppose this idea?
- Q30.** Would you support or oppose increasing federal funding to help students pay for four-year college tuition?
- Q31.** How likely do you think it is that you or your family will be able to pay for college for your oldest child in K-12?

# Should we change the school schedule?

School hours are a perennial topic of debate. This year's PDK study finds limited complaints but also a preference for later start and end times to the school day among high school parents. One attractive reason is to allow for more classroom time; another is simply to let kids sleep in. The possibility of increased bus time or bus expenses doesn't raise much concern.

In general, nearly all parents — 92% — say current school start and end times work very or somewhat well with their family's schedules, a result that's consistent across grade levels. And three-quarters of high school parents wouldn't change the current length of the school day.

Still, high school parents do identify some potential areas for change. Sixty-four percent say their child's current school start time is between 7 and 7:45 a.m., but only one-third of parents pick this as their preferred school start time. Instead, 66% would prefer that school start at 8 a.m. or later — just 36% say their child's school now starts at 8 a.m. or later.

Fathers of high schoolers are more likely to favor an early start, with 42% saying school should start between 7 and 7:45 a.m., compared with just 24% of mothers. There's common ground at 8 to 8:45 a.m., preferred by 48% of fathers and 57% of mothers.

Similarly, 54% say their high schooler's school day now ends at 2 to 2:45 p.m., but fewer (35%) call this ideal. Sixty-three percent of high school parents want school to end at 3 p.m. or later. School now ends that late for many fewer (42%).

Parents whose oldest (or only) child is a high school boy are more likely than those whose oldest is a girl to prefer a 2 to 2:45

p.m. end-of-school time, 46% vs. 19%. Parents whose oldest is a girl are more likely to favor a slightly later slot, 3 to 3:45 p.m.

In all, about 6 in 10 high school parents would like a change of at least 30 minutes in either school start or end times — in almost all cases, a later start or a later end time.

Asked about positive reasons to change school schedules, 71% endorse creating more time in the classroom and 63% like letting their high schooler get more sleep. Many fewer (41%) say it would be worth it to change the schedule to better fit their work hours. (Just one-third of whites say that accommodating one's work is a good reason to adjust the schedule vs. 52% of nonwhites.)

Asked about negatives of a schedule change, just 28% and 32% express concern about more time on the school bus or higher school district costs for bus service. More, but still a minority (41%), are concerned about conflicts with before- or after-school activities.

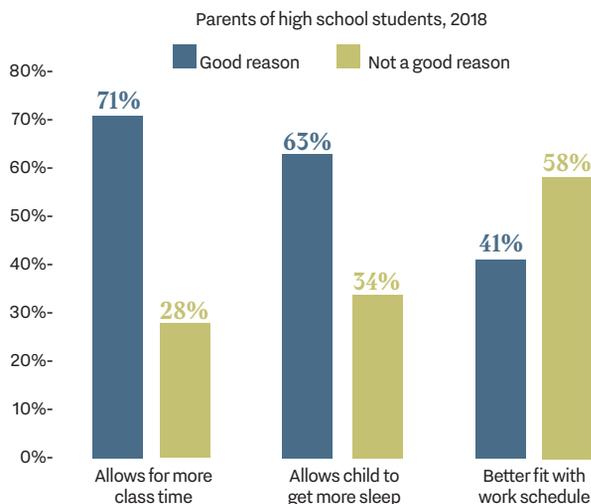
## School start and end times

Parents of high school students, 2018

	7 to 7:45 a.m. %	8 a.m. or later %
Current high school start time	64	36
Preferred start time	33	66
	2 to 2:45 p.m. %	3 p.m. or later %
Current end time	54	42
Preferred end time	33	63

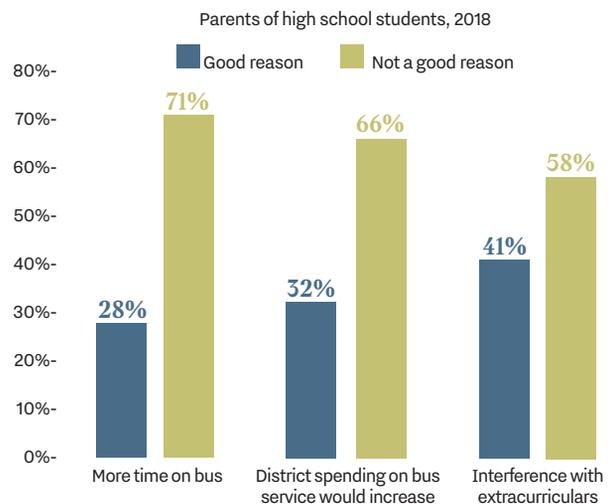
## PDK poll, 2018

## Reasons to change school schedules



PDK poll, 2018

## Reasons not to change school schedules



PDK poll, 2018

.....

**THE QUESTIONS**

- Q32.** Thinking again about your [oldest] child in K-12, how well do your child’s regular school hours work with your family’s schedule?
- Q33.** [Asked only of parents of high school students] Would you prefer your child’s regular school day to be longer than it is now, shorter than it is now, or kept the same length as it is now? Do not include clubs and other extracurricular activities.
- Q34.** About what time does your child start his/her regular school day? Do not include clubs and other extracurricular activities.
- Q35.** From your perspective, what would be the ideal time for his/her regular school day to start?

- Q36.** About what time does your child’s regular school day end? Do not include clubs and other extracurricular activities.
- Q37.** From your perspective, what would be the ideal time for your child’s regular school day to end?
- Q38.** What do you think about these reasons for changing his/her school schedule? He/she could get more sleep. It would work better with your work schedule. It allows for more time in the classroom.
- Q39.** What do you think about these reasons against changing your child’s school schedule? He/she would have to spend more time on the bus. The district would have to spend more for bus service. It would interfere with before-school or after-school activities.

**WHAT AMERICANS SAID . . .**

# How would you grade the schools?

The 2018 PDK poll repeated its long-standing practice of asking Americans to assign A-Fail grades to the public schools. As in past years, parents rate their own children’s schools quite highly — 70% give them an A or B grade. The public overall gives lower ratings to their local schools, 43% A’s or B’s, and the nation’s schools as a whole receive much lower ratings still, 19% A’s or B’s.

Even though ratings for one’s child’s school are high, there are large gaps among groups. Those living in higher-income areas, college graduates, and parents with higher incomes themselves are more likely than those living in lower-income areas, adults without a college degree, and those earning less than \$100,000 to award A or B grades to their child’s school, by 27-, 20-, and 12-point margins.

Slightly fewer blacks (60%) than whites (73%) give an A or B to their oldest child’s school.

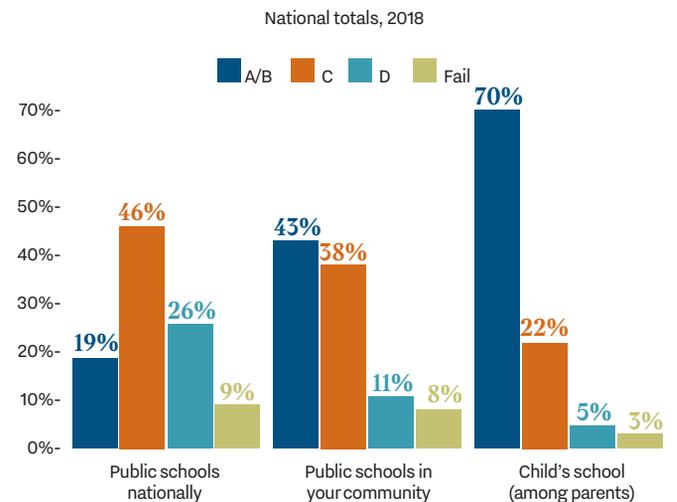
Local schools are graded well by more than half of parents and those living in high- or upper-middle-income areas. By contrast, only about one-third of blacks, conservatives, and those making less than \$50,000 say the same. Evaluations among parents are more positive, with the exception of black parents, but follow similar patterns.

While the nation’s public schools overall receive middling grades, Hispanics (36%) and blacks (23%) are significantly more likely than whites (14%) to give them an A or B. The same goes for urbanites (22%) and suburbanites (20%) vs. rural residents (11%). More parents of school-age children (27%) say schools nationally

deserve higher grades than do other adults (17%).

This year’s ratings for schools in the community and nationally may be influenced by a survey mode effect; the new study was conducted using a random-sample online panel rather than random-sample telephone calls, and research indicates that questions like these can produce more negative results when self-administered rather than when talking to a live

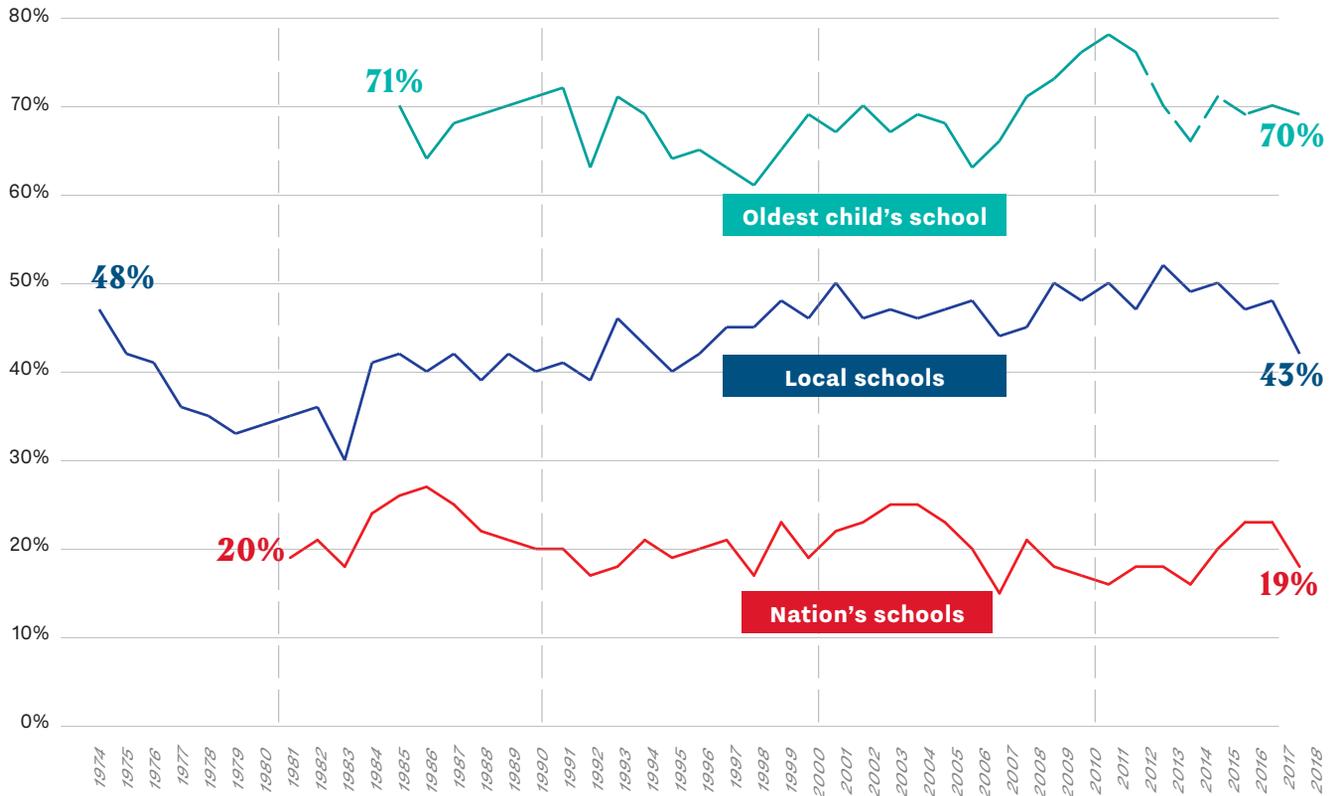
## Grading the schools



**PDK poll, 2018**

# A's and B's for public schools, 1974-2018

National totals, 1974-2018



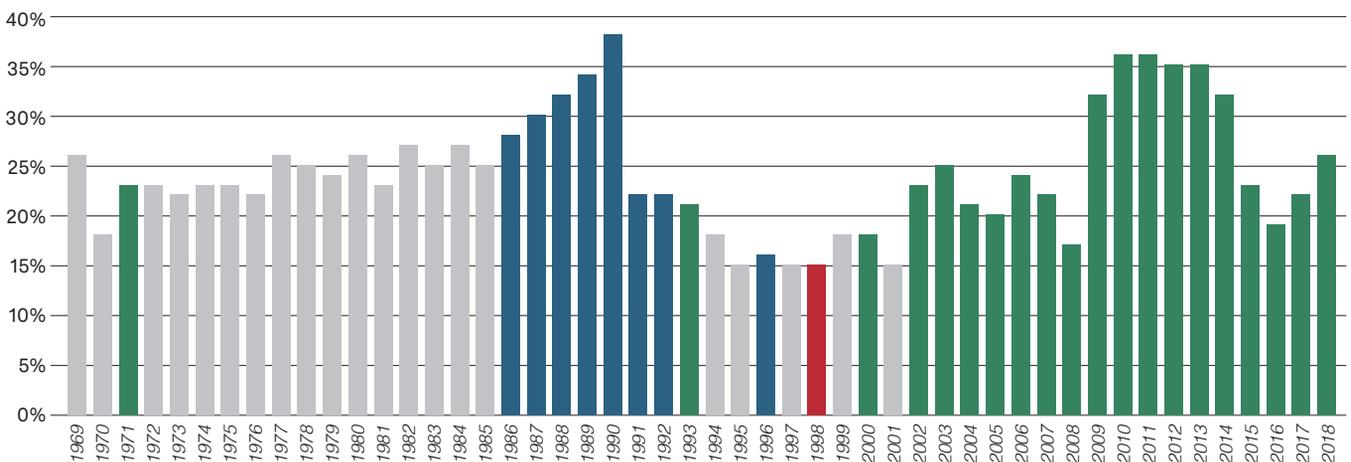
Gallup produced the PDK polls from 1969 to 2015. Langer Research Associates has produced the PDK poll since 2016, including the 2018 poll.

**PDK poll, 2018**

# Biggest problem facing local schools, 1969-2018

National totals, 1969-2018

■ Lack of discipline 
 ■ Lack of financial support 
 ■ Use of drugs 
 ■ Fighting/gang violence



Gallup produced the PDK polls from 1969 to 2015. Langer Research Associates has produced the PDK poll since 2016, including the 2018 poll.

**PDK poll, 2018**

interviewer. At the same time, both results have been this low or lower previously — most recently in 1996 for community schools and in 2014 for schools nationally.

We asked respondents who didn't give their community's schools an A grade what it would take for those schools to earn an A. One in 5 said changing the curriculum would help, while other frequently cited issues included education standards, funding problems, and teacher quality.

Since 1969, the poll's first question has been about the biggest problem facing the local public schools. For 17 consecutive years, the lack of funding stands out as the most frequently cited issue, with 26% mentioning it this year. Problems with student behavior are the next most common, with 10% each mentioning general student discipline or bullying this year.

## THE QUESTIONS

**Q40.** What do you think are the biggest problems facing the public schools in your community?

**Q41.** Students are often given the grades of 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?

**Q42.** 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?

**Q43.** Using the A, B, C, D, Fail scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

**Q44.** Thinking again about *the public schools in your own community*, what would they have to do to earn an A grade from you?

**Q45.** Which approach do you think is preferable in order to improve public education *in America*?

## Methodology

The 2018 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools was designed, managed, analyzed, and reported by Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y., in consultation with PDK. All results described in this report were tested for statistical significance.

Langer Research Associates is a charter member of the Transparency Initiative of the American Association for Public Opinion Research. After six months, researchers will have access to the complete dataset through the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

The 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.

Sampling and data collection were provided by GfK Custom Research via its nationally representative, probability-based online 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 about 540 adults in the general population, and, through oversampling, 500 parents of students in grades K-12, including 100 black parents and 100 Hispanic parents. The full sample was weighted to reflect the correct proportions of these oversampled populations. The questionnaire was available to respondents in English and Spanish.

The survey questionnaire was pretested April 27-30, 2018. After initial invitations, email reminders were sent to all nonresponders on the third, seventh, and 14th days of the field period, with additional reminders to black and Hispanic parents on the 10th, 17th, and 19th days of the field period. Out of 1,830 panel members invited to participate, completed, qualified surveys were provided by 1,065. Participants completed the survey in a median time of 11 minutes.

The sample composition after quality control was 527 general population adults and 515 K-12 parents, including 103 black parents and 101 Hispanic parents.

More complete details about the methodology are available at [pdkpoll.org/methodology](http://pdkpoll.org/methodology)

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# PDK Poll

50 YEARS OF AMERICAN VOICES

## Celebrate 50 years of listening to American voices

Since 1969, PDK has asked nearly 70,000 American adults more than a thousand questions about the public schools. Each year, PDK has faithfully reported the results in full because of our belief in the value of listening to what Americans have to say about education.

Over five decades, the PDK poll has become the most trusted source of public opinion about K-12 education because of its rigor, its depth, and its commitment to capturing all voices and viewpoints.

Learn more about the illustrious work of this poll and its significant contributions to the history of American education.

[pdkpoll.org/timeline](https://pdkpoll.org/timeline)

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1969 ...



1993 ...



2018 ...

