

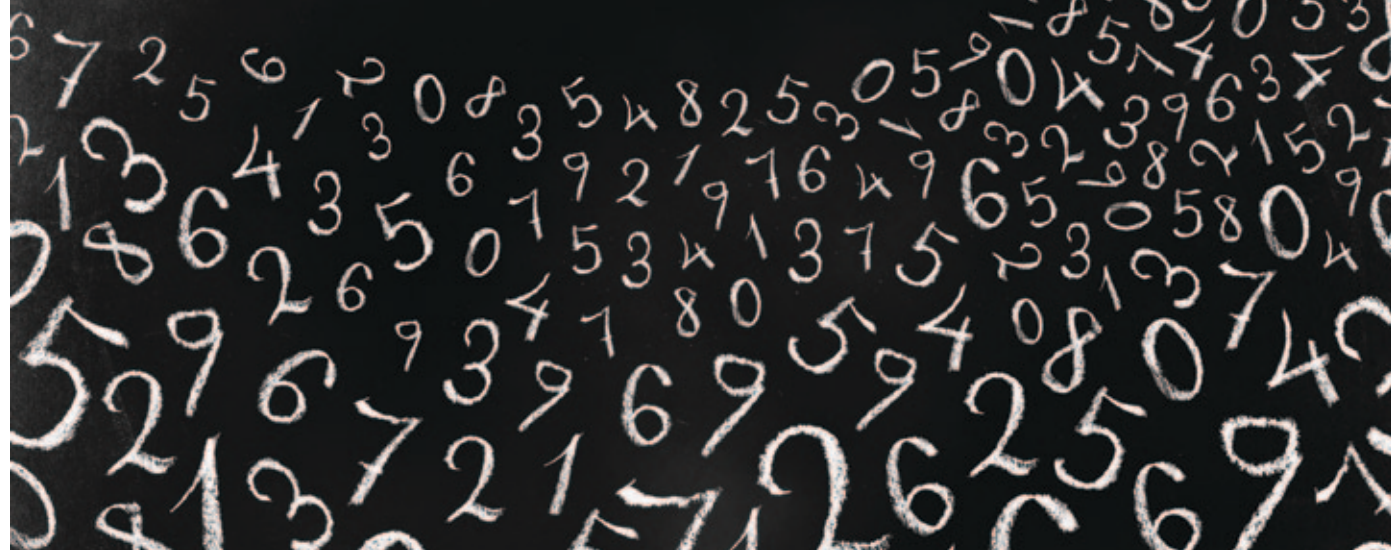
# Betting on teachers

The 43rd annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

**By William J. Bushaw and Shane J. Lopez**

**Are schools and teachers getting a bad rap? The American public has its own views on this.**

**W**ith all the heated discourse about American public education — documentary films, opinion articles in newspapers, and more opinions on blogs — or perhaps despite them, Americans have reached their own conclusions about what's necessary to ensure a good education for all children: Identify and retain great teachers. Not only do Americans understand the need for great teachers, they also trust and support teachers who are in classrooms now. And when it comes to choosing between highly effective teachers versus class size or the style of presentation, they go with teachers every time.



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

This is only part of the story emerging from the 43rd annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward their Public Schools. We asked Americans difficult, often controversial, questions about vouchers, charter schools, digital learning, teacher unions, and preparing students for careers and college. We discovered some surprising as well as predictable results.

The annual PDK/Gallup poll is a scientifically based survey of about 1,000 Americans 18 years and older. The poll is unique and significant because its longitudinal data documents important changes in American opinion over time. Although the PDK/Gallup poll revisits many questions asked in previous polls, we also turn to a panel of advisors each year to help us identify emerging issues. Among this year's issues are teacher recruitment, collective bargaining, digital learning and technology, education quality, school choice, schools as well-being centers, and a rating of President Obama's support for public education.

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 in June 2011. And 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.

## RECRUITING, RETAINING GREAT TEACHERS

In March, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan hosted delegations from 15 nations plus the United States at the first International Summit on the Teaching Profession in New York City. Highlighting the event were presentations by delegations from Finland, Hong

Kong, the United Kingdom, China, Norway, Singapore, and the U. S. on topics of teacher recruitment, preparation, support, retention, evaluation, compensation, and engagement. A unifying theme emerged: Nations that have invested in improving teacher quality have realized the largest gains in student achievement. From the results of this year's poll, Americans have reached the same conclusion.

## FINDINGS

Three of four Americans support recruiting high-achieving high school students to become teachers, and the same percentage would encourage the brightest person they know to become a teacher. Half said that encouraging high school and college students to become science and math teachers is just as important as encouraging them to become scientists and mathematicians. But two of three think the ability to teach comes more from natural talent than from college training on how to teach.

Two of three Americans would like a child of theirs to become a public school teacher, a finding consistent with past poll results. However, Americans are concerned that their local public schools are having a hard time getting good teachers. This could be because Americans say they hear more bad stories than good stories about teachers from the news media.

Almost three of four Americans have trust and confidence in public school teachers, and this level of trust is even higher for Americans under age 40, the college educated, and parents of children in public schools. As an indicator of this trust, three of four Americans believe teachers should have flexibility to teach in the ways they think best rather than being required to follow a prescribed curriculum.

**TABLE 1. Do you think high-achieving high school students should be recruited to become teachers?**

	National Totals	
	'11	%
Yes	76	
No	23	
Don't know/refused	2	

**TABLE 2. Suppose the brightest person you know said he or she would like to be a teacher. What would you most likely do: Encourage that person, discourage that person, or suggest that he or she consider other fields before deciding?**

	National Totals	
	'11	'96
	%	%
Encourage that person	74	73
Discourage that person	2	2
Suggest a different field	23	23
Don't know/refused	1	2

Should high-achieving students become teachers?

Yes



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



**TABLE 3. Which do you think is most important for our nation's future — to encourage high school and college students with skills in science and math to become scientists or to become science and math teachers?**

	National Totals '11 %
Become scientists	47
Become science or math teachers	48
Don't know/refused	5

**TABLE 4. In your opinion, is the ability to teach or instruct students more the result of natural talent or more the result of college training about how to teach?**

	National Totals '11 %
Natural talent	70
College training	28
Don't know/refused	3

**TABLE 5. Would you like to have a child of yours take up teaching in the public schools as a career?**

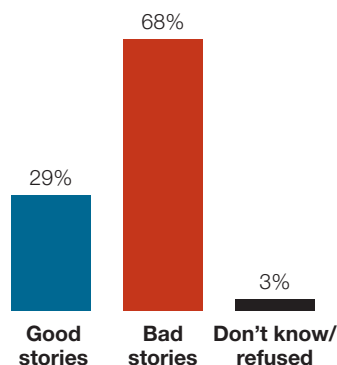
	National Totals		
	'11 %	'10 %	'09 %
Yes	67	67	70
No	31	30	28
Don't know/refused	2	3	2

**TABLE 6. Do you think your local public school system has a hard time getting good teachers?**

	National Totals	
	'11 %	'03 %
Yes	52	61
No	45	37
Don't know/refused	3	2

**TABLE 7. Generally speaking, do you hear more good stories or bad stories about teachers in the news media?**

National Totals  
2011



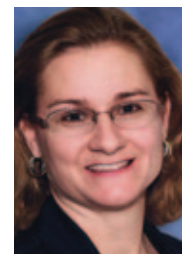
**TABLE 8. Do you have trust and confidence in the men and women who are teaching children in the public schools?**

	National Totals	
	'11 %	'10 %
Yes, have confidence	71	71
No, do not	27	27
Don't know/refused	2	2

**Table 9. Should education policies require teachers to follow a prescribed curriculum so all students can learn the same content, or should education policies give teachers flexibility to teach in ways they think best?**

	National Totals '11 %	Rep. '11 %	Dem. '11 %	Ind. '11 %
Require teachers to follow prescribed curriculum	26	30	24	24
Give teachers flexibility	73	69	75	74
Don't know or refused	2	1	2	1

## MICHELLE M. SHEARER HIGHLIGHT GOOD TEACHERS



As a career classroom teacher with over 14 years of experience in chemistry and special education, I'm encouraged that this year's poll results reflect a positive image of our nation's dedicated teachers. The survey confirms the public's overall trust and confidence in the women and men who teach in our schools, and respondents affirm the need

### COMMENTARY

for flexibility that allows teachers to deliver dynamic and creative instruction to students. About 75% of those surveyed would encourage our "best and brightest" to enter teaching, a profession that many would be proud for their own children to pursue.

Despite their positive feelings, poll respondents indicate that they are much more likely to hear "bad stories" than "good stories" about teachers in the news media. It's time for a change: Positive reports about teachers and our schools ultimately benefit our students. Imagine if the national news began with a segment entitled "Highlights in American Education," a broadcast designed to energize our nation with inspirational stories about innovative teachers and successful students. Think of the stories we could share! As we strive to provide high-quality public education nationwide, we need to showcase the talents of effective classroom educators to get a broad and multi-faceted view of what "good teaching" looks like. Let's focus our attention, in our communities and in the media, on celebrating and emulating extraordinary teaching in an effort to support students and advance public education.

*MICHELLE M. SHEARER is the 2011 National Teacher of the Year. She teaches chemistry at Urbana High School, Ijamsville, Md.*



## TEACHERS AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Clashes between teacher union representatives and governors made front-page news across the country several months ago. While Wisconsin received the most attention, legislators in several other states debated and in many cases adopted legislation limiting teacher collective bargaining. These clashes signaled that state capitals still exert significant control over schools in spite of the expanding federal role in education. However, the nexus of the two power centers also came more into focus in states that received federal Race to the Top funding. That funding came with its own price tag: In exchange for the federal money, states must increase education choice and incorporate student achievement data in teacher evaluation processes. So, after monitor-



### LEILANI BELL ENCOURAGE FUTURE TEACHERS

I am totally surprised that a quarter of our population would discourage the smartest person they know from pursuing a career in teaching or encourage them to consider another field before deciding on teaching. Growing up, I always knew that I wanted a career related to history. Though being a history teacher was at the top of my list, I did sometimes

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think about becoming a lawyer. Countless times I have heard a shocked “Why?!” when I tell people that I want to become a teacher. Without the encouragement of my 1st- and 2nd-grade teacher, Mariarosa Da Costa, I may have chosen to get a law degree. Ms. Da Costa truly inspired me. When I was discouraged about pursuing education as a profession, she encouraged me to continue following my passion. Having someone reassure me about my career choice helped solidify my decision to major in secondary education.

Teachers and schools are the cornerstone of our democracy. Every young child needs an education in order to succeed in life. Without smart and motivated teachers, students will not receive the quality education they need to help and support the future of our nation. As President Barack Obama said in his January 2011 State of the Union address, “After parents, the biggest impact on a child’s success comes from the man or woman at the front of the classroom.” If that’s the case, shouldn’t all Americans want the very best students to pursue careers in education and teach the children who will build the future?

*LEILANI BELL is the Future Educators Association® national student president. She is a freshman at The College of New Jersey, Ewing, N.J., and plans to become a history teacher in an urban school.*



ing American opinion about national education policy, we shifted gears this year to focus on state-level issues, teacher unions, and collective bargaining.

## FINDINGS

In 1976, the PDK/Gallup poll asked Americans if teacher unionization helped, hurt, or made no difference in the quality of public school education in the United States. Back then, only one in four Americans believed teacher unions helped, but a relatively large number (13%) were undecided. Thirty-five years later, few Americans are undecided on this question. Today, one in four Americans still believe teacher unions help, but almost one of two Americans believes that teacher unions hurt public education. Not surprisingly, these opinions are strongly related to the respondent’s political affiliation.

Despite that, Americans side with teacher union leaders in disputes with governors over collective bargaining versus limited state budgets. Again, opinions on this topic are strongly related to the respondent’s political party affiliation.

Consistent with past findings, Americans believe teacher salaries should be based on multiple factors including advanced degrees, experience, and the principal’s evaluation of the teacher. While Americans support using student scores on standardized tests, that factor received a significantly lower approval rating.

Teacher layoffs based on seniority (last hired-first fired) is the general practice in most school districts across the country. We discovered that Americans believe that school districts should use multiple factors to determine which teachers should be laid off first, but, of the options presented, Americans believe the principal’s evaluation of a teacher’s performance should be given the most weight.

When given the choice, Americans overwhelmingly would prefer larger classes with more effective teachers than smaller classes with less effective teachers. At the elementary level, almost three of four Americans support this trade-off, and that support increases at the middle and secondary levels.

Last year, the *Los Angeles Times* stirred controversy by reporting performances of teachers based solely on student test scores. When asked their opinion about this practice, Americans were evenly divided.

**TABLE 10. Most teachers in the nation now belong to unions or associations that bargain over salaries, working conditions, and the like. Has unionization, in your opinion, helped, hurt, or made no difference in the quality of public school education in the United States?**

	National Totals		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	'11	'76	'11	'11	'11
	%	%	%	%	%
Helped	26	22	12	43	20
Hurt	47	38	68	23	52
Made no difference	25	27	18	31	26
Don't know/refused	2	13	2	4	1

**TABLE 11. As you may know, some states have been in the news because of disputes between the governors and state employee labor unions, including teacher unions, over collective bargaining policies and the state's budget. In states where there are such disputes, would you say you agree more with the governors or the state teacher unions?**

	National Totals	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	'11	'11	'11	'11
	%	%	%	%
Side with governors	44	71	16	49
Side with teacher unions	52	25	80	49
Don't know/refused	4	5	4	2

## Poll App for iPad



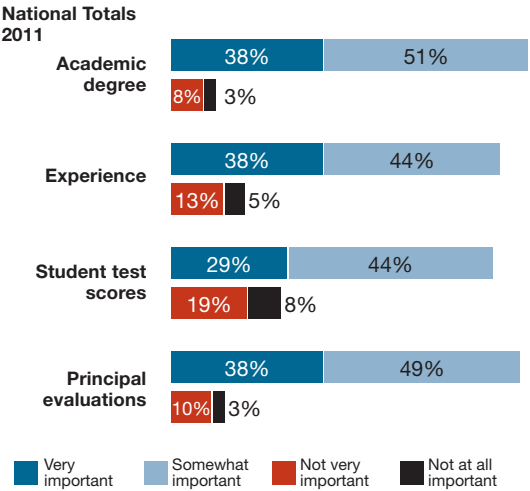
The complete 2011 PDK/ Gallup poll results are available free for iPad users

- Highlights of results
- Tables
- Charts
- Commentaries

Download the PDK/ Gallup poll app at the App Store



**TABLE 12. How important do you think each of the following factors should be in determining a public school teacher's salary: level of academic degree earned, years of teaching experience, scores the teacher's students receive on standardized tests, evaluations conducted by the principal?**



**Have teacher unions helped or hurt public school education?**

**Hurt**

**Do you side with governors or teacher unions in disputes over collective bargaining?**

**Teacher unions**



## MILTON CHEN INTERNET ACCESS: CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUE

This survey should be read by every elected official, school board member, and journalist.

The public knows that access to the Internet for education is now the civil rights issue of our time.

**COMMENTARY** With as near unanimity as our diverse public ever achieves, 91% believe that providing all students with access to the Internet is important. They see its benefits in leveling the playing field of course offerings for smaller and rural schools, improving students' motivation, and preparing them for college and career. The public has spoken. It's now time for public education to listen to its public.

Moreover, the American public was resoundingly clear — consistently about 70% — in its convictions about the importance of teachers and giving them more "flexibility to teach in ways they think best."

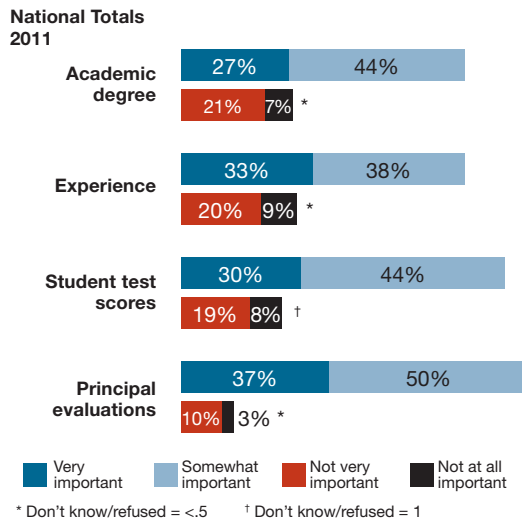
Americans also know that teacher effectiveness, rather than class size, is a stronger determinant of academic achievement. Maybe these survey respondents have read the research, but I'd bet they just have good instincts and common sense. However, close to 70% also say they see and hear more negative than positive press about education. We could improve our schools and our economy more quickly if we told ourselves better stories about our best teachers and students.

*MILTON CHEN is senior fellow at the George Lucas Educational Foundation.*

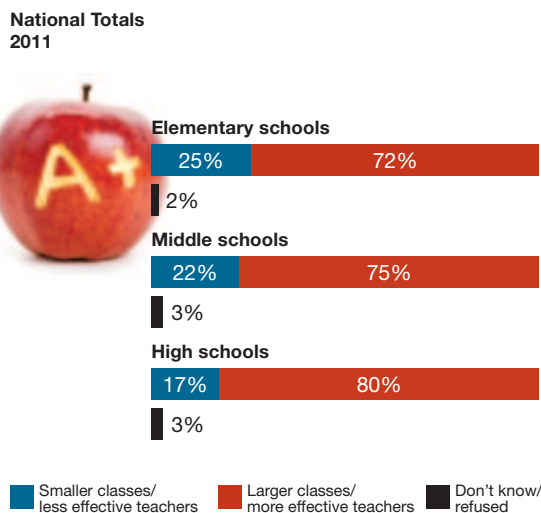
Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Smaller  
or larger  
classes?  
Larger classes  
with more  
effective  
teachers

**TABLE 13. How important do you think each of the following factors should be in determining which teachers are laid off first if the school is forced to reduce the number of teachers: level of academic degree earned, years of teaching experience, scores the teacher's students receive on standardized tests, evaluations conducted by the principal?**



**TABLE 14. Which do you think would result in higher student achievement in (elementary, middle, high schools): classes with fewer students and a less effective teacher or classes with more students and a more effective teacher?**



**TABLE 15. Some newspapers are releasing information about how the students of individual teachers perform on standardized tests. Do you favor or oppose the release of this information to the public?**

	National Totals '11 %
Favor	51
Oppose	48
Don't know/refused	1



## DIGITAL LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY

In December 2010, former governors Bob Wise (D-W. Va.) and Jeb Bush (R-Fla.) released a report titled, *Digital Learning Now*. The report suggests that now is the time to unleash the power of digital learning to customize and personalize education so all students can learn in their own style at their own pace. The PDK/Gallup poll has frequently tested American opinions of computers, the Internet, and online learning. We revisited some of those questions and add several new ones about using electronic readers, allowing students to learn via online learning at home, and using computer technology in high schools.

## FINDINGS

Americans understand that students need access to the Internet in their schools. In 1996, 80% of Americans believed this was somewhat or very important. Now, that percentage has risen to 91% with parents at 95% supporting. Similarly, Americans believe all students should have access to computer technology, and that computer technology is important for ensuring student academic success.

At the same time, Americans appear to believe that schools already have made important investments in computer technology for instructional purposes. In 2000, 82% of Americans said schools should invest more in computer technology, but, this year, that percentage declined to 74%. Americans are evenly split on whether all high school students in their community should have their own computer to use at school.

Americans said preparing students for college or a career — also the president's primary education goal — was the number one reason why high schools should use more computer technology, followed by making more classes

available for students who attend smaller schools or live in rural areas. At the same time, Americans said relying on computers rather than teachers was a low priority.

You can't travel without seeing Americans reading e-books — iPads, Kindles, and Nooks. So, we wanted to know if Americans support having students use e-books in school. While only one of four Americans thought elementary students should use them, half of Americans thought they were appropriate in middle schools, and almost two of three Americans believe they were appropriate for high school students. The respondent's age was not a factor in their opinion, but gender was: Men were more favorable than women in having students use e-books.

We asked Americans if they favor using a more effective high school teacher who would offer instruction over the Internet as opposed to a less effective teacher who was physically in the classroom with students. Almost half of Americans are open to the idea that higher quality instruction trumped having a teacher present in the classroom. On the other hand, only 40% of Americans approve allowing high school students to be at school fewer hours each week if they're using computer technology to learn at home. But public school parents are nearly split on this question (46% approving and 52% opposing). Our conclusion: The jury is still out on American's acceptance of Internet-based instruction in the public schools.

**TABLE 16. The federal government and some states have attempted to provide all students with access to the Internet in their schools. How important do you think this would be for the public school students in your community?**

	National Totals	
	'11	'96
	%	%
Very important	61	49
Somewhat important	30	31
Not very important	6	13
Not at all important	3	6
Don't know/refused	<.5	1

**TABLE 17. In your opinion, how important is it that all students have access to computer technology? In your opinion how important is access to computer technology for ensuring student academic success?**

	National Totals	
	'11	
	Access to computer technology	Importance for academic success
	%	%
Very important	70	52
Somewhat important	25	39
Not very important	4	7
Not at all important	2	2
Don't know/refused	<.5	<.5

**TABLE 18. Do you think the public schools in your community should or should not invest more in computer technology for instructional purposes?**

	National Totals	
	'11	'00
	%	%
Yes, should invest more	74	82
No, should not invest more	25	15
Don't know/refused	2	3

**MERIA CARSTARPHEN**  
**ENSURE TECHNOLOGY**  
**ACCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS**



In the rapidly advancing world in which we live, and in which our students will need to navigate, it is critical that students have access to the latest computer technology. In an urban district, such as Austin Independent School District, 63% of our students are economically disadvantaged, and likely have limited access to technology in their

**COMMENTARY**

homes. Thus, this “digital divide” places the responsibility on school districts to bridge the gap by providing our students with access to technology that will make them competitive in college and career.

Because we recognize the importance of equitable access to the best educational technology, in AISD, we have created a smart cloud computing environment that provides online access to learning and teaching resources. For students, this includes access to more than 100 approved web sites, electronic textbooks, e-mail, hundreds of education applications — categorized by grade and subject — collaboration tools, and video conferencing.

Through cloud computing, students and their teachers have access to these tools and resources from anywhere, anytime, via almost any device, including smartphones. This allows the learning environment to be mobile, just like our students.

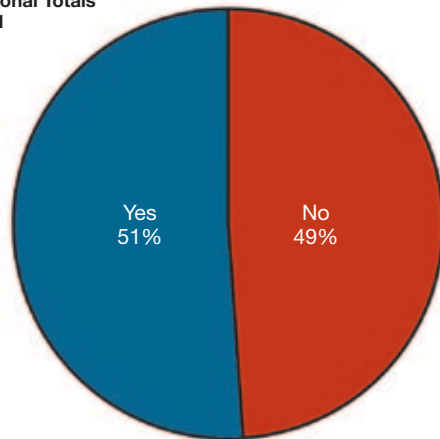
Computer skills are no longer a luxury — they are a necessity. Whether a student's future involves college, a profession such as medicine, or a vocation such as an automobile mechanic, the ability to master technology is now a basic skill and one that is critical for all students.

*MERIA CARSTARPHEN is superintendent of the Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas.*



**TABLE 19.** Do you think all high school students in your community should have their own computer to use at school?

National Totals  
2011



Should  
high school  
students have  
their own  
computers?  
Maybe

**TABLE 20.** I'm going to read you a list of possible reasons for high schools to use more computer technology in classrooms. Please tell me whether each of these is a very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important reason for high schools to use more computer technology: reduce costs by hiring fewer teachers; make more classes available for students from smaller schools or who live in rural areas; give students access to more high-quality teachers; help students become more motivated to learn; help make students ready for college or a career.

	National Totals '11				
	Reduce costs by hiring fewer teachers	Increase classes in smaller/rural schools	Access to high-quality teachers	Increase student motivation	Prepare students for college or career
	%	%	%	%	%
Very important	14	62	55	55	77
Somewhat important	28	31	28	30	19
Not very important	33	5	13	11	4
Not at all important	24	1	4	4	1
Don't know/refused	1	1	1	<.5	<.5

**TABLE 21.** Many Americans read books using electronic readers such as a Kindle or a Nook. Do you believe electronic books should be available for students in elementary schools; middle schools; high schools.

	National '11		
	Elementary schools	Middle schools	High schools
	%	%	%
Yes	28	51	64
No	72	48	35
Don't know/refused	1	1	1

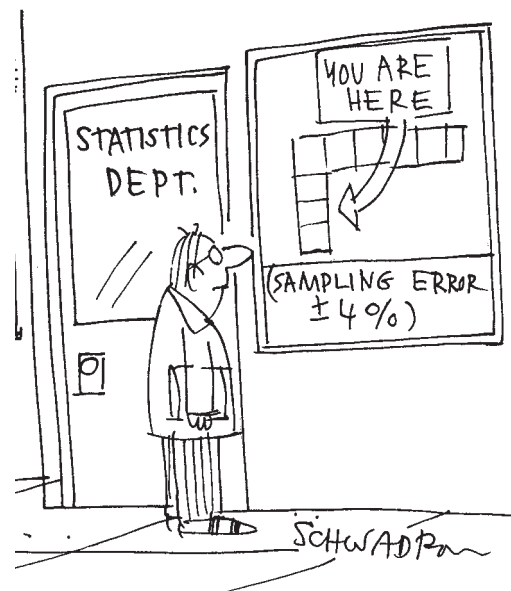
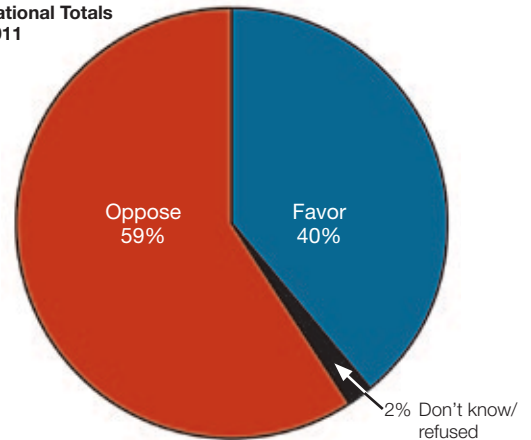
Percentages  
may not add up  
to 100% due to  
rounding.

**TABLE 22.** Suppose a school wants to offer a new class and is considering whether the class should be taught online or in person. Would it be best for the school to hire a more effective teacher who was only available to teach over the Internet or would it be better to use a less effective teacher who could teach the class in person?

	National Totals '11 %
More effective teacher online	46
Less effective teacher in person	50
Don't know/refused	5

**TABLE 23.** Some high schools use computer technology to allow students to learn at home. Do you favor or oppose having high school students attend school for fewer hours each week if they are using computer technology to learn at home?

National Totals  
2011





## PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY AND THE BIGGEST PROBLEM FACING EDUCATION

**T**he PDK/Gallup poll asks a series of four questions every year. The first question is, “what do you think are the biggest problems that the public schools in your community must deal with?” We don’t provide prompts, and we ask this question first so they’re not biased by other questions. We follow that question with three questions that ask Americans to assign grades, A to Fail, to their local schools, then the nation’s schools, and finally, we ask just parents to grade the school that their oldest child attends.

Over the years, we’ve documented the great disparity between grades that Americans give their local schools and those they give the nation’s schools. This year, we asked Americans why they believe this is so.

We continue to ask Americans to grade President Barack Obama, and give their perception of his support of public schools. And, for the first time in several years, we ask Americans to grade other groups including teachers, principals and other administrators, school boards, and parents.

### FINDINGS

Again this year, in significant numbers, Americans said lack of financial support was the biggest problem facing their local schools. School funding is a concern among public school parents — 44% indicated this is the biggest problem. Overcrowded schools, lack of discipline, and lack of parental support were the next most cited issues, but these challenges garnered far fewer mentions. Even combining lack of discipline, use of drugs, and fighting, the total registers only 11%.

The percentage of A’s and B’s that Americans gave to their local schools continues at an all-time high at 51%, and the percentage of Americans giving an A to their local schools is the highest on record at 14%. Americans under age 40 give their local schools significantly higher grades (62% A’s or B’s) versus Americans over age 40 (46% A’s or B’s).

But American perception of the nation’s schools continues to decline — only 17% assigned a grade of A or B to the nation’s schools. Not only are the percentages of A’s and B’s low, the percentages of D’s and Fails is increasing.

## Take a Deeper Dive into the 2011 PDK/Gallup Poll Results!

### Learn more

Explore this year’s poll results and get your questions answered in a webinar hosted by William J. Bushaw, PDK executive director and poll co-director.

### **Webinar Times/Dates**

4 pm ET Tuesday, Sept. 6

4 pm ET Thursday, Sept. 15

Register now: **[www.pdkpoll.org](http://www.pdkpoll.org)**

### Share your opinion

Visit PDK’s Facebook page for a chance to tell us how you would have answered questions in this year’s PDK/Gallup poll.

**[www.facebook.com/pdkintl](http://www.facebook.com/pdkintl)**

When asked why there was such a disparity between the grades assigned to their local schools versus their perception of the nation's schools, Americans overwhelmingly said they based the grade of their local schools on their knowledge about the immediate community and the local schools, and their pride in their community. Some believe they assigned low grades for the nation's schools based on negative media information. Interestingly, a relatively large percentage of Americans (15%) either couldn't or wouldn't answer the question.



## MARY BELL TEAMWORK KEY TO WEATHERING THE STORM

In the midst of a political storm, education is receiving a lot of attention. Diverse education reform ideas are being debated, and the poll shows that Americans recognize the importance of and challenges to teaching today. They believe in their teachers, they look for ways to effectively measure success, they are thinking about the future of education, and they understand the perceptions and problems facing education.

### COMMENTARY

The poll underscores the obvious: Americans are hopeful, yet realistic — recognizing that it's a difficult environment for educators and public schools. They are not supportive of extreme ideology or blame. The public trusts teachers — 71% report high trust and confidence in them. Yet it's unfortunate that negative news media stories of educators and public schools detract from the vast majority of everyday heroes who roll up their sleeves to support their students, schools, and communities.

As a union of educators, we continue to be a voice for quality schools and those who depend on them. Americans value public schools — the key to improving them and boosting academic success is teamwork. We need to support students by fostering partnerships that bring parents, teachers, and their communities together to overcome obstacles and ensure every child a quality public education.

At the end of the day, that's what education is all about: student success. We are committed to moving education forward.

*MARY BELL is president of the Wisconsin Education Association Council, Madison, Wis.*

Parents continue to give very high grades to the school that their oldest child attends. This year, 79% of the parents assigned grades of A or B, even higher than last year's 77%. These grades did not vary based upon political affiliation but were slightly lower for Americans over age 40 (73%).

In 1984, we asked Americans to assign letter grades, A to Fail, to teachers, principals and other administrators, school boards, and parents. In comparing grades assigned in 1984 with those assigned in 2011, teachers fared the best with a 19-point increase in the percentages of A's and B's received then (50%) and this year (69%). These results support the opening premise that Americans trust and respect their classroom teachers. Principals and other administrators also received higher grades — 47% A's and B's in 1984 as compared to 54% in 2011. Then as now, school board members and parents received lower grades, and, further, their grades did not improve over the 27-year period.

Good news for the president: The grades Americans gave him for his performance in support of public schools increased seven points, with 41% giving the president either an A or B, close to what he received in his first year in office. Not surprisingly, the grades were strongly related to political affiliation, but the president did receive higher grades from all three groups this year than in 2010.

**TABLE 24. What do you think are the biggest problems that the public schools of your community must deal with?**

	National Totals		
	'11 %	'06 %	'01 %
Lack of financial support/ funding/money	36	24	15
Overcrowded schools	6	13	10
Lack of discipline/more control	6	11	15
Fighting/violence/gangs	3	5	10
Use of drugs/dope	2	8	9

**TABLE 25. 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				
	'11 %	'10 %	'09 %	'08 %	'07 %
<b>A &amp; B</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>45</b>
A	14	11	10	12	9
B	37	38	41	34	36
C	32	33	32	30	34
D	11	11	11	11	14
Fail	5	5	3	5	5
Don't know/refused	2	2	3	8	2

**TABLE 26.** 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				
	'11 %	'10 %	'09 %	'08 %	'07 %
<b>A &amp; B</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>16</b>
A	1	1	1	3	2
B	16	17	18	19	14
C	51	53	55	44	57
D	23	20	19	13	18
Fail	7	6	6	5	5
Don't know/refused	3	3	1	16	4

**TABLE 28.** Using the A, B, C, D, and Fail scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

	National Totals				
	'11 %	'10 %	'09 %	'08 %	'07 %
<b>A &amp; B</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>67</b>
A	37	36	31	30	19
B	42	41	43	42	48
C	17	18	17	14	24
D	3	4	6	5	5
Fail	1	1	2	4	3
Don't know/refused	1	0	1	5	1

How would you grade teachers, administrators, and school boards?

Teachers get the best grades

**TABLE 27.** Americans tend to grade the public schools in their community higher than the public schools in the nation as a whole. Why do you think this is?

National Totals 2011

5%

Better community & parental involvement in the local schools

15%

Don't know/refused

5%

Other schools must deal with high poverty and insufficient budgets

17%

Pride in the local community/no one wants to look bad

43%

Greater knowledge of immediate community & local schools

**TABLE 29.** What grade would you give the following groups in your community? The teachers in the public schools; the principals and administrators in the public schools; the school board?

	National Totals				School Board	
	Teachers '11 %	Teachers '84 %	Principals '11 %	Principals '84 %	'11 %	'84 %
<b>A &amp; B</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>41</b>
A	27	13	16	13	8	9
B	42	37	38	34	29	32
C	21	31	27	29	32	29
D	5	7	11	8	15	11
Fail	2	3	5	5	11	6
Don't know/refused	3	9	4	11	6	13

**TABLE 30.** Now, what grade would you give the parents of students in the local public schools for bringing up their children?

	National Totals	
	'11 %	'84 %
<b>A &amp; B</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>33</b>
A	8	7
B	28	26
C	37	36
D	18	16
Fail	6	6
Don't know/refused	3	9

**TABLE 31.** President Barack Obama has been in office for over two years. How would you grade his performance in support of public schools using the A, B, C, D, Fail scale?

	National Totals			Rep. '11 %	Dem. '11 %	Ind. '11 %
	'11 %	'10 %	'09 %			
<b>A &amp; B</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>37</b>
A	11	7	12	2	23	7
B	30	27	33	14	45	30
C	25	26	26	24	23	28
D	14	18	11	21	5	18
Fail	15	15	10	35	2	12
Don't know/refused	5	7	8	5	4	5

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



## PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE

“Winning the future” was the theme of the President’s 2011 State of the Union speech, and the challenge for a nation trying to educate and innovate itself toward a better economy. In last year’s poll, we began probing the extent to which Americans believe that schools are sufficiently preparing students for the 21st-century economy. This year, we added more questions to probe deeper.



### AMBER ARELLANO PUT BALANCE IN EDUCATION REFORM

As a former teacher and former newspaper reporter, I’m alarmed to learn that 68% of Americans say they hear more bad than good stories about teachers in the news.

My hunch is this is partly about timing. Certainly, recent efforts by several governors to change tenure, layoff, and evaluation laws have drawn

#### COMMENTARY

widespread media attention. Sometimes, advocates argue for those reforms with extreme portraits of “terrible” teachers — exactly the kind of stories that make headlines.

But not even the most aggressive reformer believes that most, or even many, of our teachers are awful. What’s awful is the system that’s been built around the profession. For too long, teachers have been treated like interchangeable widgets, deprived of the honest evaluation, support, and coaching that help all professionals improve.

Fortunately, the public grasps the distinction between bad teachers and bad systems. When asked what should matter in teacher compensation, most Americans in the PDK/Gallup poll said student performance and principal evaluations should be important factors. They agree that good teachers should be rewarded, and teachers whose students consistently perform poorly should either have a chance to improve or be removed from the system.

Here in Michigan, Gov. Rick Snyder has pursued sensible reforms of teacher tenure and evaluation without demonizing teachers or gutting their collective bargaining rights as other governors have attempted. That’s great news for Michiganders, and, by extension, for all of America’s schoolchildren.

*AMBER ARELLANO is executive director of The Education Trust-Midwest, Ann Arbor, Mich.*

## FINDINGS

Americans consider a high school graduate more ready for the world of work than a high school dropout. Two of every three respondents said they know someone who had earned a GED, certifying their high school-level academic knowledge and skills, and three out of every four consider the GED a path to greater readiness for the future.

College graduates are considered most ready for the world of work. Interestingly, however, not all Americans believe that a college degree is sufficient for readiness.

Parents with school-aged children are hopeful about the education futures of their children, but less hopeful that their children will land a good job one day.

Regarding education practices and conditions that might promote readiness, most parents agree that schools are safe, that education is relevant, and that teachers encourage students to do what they do best and recognize and praise students for good schoolwork. But parents believe they’re more generous with praise and recognition than their children’s teachers.

New questions in the poll asked parents about their perceptions of schools as places where students can learn and grow and achieve both academic outcomes and develop life skills. Generally, parents consider schools to be organizations that encourage well-being. Notably, parents indicated that schools don’t prepare students to deal with their finances.

**TABLE 32. Do you know someone who has earned a high school equivalency diploma by passing the GED test?**

National Totals  
2011

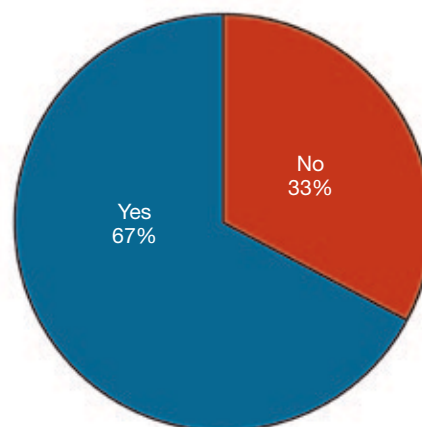


TABLE 33. Do you think passing the GED test helped in their preparations for college or a career?

	National Totals '11 %
Yes	74
No	25
Don't know/refused	1

TABLE 34. 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 items: today's high school dropout is ready for the world of work; today's high school graduate is ready for the world of work; today's college graduate is ready for the world of work.

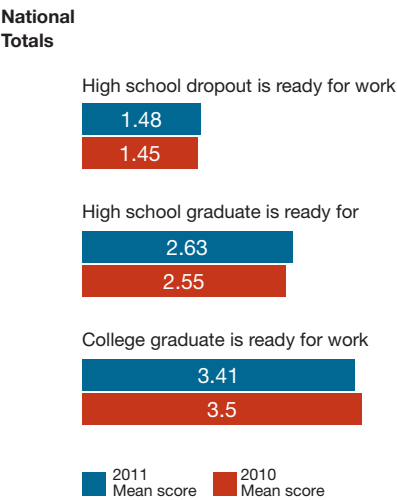


TABLE 35. Now, think about your oldest child in your response to the next questions. On a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following items: I know my child will graduate from high school; I know my child will find a good job after he or she graduates; my child's teachers make schoolwork relevant with real-world examples; at school, my child has the opportunity to do what he or she does best every day; in the last seven days, a teacher has given my child recognition or praise for doing good schoolwork; in the last seven days, I have given my child recognition or praise for doing good schoolwork; I feel that my child is safe at school.

	National Totals (Parents only)	
	'11 Mean score	'10 Mean score
Will graduate from high school	4.82	4.81
Will find a good job after graduation	3.74	3.77
Teachers make schoolwork relevant	3.83	3.68
Can do his/her best at school	3.68	3.73
Is safe at school	4.44	4.33
Received praise from a teacher (not asked in 2010)	4.19	
Received praise from me (not asked in 2010)	4.74	

TABLE 36. Now, think of your oldest child in your response to the next questions. 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 items: my child has substantially higher well-being because of the school he or she attends; my child's school encourages him or her to build stronger relationships with friends and family members; my child's school teaches him or her to manage finances more effectively; my child's school does things to help him or her become more healthy; my child's school encourages him or her to be more involved in the community.

National Totals '11	Mean score
Higher well-being because of school	3.91
Encourages building strong relationships with friends and family	4.00
Teaches financial management	2.84
Teaches ways to become healthier	3.76
Encourages involvement in the community	3.83

**MONA M. ABO-ZENA**  
**TEACHING: ART AND SCIENCE**

Is the ability to teach mostly a product of natural talent or college training? Both. Teachers need natural abilities and passion as well as hard work and excellent mentoring. The public overwhelmingly attributes the ability to teach to natural talent, but the value of comprehensive education, training and professional development cannot be underestimated. Integrated, programmatic, and individualized professional development is needed for all educators, particularly given the increasingly complex roles teachers serve.

With immigration rates at historic proportions, schools are ever more linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse. Teachers grapple with identifying culturally relevant practices that reflect students' interests and educational standards. Researchers who have assessed teacher preparation programs have found that the quality of training to serve diverse students is substandard across the country.

In order to recruit, retain, and promote high-quality teachers, the education arena needs to offer mentorship and development opportunities that meet all aspects of the diverse education demands that educators face.

Teaching and the preparation of teachers is both an art and a science.

*MONA M. ABO-ZENA is a research associate in youth and development at Tufts University, Boston, Mass., and a post-doctoral fellow in immigration studies at New York University.*





## JOE NATHAN EMPOWER PARENTS, TEACHERS

When I look at this year's PDK/Gallup poll results, I see three trends emerging: Respect, empowerment, and choice.

First, as a former urban public school teacher married to a 33-year veteran of urban public schools, and parent of an urban public school teacher, I was gratified to see that two-thirds or more of Americans respect the profession since they would encourage “the brightest person you know” and “a child of yours” to become a public school teacher. While some educators feel a lack of respect, this poll found considerable support for the profession.

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Second, that esteem is demonstrated in the willingness of 73% of poll respondents to empower educators by “giv(ing) teachers flexibility to teach in ways they think best,” rather than require them “to follow a prescribed curriculum.” I hope creative, committed, hardworking teachers find these responses encouraging.

Third, just as most poll respondents want teachers to be free to select materials and strategies, 74% support allowing families “to choose which public schools in the community the students attend, regardless of where they live.” Seventy percent also favor “the idea of charter public schools.” Poll trends show support growing for public school choice, including charters.

These responses are consistent with empowering educators to decide how they teach. Some educators want more respect, but oppose allowing families to choose among district and charter public schools. Strong majorities of the public, wisely, I think, support both educator and family choice.

*JOE NATHAN is director of the Center for School Change at Macalester College, St. Paul, Minn.*

## CHARTERS, VOUCHERS, AND CHOICE

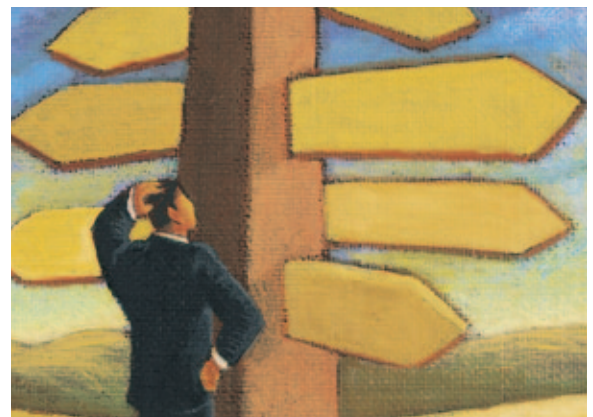
Charter schools and vouchers continue to be in the news and continue to be lightning rods of controversy in the education community. For 10 years, we've tracked Americans' opinions on charter schools (public schools that are freed from certain regulations that govern traditional public schools) and vouchers (scholarships funded by public dollars that enable students to attend certain private schools).

### FINDINGS

Americans continue to embrace the concept of charter schools. This year's poll shows an approval rating of 70%, the highest recorded since the question was first asked 10 years ago. Charter school support has increased steadily over that period. Support for public charter schools is strongest among Americans under age 40 (76%) and Republicans (77%).

Americans increasingly support choice — allowing students and parents to choose which public schools to attend in their community regardless of where they live — and this support is consistent across age differences and political affiliation.

But vouchers received the lowest approval rating in the past 10 years — only one of three Americans favor allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend with public dollars.



**TABLE 37. 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				
	'11 %	'10 %	'09 %	'08 %	'07 %
Favor	70	68	64	51	60
Oppose	27	28	33	35	35
Don't know/refused	3	4	3	14	5



**TABLE 38. Do you favor or oppose allowing students and their parents to choose which public schools in the community the students attend, regardless of where they live?**

	National Totals		
	'11	'95	'91
	%	%	%
Favor	74	69	62
Oppose	25	28	33
Don't know/refused	1	3	5

**TABLE 39. Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?**

	National Totals			
	'11	'08	'05	'02
	%	%	%	%
Favor	34	44	38	46
Oppose	65	50	57	52
Don't know/refused	1	6	5	2

STUDENTS OF MILITARY FAMILIES

America has been at war for a decade, placing enormous strains on the dedicated men and women who serve in our military. We wondered if Americans believe the public schools recognize the challenges facing military families, particularly as they relate to the education of their children.

FINDINGS

Only one of four Americans are aware of efforts made by their local schools to support students whose parents are serving in the U.S. armed forces. This is reasonable, as about one of four Americans has children in schools, and they would likely be the ones to have this knowledge. In a follow-up question asked only of those who said they were aware of efforts to support these families, one of three believed the schools were very effective in this area with another 50% indicating the schools were somewhat effective.

**TABLE 40. Based upon what you know or have heard, are you aware of efforts by schools in your community to support students whose parents are currently serving in the United States armed forces, either active duty, reserve, or National Guard?**

	National Totals
	'11
	%
Yes	26
No	72
Don't know/refused	2



School support for children of parents in the military? Somewhat effective

**TABLE 41. Just your opinion, how effective are your community's schools' efforts to support students whose parents are currently serving in the United States armed forces? (Asked only of those who responded yes in Table #40.)**

	National Totals
	'11
	%
Very effective	34
Somewhat effective	50
Not very effective	6
Not at all effective	4
Don't know/refused	7

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

## ADVISORY PANEL

Poll co-directors **William J. Bushaw** and **Shane Lopez** assembled a panel of experts in education to select the topics asked in the 2011 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.

**Kim Anderson**, director, governmental relations, National Education Association

**Sandee Crowther**, president, Phi Delta Kappa

**Virginia Edwards**, president, Educational Projects in Education

**Michael Feuer**, dean, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, George Washington University

**Kevin Huffman**, executive vice president, Teach For America (now Tennessee commissioner of education)

**Mike Petrilli**, executive vice president, Thomas B. Fordham Institute

**Wendy Puriefoy**, president, Public Education Network

**Connie Rath**, dean, Gallup University

**Marvin "Skip" Schoenhals**, chairman, WSFS Corp.

**Joan Richardson**, editor-in-chief, *Phi Delta Kappan*

**Ellen Schoetzau**, associate executive director, American Association of School Administrators

**Cheryl Williams**, executive director, Learning First Alliance

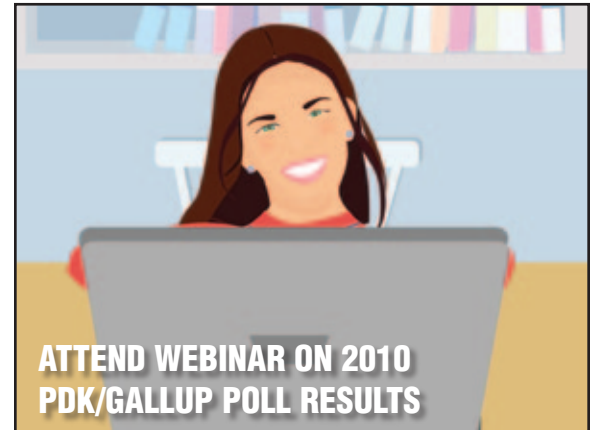
**Bob Wise**, president, Alliance for Excellent Education

## MOVING FORWARD

Some policy makers discount public opinion when it doesn't agree with personal beliefs. This can be an ill-advised strategy as it ignores the public's acceptance of important improvement strategies. An alternate pathway is to leverage public opinion, and identify strategies that are fundamentally consistent with these opinions while still identifying and implementing aggressive transformational policies.

So, how should policy makers interpret the insights of Americans who responded to this year's PDK/Gallup poll?

- The United States is facing a continuing need to replace teachers who are retiring by choice or leaving early because of early retirement options. As we fill those positions, policy makers should build upon American's respect and trust in their teachers, and do everything possible to ensure that the U.S. recruits and retains those most able to teach our children.
- While working to maintain hard fought gains in teacher salaries, benefits, and other working conditions that Americans still support, teacher union leaders should thoughtfully consider what actions they could take to improve their public image.



Bill Bushaw, PDK's executive director and co-director of the PDK/Gallup poll, will host two webinars on **Sept. 6 and Sept. 15, both at 4 pm ET**. The PDK Educational Foundation sponsors the webinar.

The webinar is free and open to any interested persons, but seats are limited. Reserve your spot by sending your request to [customerservice@pdkintl.org](mailto:customerservice@pdkintl.org).

Face-to-face and webinar PDK/Gallup poll presentations can be specially arranged. Send e-mail requests to [customerservice@pdkintl.org](mailto:customerservice@pdkintl.org). Please provide the organization's name, contact person and contact information, proposed dates and times, and information about the anticipated audience.

- The count is in — Americans have accepted charter schools. Moving forward, what can be done to support these schools? At the same time, politicians should be wary of sending public funds to private schools because Americans still do not support vouchers.
- Americans recognize that public education funding is in crisis, particularly given the nation's current economic situation. Americans will support strategies that recognize that investments in public education are investments in our nation's economic future and well-being. At the same time, education leaders should thoughtfully implement transformational strategies that build on greater efficiencies and effectiveness, resulting in better learning among all student groups.
- Policy makers and education leaders should recognize that Americans increasingly support bringing new technologies into the classroom when they can stimulate student motivation and provide greater student personalization.
- In terms of being ready for the work world, Americans say the more education the better. But a college degree doesn't guarantee readiness. Educators and policy makers should consider how 21st-century skills, combined with higher education, will affect readiness.
- Today's schools are considered well-being centers for American youth. Communities should explore ways to leverage the resources of these well-being centers to increase services to students.

## PDK/GALLUP POLL QUESTION ARCHIVE



PDK members can access the PDK/Gallup poll archive database by logging in at [www.pdkintl.org](http://www.pdkintl.org) with their user ID and password. The archive includes more than 800 questions asked of the American public since the first PDK/Gallup poll in 1969.

The database is organized by topic and reports each question as it was asked. Multiple-year results are provided when the same question was used in subsequent polls.

## CONCLUSION

As the United States continues to explore ways to not just reform but transform education, all new policies and programs must consider what will be most effective at improving student learning. Americans seem clear that the answer is investment in teachers first and foremost.

## 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?

January	Solicit issues, topics, and questions for the poll from policy makers and educators.
March	Convene an advisory committee to consider suggestions, select topics, and frame questions.
April	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. 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 to ensure respondent comprehension. Construct sampling frame.
May	Program final survey questionnaire for interviewers. Administer telephone interviews and collect data. Code and process completed surveys. Match sample and weight to reflect U.S. census population parameters.
June	Generate detailed tabular analyses (cross-tabulations). Review and analyze data.
July	Write about results for an article in the September issue of <i>Kappan</i> .
August	Release results to media, PDK members, members of Congress, superintendents/commissioners, and other interested policy makers.
September	Publish complete poll report in the September issue of <i>Kappan</i> and post online at <a href="http://www.pdkintl.org">www.pdkintl.org</a> , the Gallup education web site ( <a href="http://www.gallup.com/poll/1612/education.aspx">www.gallup.com/poll/1612/education.aspx</a> ), and the Gallup Student Poll web site ( <a href="http://www.gallupstudentpoll.com">www.gallupstudentpoll.com</a> ).



## COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE\*

<b>Adults</b>	%
No children in school	62
Public school parents	29
Nonpublic school parents	5
<b>Age %</b>	
Over 40	67
40 and under	33
<b>Gender</b>	%
Male	48
Female	52
<b>Region</b>	%
East	18
Midwest	22
South	36
West	23
<b>Political Party</b>	%
Republican	29
Democrat	34
Independent	34
Undesignated	3
<b>Education</b>	%
Total college	62
Total high school	37

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



## SAMPLE DESIGN AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Findings for the 2011 PDK/Gallup poll are based on 1,002 completed interviews. The survey was administered from June 4 through June 13, 2011. The survey was conducted with a national sample of adults aged 18 and older drawn from the Gallup Panel. The Gallup Panel was created in 2004 as 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. A national cross-section of households was sampled to yield a representative survey across all segments of the population in telephone-owning households. A four-call design was used to complete an interview with 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.

## PAST PDK/GALLUP POLLS

Copies of previously published PDK/Gallup polls are available to PDK members free at [www.pdkintl.org](http://www.pdkintl.org). Others can buy previous polls for \$4.95 each.



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