



Results from the 2018 Phi Delta Kappa Poll

As teachers work to meet higher demand in the classroom and schools/districts struggle to meet increasing demands from the public, the PDK annual poll provides interesting perspectives. The 50th Annual Poll of the Public's Attitude Toward the Public Schools, conducted by Phi Delta Kappa, surveys a random representative sample of more than a thousand adults. The poll asks many of the same questions every year with others added as the topics and concerns regarding public education change over time. This practice provides historical data and trends regarding the state of public education as well as insight into emerging concerns.

Of course, how the various respondents feel about their schools depends upon their personal experiences as students, the level of education reached, and the perceived experience of their children, as well as their political leanings and their socioeconomic status. Some trends have been consistent over the 50 years the poll has been conducted. The four most consistent factors listed as the biggest problems facing schools are lack of discipline, lack of financial support, use of drugs, and fighting/gang violence. While respondents cited each of the four multiple times, lack of discipline and lack of financial support have led the way with the most concern. From the early '70s to the mid-'80s, the polls reflected the concern with a lack of discipline in the public schools. From 2002 to the present, the polls reflect that

the biggest problem facing local schools is the lack of financial support.

The latest results indicated that 66% of respondents felt that teacher pay is too low (a new high in that area) with only 6% of respondents indicating they feel that teacher pay is too high (the highest number of respondents feeling salaries are too high are in the Northeast area of the United States where teacher salaries are the highest in the country). In response to actions that might be used to remediate this situation 78% of participants said they would support teacher walk-outs to bring attention to the issue. They cite the underpayment of teachers as the number one reason they would discourage their children from entering the teaching profession.

With more and more focus directed at differentiation in the classroom, Americans indicated they feel differentiation in school funding should also occur. 60% indicate that they would support spending more money on those identified as needing more support than more funding across the board. However, lack of adequate school funding has been identified as one of the issues most impacting quality of education nearly every year since the poll began 50 years ago.

Fifty-five percent of respondents say students do not get as strong of an education as they received when in school. However, the

response is different when talking about how the current education is rated. While respondents identified job preparation as weaker now than in “their day,” college preparation, critical thinking, and providing a good education for all received higher marks than ever before.

Overall, even though schools continue to have an “image problem,” 61% expressed trust and confidence in public school teachers, and 78%

feel that the nation should continue working at reforming the public school system rather than replacing it. Those two votes of confidence indicate that public schools have more positives than negatives. They also indicate that there is work still to be done to meet all students’ needs through public schools.

For a thorough breakdown of the data collected and a discussion of the implications of that data, see the full descriptions at pdkpoll.org.