

Understanding Perspectives on Public Education in the U.S.

The Gallup 2016 Survey of K-12 School District Superintendents



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gallup developed this research study of K-12 superintendents of public school districts in the U.S. to understand their opinions on important topics and policy issues facing education. Since 2013, Gallup has conducted the survey at least annually. The following are key findings from the 2016 study.

Superintendents think the most important factors for measuring the effectiveness of their schools have to do with what happens leading up to high school graduation rather than what happens after it. Superintendents are most likely to rate high school graduation rates, student engagement and student optimism about the future as important elements in evaluating school effectiveness. They are much less likely to say the percentages of students from the district who attend college or who find employment immediately after high school are very important. Also, very few believe standardized test scores are an important way to evaluate school effectiveness.

Of several key strategies designed to foster student success after graduation, superintendents are most likely to believe providing students with internships connected to what they are learning and project-based learning are most effective.

The vast majority of superintendents say their district offers students support for various paths they may choose after high school, particularly for postsecondary education, as well as for entering the workforce, volunteering, and serving in the military.

For the students who want to pursue higher education, superintendents view the cost of college as the biggest barrier to doing so, followed by lack of family support for going to college and not being academically prepared for college.

Two-thirds of superintendents say their district is “very effective” in providing a quality education to students. A majority also believe their district is very effective in providing student support services. Slightly less than half, 43%, say their school is very effective in recruiting and retaining talented teachers, with superintendents in suburban school districts much more likely than those in non-suburban districts to believe this.

Fewer than one in four superintendents believe their district is very effective at engaging parents in their child’s education. When asked to what degree parents are engaged in their child’s education through at-home activities and organized school activities, the majority of superintendents say parents are at least somewhat engaged. But relatively few say parents are “very engaged,” and fewer say this now than in 2014. Superintendents consider a welcoming school environment the most important of several ways to ensure parents are engaged with their children’s school.

Superintendents generally regard all the different responsibilities principals have as being very important, though they are nearly unanimous in saying selecting teachers and creating an engaging environment for students and teachers are very important.

Three-quarters of superintendents say their district conducts surveys of teachers and staff at least annually. They are somewhat less likely to report conducting annual surveys of students (65%) and parents (58%), and they are far less likely to survey community members in their district (39%) and past graduates (19%) annually. The vast majority of superintendents say they share the results of parent surveys with the school board, teachers and staff, and parents themselves. Slightly less than half, 46%, say parent feedback is very important when making decisions for the school district, with 52% saying it is somewhat important.

KEY FINDINGS

MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Gallup asked K-12 superintendents of U.S. public school districts to rate how important each of seven factors is in measuring the effectiveness of public schools in their community. The top-rated factors are the percentage of students who graduate from high school, how engaged students are with their classwork and the percentage of students who feel hopeful about their future. Student engagement and hope have meaningful links to student success and workforce readiness, according to an analysis of data from the Gallup Student Poll of students in grades 5-12.

Superintendents view the various paths students take after graduation as a much less important indicator of public schools' effectiveness. These paths include the percentages of high school graduates who go to college or community college (50% say this is very important), who go to technical or trade school (44% of superintendents say this is very important) or who get jobs immediately after completing high school (33% say this is very important).

The least important indicator for superintendents of school effectiveness (of those measured in the survey) are student scores on standardized tests. Only 14% of superintendents say standardized test scores are very important, with another 57% saying they are somewhat important.

| How important do you think each of the following is for measuring the effectiveness of the public schools in your community? | | | | | |
|--|------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | % Very important | % Somewhat important | % Not very important | % Not at all important | % Don't know/Does not apply |
| Percentage of students who graduate from high school | 90 | 9 | < 1 | 0 | 1 |
| How engaged students are with school | 88 | 11 | < 1 | < 1 | < 1 |
| How hopeful students are about their future | 85 | 14 | 1 | < 1 | < 1 |
| Percentage of high school graduates who go to college or community college | 50 | 47 | 2 | < 1 | 1 |
| Percentage of high school graduates who go to technical or trade school | 44 | 51 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Percentage of graduates who get jobs immediately after completing high school | 33 | 56 | 9 | 1 | 1 |
| Scores that students receive on standardized tests | 14 | 57 | 24 | 5 | < 1 |

Superintendents in larger versus smaller districts and city/suburban versus town/rural districts largely agree on the relative importance of these measures of school effectiveness. One area in which they differ is on the importance of college attendance: While 61% of superintendents in city or suburban districts say the percentage of graduates attending college is a very important indicator of school effectiveness, 44% of superintendents in towns or rural areas agree. Along these same lines, 61% of those in large school districts (more than 1,500 students) rate college attendance levels as a very important way to measure school effectiveness, compared with 48% of superintendents in medium-sized districts (between 500 and 1,500 students) and 43% in smaller districts (less than 500 students).

Gallup asked the same question in the November 2015 superintendents survey, and the rank order of the measures was similar then to what it is now. Gallup also asked the same question of a nationally representative sample of U.S. parents with children in public schools as part of the 2015 47th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the [Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools](#). Parents were generally in accord with public school superintendents on the best measures for evaluating school effectiveness, ranking student hope, student engagement and graduation rates as the most important factors.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE WORKFORCE

Superintendents are not convinced that high school graduates are well-prepared for success in the workforce: 37% strongly agree or agree they are, 47% are neutral, and 14% strongly disagree or disagree. The majority of superintendents, 58%, strongly agree or agree college graduates are well-prepared.

Using a 5-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements. You may use any number between 1 and 5.

| | % 5 Strongly agree | % 4 | % 3 | % 2 | % 1 Strongly disagree | % Don't know/ Does not apply |
|---|--------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| College graduates in this country are well-prepared for success in the workforce. | 7 | 51 | 34 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| High school graduates in this country are well-prepared for success in the workforce. | 4 | 33 | 47 | 12 | 2 | 1 |

Superintendents are more positive than national adults are about college graduates' workforce preparedness. The 2015 Gallup-Lumina Foundation Study of the American Public's Opinion on Higher Education asked the same question of a national sample of U.S. adults and found 39% of U.S. adults strongly agree or agree that college graduates are well-prepared for the workforce. The Gallup/Lumina poll did not ask about high school graduates' preparedness.

Education leaders have developed numerous strategies and techniques to prepare high school students for their post-school endeavors. The survey asked superintendents which of five commonly used strategies they believe are most likely to lead to success after graduation. Internships connected to what students are learning (39%) and project-based learning (33%) were the clear leaders, with seven in 10 superintendents choosing either of these techniques. Far fewer say involvement in extracurricular activities (10%), increased use of technology (9%) and smaller class sizes (6%) would most likely foster success for students after graduation.

If you had to choose, which of the following education strategies is most likely to lead to success for students after graduation — in their jobs, postsecondary education and adult lives?

| | % |
|---|----|
| Providing students with internships connected to what they are learning | 39 |
| Project-based learning | 33 |
| Involvement in extracurricular activities | 10 |
| Increased use of technology | 9 |
| Smaller class sizes | 6 |
| Don't know/Does not apply | 2 |

UNDERSTANDING PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE U.S.

Schools and districts can also prepare students for their postgraduation paths by offering information and support to help students pursue their plans. The vast majority of superintendents say their district offers “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of support for postsecondary education paths, including four-year college or university (84%), two-year college (82%), and technical or trade school (77%). Slightly less say they offer at least “a fair amount” of support for entering the workforce (65%), volunteer or service opportunities (63%), and military service (63%). Far fewer school districts offer the same level of support for starting a business (17%) or taking a gap year (9%), although graduates taking a gap year who plan to volunteer or perform public service could certainly find support for that from their school district.

To what extent, if any, does your district provide support for students pursuing the following paths after high school graduation?

| | % A great deal | % A fair amount | % Not much | % Not at all | % Don't know/Does not apply |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Four-year college or university | 44 | 40 | 5 | 1 | 10 |
| Two-year college | 38 | 44 | 6 | 2 | 10 |
| Technical or trade school | 25 | 52 | 11 | 2 | 10 |
| Volunteer or service opportunities | 17 | 46 | 26 | 3 | 8 |
| Military service | 13 | 50 | 22 | 4 | 11 |
| Entering the workforce | 9 | 56 | 22 | 2 | 11 |
| Starting a business | 1 | 16 | 53 | 17 | 12 |
| Taking a “gap year” | 1 | 8 | 39 | 32 | 20 |

Larger (72%) and medium-sized (69%) school districts are more likely than smaller districts (54%) to offer support for volunteer and service opportunities. School districts of all sizes are generally similar in the degree of support they offer for other postgraduation paths.

Whether it happens immediately after high school, college, or military service, nearly all high school graduates will enter the workforce at some point in their young adult lives. The workforce itself certainly changes over time, both in terms of the types of jobs available for prospective workers and the skills needed to succeed in those jobs. Because more young adults from the millennial generation are now entering their working years, there is an understandable focus on how they fit into the workforce and how the labor force might need to adapt to attract talented, young workers. For example, a [Gallup report on millennials](#) found that the vast majority of workers in this generation are looking at their jobs as an opportunity for personal development. Fifty percent of superintendents strongly agree or agree that their district understands the needs of millennials in the workplace; only 9% strongly disagree or disagree. These views are similar among all district sizes and community types.

Using a 5-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements. You may use any number between 1 and 5. Our district understands the needs of millennials in the workplace.

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| % 5 Strongly agree | 6 |
| % 4 | 44 |
| % 3 | 37 |
| % 2 | 8 |
| % 1 Strongly disagree | 1 |
| % Don't know/Does not apply | 3 |

Gallup asked superintendents about partnering with local businesses to understand their employment needs to best position students for higher education credentials and degrees. Twenty-five percent of superintendents say their district does this a “great deal,” while most of the rest, 61%, say “somewhat.”

| To what extent does your school district partner with local businesses to understand their employment needs to best position students for higher education credentials and degrees? | |
|---|----|
| % A great deal | 25 |
| % Somewhat | 61 |
| % Not at all | 9 |
| % Don't know/Does not apply | 5 |

Gallup asked the same question in the October 2013 superintendent survey, and the results were largely similar. At that time, 19% of superintendents said their district partnered with local businesses “a great deal” and 64% said their district “somewhat” understood employers’ needs.

In the current survey, superintendents of larger districts are most likely, at 39%, to say they partner “a great deal” with local businesses to understand workforce needs; 25% of superintendents in medium-sized districts and 15% in small districts say the same.

BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Many high school graduates’ path will involve attending college; however, some face significant barriers to doing so. The survey asked superintendents how significant they believe some of the barriers to attending college are. Of the seven barriers included in the survey, superintendents are most likely to describe the cost of college as being “very significant,” with 75% saying this. Little or no family support to go to college (60%) and not being academically prepared (56%) are the next-most significant barriers, according to superintendents. Fewer superintendents say needing to enter the workforce (33%), lack of access to information about how to apply to college (29%), wanting to enter the workforce (27%), and little or no support from friends to go to college (25%) are “very significant” barriers to higher education. However, a majority of superintendents believe all seven factors are at least “somewhat significant” barriers.

| In your opinion, how significant are each of the following potential barriers that high school students face in pursuing higher education? | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | % Very significant | % Somewhat significant | % Not too significant | % Not significant at all | % Don't know/Does not apply |
| Cost of college | 75 | 22 | 2 | < 1 | 1 |
| Little or no family support to go to college | 60 | 31 | 6 | 1 | 2 |
| Not being academically prepared | 56 | 30 | 11 | 2 | 1 |
| Needing to enter the workforce | 33 | 54 | 10 | 1 | 2 |
| Lack of access to information about how to apply | 29 | 36 | 25 | 7 | 2 |
| Wanting to enter the workforce | 27 | 57 | 13 | 1 | 2 |
| Little or no support from friends to go to college | 25 | 44 | 24 | 5 | 3 |

Perceptions of higher education barriers are also similar among superintendents of different district types.

Gallup asked this same question in the May 2014 superintendent survey. The cost of college was the clear leader in that survey as well, with 80% of superintendents rating it as a “very significant” barrier. Fewer superintendents in that survey than now believed lack of family support (47%) and not being academically prepared (33%) were “very significant” barriers to higher education. Two years ago, fewer superintendents than today also considered a lack of access to information about how to apply (12%) and a lack of support from friends to go to college (from 13%) to be “very significant” barriers to higher education.

DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS IN ACHIEVING SCHOOL OUTCOMES

Among a list of 11 desirable outcomes schools attempt to achieve, superintendents are most likely to say their district is “very effective” in providing a quality education. Sixty-six percent believe their district is very effective in this regard, while 33% say it is somewhat effective. A majority of superintendents, 53%, also credit their district for being effective at offering student support services.

Just under half of superintendents, 46%, believe their district is “very effective” at using data to aid and inform decision-making and in preparing students for postsecondary education. About four in 10 rate their district as being “very effective” at recruiting and retaining talented teachers, identifying and assessing student outcomes, and helping students feel engaged with school.

Of the items included in the survey, superintendents were least likely to say their district is “very effective” at preparing students for the world of work, controlling rising costs of education and engaging parents with their child’s school. Even in these areas, a majority of superintendents believe their district is at least “somewhat effective.”

| How would you rate the effectiveness of your district in the following areas? | | | | | |
|---|------------------|----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| | % Very effective | % Somewhat effective | % Not too effective | % Not effective at all | % Don't know/ Does not apply |
| Providing a quality education | 66 | 33 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Offering student support services | 53 | 43 | 4 | < 1 | < 1 |
| Using data to aid and inform district decision-making | 46 | 49 | 4 | < 1 | < 1 |
| Preparing students for postsecondary education | 46 | 46 | 3 | < 1 | 5 |
| Recruiting and retaining talented teachers | 43 | 49 | 7 | < 1 | < 1 |
| Identifying and assessing student outcomes | 42 | 54 | 3 | < 1 | 0 |
| Helping students feel engaged with school | 39 | 58 | 3 | < 1 | < 1 |
| Preparing students for engaged citizenship | 35 | 59 | 6 | < 1 | < 1 |
| Preparing students for the world of work | 25 | 68 | 4 | 0 | 3 |
| Controlling rising costs of education | 23 | 42 | 19 | 9 | 7 |
| Engaging parents with their child's school | 23 | 64 | 12 | < 1 | < 1 |

Superintendents’ ratings of their school’s effectiveness in these areas do not vary much by district type, with one notable exception: recruiting and retaining talented teachers. The gap is most evident between suburban and non-suburban districts. Suburban superintendents (62%) are significantly more likely than are those working in cities (46%), towns (41%) and rural areas (35%) to say their school is “very effective” at recruiting and retaining talented teachers. This may reflect income differences between suburban versus other locations, which often results in suburban districts having larger budgets, being able to offer teachers better pay and having students who, on average, perform better in school.

There are only modest differences in superintendents' views of their district's ability to find and keep talented teachers based on student enrollment. However, superintendents in the eastern part of the U.S. are more likely than those in other regions to say their school is "very effective" at recruiting and retaining talented teachers

| Rating of District as "Very Effective" in Recruiting and Retaining Talented Teachers, by District Type | |
|--|----|
| | % |
| School Location | |
| Suburban | 62 |
| City | 46 |
| Town | 41 |
| Rural | 35 |
| Student Enrollment | |
| Fewer than 500 | 40 |
| 500-1,500 | 42 |
| More than 1,500 | 49 |
| Geographical Region | |
| East | 59 |
| Midwest | 41 |
| South | 35 |
| West | 42 |

Another goal for superintendents – or any leader overseeing a significant number of employees – is to have their workers be engaged with their jobs. Gallup research finds that engaged workers are more productive, and companies and organizations with higher proportions of engaged workers perform better on a range of important organizational functions, including employee retention and absenteeism.

Among three primary workgroups in school districts, superintendents are most likely to agree that their principals and administrators are personally engaged with their jobs. Ninety-one percent agree all principals and administrators in their district are personally engaged with their jobs, including 53% who strongly agree. Fewer superintendents, but still a majority, agree all staff members and all teachers in their district are personally engaged with their jobs, with only about one in 10 strongly agreeing.

To some degree, these differences could reflect that superintendents have more personal and professional interactions with individual principals and administrators than they do with individual teachers and staff members. The opinions of superintendents in this poll are consistent with Gallup research that finds engagement levels tend to be higher for those in management positions than for front-line employees.

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Using a 5-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements. You may use any number between 1 and 5.

| | % 5 Strongly agree | % 4 | % 3 | % 2 | % 1 Strongly disagree | % Don't know/ Does not apply |
|---|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| All principals and administrators in my school district are personally engaged with their jobs. | 53 | 38 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| All teachers in my school district are personally engaged with their jobs. | 12 | 61 | 23 | 3 | 1 | < 1 |
| All staff members in my school district are personally engaged with their jobs. | 9 | 59 | 28 | 3 | 1 | < 1 |

School district size appears to be a factor in how engaged district workers are, at least based on superintendents' perceptions of worker engagement. Those from smaller districts are more likely to strongly agree that their employees – among all job types – are engaged in their jobs. Superintendents may have a better sense of employee engagement levels if they have more individual interaction with employees. But it is also possible that employees may be more engaged at work if they have more frequent interaction with the highest-ranking official in the district.

Perceptions That District Employees Are Engaged With Their Jobs, by Student Enrollment in District

| | % 5 Strongly agree | % 4 | Total % 4 / 5 |
|--|--------------------|-----|---------------|
| All Principals and Administrators Are Engaged With Their Jobs | | | |
| Student enrollment fewer than 500 | 63 | 28 | 91 |
| Student enrollment 500-1,500 | 55 | 37 | 92 |
| Student enrollment more than 1,500 | 37 | 51 | 88 |
| All Teachers Are Engaged With Their Jobs | | | |
| Student enrollment fewer than 500 | 18 | 54 | 72 |
| Student enrollment 500-1,500 | 9 | 67 | 76 |
| Student enrollment more than 1,500 | 6 | 64 | 70 |
| All Staff Members Are Engaged With Their Jobs | | | |
| Student enrollment fewer than 500 | 15 | 55 | 70 |
| Student enrollment 500-1,500 | 6 | 61 | 67 |
| Student enrollment more than 1,500 | 3 | 61 | 64 |

One way districts can help to improve their effectiveness in achieving key outcomes is through development programs for employees, particularly for their higher-ranking officials. Fifty-three percent of superintendents strongly agree or agree their district has an effective leadership coaching program in place for school and district administrators; 16% strongly disagree or disagree.

Regarding their own development, 96% of superintendents strongly agree or agree they know their personal leadership strengths, with 55% strongly agreeing.

Using a 5-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements. You may use any number between 1 and 5.

| | % 5 Strongly agree | % 4 | % 3 | % 2 | % 1 Strongly disagree | % Don't know/ Does not apply |
|--|---------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| I know my personal leadership strengths. | 55 | 41 | 3 | 1 | < 1 | 0 |
| The district has an effective leadership coaching program in place for school and district administrators. | 15 | 38 | 26 | 12 | 4 | 5 |

There is a suburban/non-suburban gap in the belief that the district has an effective leadership coaching program for school and district administrators. Fifty-nine percent of suburban superintendents strongly agree that this is the case, compared with 50% of those in non-suburban districts.

ROLES OF PRINCIPALS

Superintendents widely perceive most of principals' main job functions to be "very important." Of eight different roles principals have in school leadership, at least seven in 10 superintendents rate all eight as "very important." Topping the list were selecting teachers (94%), building an engaging environment for students (94%), building an engaging environment for teachers and other staff (94%), and developing teachers (91%).

Slightly fewer say improving student achievement (85%) and building strong relationships with parents (84%) are very important roles for principals. Relatively fewer rate leading curriculum and instruction (76%) and evaluating teachers (72%) as very important.

Thinking now about the role of principals, how important do you think each of the following is?

| | % Very important | % Somewhat important | % Not very important | % Not at all important | % Don't know/Does not apply |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Selecting teachers | 94 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Building an engaging environment for students | 94 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Building an engaging environment for teachers and other staff | 91 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Developing teachers | 91 | 9 | < 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Improving student achievement | 85 | 15 | < 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Building strong relationships with parents | 84 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Leading curriculum and instruction | 76 | 23 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Evaluating teachers | 72 | 26 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

Given the widespread agreement on the importance of these various principal roles, it follows that there is little variation by district type. However, there is a slight tendency for larger enrollment school district superintendents to assign greater importance to improving student achievement. Ninety-two percent of

superintendents in large districts say this is very important, compared with 84% of those in medium-sized districts and 80% of those in small districts.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

Most education experts emphasize the important role parental involvement plays in children’s education outcomes. Gallup research underscores this, but estimates only [20% of parents are engaged in their child’s school](#), meaning they participate in school-related activities, have an emotional attachment to the school and act as an advocate for it.

Superintendents’ assessment of the level of parental involvement in schools tends to confirm the point that most parents are involved in their child’s learning at home and participate in school-related activities, but that involvement could be greater. The majority of superintendents, 74%, believe parents in their district are at least “somewhat engaged” in their children’s learning and academic goals at home, but only 17% say parents are “very engaged.” When Gallup asked the same question in its November-December 2014 survey, superintendents reported a higher level of parent engagement. That difference could partly stem from the timing of the surveys, with the 2014 question asked during the school year, when engagement might be expected to be higher.

In general, how engaged are parents in your district with supporting their children's learning and academic goals *at home*, such as reading together, discussing school work, helping with homework assignments or helping prepare older children for college?

| | % Very engaged | % Somewhat engaged | % Not very engaged | % Not at all engaged at | % Don't know/Does not apply |
|------------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| July 2016 | 17 | 57 | 24 | 1 | <1 |
| November-December 2014 | 22 | 61 | 16 | 0 | 1 |

Suburban superintendents are much more likely than those in non-suburban districts to perceive high levels of engagement among their district’s parents in their children’s learning activities at home. Thirty-three percent of suburban superintendents believe their district’s parents are “very engaged” in these activities – roughly triple the percentage of those from rural and town districts. Superintendents in the eastern U.S. also perceive a higher degree of parental involvement in children’s educational activities at home compared with superintendents in other regions.

Perceptions of Parent Engagement Levels With Children’s Learning and Academic Goals at Home, by District Characteristics

| | % Very engaged | % Somewhat engaged | Total % Very/Somewhat engaged |
|---------------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| School Location | | | |
| Suburban | 33 | 50 | 83 |
| City | 21 | 61 | 82 |
| Town | 12 | 56 | 68 |
| Rural | 11 | 60 | 71 |
| Student Enrollment | | | |
| Fewer than 500 | 12 | 57 | 69 |
| 500-1,500 | 20 | 54 | 74 |
| More than 1,500 | 21 | 61 | 82 |

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| | % Very engaged | % Somewhat engaged | Total % Very/ Somewhat engaged |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Geographical Region | | | |
| East | 26 | 56 | 82 |
| Midwest | 16 | 59 | 75 |
| South | 12 | 55 | 67 |
| West | 16 | 60 | 76 |

A majority of superintendents, 58%, also say parents in their district are at least somewhat engaged in organized school activities such as the PTA/PTO, volunteering at school or attending board meetings. Thirteen percent say parents in their district are “very engaged” in those types of activities. Superintendents were more likely to perceive parents as being “very” (18%) or “somewhat” (51%) engaged in these types of activities in 2014, which again could be a function of asking about engagement during the school year versus outside of it.

| In general, how engaged are parents in your district with supporting their children's learning and academic goals through participation in organized activities, like PTA/PTO, volunteering at school, board meetings, and other public and policy forums? | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | % Very engaged | % Somewhat engaged | % Not very engaged | % Not at all engaged | % Don't know/Does not apply |
| July 2016 | 13 | 45 | 38 | 4 | 0 |
| November-December 2014 | 18 | 51 | 28 | 2 | 1 |

As with home-based education activities, superintendents in suburban and eastern U.S. schools report a greater level of parent involvement in organized school activities tied to children’s learning.

| Perceptions of Parent Engagement Levels With Children’s Learning and Academic Goals Through Participation in Organized Activities, by District Characteristics | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | % Very engaged | % Somewhat engaged | Total % Very/ Somewhat engaged |
| School Location | | | |
| Suburban | 26 | 43 | 69 |
| City | 12 | 53 | 65 |
| Town | 8 | 46 | 54 |
| Rural | 8 | 44 | 52 |
| Student Enrollment | | | |
| Fewer than 500 | 10 | 43 | 53 |
| 500-1,500 | 12 | 46 | 58 |
| More than 1,500 | 17 | 49 | 66 |
| Geographical Region | | | |
| East | 18 | 50 | 68 |
| Midwest | 11 | 45 | 56 |
| South | 11 | 45 | 56 |
| West | 12 | 43 | 55 |

UNDERSTANDING PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE U.S.

The survey asked superintendents to rate the importance of eight ways school districts can ensure parents are engaged with their child's school. Eighty-three percent say a welcoming school environment is "extremely important" in making sure parents are engaged with their child's school. Two-thirds rate open communication between parents and school leaders, knowing the needs of each student and responding to those needs, and commitment to high academic standards as "extremely important" factors.

Superintendents are generally least likely to rate appropriate discipline policies (46%) and academic and co-curricular programs that reflect the needs and interest of school families as "extremely important." However, nearly all superintendents rate all eight factors as either "extremely" or "very" important.

How important do you think each of the following is in making sure parents are engaged with their child's school?

| | % Extremely important | % Very important | % Somewhat important | % Not that important | % Don't know/ Does not apply |
|---|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| A welcoming school environment | 83 | 17 | < 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Open communication between parents and school leaders | 69 | 30 | 1 | 0 | < 1 |
| Knowing the needs of each student and responding to those needs | 67 | 31 | 2 | < 1 | 0 |
| Commitment to high academic standards | 66 | 31 | 3 | < 1 | 0 |
| Knowing the strengths of each student and developing those strengths | 64 | 33 | 3 | < 1 | 0 |
| A school culture that encourages active parent involvement in their child's education | 58 | 39 | 3 | < 1 | 0 |
| Academic and co-curricular programs and courses that reflect the needs and interests of school families | 49 | 46 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Appropriate discipline policies | 46 | 45 | 8 | < 1 | < 1 |

CONSTITUENCY SURVEYS

Superintendents widely report they conduct surveys of various key constituency groups in their school district. This includes a majority saying they conduct surveys at least annually of teachers and staff (76%), students (65%) and parents in the district (58%). Superintendents survey community members in the district less frequently and past graduates even less often.

How often, if ever, do you conduct surveys of the following groups to gain insight into their opinions, input and feedback?

| | % Once a year or more | % Every two to three years | % Every four to five years | % Less often than every five years | % Never | % Cannot remember/ Don't know/Does not apply |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|--|
| Teachers and staff | 76 | 16 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Students | 65 | 19 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| Parents in the district | 58 | 24 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| Community members in the district | 39 | 27 | 9 | 11 | 7 | 6 |
| Past graduates of schools in the district | 19 | 17 | 8 | 13 | 24 | 18 |

UNDERSTANDING PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE U.S.

Superintendents say they widely report the results of parent surveys: 97% say they share and discuss the results with both the school board and teachers and staff, and 85% say they share the results with parents. Two-thirds share and discuss the results with the broader community.

(Asked of those whose district conducts surveys of parents) When you conduct surveys of parents, do you share and discuss the results with _____?

| | % Yes | % No | % Don't know/ Does not apply |
|-----------------------|-------|------|---------------------------------|
| The school board | 97 | 2 | 1 |
| Teachers and staff | 97 | 2 | 1 |
| Parents | 85 | 12 | 3 |
| The broader community | 67 | 28 | 5 |

Nearly all superintendents regard parent feedback as important when making decisions for the school district, with 46% saying it is “very important” and 52% saying it is “somewhat important.”

How important is parent feedback when making decisions for the school district?

| | % |
|---------------------------|----|
| Very important | 46 |
| Somewhat important | 52 |
| Not very important | 2 |
| Not at all important | 0 |
| Don't know/Does not apply | <1 |

However, more superintendents regard parent feedback as important than agree they regularly consider it in making decisions, suggesting a slight disconnect between its stated importance and how much it actually matters in practice. Seventy-four percent of superintendents strongly agree (23%) or agree (51%) that they regularly consider parent feedback in the decisions they make for the school district. Only 4% strongly disagree or disagree. These numbers are similar to what Gallup measured two years ago.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. I regularly consider parent feedback in the decisions I make for the school district.

| | % 5 Strongly agree | % 4 | % 3 | % 2 | % 1 Strongly disagree | % Don't know/ Does not apply |
|-----------|--------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| July 2016 | 23 | 51 | 21 | 3 | 1 | < 1 |
| July 2014 | 27 | 52 | 18 | 3 | 0 | 0 |

Superintendents from different types of school districts all generally agree that they regularly consider parent feedback in decisions they make, although superintendents in city and suburban districts and those living in the western U.S. are slightly more likely to strongly agree they do so.

CONCLUSION

The results of the survey underscore the importance of many stakeholders in achieving student success, including superintendents, principals, teachers and parents. Essential to achieving that success is communication and reciprocal feedback among these various people. Superintendents believe that districts do a lot to bring principals, teachers and parents into the process, but more can still be done.

For instance, most superintendents say that they conduct regular surveys of parents, students, and teachers and staff to gather their feedback, and that they widely report the results of parent surveys. Nearly all superintendents regard parent feedback as “very” or “somewhat” important in district decision-making, but a smaller 74% agree that they regularly consider feedback in their actual decision-making. Fifty-eight percent say they survey parents annually, suggesting that many are relying on sparse data on what parents want, or are perhaps listening to input from a narrow set of (likely highly involved) parents who may not represent the views of all parents.

Superintendents believe parents are at least somewhat engaged in their children’s education, but they believe there is much room for improvement. Only 23% say their district has been very effective in engaging parents with their child’s school. They see a welcoming school environment as the most important way to ensure parents are engaged with their child’s education. Other important factors to ensuring parent engagement are open communication between parents and school leaders, having a commitment to high academic standards, and knowing the needs and strengths of students and being responsive to those factors.

Superintendents clearly recognize the value of having an engaged student body and an engaged staff; they rank these as some of the most important ways to evaluate how a district and its educational leaders – including superintendents and principals – are doing. Making sure their schools are doing the types of things that engage parents in their children’s education will go a long way to helping parents fulfill their roles in ensuring students succeed in school.

METHODOLOGY

This survey is an attempted census of U.S. public school district superintendents. Gallup used a purchased sample list of 12,376 K-12 school districts across the U.S. to email their superintendents to ask their participation in an internet survey. Gallup conducted 1,733 web interviews from July 11-31, 2016, achieving a 14% response rate. The sample of superintendents was weighted to correct for possible nonresponse bias by matching the obtained sample to targets for all U.S. school districts from the National Center for Education Statistics database on district enrollment, geographical region and location of the school in a city, suburb or rural area. The weighted sample thus can be projected to represent public school districts nationwide.

ABOUT GALLUP

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

For more information, visit www.gallup.com.

ABOUT GALLUP EDUCATION

Gallup experts work with leaders in education to hire and develop talented educators, identify the strengths of each student and create engaging learning environments — fostering long-term student success in the classroom and in future careers. The best educators know that for students to achieve meaningful, lasting success in the classroom and beyond, they must be emotionally engaged in the educational experience. This means educators must focus on students' hope, engagement and well-being — the predictors Gallup has discovered matter the most. Measuring and moving the needle on these factors transforms educational institutions into places where students — and educators — thrive.

For more information, visit education.gallup.com, or follow @GallupEducation.

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

| What is your age? | % |
|---|-----|
| Younger than 30 | < 1 |
| 30 to 39 | 2 |
| 40 to 49 | 29 |
| 50 to 59 | 42 |
| 60 to 69 | 24 |
| 70 or older | 2 |
| What is your gender? | % |
| Male | 75 |
| Female | 25 |
| How many years have you served as the superintendent in this school district? | % |
| Less than six months | 2 |
| Six months to less than three years | 34 |
| Three years to less than five years | 24 |
| Five years to less than 10 years | 25 |
| 10 years or more | 15 |
| Don't know/Does not apply | 0 |
| How many years have you served as the superintendent in any school district? | % |
| Less than six months | 2 |
| Six months to less than three years | 20 |
| Three years to less than five years | 18 |
| Five years to less than 10 years | 26 |
| 10 years or more | 33 |
| Don't know/Does not apply | 2 |
| How would you categorize your school district? | % |
| City | 7 |
| Suburban | 23 |
| Town | 9 |
| Rural | 61 |
| About how many students are currently enrolled in your school district? | % |
| 0-999 | 52 |
| 1,000-1,999 | 18 |
| 2,000-4,999 | 13 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 7 |
| 10,000 or more | 9 |