

UNDERSTANDING PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN PUBLIC EDUCATION

RESULTS OF A GALLUP-*EDUCATION WEEK* SURVEY OF
K-12 SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS

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ABOUT *EDUCATION WEEK*

Since its founding in 1981, *Education Week* has been recognized as America's preeminent source of news and information in pre-collegiate education. With an editorial purview that spans local, state, and national news, and issues from preschool through the transition to high school, *Education Week* strives to be a one-stop source for news, information, analysis, and services essential to driving critical changes in K-12 policy and practice. The paper, published 37 times a year, has a print readership of 225,000 and reaches an audience of 1.1 million users through the edweek.org website. *Education Week* is published by Editorial Projects in Education, a nonprofit organization based in Bethesda, Md.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Gallup research study of K-12 superintendents in the United States was developed to track and understand their opinions on important topics and issues facing education. The survey is the first in a series of three planned for 2014. The following are key findings from the study.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

- When asked how challenging the Common Core State Standards are for students, about two-thirds (66%) of superintendents say the standards are just about right, while (14%) say the standards are too challenging.
- Sixty-six percent of superintendents believe the Common Core State Standards would improve the quality of education in their community.
- A small proportion (4%) of superintendents strongly agree that the Common Core State Standards will prevent individualized learning.

BARRIERS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FACE IN PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION

- The majority of superintendents (80%) say the cost of college is a very significant potential barrier that high school students face in pursuing higher education.
- Over one in four (27%) superintendents say that needing to enter the workforce is a very significant potential barrier for students.
- Nearly half (47%) of superintendents say having little or no family support to go to college is a very significant potential barrier.

EVALUATING TEACHER PERFORMANCE

- Nearly all superintendents say overall teaching effectiveness (96%) and the level of student engagement (94%) are very important factors in evaluating a teacher's performance.
- Few (6%) superintendents say the number of years of experience in the classroom is a very important factor in evaluating a teacher's performance.

SELECTING AND DEVELOPING TALENT WITHIN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

- About half (51%) of superintendents say their school district is very effective at selecting talented teachers.
- Over half (56%) of superintendents say their school district is very effective at selecting talented principals.
- Roughly three-quarters (77%) of superintendents say their school district has a system in place to develop talented students for future leadership roles.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

- About four in 10 (42%) superintendents strongly agree that the use of technology in the classroom increases student engagement.
- Less than three in 10 (25%) strongly agree that the use of technology in the classroom increases teacher engagement.

BUDGET CUTS

- Less than half (45%) of superintendents say they expect to make budget cuts in the upcoming school year.
- When asked about the areas that will be most affected by budget cuts next year, 28% of superintendents say operations and maintenance will be most affected.
- Less than one in 10 superintendents say performing arts and special education (7% and 8%, respectively) will be facing budget cuts.

SUPERINTENDENT TIME MANAGEMENT

- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of superintendents say they spend a lot of time with administrators, and over one-half (54%) say they spend a lot of time budget planning.
- Few (7%) superintendents say they spend a lot of time lobbying state legislators.
- The majority (67%) of superintendents say they would ideally like to spend a lot of time with administrators, and 64% say they ideally would like to spend a lot of time interacting with students.

METHODOLOGY

Gallup used a purchased sample list of 13,109 K-12 school districts across the United States. The list contained email addresses of superintendents of U.S. public school districts. Data are not weighted, and the sample is not nationally representative of U.S. school districts. Gallup conducted 1,801 Web surveys from May 14-29, 2014.

For results based on this sample size of 1,801 total respondents, with about 95% confidence, the margin of error attributable to sampling error is ± 2.3 percentage points.

KEY FINDINGS

THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

About two-thirds of superintendents (66%) say the Common Core State Standards will improve the quality of education in their community. By contrast, about two in 10 (22%) believe that the standards will have no effect on educational quality in their community.

Do you believe Common Core Standards would improve the quality of education in your community, decrease the quality of education in your community, or have no effect?	
Improve the quality of education	66%
Decrease the quality of education	7%
Have no effect	22%
Don't know	5%

A small number (4%) of superintendents strongly agree that the Common Core State Standards will prevent individualized learning, while four in 10 (40%) strongly disagree. A similar percentage (43%) of superintendents also strongly disagree that their school district is getting adequate support at the federal level to implement the standards, and just 2% strongly agree. Over one-fifth (22%) of superintendents say the standards will help more students learn what they need to know regardless of where they go to school.

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 statements.						
	%1 Strongly Disagree	%2	%3	%4	%5 Strongly Agree	Don't know
The Common Core Standards prevent individualized learning.	40%	27%	15%	10%	4%	5%
My school district is getting adequate support at the federal level to implement Common Core Standards.	43%	25%	16%	4%	2%	10%
The Common Core State Standards will help more students learn what they need to know regardless of where they go to school.	7%	12%	22%	32%	22%	5%

Because of rounding, percentages will add up to 100% ±1 percentage point.

When asked how challenging the Common Core State Standards are, about two-thirds (66%) of superintendents say the standards are just about right, while 14% say they are too challenging.

In your opinion, are the Common Core State Standards too challenging for most students, not challenging enough, or are the Common Core State Standards just about right for most students?	
Too challenging	14%
Not challenging enough	5%
Just about right	66%
Don't know	15%

More than half (55%) of superintendents say their school district has implemented an assessment in any subject area that is designed to measure students' mastery of the Common Core State Standards, while four in 10 (40%) say their district has not initiated such an assessment.

Has your school district implemented an assessment in any subject area that is designed to measure students' mastery of the Common Core State Standards?	
% Yes	55%
% No	40%
% Don't know	5%

When superintendents were asked how effective the assessment is at measuring mastery of the Common Core State Standards, 58% say the assessment is somewhat effective while 17% say it is very effective.

In your opinion, how effective is the assessment at measuring mastery of the Common Core State Standards?				
%1 Not effective at all	%2 Not too effective	%3 Somewhat effective	%4 Very effective	Don't know
2%	9%	58%	17%	14%

BARRIERS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FACE IN PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION

For superintendents, the cost of college emerges as the biggest obstacle to higher education for students. A majority (80%) say it is a very significant potential barrier that high school students face in pursuing higher education. Nearly half (47%) of superintendents say that having little or no family support to go to college is a very significant potential barrier. Far fewer (33%) say not being academically prepared is a very significant potential barrier. Over one-quarter (27%) of superintendents say that needing to enter the workforce is a very significant potential barrier.

In your opinion, how significant are each of the following potential barriers that high-school students face in pursuing higher education?					
	%1 Not significant at all	%2 Not too significant	%3 Somewhat significant	%4 Very significant	Don't know
Not being academically prepared	4%	20%	41%	33%	2%
Cost of college	0%	2%	17%	80%	1%
Little or no family support to go to college	1%	11%	40%	47%	2%
Lack of access to information about how to apply	17%	39%	31%	12%	2%
Little or no support from friends to go to college	10%	40%	34%	13%	4%
Needing to enter the workforce	2%	18%	51%	27%	2%
Wanting to enter the workforce	3%	19%	56%	20%	3%

Because of rounding, percentages will add up to 100% ±1 percentage point.

EVALUATING TEACHER PERFORMANCE

Nearly all superintendents say overall teaching effectiveness (96%) and the level of student engagement (94%) are very important factors when evaluating a teacher’s performance. Almost eight in 10 superintendents (78%) say that the learning growth of students is a very important factor in evaluating a teacher’s performance. Few say student test scores (16%) or the number of years of experience in the classroom (6%) are very important factors in evaluating a teacher’s performance.

In your opinion, how important are each of the following factors in evaluating a teacher’s performance?					
	%1 Not important at all	%2 Not too important	%3 Somewhat important	%4 Very important	Don’t know
Overall teaching effectiveness	0%	0%	3%	96%	0%
Years of experience in the classroom	12%	41%	41%	6%	0%
Learning growth of students	0%	1%	20%	78%	0%
Student test scores	4%	17%	63%	16%	0%
The level of student engagement	0%	0%	5%	94%	0%
Feedback of fellow educators	3%	18%	49%	30%	1%
Feedback of the principal	0%	1%	20%	79%	0%

Because of rounding, percentages will add up to 100% ±1 percentage point.

SELECTING AND DEVELOPING TALENT WITHIN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Over three-quarters of superintendents (77%) say their school district has a system in place to develop talented students for future leadership roles. About two-thirds (67%) say their school district has a system in place to develop talented students for careers in STEM fields. Nearly half (48%) say their school district has a system in place to develop talented students in the area of entrepreneurship.

Does your school district have a system in place to develop talented students in the following areas?			
	Yes	No	Don’t know
For future leadership roles	77%	21%	3%
For a future in education	55%	42%	3%
For careers in STEM fields	67%	29%	3%
Entrepreneurship	48%	49%	4%

Because of rounding, percentages will add up to 100% ±1 percentage point.

About one in two (51%) superintendents say their school district is very effective at selecting talented teachers, while 56% say their school district is very effective at selecting talented principals. Less than two in 10 superintendents say their school district is very effective at developing support staff (19%) and evaluating support staff performance (17%).

How effective would you say your district is in the following areas?					
	%1 Not effective at all	%2 Not too effective	%3 Somewhat effective	%4 Very effective	Don't know
Recruiting talented teachers	3%	11%	57%	29%	0%
Selecting talented teachers	0%	3%	46%	51%	0%
Developing teachers	1%	6%	54%	38%	0%
Evaluating teacher performance	1%	8%	59%	32%	0%
Recruiting talented support staff	2%	17%	60%	21%	1%
Selecting talented support staff	1%	9%	60%	30%	1%
Developing support staff	2%	18%	61%	19%	1%
Evaluating support staff performance	3%	23%	56%	17%	1%
Recruiting talented principals	1%	5%	45%	44%	4%
Selecting talented principals	1%	3%	37%	56%	4%
Developing principals	1%	6%	48%	44%	2%
Evaluating principal performance	1%	6%	52%	39%	2%

Because of rounding, percentages will add up to 100% ±1 percentage point.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

Over four in 10 (42%) superintendents strongly agree that the use of technology in the classroom increases student engagement, while 25% strongly agree that it increases teacher engagement.

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 statements.						
	%1 Strongly disagree	%2	%3	%4	%5 Strongly agree	Don't know
The use of technology in the classroom increases student engagement.	1%	3%	12%	43%	42%	0%
The use of technology in the classroom increases teacher engagement.	1%	5%	24%	45%	25%	0%

About one in four (24%) superintendents say they are extremely confident that their school district’s information technology infrastructure is currently meeting the needs of employees and students.

Overall, how confident are you that your school district’s information technology infrastructure is currently meeting the needs of your employees and students?					
%1 Not at all confident	%2	%3	%4	%5 Extremely confident	Don't know
4%	11%	21%	40%	24%	0%

Because of rounding, percentages will add up to 100% ±1 percentage point.

BUDGET CUTS

Less than half (45%) of superintendents say they expect to make budget cuts in the upcoming school year.

Does your school expect to make budget cuts in the upcoming school year?	
Yes	45%
No	53%
Don't know	2%

When asked about the areas that will be most affected by budget cuts next year, 28% of superintendents say operations and maintenance will be most affected. Only 7% say performing arts will be affected by budget cuts next year, and 8% say special education will be affected.

Which of the following areas will be most affected by budget cuts next year? <i>Select all that apply.</i>	
Special education	8%
Transportation	11%
Athletics	12%
Fine arts	9%
Performing arts	7%
Administration	18%
Operations and maintenance	28%
Instruction	19%
Salary and wages	18%
Employee benefits	14%
Other	10%
Don't know/Does not apply	1%

SUPERINTENDENT TIME MANAGEMENT

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of superintendents say they spend a lot of time with administrators, and over one-half (54%) say they spend a lot of time budget planning. Few (7%) say they spend a lot of time lobbying state legislators.

What percentage of time as superintendent did you dedicate to the following activities this year?					
	%1 A lot of time	%2 Some time	%3 Not much time	%4 No time at all	Don't know
Lobbying state legislators	7%	46%	35%	12%	0%
Time with community	47%	48%	5%	0%	0%
Spending time with administrators	64%	33%	3%	0%	1%
Budget planning	54%	44%	2%	0%	0%
Curriculum planning	31%	55%	13%	1%	0%
Time spent interacting with students	19%	54%	27%	0%	0%

Because of rounding, percentages will add up to 100% ±1 percentage point.

Over six in 10 superintendents say they would ideally like to spend a lot of time with administrators (67%) and interacting with students (64%). Half of superintendents (50%) say they would like to devote a lot of time with the community, and 49% say they would like to dedicate a lot of time to curriculum planning.

What percentage of time would you ideally like to devote to the following activities over a year?					
	%1 A lot of time	%2 Some time	%3 Not much time	%4 No time at all	Don't know
Lobbying state legislators	7%	47%	31%	15%	0%
Time with community	50%	49%	2%	0%	0%
Spending time with administrators	67%	31%	1%	0%	1%
Budget planning	25%	60%	14%	1%	0%
Curriculum planning	49%	45%	6%	1%	0%
Time spent interacting with students	64%	34%	2%	0%	0%

Because of rounding, percentages will add up to 100% ±1 percentage point.

CONCLUSION

Superintendents' opinions and ideas provide crucial insights into the challenges and successes of leading a public school district in the U.S. One challenge that most currently face is implementing the Common Core State Standards that have galvanized partisans across the country. The topic seems to provoke relatively little controversy among superintendents, a strong majority of whom say the standards will improve the quality of education in their communities. Likewise, few are concerned about the standards being too challenging for students or preventing individualized learning in their schools. However, a majority disagree or strongly disagree that their school district is receiving adequate support from the federal government to implement the standards.

The Common Core States Standards are widely seen as a strategy to help students compete globally while preparing them to succeed in college. However, when it comes to pursuing higher education, superintendents see various potential barriers for high school students. Nearly every superintendent Gallup surveyed considers the costs of college as either a somewhat or very significant barrier, while majorities also see not being academically prepared, a lack of family support, and wanting or needing to enter the workforce as somewhat or very significant barriers to pursuing higher education.

Despite these potential obstacles, the majority of districts have programs in place to help develop talented students for future roles in leadership, education, science, technology, engineering, and math. However, less than half of superintendents say their district is developing talented students to become entrepreneurs, which is a serious problem given that small businesses — the engines of economic growth in the U.S. — are closing at a rate faster than new ones are starting up, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

When it comes to running a school district, one of the most significant responsibilities is selecting and developing the best teachers. About half of superintendents say their districts are very effective at selecting talented candidates, and one-third feel their districts do a good job of evaluating teacher performance. They see assessing teachers' overall effectiveness and ability to engage students as the most important factors in judging their performance, rather than looking at student test scores and teachers' years of classroom experience.

Maintaining a sound budget is an important duty for superintendents, and it is a task that might be becoming slightly less difficult as the U.S. economy continues to recover, albeit slowly, from the Great Recession. A slight majority of superintendents say their district is not expecting to make budget cuts in the upcoming school year. Those who will be making cuts say operations and maintenance costs are most likely to be on the chopping block.

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