



the
CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM

ANALYSIS OF NATIONWIDE
SURVEY OF 1,000 ADULTS
DECEMBER 2013

AMERICA'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS EDUCATION REFORM PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Today, Americans have unprecedented access to information and opinions thanks to new innovations in technology, the 24-hour news cycle and new media. Calls for greater transparency and higher standards in the early 2000s brought us state report cards and websites dedicated to providing parents with more information about their schools. Armed with this data, including state and international test results, the American public has a greater understanding of how U.S. students are doing in today's global society, and the results are less than encouraging.

According to the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), U.S. students are lagging behind almost all industrialized nations, including Norway and Italy, whose food and cultural abundance outshines any educational rigor. In 2009, the U.S. ranked 31st in Math, 17th in reading, and 23rd in science. The 2012 results show the U.S. is on a rapid decline, ranking 36th in math, 24th in reading and 28th in science. On the Nation's Report Card (NAEP) the picture is not as "encouraging" as some would like us to believe. Only 34 percent of our nation's 8th graders are proficient in reading and math.

These unimpressive academic achievements have brought about much discussion on ways to improve our public education system - more rigorous teacher evaluations, the

creation of charter schools, introduction of technology in classrooms, and the creation of Common Core standards.

It's not surprising then that in the court of public opinion, accountability leads the way and there is greater recognition today of the deficiency of the status quo.

Over the years The Center for Education Reform has commissioned polls to test the knowledge we have gained on the ground and in the trenches, to better understand the challenges. Polling has become an important tool in the education reform movement, giving us the understanding and insight needed to develop the policies that put students first and bring about transformational learning opportunities.

However, when CER commissioned *America's Attitudes Towards Education Reform* earlier this fall, we wanted to take a deeper dive to fully understand the nation's views. We tested terms to be able to look at trends, but we wanted to understand the motivators, knowledge base and information sources as well.

What is clear from the results is that the American people want power and they want options.

In fact, it is rare to find a policy issue that 86 percent of the country agrees with, and in education, accountability does just that. Eighty-six percent of respondents think

that public schools should have the ability to fire a poorly performing teacher. This policy is supported far and wide: Republicans, Democrats, men, women, old, young, wealthy, and poor. Everybody understands that if you're not performing at your job, you need to be held accountable. When it comes to improving education for children, this is imperative.

What follows is a brief but more thorough look at the results of America's Attitudes Towards Education Reform when it comes to accountability in our schools.

Kara Kerwin
President

KEY FINDINGS - PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN SCHOOLS

Accountability Leads the Way. It's rare to find a policy issue that 86% of the country agrees with, but in education, accountability does just that: 86% of Americans think that public schools should have the ability to fire a poorly performing teacher. This policy is supported far and wide: Republicans, Democrats, men, women, old, young, wealthy, and poor: everybody understands that if you're not performing at your job, you need to be held accountable. When it comes to improving education for children, this is imperative.

Americans Recognize the Deficiency of the Status Quo. Even more impressive than the 86% support for accountability is that most Americans also recognize that this is a policy NOT featured in most schools today. A majority—54%—knows that most schools cannot fire a poorly performing teacher. With so much misinformation and apathy, this is a topic where Americans are informed and aware—and they don't like what they see.

Performance Pay is Popular. Most teachers will tell you they don't go into that career for the pay. So why not help them out a bit by rewarding the good ones? Most Americans—62%—are on board with considering student performance as part of determining how to compensate teachers. When teachers compete over how best to educate students, students win. Moreover, 75% of

Americans recognize that this is a practice not currently in place in most schools.

Parent Involvement, Student Achievement, and Accountability Go Hand-in-Hand. By looking at three different findings, there is a clear nexus between parent involvement and accountability:

- A plurality of parents (46%) say they need more power in decisions about their child's education;
- 67% say they would move their child to another school if their current school didn't mean annual testing standards, and 71% would move if their child wasn't being challenged
- Only 7% would not take a specific action from a list of options to try and change things about education—41% would contact their state legislator and 31% would organize with other parents.

They Want More Power But They Are Not Getting What They Want From State Legislators. Most Americans realize that the state government has a major role to play in education funding, despite constant attempts to "pass the buck" to Washington D.C. More importantly, most Americans aren't happy with how their state legislature is handling school issues, and they are making their voices heard. Two-thirds (65%) rate their job as "fair" or "poor", and the most likely action Americans say they would take to effect change is to contact their state legislator.

These findings paint a clear picture for policymakers: involve the parents, give them options, or risk hearing about it come election time. Americans are prepared to step up to demand more out of their children's schools.

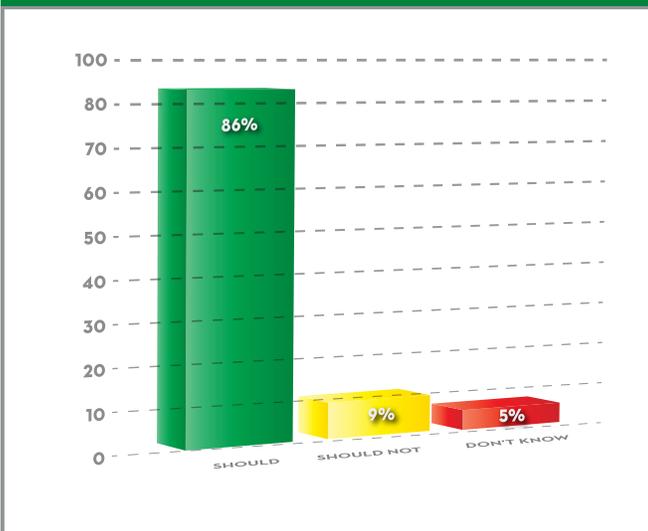
EMPOWER SCHOOLS TO HOLD TEACHERS ACCOUNTABLE

A majority of Americans know that most schools cannot fire a poorly performing teacher (37% said they could, 54% said they could not)—but in a separate question an astounding **86% of Americans think that schools SHOULD be able to do so.** Teachers unions and other organizations that are protecting bad teachers are

standing on the wrong side of over 17 out of 20 Americans on this issue.

As 86% of all Americans support this policy, it is not surprising to see that support is very high across all demographic groups. Accountability for poorly performing teachers tops 80% among the following groups: men, women, voters of all ages, whites, African-Americans, Hispanics, Republicans, Democrats, Independents, every income bracket, parents, non-parents, and in 8 out of 9 regions (in the 9th, it is only supported by 77% of voters).

SHOULD SCHOOLS FIRE A POORLY PERFORMING TEACHER?



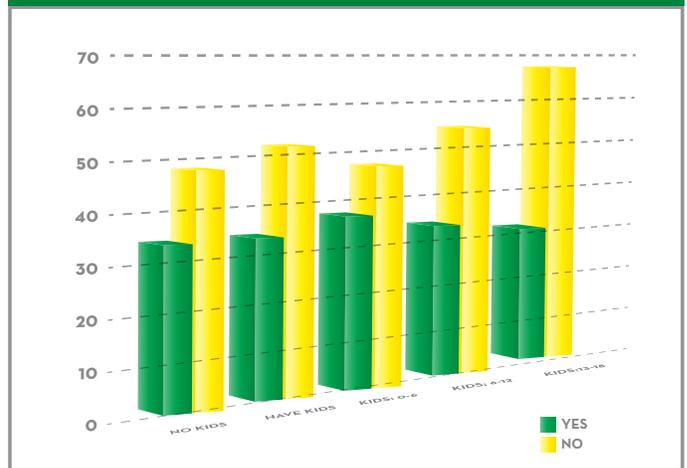
What is most encouraging about these findings is the level of awareness on this issue, as 54% correctly responded that most schools currently cannot fire a teacher for poor performance.

- Awareness drops among minorities, as only 46% of African-Americans and only 50% of Hispanics answered the question correctly.
- The worse one's child's school is working, the more aware one is:
 - Among those who say that their current school works well "completely", only 50% say that schools cannot fire a poorly-performing teacher;
 - 56% of those that answered "somewhat" answered correctly;

- 66% of those that said their school "rarely" works and 77% of those that said their school "never" works answered correctly, indicating that they have seen first-hand the fact that this policy is not in place.

- A plurality of low-income voters (income under \$25,000 annually) believe schools CAN fire teachers, 47% to 42%.
- Republicans (61%) and Independents (58%) are more likely to answer correctly than the average voter, while Democrats were less likely (47%).
- Having kids does not make somebody more likely to answer correctly; however, those who have had kids in schools the longest (their child is 13-18) are the most knowledgeable:
- Awareness varies by as much as 16-points depending on what sources one relies on for information: those who rely on Facebook and information from the schools are less likely to answer correctly, while those who read online blogs and get information from educational organizations (like CER) are the most informed:

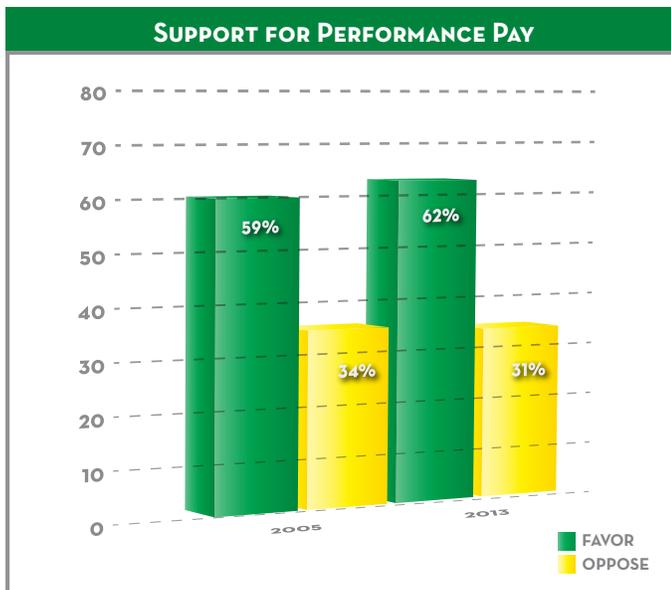
CAN SCHOOLS FIRE A POORLY-PERFORMING TEACHER?



REWARD TEACHERS FOR PERFORMANCE

(Just Like in the Real World)

Support for “considering student performance when deciding how to compensate teachers” has remained consistently high over eight years: 59% supported this idea in January of 2005, and that has risen to 62% in October of 2013. Most Americans recognize that in all other walks of life, hard work and great results on the job is rewarded financially; not only is this more fair, it also creates competition and an incentive for doing your job well. Americans think that students would benefit if teachers were treated the same.

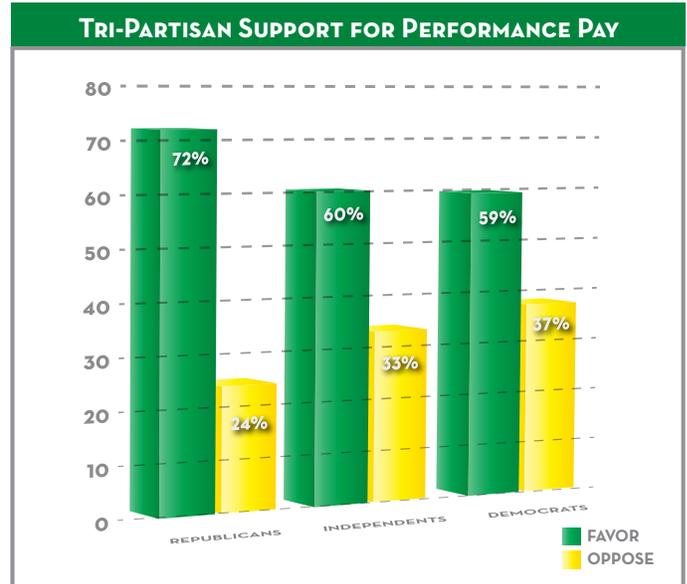


People want performance pay – and know that it is missing from the classroom. A full three-quarters (75%) of Americans know that this system is not in place in most schools today. They correctly recognized the situation, and then asked for it to be fixed. This is very encouraging news for parents and student advocates like.

Looking closer at the support for performance pay:

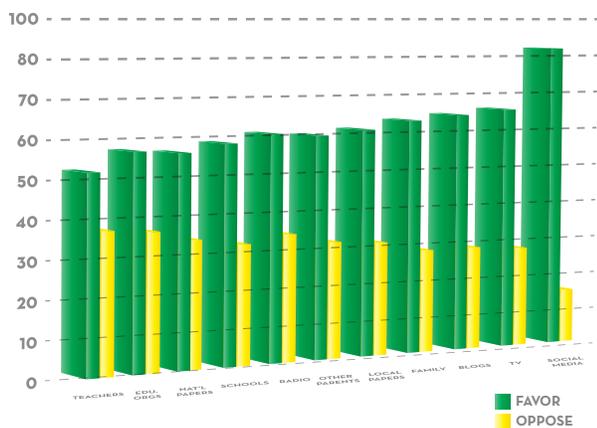
- Men (66%) and middle-aged Americans ages 35-54 (67%) are the most supportive of performance pay. There is no difference in support between whites and African-Americans, but Hispanics are less in favor of this reform, a turnaround from their high support for charter schools.

- Support for performance pay is highest in rural communities (67%) and lowest in urban centers (58%); support is also highest among those in the lowest income brackets (74%).
- There is little difference between those who have kids currently and those who do not; however, 74% of those who are likely to have kids soon are supportive.
- There is little difference in support based on how well their current school works for their child. However, 73% of those who want more power for parents support performance pay, compared to only 55% of those who think that parents currently have the right amount of power.



- Political ideology breaks down as expected, with Republicans (72%) much more supportive of performance pay than Democrats (59%):
- Those that get their information from teachers are the least supportive of performance pay, while those who get their information from social media and online blogs are the most supportive:

BY SOURCES OF INFORMATION

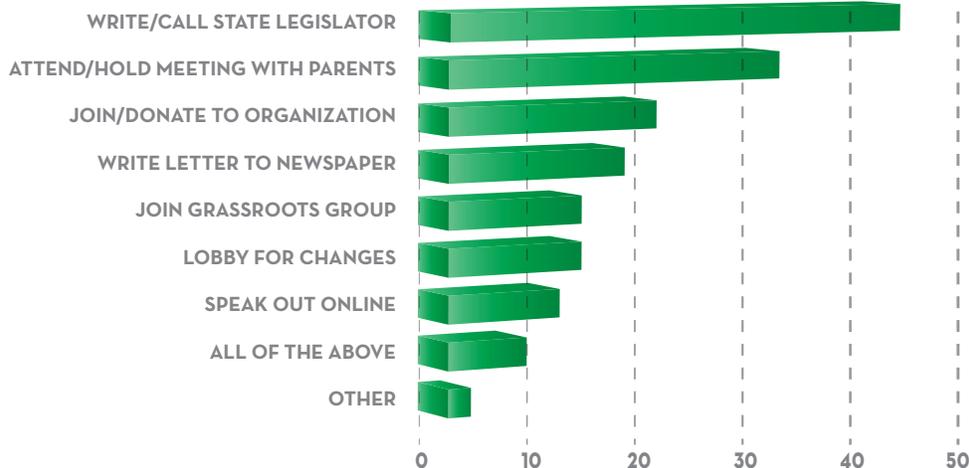


Writing their state legislator is a top answer as a plurality (37%) recognizes that the state legislature is most responsible for funding local public schools. In fact, only 9% say the federal government is most responsible, meaning the continuing “blame game” of passing the buck will no longer work for state legislators looking to respond to parents. That time may be soon, as only 24% of Americans say their state legislature is doing an “excellent” or “good” job on education issues, and 34% saying their job is “fair” and a plurality of 35% saying their job is “poor”.

Getting Involved. Respondents were asked to consider what actions they would take if they were to try and change some things about education. Encouragingly, only 7% did not choose one of the listed actions, and only another 6% didn’t respond to the question. The remaining 87% of Americans knew exactly what they would do to get involved in education:

(Multiple responses accepted; results will not add up to 100%)

PARENT INVOLVEMENT



METHODOLOGY

The Center for Education Reform (CER) commissioned the polling company™, inc. to conduct and analyze the results of a nationwide telephone survey of 1,000 adults in the United States. Interviews were conducted September 29 through October 1, 2013, at a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) facility by telephone and with live callers. At least 25% of the interviews were completed on cell phones.

Sampling controls were used to ensure that a proportional and representative number of people were interviewed from the demographic groups of age, race, gender, and region. The survey was weighted by political party self-identification only, while maintaining its demographic representativeness. The margin of error for the entire survey is +/- 3.1% at a 95% confidence interval, meaning that if the survey were conducted in the same way at the same time, we would the results to be within three percentage points as the results shown here 19 out of 20 times.

The survey contained a total of 42 questions, of which two were open-ended and 12 were demographic. Several questions were repeated verbatim from an earlier survey conducted by the polling company, inc. for CER in January 2005 (800 adults nationwide; margin of error of +/- 3.5%) to allow for trending data.



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