

EdChoice Polling Primer

An overview of American public
opinion on K–12 education

2024 EDITION



INTRODUCTION

For more than 15 years, EdChoice has conducted polling as a core part of our research. We've sought to better understand where American parents and the public stand on K-12 education issues ranging from educational choice, to technology, to school safety, to school choice policies. Since 2009 (when we were known as the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice), we have produced more than 100 survey-based reports and briefs for our partners and the public.

In 2013, after several years of exclusively conducting and reporting state-level polls, we launched our first national poll with Braun Research: the *Schooling in America Survey (SIA)*. We have continued to field that annual, national poll ever since.

That first *SIA* survey contained more than a dozen questions that we continue to ask each year. Our methods have evolved over time, along with those of other survey researchers and pollsters. Initially, we conducted interviews only by phone. Since 2017, we have taken a mixed-mode approach for *SIA*—still including a sample of phone interviews, but mostly administering the survey online.

At the beginning of 2020, EdChoice and Morning Consult partnered to launch a new monthly poll called the *EdChoice Public Opinion Tracker* to focus on timely issues in K-12 education. We conducted three polling waves just before the global COVID-19 pandemic, and our team was able to track and document parents' and the public's experiences during an extremely turbulent and volatile time in American schooling.

We administer our monthly *Tracker* poll completely online. Each month, we obtain completed surveys from approximately 2,200 general public respondents. With additional fielding, we also survey a large sample of parents of K-12 school-age children—typically more than 1,200. These national samples are adjusted to match a range of demographic benchmarks as closely as possible so that the *Tracker* can reflect statistically representative views of the national adult and parent populations. We have also used the *Tracker* platform to survey other specific populations of interest from teens, to teachers, to parents of students with special needs.

For both *SIA* and the *Tracker*, we prioritize questions gauging public opinion on educational choice policies, as well as parents' schooling experiences and preferences. These areas are foundational for our organization and partners, and we pay close attention to trends and changes over time. Another key focus for our work is capturing the differences in experiences and perspective across various school sectors (district, private, charter, etc.). K–12 education funding and spending is another longstanding area of interest.

From the outset, we have articulated four goals for our polling. We want to:

- Provide timely and reliable data, trends, and analysis so we can be responsive to current events and developments.
- Assist partners, policy analysts, the media, and other researchers in their work.
- Produce state-level findings (via the *Tracker*) that assist policymakers, influencers, and other stakeholders to better understand the views and attitudes of their constituents and community members.
- Generate information and content for discussion and debate about issues and among various group perspectives.

We set out to ask clear, understandable questions, collect revealing response data, and report findings in a non-partisan way.

Our *SIA* and *Tracker* reports are heavy on data and concise descriptives. We continue to let the charts, numbers, trends, and key findings do most of the talking. We do our best to avoid overstating findings or teasing out too many implications. The EdChoice mission is to advance educational freedom and choice for all as a pathway to successful lives and a stronger society. Our mission at EdChoice establishes our priorities, and our commitment to producing reliable and accurate survey research guides our approach to methods, data collection, and reporting.

In this polling primer, we cover top findings from across both our *Schooling in America* and monthly *Public Opinion Tracker* reports.

Access EdChoice Survey Publications



*Schooling in
America Survey*



*EdChoice Public
Opinion Tracker*



*What Do
Parents Want?*



*Semi-Annual
Teacher Survey
(Spring 2024)*



*Semi-Annual
Teen Survey
(Spring 2024)*

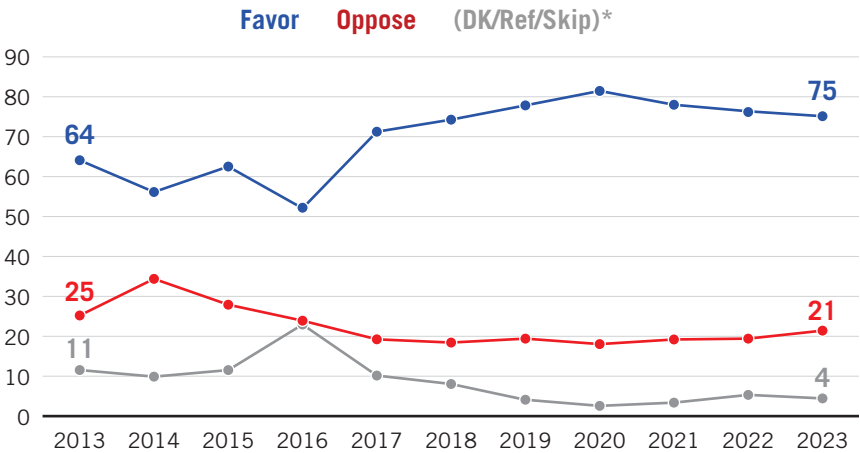
***SCHOOLING
IN AMERICA
SURVEY FINDINGS***

EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNT TRENDS

Without any description of education savings accounts (ESAs), about half (51%) of Americans support Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) and 31% say they have never heard of them. When given a description of education savings accounts (ESAs)*, Americans are more than three times as likely to support ESAs (75%) than oppose them (21%), a trend that has held true since 2017. Support peaked in 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. ESAs have higher support levels than any other school choice policy presented in our *Schooling in America Survey*. The intensity of ESA favorability is also high, as Americans are more than twice as likely to strongly support (27%) versus strongly oppose (13%) ESAs.

PUBLIC FAVORABILITY OF EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (ESAs), 2013-2023

Three out of four Americans support ESAs. Favorability of ESAs has declined slightly since 2020, and opposition has remained stable and much lower.



*DK = Don't Know, Ref = Refuse

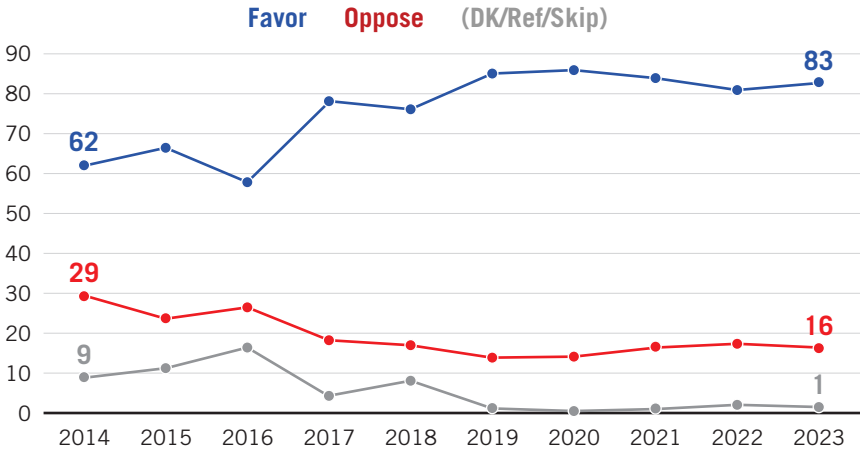
Parents of children in K–12 education are even more supportive of ESAs. Without a description of ESAs, parents are nine percentage points more likely than all adults to favor this school choice policy (60%), and they are five percentage points more likely to have heard of ESAs. After seeing the

* Respondents see the following description of ESAs: “An ‘education savings account’ in K–12 education – often called an ESA – establishes for parents a government-authorized savings account with restricted, but multiple uses for educational purposes. Parents can then use these funds to pay for: school tuition; tutoring; online education programs; therapies for students with special needs; textbooks or other instructional materials; or save for future college expenses.”

description of ESAs, more than four out of five parents (83%) are in support, and just 16% are in opposition. Like the general population, ESA support peaked in 2020 at 86%, but support in the three subsequent years has remained relatively stable.

PARENTS' FAVORABILITY OF EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (ESAs), 2014-2023

Current school parents are more than five times more likely to support ESAs than they are to oppose them.



VOUCHER TRENDS

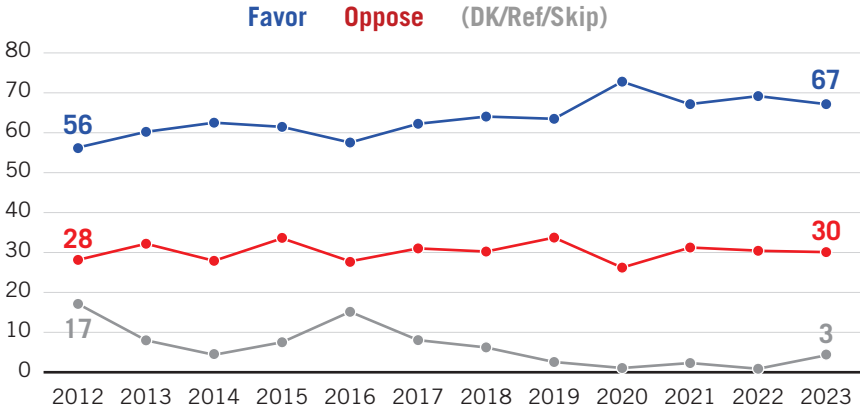
When given a description of school vouchers,* two-thirds (67%) of the general public support this form of choice. Just under one-third (30%) are in opposition. Voucher support peaked in 2020 at 73% and has remained around two-thirds since 2021. Without a description, 48% of Americans support school vouchers. One-fourth (25%) say they never heard of vouchers, and 23% say they oppose them. When seeing a description of school vouchers, support increases by 19 percentage points, while opposition increases only seven points.

Parents are more favorable to school vouchers than the general population. Before receiving a description of vouchers, 55% of parents indicate they are

* Respondents see the following description of school vouchers: "A school voucher system allows parents the option of sending their child to the school of their choice, whether that school is public or private, including both religious and non-religious schools. If this policy were adopted, tax dollars currently allocated to a school district would be allocated to parents in the form of a 'school voucher' to pay partial or full tuition for the child's school."

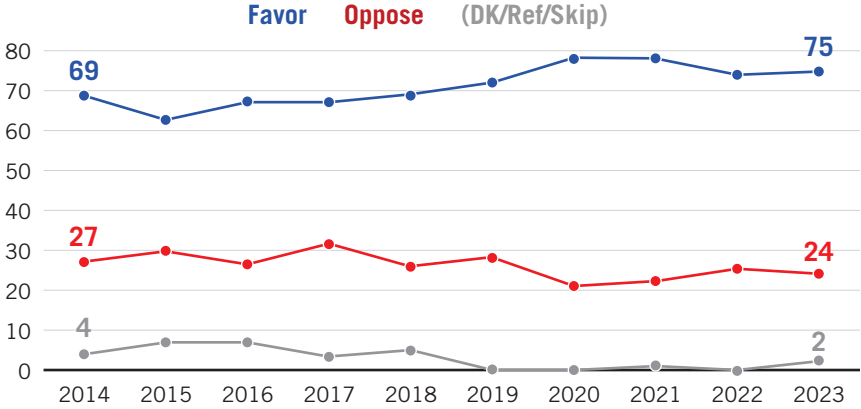
PUBLIC FAVORABILITY OF SCHOOL VOUCHERS, 2012-2023

More than two-thirds of the public support vouchers. Overall support remains higher than pre-pandemic levels.



PARENTS' FAVORABILITY OF SCHOOL VOUCHERS, 2014-2023

Three-fourths of parents support school vouchers. Similar to last year, supporters outnumbered opponents three to one.



in support. Like the general population, nearly one-fourth (24%) of parents say they have not heard of vouchers. Just under one out of five (19%) oppose them. After seeing the description, three out of four parents (75%) support vouchers and less than one-fourth (24%) oppose them. Voucher support among parents was highest in 2020, but support did not immediately taper.

UNIVERSAL VS. NEEDS-BASED

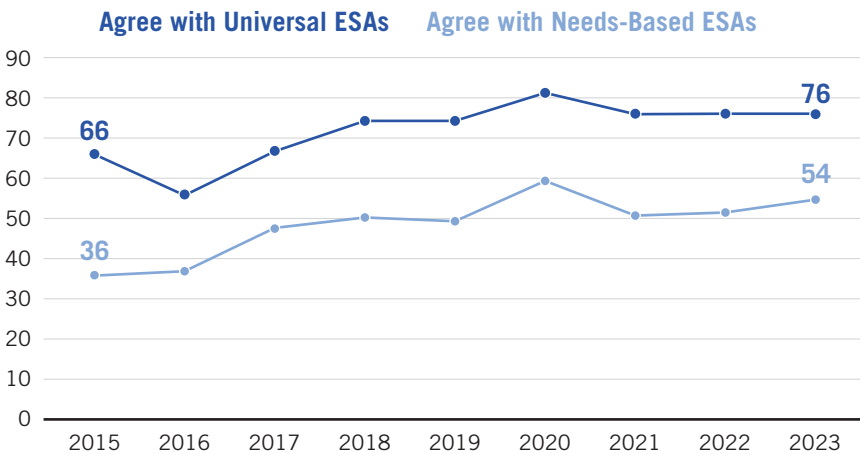
In the *Schooling in America Survey*, we ask a split-sample question about who should be eligible to receive ESAs. In a split-sample question, participants are randomly shown one of two question options. For this case, respondents are asked one of the two following questions:

- Some people believe that ESAs should be available to all families, regardless of income and special needs. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?
- Some people believe that ESAs should be available to families based on financial need. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?

The former question suggests that ESAs should be universally available, while the latter suggests that eligibility should be limited to those below certain income levels. Both versions are generally agreeable, as more than half of each group agree with the question asked. However, people were substantially more likely to agree that ESAs should be universally available (76%) than have needs-based restrictions (54%).

UNIVERSAL VS. NEEDS-BASED EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (ESAs), 2015-2023

More than three-fourths of the public support universal ESAs - a similar result to what we have observed in recent years.

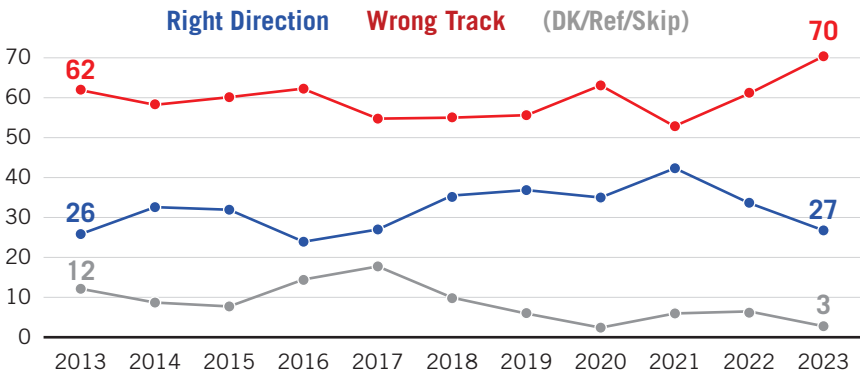


Responses were more strongly favorable across numerous demographic categories. Asian (84%), Black (83%), and Hispanic (83%) respondents all favored universal ESAs in larger numbers than white respondents (73%). While high-income respondents were less likely than low-income respondents to agree ESAs should have need-based restrictions (43% versus 63%), both demographics were more likely to agree with the universal ESA language (77% and 73%, respectively).

K-12 DIRECTION

PUBLIC VIEWS ON THE DIRECTION OF K-12 EDUCATION, 2013-2023

About one in four Americans believe K-12 education is heading in the right direction – a 15-point decline since 2021.

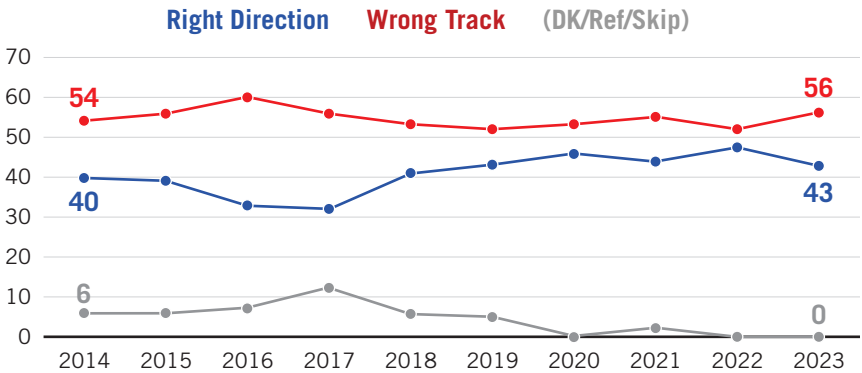


Based on 11 years of data from *SIA*, Americans have never been more pessimistic about the direction of K-12 education. In the most recent wave, 70% of the general public felt K-12 education was on the “wrong track,” the highest share ever seen in more than a decade of asking this question. This comes just two years after the lowest levels of pessimism, when just 53% of surveyed Americans said they felt K-12 education was heading in the wrong direction. Negative responses have exceeded optimistic ones in each year of our survey.

Parents are more optimistic than the general public, though they are still more likely to be pessimistic than optimistic about the future of K–12 education. In the most recent wave, 56% of parents indicate they feel education is on the “wrong track,” while 43% said it was heading in the “right direction.” Unlike the general public, parent perceptions have not varied much since 2018.

PARENTS’ VIEWS ON THE DIRECTION OF K–12 EDUCATION, 2014-2023

School parents’ pessimism about the direction of K–12 education increased slightly in 2023.



SCHOOL SPENDING: EFFECTS OF INFORMATION

Americans tend to drastically underestimate how much money is spent on public schools. We ask survey respondents to estimate how much public schools spend on each student in their particular states. Three out of four respondents (75%) and four out of five (81%) parent respondents guessed amounts below what their states actually spend, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics. Not only do respondents tend to underestimate public school spending in their states, but the median parent’s guess (\$5,000 per pupil) is significantly less than the lowest state average (\$9,104 per student in FY21).

We also pose a split-sample question about school spending. For this case, one group is shown the following multiple-choice question:

“Do you believe that public school funding in [Your State] is at a level that is:”

- **TOO HIGH**
- **TOO LOW**
- **ABOUT RIGHT**

The other group sees this question:

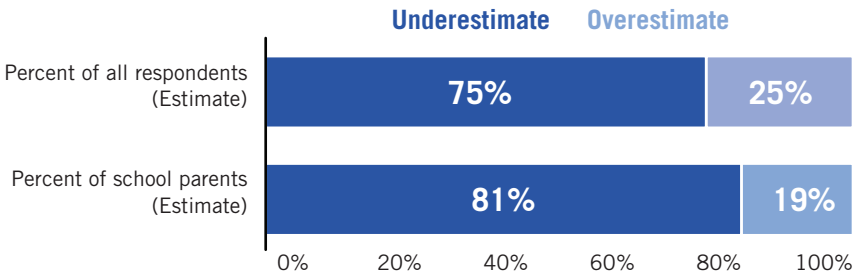
“According to the most recent information available, on average \$[CurrentSpendingAmount] is being spent per year on each student attending public schools in [Your State]. Do you believe that public school funding in [Your State] is at a level that is:”

- **TOO HIGH**
- **TOO LOW**
- **ABOUT RIGHT**

Question options are randomly ordered for each participant. In short, both groups were asked how they felt about school spending levels, but one group saw how much money their state was spending, while the other group did not.

ESTIMATING SCHOOL SPENDING

Most Americans and parents drastically underestimate public school spending. The median parent respondent (\$5,000 per student) said spending is significantly less than the lowest state average (\$9,104 per student in FY21).



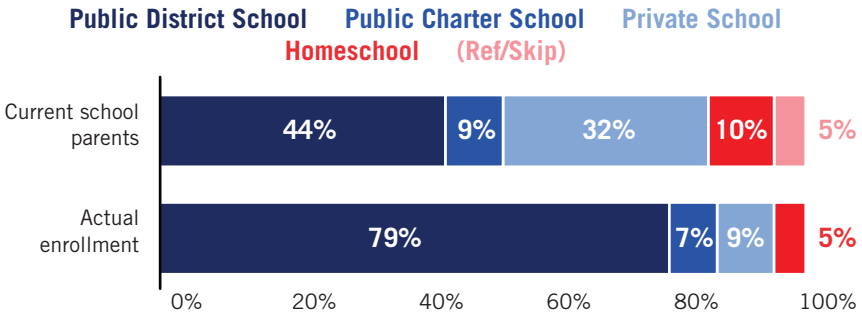
Among both groups, respondents were most likely to say school spending was too low. There were significant differences between the groups, however. Those who saw actual school spending numbers were 15 percentage points less likely to say school spending was too low, seven points more likely to say school spending was too high, and eight points more likely to say spending levels are about right.

***PUBLIC OPINION
TRACKER***
RESULTS

PARENT PREFERENCES VS. ACTUAL ENROLLMENT

Parents have a diverse set of preferences for their child’s education. However, there is a substantial disconnect between preferences and actual enrollment patterns. The most recent enrollment data show that nearly 80% of parents send their child to a public district school. Private school, charter school, and homeschool enrollments are miniscule in comparison, at 9%, 7%, and 5%, respectively. What parents say they prefer is a different story. A substantial number of parents (44%) do prefer a public district school, but not nearly to the extent we see in actual enrollment patterns. Nearly one-third of parents would prefer a private school (32%), while 10% and 9% would prefer a homeschool and charter school, respectively.

SCHOOL TYPE PREFERENCE VS. ENROLLMENT 2024



Source: Authors' calculations; Colyn Ritter, January 17, 2024, 2024 EdChoice Share: Exploring Where America's Students Are Educated

SCHOOL SWITCHERS AND REASONS WHY

In 2023, we wanted to gauge how often students have switched from one type of school to another. We posed the following question to parents: “Besides moving from grade school to middle school or middle school to high school, has your child ever switched from one type of school (or school sector) to another?” Overall, the results have been relatively stable over time. Roughly one in four parents (23%) report that their child has switched school types. Taking a closer look at demographics, private school parents and parents of special needs children are consistently the most likely groups to say their child has switched school types. The reasons why kids switch school types have evolved over time. Initially, the most prominent reason parents gave

for switching schools was that their child’s academic needs were not being met. While that still remains a common reason, it has been overtaken by other reasons such as bullying and excessive stress or anxiety.

PARENTS’ RESPONSES ON SCHOOL SWITCHING

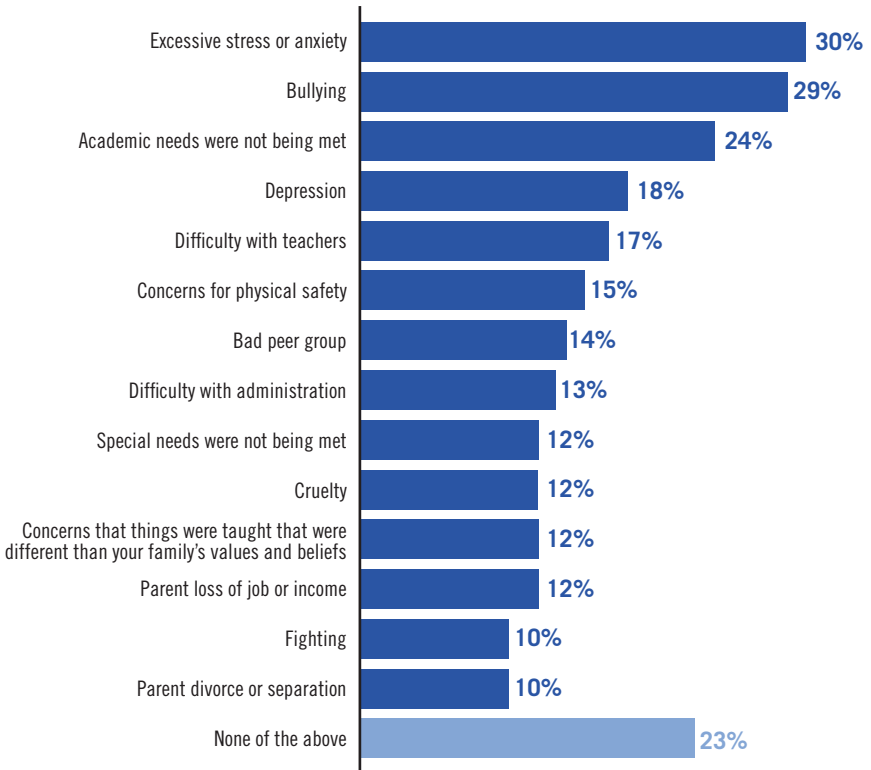
Nearly 1 in 4 parents indicate that their child has switched from one school type to another. School switching is the highest among private school, special needs and special education parents.

Yes, my child has changed school types **No, my child has not changed school types**
 I don't know if my child has changed school types



PARENTS’ REASONS FOR SWITCHING THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL

School switchers are most likely to indicate a switch because of bullying, excessive stress or anxiety at their former school.

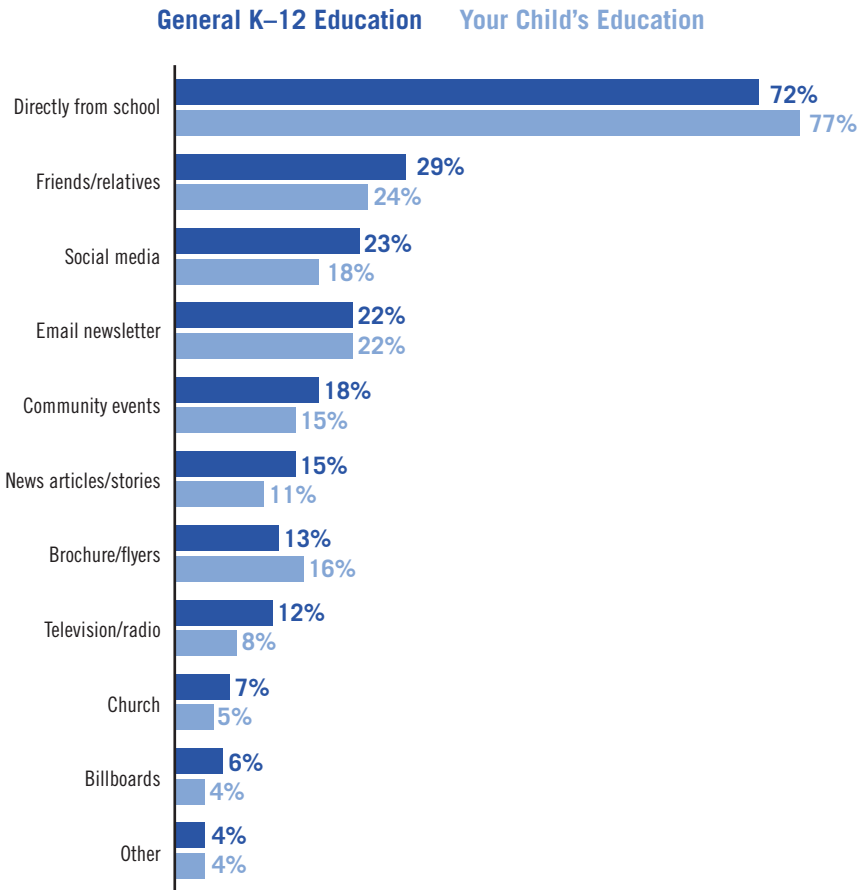


PARENT COMMUNICATIONS WITH SCHOOLS

Transparency within schools is a widely discussed topic, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. In July of 2023, we asked parents where they receive information about their child’s education, as well as K–12 education generally. Parents were overwhelmingly likely to say their primary source of information about their child’s education came straight from the school

WHERE PARENTS GET INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION

Parents are most likely to get information about their child’s education, and K–12 education generally, directly from their school. About one-fourth of parents receive such information from friends and relatives.

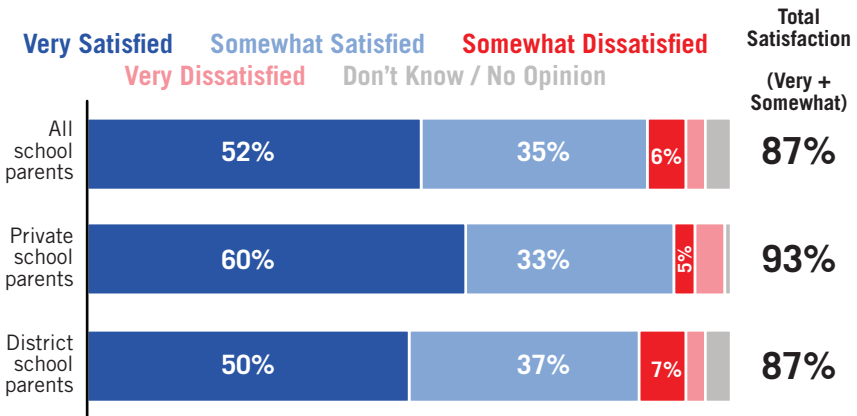


(77%). While parents mostly rely on schools to stay informed about their child's education, parents also turn to friends/relatives (24%), email newsletters (22%), and social media (18%) to get this information.

Diving deeper, parents are generally satisfied with how their child's school communicates with them on their child's grades and progress. Private school parents (93%) are slightly more satisfied than district school parents (87%) with the communication from their child's school, though both groups maintain very high levels of satisfaction.

PARENTS' SATISFACTION WITH THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

The vast majority of parents are at least somewhat satisfied with how their child's school communicates grades/progress with them.

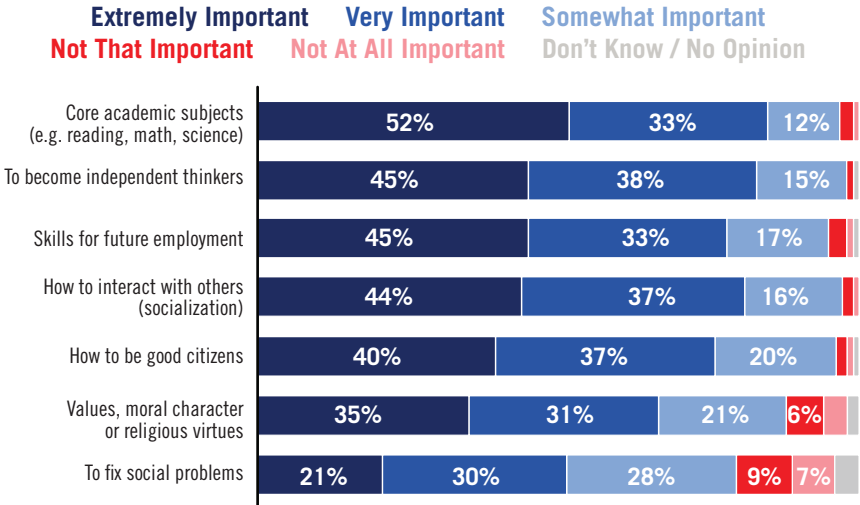


PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Our polling has sought to gain a better understanding of what parents believe should be the purpose of education. We examine this question in two school levels, one for K–8 schooling and another for 9–12 schooling. Throughout the years we've asked this question, parents are consistently more likely to say learning core academic subjects, becoming independent thinkers, developing skills for future employment, and learning to interact with others should be prioritized for K–8 grade education.

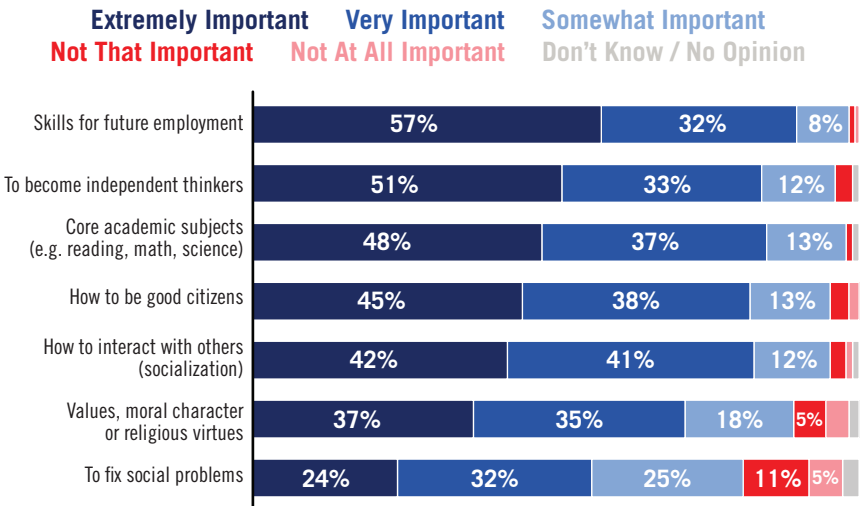
PARENTS' VIEWS ON THE PURPOSE OF K–8 EDUCATION

School parents are most likely to say core academic subjects are extremely important for K–8 education. Fixing social problems ranks lowest.



PARENTS' VIEWS ON THE PURPOSE OF HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

School parents are most likely to indicate that skills for future employment should be the most important purpose of high school. They view fixing social problems as a much lower priority.



SCHOOLS' HANDLING OF KEY ISSUES

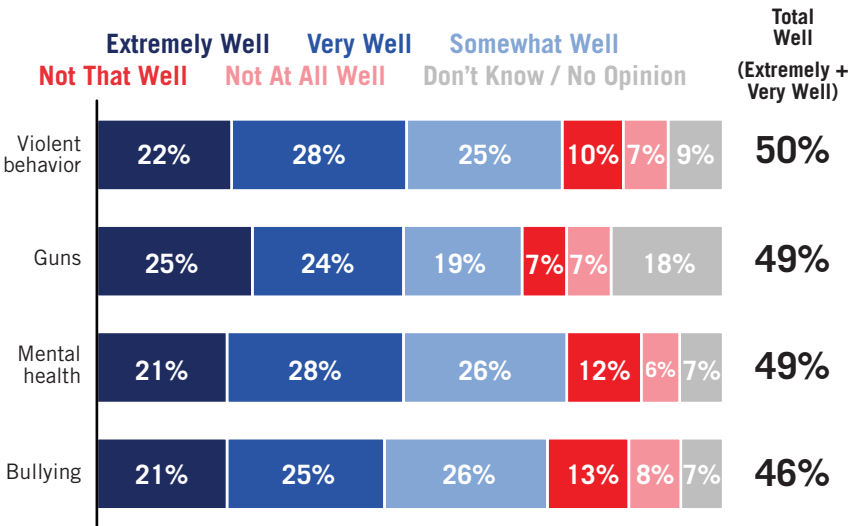
How well are schools handling issues like violent behaviors, guns, bullying, and mental health? According to parents, schools could be doing better.

We began asking parents to judge how schools handle these issues back in 2023, and results have been steady. Roughly half of parents feel their child's school is doing "extremely" or "very" well handling these key issues. In a more detailed look, schools' handling of issues like mental health and bullying have been graded slightly more harshly by parents but approval still hovers around 50%.

Even so, that leaves around 50% of parents who believe their child's school is not handling these issues well, which indicates a problem. Our polling of teens and teachers consistently shows less faith in schools' ability to manage these issues. Only roughly one-third of teachers and teens feel their schools handle these types of safety concerns either "extremely" or "very" well.

PARENTS' VIEW ON SCHOOLS' HANDLING OF KEY ISSUES

Roughly half of school parents feel their child's school handles the following four important issues at least very well.

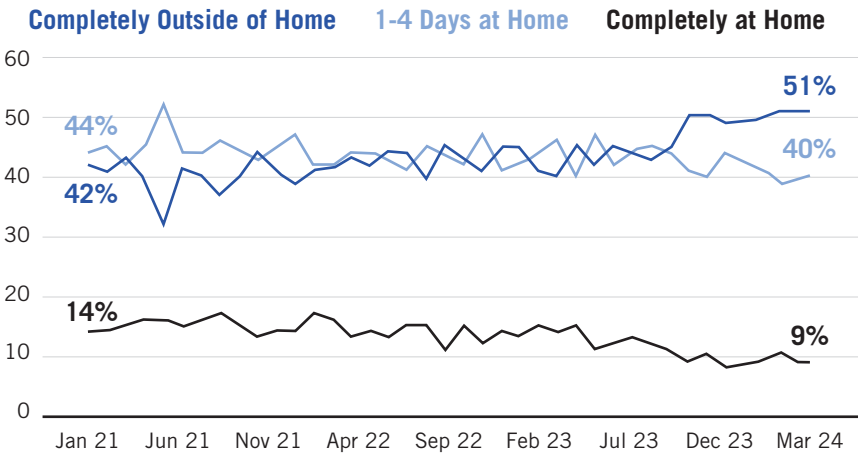


HYBRID SCHOOL PREFERENCES

In 2021, we started asking parents what their preferred weekly schedule and location would be for their child’s education. Results show that a large portion of parents (49%) would prefer to break from the traditional learning schedule of five-days-a-week at a brick-and-mortar school for their child. We’ve consistently observed that roughly 50% of parents would prefer their child to learn from home at least one day per week. Furthermore, around one in 10 parents (9%) would prefer their child to learn completely at home. The percentage of parents who want their child to learn from home at least one day per week peaked around spring of 2021. Parents have become more likely to prefer their child learning completely outside the home.

PARENTS' PREFERENCES ON HYBRID SCHOOL SCHEDULE

Roughly half of parents would prefer having their child learn at home at least one day per week.



Survey Methods

SCHOOLING IN AMERICA SURVEY (SIA)

The *Schooling in America Survey* is sponsored and developed by EdChoice. Braun Research is the survey research partner that administers the survey online and conducts live phone interviews. The Braun Research network of companies, founded in 1995, engages in data collection via telephone, and internet for various survey research firms, government and advertising agencies, local community organizations, local and national business groups, foundations, universities and academic entities, as well as religious organizations. In more than 25 years Braun Research has conducted over 11,000 research projects by telephone, internet, and mail worldwide. In partnership with Braun, we employ a mixed mode approach—online and phone—to administer questionnaires and complete interviews. Using this approach, we are able to collect statistically representative national samples of adults (ages 18+) and K–12 school parents in the United States.

For the online survey administration, Braun Research randomly selects individuals from an opt-in, non-probability online panel. Online contacts with potential respondents generally occur differently than by other modes like phone or mail. EdChoice develops and creates the survey questionnaire. The online panel connector (PureSpectrum) takes that survey and, via a link, reaches out to its partners—who are online panel suppliers—to offer opportunities to participate.

Rather than sending email invitations to initiate contacts, most online panel companies use a dashboard-type platform and process, whereby panelists visit these dashboards (or apps) to see the latest survey offerings. A link is created, sent out, and the panelist clicks on the survey if he/she wants to participate or not.

For the phone-based interviews, the data collection methods include probability sampling and random-digit dial (“RDD”). Braun Research’s live callers conduct all interviews via computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) using a survey instrument developed and scripted by EdChoice. Braun Research works with a company, Dynata, using a combination of landline and cellular RDD samples to represent the General Population (adults age 18+ in the United States) who have access to either a landline or cell phone.

Braun conducts live telephone interviews, and their callers make as many as eight attempts to contact every sampled phone number. Calls are staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chance of contacting potential respondents. Each phone number receives at least one daytime call.

The online and phone surveys are typically conducted in English. The length of time to complete is usually no more than 15 minutes. Survey responses are adjusted (“weighted”) to correct for any known demographic discrepancies based on certain demographic information provided by the U.S. Census Bureau.

EDCHOICE PUBLIC OPINION TRACKER

The *EdChoice Public Opinion Tracker* is a monthly, nationally representative poll of Americans. EdChoice sponsors and develops the *Tracker* polling series in cooperation with Morning Consult. Morning Consult is a global data intelligence company delivering insights on what people think in real time. By surveying tens of thousands across the globe every day, Morning Consult is unmatched in scale and speed. It determines the true measure of what people think and how their decisions impact business, politics and the economy. Morning Consult fields the general population polls online, among a national sample of adults (age 18+) living in the United States, using non-probability sampling. For every survey, Morning Consult draws a stratified sample from the Lucid and PureSpectrum online sample exchanges, among others, based on age and gender quota targets derived from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2022 Current Population Survey. Sample exchanges act as a marketplace where research companies’ demand and sample providers’ supply are matched via bidding.

For EdChoice’s monthly tracking poll, approximately 2,200 adults are interviewed in English with a fielding period of two to five days.

In addition to the monthly general population polling, Morning Consult also conducts a monthly online oversample poll of K–12 school parents, among a national sample of parents living in the United States. The sample is collected via stratified sampling from the Lucid and PureSpectrum online sample exchanges, among others, based on race and ethnicity quota targets derived from the 2021 American Community Survey. Approximately 800 K–12 school parents are interviewed in English over the course of one week each month. The completed general population and K–12 school parent interviews are weighted to match population totals obtained from the 2021

American Community Survey by age, gender, region, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment.

For quality control purposes, Morning Consult includes a set of attentiveness tests including simple, open-ended questions and addition or subtraction tests. Respondents who complete the survey too quickly or show suspicious response patterns are removed from the results before weighting and do not count towards the total sample size.

Full survey specifications such as dates, median survey times, sample sizes, measures of precision, and participation rates for individual polls can be found in the monthly/quarterly reports located under the [Report Library](#) tab of our *Public Opinion Tracker* website. The Participation Rate is reported as the number of panel members who completed the survey divided by the number of panel members who were invited to take the survey, based on the American Association for Public Opinion Research outcome rate guidelines for non-probability internet panels. Morning Consult regularly validates its weighting methodology on benchmarks derived from U.S. Census data.

COMMITMENT TO METHODS & TRANSPARENCY

EdChoice is committed to research that adheres to high scientific standards; matters of methodology and transparency are taken seriously at all levels of our organization. We are dedicated to providing high-quality information in a transparent and efficient manner. The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) welcomed EdChoice to its AAPOR Transparency Initiative (TI) in September of 2015. The TI is designed to acknowledge those organizations that pledge to practice transparency in their reporting of survey-based research findings and abide by AAPOR's disclosure standards as stated in the Code of Professional Ethics and Practices. The contents of this publication are intended to provide empirical information and should not be construed as lobbying for any position related to any legislation. The authors welcome any and all questions related to methods and findings.



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