

UNDERSTANDING PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE U.S.

RESULTS OF A GALLUP SURVEY OF K-12 SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS: SURVEY 1

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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. Gallup works with leaders and organizations to achieve breakthroughs in customer engagement, employee engagement, organizational culture and identity, leadership development, talent-based assessments, entrepreneurship and well-being. Gallup's 2,000 professionals include noted scientists, renowned subject-matter experts and bestselling authors who work in a range of industries, including banking, finance, healthcare, consumer goods, automotive, real estate, hospitality, education, government and business-to-business.

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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, follow @GallupEducation or contact education@gallup.com.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gallup developed this research study of K-12 superintendents in the U.S. to understand superintendents' opinions on important topics and policy issues facing education. The June and July survey is the first of two planned for 2015. The following are key findings from the study.

FUTURE OF EDUCATION

- Superintendents who responded to the survey are excited about the future of their school district: 86% agree they are excited, including 52% who strongly agree.
- Superintendents are far less excited about the future of K-12 public education in the U.S.: 44% agree, including 14% who strongly agree.
- Superintendents largely believe their principals and teachers are excited about the future of their school district, but they think these staff members are far less excited about K-12 education in the country.

ENROLLMENT

- Equal percentages of superintendents say enrollment in their district will increase in the coming year as say it will decrease. Longer term, they are slightly more likely to expect enrollment to increase rather than decrease over the next 10 years.

SCHOOL BUDGETS AND FINANCIAL AID

- The plurality of superintendents report (or expect, if they have not yet heard) that their total state and federal financial aid will stay about the same as the prior year (40%). More expect or have seen a decrease (34%) than an increase (27%).
- Sixty percent of superintendents are confident that their district will have sufficient revenue to meet their budget demands for the 2015-2016 school year, including 23% who are very confident.
- The most common steps superintendents say they will take to make up for budget shortfalls are reducing staff positions, reducing certified teaching positions and increasing teaching loads for teachers.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS TESTING

- A majority of superintendents in participating states (54%) agree the Common Core State Standards have improved the quality of education in their school district; 12% disagree.
- Most superintendents, 65%, say the Common Core State Standards are “just about right” for most students rather than “too challenging” or “not challenging enough.”
- Sixty-nine percent of superintendents say their district administered a Common Core State Standards test this past school year. More said the administration of the test went well than went poorly, and more say the assessment was effective rather than not effective at measuring mastery of the Common Core State Standards.

METHODOLOGY

The survey is an attempted census of U.S. public school district superintendents. Gallup used a purchased sample list of 12,575 K-12 school districts across the U.S. The list contained email addresses of superintendents of U.S. public school districts. Data were not weighted, and therefore the results only reflect the views of those interviewed and cannot be projected with a high degree of confidence to all superintendents. Gallup conducted 1,811 Web interviews, June 24-July 12, 2015.

KEY FINDINGS

FUTURE OF EDUCATION

The superintendents interviewed for the study are highly optimistic about the future of their school district: 86% agree they are excited about the future, including 52% who strongly agree. Superintendents also widely agree principals (84%) and teachers (73%) are excited about the future of their school district.

When the focus turns more broadly to the future of K-12 public education in the U.S., superintendents are far less optimistic about the future and believe principals and teachers are less optimistic as well. Forty-four percent of superintendents agree — including 14% who strongly agree — they are excited about the future of U.S. public education. Forty-one percent of superintendents believe principals are excited about public education nationwide. Superintendents are slightly more likely to disagree (33%) than to agree (27%) that teachers are excited about the future of K-12 public education in the U.S.

Superintendents and, by extension, principals and teachers, may be more positive about their own district because they are more familiar with it and actively contribute to the quality of education it provides. Their perceptions of U.S. public education could be influenced more by what they hear secondhand in news reports, much of which — accurate or not — may paint an unflattering picture of education in the U.S.

On 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 items.						
	%5 Strongly Agree	%4	%3	%2	%1 Strongly Disagree	% Don't Know
I am excited about the future of my school district.	52	34	9	4	2	0
Principals in my district are excited about the future of my school district.	40	44	10	3	1	2
Teachers in my district are excited about the future of my school district.	19	54	20	5	1	1
I am excited about the future of K-12 public education in the U.S.	14	30	33	18	6	<1
Principals in my district are excited about the future of K-12 public education in the U.S.	10	31	35	15	4	4
Teachers in my district are excited about the future of K-12 public education in the U.S.	4	23	37	24	9	3

ENROLLMENT

Superintendents are as likely to report that enrollment in their school district will increase (30%) as say it will decrease (30%) in the coming school year. A plurality, 39% expect it will remain the same. Very few anticipate a substantial increase or decrease.

Most superintendents expect enrollment in their district to change within the next 10 years, with 44% expecting an increase and 39% a decrease. Just 16% believe enrollment will remain the same over the next decade.

I think that the enrollment in my school district in the fall of 2015, compared to the fall of 2014, will:	
Substantially increase	2%
Somewhat increase	28%
Remain unchanged	39%
Somewhat decrease	28%
Substantially decrease	2%
Don't know/Does not apply	<1%

Over the next 10 years, do you think enrollment in your school district will:	
Substantially increase	9%
Somewhat increase	35%
Remain unchanged	16%
Somewhat decrease	32%
Substantially decrease	7%
Don't know/Does not apply	1%

There are regional differences in expected enrollment changes. Superintendents working in the South and West generally expect a net increase in enrollment both in the short term and the long term, while those working in the East and Midwest expect a net decrease. Those differences could reflect recent population shifts in the U.S., with proportionately more Americans residing in southern and western states and fewer in the East and Midwest.

Expected Changes in School District Enrollment, by Region of the Country				
	East	Midwest	South	West
In the Fall of 2015				
Substantially increase	1%	2%	5%	3%
Somewhat increase	18%	24%	39%	33%
Remain unchanged	37%	42%	36%	37%
Somewhat decrease	43%	29%	18%	25%
Substantially decrease	2%	3%	1%	2%
Over the Next 10 Years				
Substantially increase	3%	5%	17%	14%
Somewhat increase	26%	31%	42%	42%
Remain unchanged	16%	18%	14%	15%
Somewhat decrease	42%	38%	21%	21%
Substantially decrease	12%	7%	4%	6%

In addition, superintendents who describe their school district’s location as “rural” expect decreases in enrollment both in the coming year and over the next 10 years. Superintendents who describe their location as “a city,” “suburban” or “a town” expect net enrollment increases in the next year and over the next 10 years.

SCHOOL BUDGETS AND FINANCIAL AID

At the time they completed the survey in June or July, most superintendents, 75%, had received information about state or federal aid their district will receive for the coming school year. Of these superintendents, 30% say they will get an increase in aid, 31% say a decrease, and 39% say no change. Those who had not yet heard about 2015-2016 state or federal aid are much more pessimistic — 42% expect a decrease and 16% expect an increase.

Have you received information from your state about your district’s state and federal financial aid for the 2015-2016 school year?	
Yes	75%
No	25%

(Will/Do you expect) the total state and federal financial aid to your school district (to) increase, decrease or stay about the same for the 2015-2015 school year?			
	All respondents	Yes, have received information about aid	No, have not received information about aid
Increase	27%	30%	16%
Decrease	34%	31%	42%
Stay about the same	40%	39%	42%

Sixty percent of superintendents surveyed are generally confident that their school district will have sufficient revenue to meet budget demands for the new school year, with slightly less than one-quarter (23%) reporting they are very confident. Those who have received information about state or federal aid are a bit more confident than those who have not (62% vs. 54%, respectively).

How confident are you that your school district will have sufficient revenue to meet budget demands for the 2015-2016 school year?			
	All respondents	Yes, have received information about aid	No, have not received information about aid
Very confident	23%	25%	17%
Somewhat confident	37%	37%	37%
Not very confident	24%	24%	26%
Not at all confident	15%	14%	20%

When asked about several approaches that superintendents could use to make up for a shortfall in district revenue, superintendents are most likely to say their district will reduce staff positions, with 52% citing this — the only measure a majority chose. The next most often selected steps are reducing certified teacher positions (40%) and increasing teaching loads for teachers (39%). Superintendents are far less likely to say they will consolidate with other school districts, reduce extracurricular programs for students or reduce art, music or physical education classes.

As would be expected, superintendents who are not confident they will have sufficient revenue in the coming school year are more likely to indicate they will implement each of these cost-saving measures. However, even a sizable minority of those who are confident about their district’s revenue expect to reduce staff positions (38%) as well as take several other steps.

Which, if any, of the following will your school district do to make up for insufficient revenue to meet budget needs?			
	All respondents	Very/Somewhat confident will have sufficient revenue	Not at all confident/ Not very confident will have sufficient revenue
Reduce staff positions	52%	38%	71%
Reduce certified teacher positions	40%	29%	56%
Increase teaching loads for teachers	39%	26%	58%
Reduce professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators	28%	18%	42%
Reduce administrative positions	27%	19%	39%
Promote early retirement of faculty or staff	21%	16%	29%
Outsource support services	21%	17%	26%
Increase cost-sharing with parents for school supplies, lunches or transportation	19%	13%	27%
Ask teachers and retirees for concessions on pay or benefits	17%	10%	26%

	All respondents	Very/Somewhat confident will have sufficient revenue	Not at all confident/ Not very confident will have sufficient revenue
Increase the number of school fundraising events	16%	12%	22%
Reduce or eliminate non-core classes, such as art, music and physical education	13%	8%	21%
Reduce extracurricular programs for students, such as sports, band and clubs	12%	7%	21%
Consolidate with other school districts	6%	5%	8%
Other	12%	10%	15%
None of these	19%	30%	2%

Nineteen percent of respondents, including 30% of those who are confident they will have sufficient revenue for the 2015-2016 school year, say they will not take any of these steps.

Twelve percent volunteer a cost-saving approach other than those listed. Some examples of the other approaches they are taking include applying for grants; drawing on cash reserves; sharing staff and services with other districts; closing individual schools within the district; foregoing capital improvements; instituting a four-day school week and asking voters to approve a tax increase.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS TESTING

Three-quarters of the superintendents interviewed indicate their state has adopted the Common Core State Standards. The majority of these, 54%, agree that the Common Core has improved the quality of education in their school districts, answering with a 4 or 5 rating on a 5-point scale where 5 means “strongly agree” and 1 means “strongly disagree.” At the other end of the scale, 12% disagree, giving a response of 1 or 2, while 31% are neutral, choosing the midpoint 3 of the scale.

Has your state adopted the Common Core State Standards?	
Yes	74%
No	25%
Don't Know	1%

<i>(Asked of those whose state has adopted Common Core State Standards.)</i> Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement.						
	%5 Strongly Agree	%4	%3	%2	%1 Strongly Disagree	% Don't Know
The Common Core State Standards have improved the quality of education in my school district.	17	37	31	8	4	3

However, when Gallup asked all superintendents to evaluate the effect of the Common Core State Standards on education in the U.S. more broadly, 39% agree it has improved the quality, 18% disagree and 43% are neutral or have no opinion.

Superintendents working in Common Core states tilt positive on this question, with 46% agreeing it has improved the quality of U.S. education, 13% disagreeing and 41% neutral or unsure. However, superintendents in non-Common Core states tilt negative: 18% agree the standards are improving U.S. education, 34% disagree and 48% are neutral or have no opinion.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. The Common Core State Standards have improved the quality of education in U.S. schools.						
	%5 Strongly Agree	%4	%3	%2	%1 Strongly Disagree	% Don't Know
All respondents	11	28	28	11	7	15
Yes, state has adopted Common Core	13	33	30	9	4	11
No, state has not adopted Common Core	4	14	21	17	17	27

The relationship between being in a Common Core state and views of the Common Core State Standards could be influenced by superintendents' experience with the standards: Those who have hands-on experience with it view it positively, while those without that experience are less likely to do so. It is also possible that the superintendents are taking cues from their respective state's political and education leaders' decision to adopt or not adopt the Common Core as a way to inform their own opinion. Superintendents residing in states that have rejected the Common Core may be more leery about its potential than superintendents residing in states that have embraced the standards.

The majority of all superintendents surveyed, 65%, believe the Common Core standards are just about right for students, while 14% say they are too challenging and 3% say not challenging enough. Satisfaction with the level of standards rises to 75% among superintendents working in Common Core states. Half of those who work in non-Common Core states do not have an opinion on this question, but among those who do, most think the standards are appropriately 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?			
	All respondents	Yes, state has adopted Common Core	No, state has not adopted Common Core
Too challenging	14%	16%	10%
Not challenging enough	3%	3%	3%
Just about right	65%	75%	36%
Don't know/Does not apply	17%	6%	51%

Nearly seven in 10 superintendents in Common Core states say their district has administered a Common Core test this past school year.

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Of these, 80% say the testing went well, though most of those say it went somewhat well (52%) rather than very well (28%). By a 2-to-1 margin, superintendents whose districts administered a Common Core test believe the tests were effective (42%) rather than not effective (22%) at measuring mastery of the standards.

Only 14% of superintendents indicate they have already received results of the Common Core State Standards tests at the time they completed the Gallup survey.

(Asked of those whose state has adopted Common Core State Standards.) This past school year, did your district administer a Common Core test, either a PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) or SBAC (Smarter Balanced Consortium) test?

Yes	69%
No	30%
Don't know/Does not apply	2%

(Asked of those whose district administered a Common Core test.) Overall, how would you say the administration of that test went in your school district this year?

Very well	28%
Somewhat well	52%
Somewhat poorly	16%
Very poorly	4%

(Asked of those whose district administered a Common Core test.) In your opinion, how effective is the assessment at measuring mastery of the Common Core State Standards?

Very effective	8%
Somewhat effective	34%
Not too effective	13%
Not effective at all	9%
Don't know	37%

(Asked of those whose district administered a Common Core test.) Has your school district received results of the Common Core State Standards tests administered in 2015?

Yes	14%
No	86%

CONCLUSION

Superintendents in K-12 schools are generally optimistic about the future of their district, and believe principals and teachers in their district share that optimism. Also, superintendents are generally confident about having sufficient revenue in the coming year even though barely one-quarter expect increases in state or federal financial aid. In addition, as many predict enrollment in their district will decline in the coming year as think it will increase. Longer term, slightly more believe enrollment will increase rather than decrease over the next 10 years. Of the four U.S. regions, superintendents working in the South and West expect the most growth in student enrollment, both in the coming school year and in the next decade.

Superintendents in Common Core states are more positive than negative about the Common Core State Standards, tending to believe they have improved the quality of education in their districts. They are also generally positive about the effect these standards are having nationally. They do not believe the standards are too challenging. Most say their district has administered a Common Core State Standards test, and report it went well, though many more say it went somewhat well rather than very well. These superintendents tend to believe the tests are effective at measuring mastery of the standards, although many do not have an opinion on this. A small minority of superintendents say they had received the Common Core State Standards test results at the time of the survey.

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

What is your age?	Percentage
Younger than 30	0
30 to 39	4
40 to 49	30
50 to 59	42
60 to 69	22
70 and older	1

What is your gender?	Percentage
Male	76
Female	24

How many years have you served as the superintendent in this school district?	Percentage
Less than six months	2
Six months to less than three years	37
Three years to less than five years	24
Five years to less than 10 years	25
10 or more years	12
Don't know/Does not apply	0

How many years have you served as the superintendent in any school district?	Percentage
Less than six months	3
Six months to less than three years	25
Three years to less than five years	17
Five years to less than 10 years	26
10 or more years	28
Don't know/Does not apply	2

How would you categorize your school district?	Percentage
City	6
Suburban	20
Town	11
Rural	63

How many employees does your school district employ?	Percentage
0-199	47
200-499	27
500-999	13
1,000 or more	13