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# 2017 SCHOOLING IN AMERICA

Public Opinion on K–12 Education, Parent Experiences, School Choice, and the Role of the Federal Government

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**Paul DiPerna**  
**Michael Shaw**  
**Andrew D. Catt**



## **ABOUT EDCHOICE**

EdChoice is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing full and unencumbered educational choice as the best pathway to successful lives and a stronger society. EdChoice believes that families, not bureaucrats, are best equipped to make K–12 schooling decisions for their children. The organization works at the state level to educate diverse audiences, train advocates and engage policymakers on the benefits of high-quality school choice programs. EdChoice is the intellectual legacy of Milton and Rose D. Friedman, who founded the organization in 1996 as the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The national nomenclature surrounding education has shifted dramatically in the past year. Terms like “vouchers,” “charter schools,” and “tax-credit scholarships”—all educational options—have entered the mainstream dialogue as a result of a political embrace by the executive administration. This emergence has fueled the ongoing debate on what is and should be considered public education in the United States.

Often in this political climate, the loudest voices garner the most attention. That has certainly been true in education, where distinct stakeholders of parents, teachers, administrators, boards, and governments often struggle to align their goals. Yet the voices of everyday citizens as a whole also should be examined for this most important public good.

In this report, we share results from a 2017 national telephone survey of 1,000 American adults on their views of K–12 education and related policy issues. Our goal was to unleash the narrative data resulting from the survey and relate them with recent and intermediate trends in K–12 education public opinion polling, including national surveys released this year and past EdChoice survey data. This publication, an annual project developed and conducted by EdChoice in collaboration with survey partner Braun Research, Inc, is the fifth installment of our *Schooling in America* series.

This report addresses the following four general research areas for exploration:

1. What are parents’ experiences in K–12 education and local schooling? How satisfied are parents with different types of schooling experiences?
2. What are the levels, margins, and intensities of support and opposition for different types of K–12 educational choice policies, including school vouchers, education savings accounts,

and tax-credit scholarships?

3. What do Americans perceive as the national direction of K–12 education and know about average per-student spending?
4. To what extent do Americans see a role for the federal government in various public policy areas? What should be the federal role within K–12 education?

Education touches all Americans. With attention close on the Department of Education and the federal government in general, revealing citizens’ views on K–12 education, federal involvement, and parental satisfaction with schooling experiences can inform future policies. Though the following findings are only a part of the story of American education, they detail the views and sentiments the country holds toward this democratic pillar.

## Key Findings

### ***Parents’ Local Schooling Experiences and Preferences***

#### Rating Local School Districts

Current and former school parents were more likely to rate their public school districts positively on effectiveness and performance. School districts earn the highest ratings for keeping parents informed about school activities. About six out of 10 gave positive marks. Parents are nearly twice as likely to give a positive rating than a negative rating (61% excellent/good vs. 32% fair/poor). More than half of current and former school parents gave positive ratings to school districts for communicating effectively with parents (55%), and about half said the same about providing school counseling services (52%), being responsive/proactive to unique situations (52%), and providing additional academic supports outside the classroom (49%).

However, there still appears to be quite a bit of room for improvement. At least one-third of current and former school parents gave low marks on the following performance categories: providing academic support outside the classroom (44%), being responsive/proactive to unique situations (41%), providing counseling services (39%), and communicating effectively with parents (40%).

## School Type Enrollments and Satisfaction

The vast majority of Americans' schooling experiences are with public school districts, although such schools ranked last in satisfaction. Of parents who have enrolled a child in a given school type, current and former school parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with all school types: 93 percent were satisfied with private schools; 90 percent were satisfied with homeschooling; 75 percent were satisfied with public charter schools; and 73 percent were satisfied with public district schools.<sup>1</sup>

The private school and homeschool satisfaction margins (+86 points and +79 points, respectively) were much wider than the margins observed for district schools (+48 points) and charter schools (+53 points). There is some variation across school types when considering only those parents who said they were "very satisfied": private schools (58%), homeschooling (54%), charter schools (45%), district schools (29%). Parents were twice as likely to say they were very satisfied with their private school experience compared to the proportion who said they were very satisfied with district schools.

## Grading Local Schools

American parents give varying grades to different types of local schools. Current school parents are much more likely to give grades A or B to private/parochial schools in their communities than they

are to do the same for their local public schools. Of those respondents who actually gave a grade to schools, they were much more likely to give higher grades to area private schools (75% gave an A or B) than public charter schools (61% gave an A or B) or public district schools (50% gave an A or B). Higher proportions of current school parents did not express a view for public charter schools (16%) or local private schools (13%), compared with the proportion that did not grade regular public schools (3%).

## School Type Preferences

More than eight out of 10 American students attend public district schools, but in our interviews, only about three out of 10 parents said they would choose a district school as a first preference.

- 42% prefer private school
- 33% prefer public district school
- 15% prefer public charter school
- 7% prefer to homeschool

## ***Educational Choice Policies and Reforms***

### Education Savings Accounts (ESAs)

When given a description of education savings account programs, seven out of 10 Americans (71%) said they were in favor of them. The margins of both support (+52 points) and strong support (+24 points) are large. We observed a noticeable spike—19 percentage points—in support for ESAs when compared to last year's survey.

We have asked an ESA question several ways since 2013. In the first three years of asking about ESAs, we had generally observed support for the concept in the high 50s to low 60s. Last year was

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<sup>1</sup> We advise caution about over-interpretation. The sample sizes were relatively small for those who said they have enrolled their child in a charter school (N = 59) or who have homeschooled (N = 47).

a low point for ESA support (52%). Wording was slightly modified this year for better precision, and after performing an online experiment we believe that ESA responses in 2016 were likely anomalies. Regardless of question wording, and based on our experiment, we estimate that support for ESAs has increased by at least 12 percentage points since last year.

Reasons respondents are in favor of ESAs include:

- Access to schools that have better academics (32%)
- More freedom and flexibility for parents (27%)
- Access to schools that provide more individual attention (20%)

Reasons respondents are opposed to ESAs include:

- Divert funding away from public schools (33%)
- Cause fraudulent behavior (19%)
- Benefit unaccountable private schools (13%)

## School Vouchers

More than six out of 10 Americans (62%) said they support school vouchers, compared with 31 percent who said they oppose such a school choice system. The margin of support (+31 points) is large, indicating the public is twice as likely to be supportive of vouchers. The intensity is net positive (+11 points) as respondents are more likely to express a strongly favorable view toward vouchers (28% “strongly favor” vs. 18% “strongly oppose”). Over the last four years, Americans generally have been twice as likely to support vouchers than oppose them. We saw an increase in both voucher support (+5 points) and opposition (+3 points) from last year. Support is slightly higher than two years ago (+1 point), and the opposition is modestly lower (-2 points).

## Tax-Credit Scholarships

Similar to vouchers, respondents are more than twice as likely to support (62%) a tax-credit scholarship system than to oppose (26%) one—a margin of +36 points. Looking at recent trends, the margin has hovered around this year’s +36 points, except last year (+28 points). This general finding has been consistent over the last four years.

## Public Charter Schools

Despite their 25 years of existence and consistent media coverage, nearly a fourth (23%) of respondents were unfamiliar with charter schools. When given a description, though, respondents are twice as likely to support charter schools (61%) than to oppose them (29%). The margin of support for charter schools is large (+32 points). Americans are nearly twice as likely to express intensely positive responses toward charters (21% “strongly favor” vs. 11% “strongly oppose”). We saw an increase in charter school support (+2 points) and opposition (+6 points) from last year, and support (+8 points) and opposition (+2 points) are higher than two years ago. Support for charter schools matches the highest we have seen (61%, also in 2014).

## ***National Direction and K–12 Education Spending***

### Perceived Direction of K–12 Education

Though negative sentiment has decreased since last year, Americans are still twice as likely to think K–12 education is on the wrong track (55%) rather than headed in the right direction (27%). Most subgroups have negative attitudes about the direction of K–12 education. One-fifth of Independents (20%), Gen Xers (21%), Asian Americans (20%), and low-income Americans (20%) did not know or have an opinion of its direction.



Current school parents were slightly more likely to believe K–12 education is headed in the right direction (33%), which is a higher level than what former school parents said (21%).

## Knowledge and Opinion Changes about Education Spending

The United States funded public education at an average of more than \$11,000 per student during the 2016–17 school year.<sup>ii</sup> But only 11 percent of respondents could estimate within the correct range that includes that average spending statistic ( $\geq$  \$8,000 and  $<$  \$12,000). Nearly half of respondents (45%) underestimated spending by at least \$3,000 per student.

When considering “total expenditures” per student, which is another federal government definition for spending in K–12 education, it is even more likely Americans’ estimates would have been further off target.<sup>iii</sup>

Given an actual per-student spending statistic, Americans are less likely to say public school funding is at a level that is “too low.” In a split-sample experiment, we asked two slightly different questions. On the baseline version, 54 percent of respondents said public school funding was “too low.” However, on the version where we included average national public per-student spending information (\$11,392 in 2014–15), the proportion that said spending was “too low” shrank dramatically by 16 percentage points to 38 percent.

## Public Affairs Interest and Preferences for the Federal Government’s Role

### Interest in Public Affairs

Three-fourths (75%) of respondents regularly follow government and public affairs. The most visible demographic differences occurred between age groups, with seniors (86%) much more likely to express interest in public affairs than middle-aged (76%) and younger (62%) respondents.

### Trust in the Federal Government

Based on our survey, less than half of respondents (42%) said they trust the federal government some or most of the time, compared to 53 percent who said they can trust it occasionally or never. Only 10 percent of Americans said they can trust the federal government to do what is right “always or most of the time.” Only a handful of subgroups were more likely to trust the federal government, including urban dwellers (margin = +3 points), high-income earners (margin = +4 points), Democrats (margin = +3 points), African Americans (margin = +1 point), and Latinos (margin = +3 points).

Certain demographic groups exhibited wide margins of distrust toward the federal government:

- Independents (-27 points)
- Gen Xers (-25 points)
- Low-income households (-23 points)
- Former school parents (-22 points)
- Whites (-20 points)

<sup>ii</sup> United States Census Bureau (2017), *Public Education Finances 2015: Economic Reimbursable Surveys Division Reports (G15-ASPEF)*, table 8, p. 20, retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2017/econ/g15-aspef.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> “Current Expenditures” data include dollars spent on instruction, instruction-related support services, and other elementary/secondary current expenditures, *but exclude* expenditures on long-term debt service, facilities and construction, and other programs. “Total Expenditures” includes the latter categories. Total current spending per student does not include capital outlay and interest on debt. National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Facts: Expenditures [web page], retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=66>

## Prioritizing Federal Involvement in Household, Public Policy Issues

A comparison of split-sample results yielded mostly similar responses on how Americans rank issues they believe the federal government should address. Healthcare/health issues, government, and inequality/racism ranked high on both versions of split-sample questions. The framing difference of top household vs. public policy priorities diverged on a major issue, however. Twenty-four percent of respondents said economic issues were the most critical “family” or household issue for the federal government to address, ranking first on that specific version of the question. On the other version of the question, only 8 percent said economic issues should be a top “public policy” priority for the federal government.

Education did not rank high among issues respondents identified as being the most critical for federal government action. Only 3 percent identified education as the most important issue in both split samples.

## Views on the Role of the Federal Government

More than half of respondents believe the federal government should play a major role in 14 distinct issues. National security and defense (83%) garnered the most support. K–12 education was one of only four options for which less than half of respondents felt a major federal role would be appropriate.

## Views on the Federal Role in K–12 Education

When asked about specific activities that the federal government can pursue in K–12 education, majorities of respondents did indicate a major federal role along the lines of “funding access to a quality education” and safeguarding students’ civil rights:

- Funding access to a quality education for military families (72%)
- Funding access to a quality education for students with disabilities (68%)
- Protection of students’ civil rights (66%)
- Funding access to a quality education for all students (64%)
- Funding access to a quality education for low-income students (61%)

However, respondents were much less likely to want the federal government to play a major role in the regulation of schools, districts, and education agencies. A plurality (40%) said they prefer it play a minor role, compared to the 37 percent that said it should play a major role or the 17 percent that said it should have no role.

The 2017 *Schooling in America Survey* questionnaire with topline results are publicly available and posted separately at [www.edchoice.org/NationalSurvey2017](http://www.edchoice.org/NationalSurvey2017). That document allows the reader to follow the survey interview by question and to consider item wording and ordering.

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<sup>iv</sup>We framed the question differently for the split-sample experiment, either as a “public policy issue” or as a “problem facing you and your family.” Respondents were free to give an open-ended phrase or description of the issue, and then our team coded the responses into broad categories.

# WHAT SMALL TOWN AND RURAL AMERICANS THINK

For this year's *Schooling in America Survey*, we collected additional interviews of Americans who self-identified as living in small town or rural areas (N=506). The following are some key findings:

## On Schooling Experiences and Preferences

At least half of small town/rural respondents rated their local school district as excellent or good with keeping parents informed of school activities (62%), providing additional academic support outside the classroom (52%), effectively communicating with parents (51%), providing school counseling services (51%), and being responsive and/or proactive to unique situations (50%).

The vast majority of small town/rural residents taking our survey have had children in public district schools for at least one school year (87%), while much smaller proportions said the same of private schools (15%), homeschooling (11%), and charter schools (8%). Of those who have enrolled a child in these schools for at least one year, nine out of 10 expressed satisfaction with their private school (90%) and homeschooling (89%) experiences. About two out of three were satisfied with their experiences at their public district schools (67%) and a smaller percentage were satisfied with their public charter school experiences (58%).

Based on the average response to two similar questions about school type preferences, a plurality of small town/rural Americans would choose a private school (35%) as a first option for their child. More than one-fourth of those respondents (28%) would select a regular public school. Nearly equal proportions said they prefer a public charter school (14%) or home school (15%). Small town and rural respondents were significantly more

likely than urbanites (6%) or suburbanites (5%) to prefer to homeschool their children.

## On Educational Choice Policies and Reforms

Given a description of education savings accounts (ESAs), small town/rural respondents were much more inclined to support the choice-based education policy than to oppose it. Nearly three out of four (74%) said they favor ESAs, compared to a much smaller percentage in opposition (18%). The margin of support is very large (+55 points), and the proportion who said they “strongly favor” ESAs (30%) is more than three times as large as the number who said they “strongly oppose” them (9%). Twenty-eight percent (28%) of rural and small town Americans who favor ESAs do so because they provide access to better academic environments. Nearly half of small town/rural residents who oppose ESAs said they do so because they believe ESAs will divert funding away from public schools (47%), and they are significantly more likely to give that reason than suburbanites (25%).

Large proportions of small town/rural respondents supported school vouchers (62%), tax-credit scholarships (60%), and public charter schools (60%). Those levels of support roughly doubled the levels of opposition for those types of school choice policies.

## On the Direction of K–12 Education and Knowledge about Spending

Americans in small towns and rural areas are more than twice as likely to say that K–12 education has gotten off on the wrong track (58%) than they are to say it's heading in the right direction (24%).

Only one out of 10 small town and rural Americans (10%) could correctly estimate how much is currently spent per student in America's K–12 public schools, on average. That finding is similar to the responses of urbanites and suburbanites.

## On the Potential Federal Role in K–12 Education

Thirty-eight percent said they can trust the federal government always/most/some of the time, *which is significantly lower than the proportion of urbanites (50%) who said the same thing.*

A relatively small proportion of small town and rural respondents (41%) said the federal government should play a major role in K–12 education, which is lower than what we observe for urbanites (52%).

On more specific items small town and rural respondents indicated the highest support for a major federal role supporting military-connected students (72%) and students with disabilities (71%) to access a quality education. On the other hand, less than one-third (32%) believed the federal government should play a major role in regulating schools, districts, and state education agencies.

# OVERVIEW

The national nomenclature surrounding education has shifted dramatically in the past year. Terms such as “vouchers,” “charters,” and “tax-credit scholarships”—all school choice options—are much more common now in the national dialogue on education policy and reforms. This emergence has fueled the ongoing debate on what is and should be considered public education in the United States.

Often in this political climate, the loudest voices garner the most attention. That has certainly been true in education, where distinct stakeholders of parents, teachers, administrators, boards, and governments often struggle to align their goals. Yet the voices of everyday citizens as a whole need also be examined for this most important public good.

In this report, we share results from the fifth installment of the *Schooling in America Survey*. This annual project involves live telephone interviews of at least 1,000 American adults. We report findings based on that statistically representative national sample as well as a range of demographic groups with varying sample sizes and margins of error.

Each year we include a focus on the views of school parents and at least one other demographic group. In 2017 we oversampled Americans living in small town or rural areas. We completed a total of 506 interviews of the latter subgroup and 500 interviews with parents of school-aged children. Those larger sample sizes allow us to be more confident in the reliability of the corresponding subgroup results.

Our 2017 *Schooling in America Survey* addresses four general research areas for exploration:

1. What are parents’ experiences in K–12 education and local schooling? How satisfied are parents with different types of schooling experiences?
2. What are the levels, margins, and intensities of support and opposition for different types

of K–12 educational choice policies, including school vouchers, education savings accounts, and tax-credit scholarships?

3. What do Americans perceive as the national direction of K–12 education and know about average per-student spending?
4. To what extent do Americans see a role for the federal government in various public policy areas? What should be the federal role within K–12 education?

One of our objectives is to contribute new data to the nationwide dialogue around education. Surveys from *Education Next*, *Phi Delta Kappa* (PDK), Associated Press/NORC, Gallup, and GenForward have supplied a wealth of data and findings about Americans’ views on K–12 education issues and reforms.<sup>1</sup> Although there are common themes and topics on the national survey landscape, questions and survey instruments differ. We encourage readers to consider those latter factors and compare and contrast question wording, response options, question ordering, and other survey design parameters when gleaning general takeaways about public opinion.

Generally, we find multiple national surveys this year have shown Americans are more supportive of school choice issues than in previous years. Our *Schooling in America survey* results from 2016 may have produced some anomalous results on certain topics and questions. Our results suggest a “bounce back” for school choice in 2017. We also noticed shifts of “don’t know” or non-opinions on school choice issues returning to pre-2016 levels.

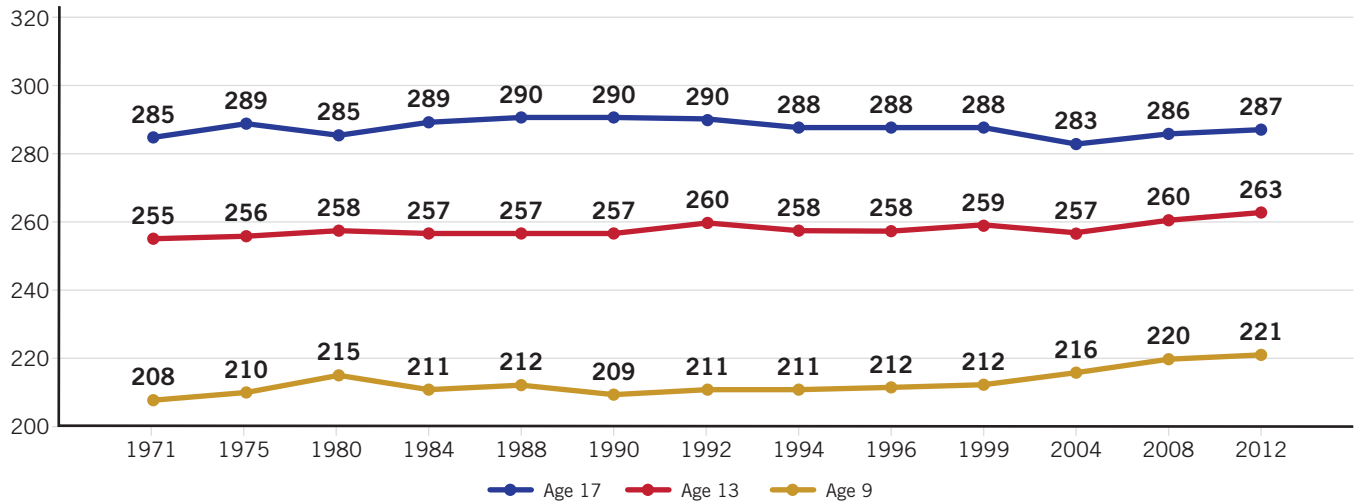
K–12 education touches all Americans, either in the present or in the past. Last year’s electoral outcomes have elevated public and media attention toward the U.S. Department of Education and federal government generally. Public policy debates should not ignore the public’s views on K–12 education, school choice, and federal involvement. The voice of the people is an essential thread in the fabric of a great education system.

# NATIONAL K–12 EDUCATION PROFILE AND CONTEXT

## Long-Term Trend NAEP Reading Score Changes Over Time, By Year and Age

Reading scores peaked for 17-year-olds around 1990, although younger students have seen gains since that time.

Average scale scores on the Long-Term Trend NAEP reading assessment, by NAEP test year and age



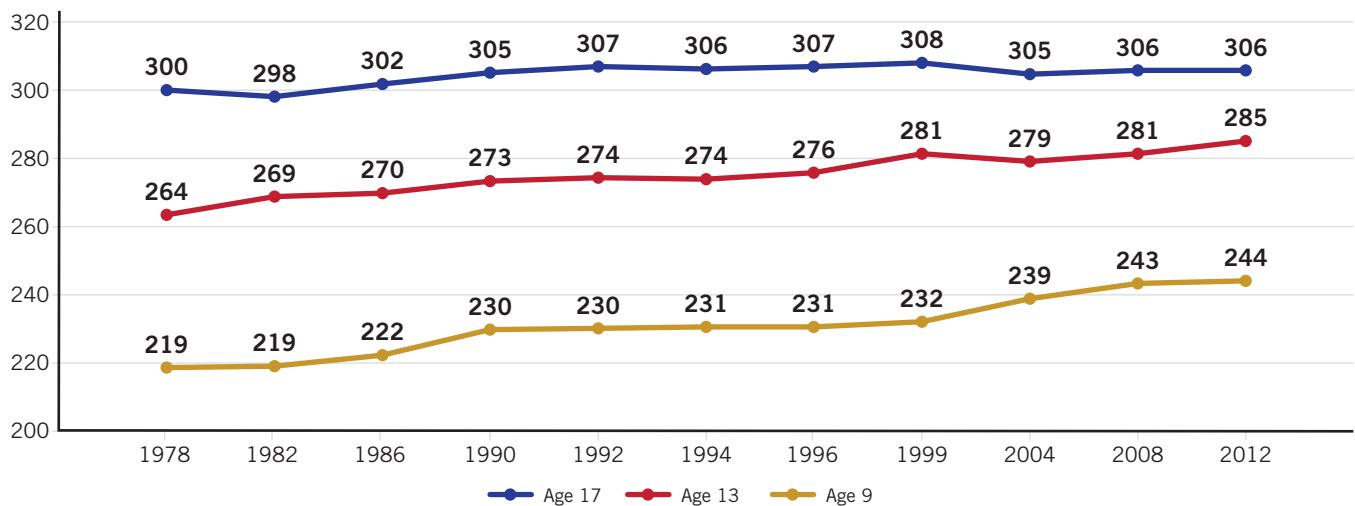
Notes: The NAEP Long-Term Reading scale ranges from 0 to 500. The original assessment format score was used for years 1971–1999, while the new format was used for the subsequent years.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Long-Term Trend Reading [data set], accessed October 26, 2017, retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/ltrdata>

## Long-Term Trend NAEP Math Score Changes Over Time, By Year and Age

Math scores have grown overall, although gains have not accelerated as quickly for 17-year-olds.

Average scale scores on the Long-Term Trend NAEP mathematics assessment, by NAEP test year and age



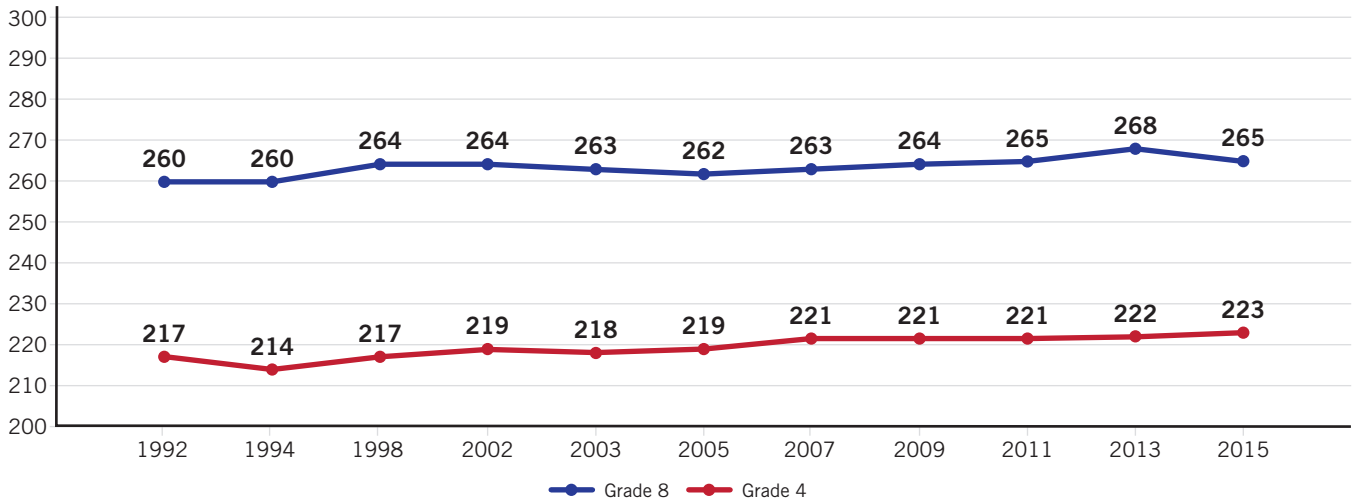
Notes: The NAEP Long-Term Mathematics scale ranges from 0 to 500. The original assessment format score was used for years 1978–1999, while the new format was used for the subsequent years.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Long-Term Trend Mathematics [data set], accessed October 26, 2017, retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/ltrdata>

## Main NAEP Reading Score Changes Over Time, By Year and Grade Level

Reading scores have gained modestly for elementary and middle school students.

Average scale scores for on the Main NAEP reading assessment, by NAEP test year and grade level



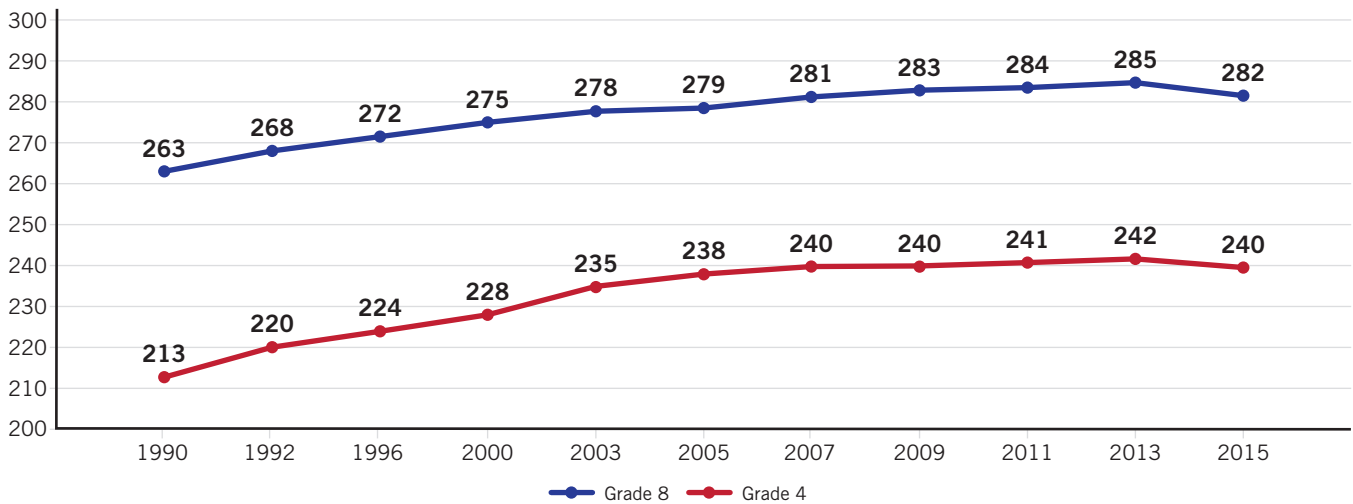
Note: The Main NAEP Reading scale ranges from 0 to 500.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading [data set], accessed October 26, 2017, retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/dataset.aspx>

## Main NAEP Math Score Changes Over Time, By Year and Grade Level

Math scores have risen steadily for elementary and middle school students.

Average scale scores for on the Main NAEP mathematics assessment, by NAEP test year and grade level



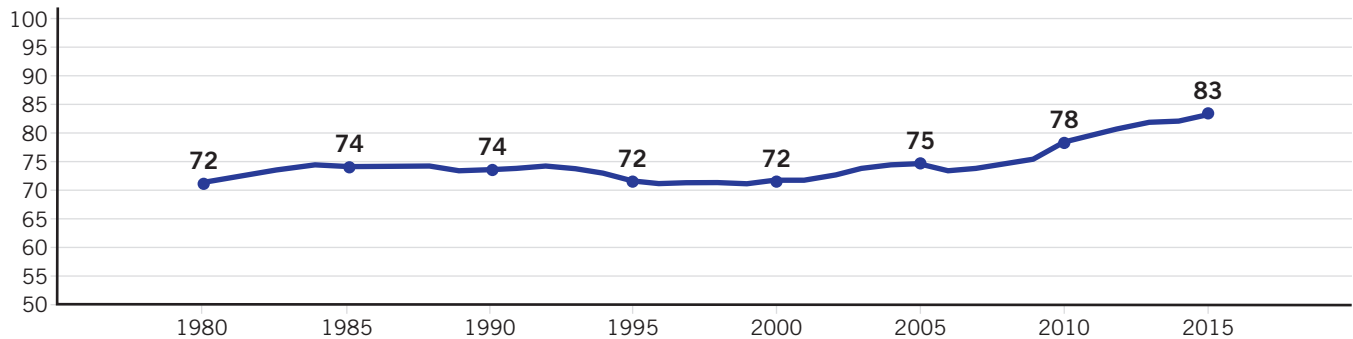
Note: The Main NAEP Mathematics scale ranges from 0 to 500.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Mathematics [data set], accessed October 26, 2017, retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/dataset.aspx>

## National Average High School Graduation Rate Trend Since 1980

While dipping in the 1990s, and again briefly in 2006, graduation rates have risen steadily over the past decade.

SY1980 through SY2013: Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR); SY14 through SY15: Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR)



Notes: AFGR was used for the years 1979–80 through 2012–13, whereas ACGR was used from 2013–14 through 2014–15 due to NCES changing their reporting. Percentages to the tenth decimal place were not available for the ACGR years.

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, Table 219.10. High school graduates, by sex and control of school: 1869-70 through 2025-26 [web page], last modified January 2016, retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15\\_219.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_219.10.asp); National Center for Education Statistics, Public High School Graduation Rates [web page], last modified April 2017, retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_coi.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_coi.asp)

## Additional Information about American K–12 Education

PISA Reading Mean Score Comparison: U.S. vs. OECD <sup>i</sup> .....	497 vs. 493
PISA Math Mean Score Comparison: U.S. vs. OECD <sup>i</sup> .....	470 vs. 490
PISA Science Mean Score Comparison: U.S. vs. OECD <sup>i</sup> .....	496 vs. 493
# Public School Students (excluding Charter School Students) <sup>ii</sup> .....	47,191,000
# Public Charter School Students <sup>iii</sup> .....	2,519,000
# Private School Students <sup>iii</sup> .....	5,750,520
# Home School Students <sup>iv</sup> .....	1,642,027
% Public School Students (excluding Charter School Students) <sup>v</sup> .....	83%
% Public Charter School Students.....	4%
% Private School Students.....	10%
% Home School Students.....	3%
# Public School Districts <sup>vi</sup> .....	13,601
# Public Schools (excluding Charter Schools) <sup>vii</sup> .....	98,271
# Public Charter Schools <sup>viii</sup> .....	6,465
# Private Schools <sup>vii</sup> .....	33,619
# Education Savings Account Programs <sup>ix</sup> .....	5
# School Voucher Programs <sup>ix</sup> .....	26
# Tax-Credit Scholarship Programs <sup>ix</sup> .....	22
% Free and Reduced-Price Lunch <sup>x</sup> .....	50%
% Individualized Education Program (IEP) <sup>x</sup> .....	12%
% Limited Eng. Proficient (LEP)/Eng. Language Learners <sup>x</sup> .....	8%
\$ Revenue Per Student <sup>xi</sup> .....	\$13,246
\$ “Total” Per Student Spending <sup>xii</sup> .....	\$12,335
\$ “Current” Per Student Spending <sup>xi</sup> .....	\$11,392
\$ “Instructional” Per Student Spending <sup>xi</sup> .....	\$6,903



## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation (2016), *PISA 2015 Results in Focus*, p. 5, retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Table 213.30. Number and percentage distribution of public elementary and secondary students and schools, by traditional or charter school status and selected characteristics: Selected years, 1999-2000 through 2013-14 [web page], last modified September 2015, retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15\\_213.30.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_213.30.asp)

<sup>iii</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Table 205.80. Private elementary and secondary schools, enrollment, teachers, and high school graduates, by state: Selected years, 2005 through 2015 [web page], last modified June 2017, retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_205.80.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_205.80.asp)

<sup>iv</sup> Ann Zeise (2017), Number of Homeschoolers in US 2017-18 [blog post], last modified August 21, 2017, retrieved from [http://a2zhomeschooling.com/thoughts\\_opinions\\_home\\_school/numbers\\_homeschooled\\_students](http://a2zhomeschooling.com/thoughts_opinions_home_school/numbers_homeschooled_students)

<sup>v</sup> Percentages are meant for general impressions only. Due to rounding, percentage totals may be slightly greater or less than 100 percent.

<sup>vi</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Table 214.10. Number of public school districts and public and private elementary and secondary schools: Selected years, 1869-70 through 2014-15 [web page], last modified November 2016, retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_214.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_214.10.asp)

<sup>vii</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Table 216.10. Public elementary and secondary schools, by level of school: Selected years, 1967-68 through 2013-14 [web page], last modified September 2015, retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15\\_216.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_216.10.asp)

<sup>viii</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Table 216.90. Public elementary and secondary charter schools and enrollment, by state: Selected years, 1999-2000 through 2013-14 [web page], last modified September 2015, retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15\\_216.90.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_216.90.asp)

<sup>ix</sup> EdChoice, Fast Facts on School Choice [web page], last modified August 30, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.edchoice.org/resource-hub/fast-facts/#taxcredit-scholarship-fast-facts>

<sup>x</sup> Authors' calculations from National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Local Education Agency (School District) Universe Survey LEP Data", 2014-15 v.1a; "Local Education Agency (School District) Universe Survey Special ED Data", 2014-15 v.1a; "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Free Lunch Data", 2014-15 v.1a; "State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey Directory Data", 2014-15 v.1a; "State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey Membership Data", 2014-15 v.1a, generated October 26, 2017

<sup>xi</sup> United States Census Bureau (2017), *Public Education Finances 2015: Economic Reimbursable Surveys Division Reports* (G15-ASPEF), table 8, p. 20, retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2017/econ/g15-aspef.pdf>

<sup>xii</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "National Public Education Financial Survey (State Fiscal)," 2013-14 (FY 2014) v.1a and "State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey Directory Data," 2014-15 v.1a, accessed February 24, 2017, retrieved via EISi tableGenerator from <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/tableGenerator.aspx>; National Center for Education Statistics, Table 236.75. Total and Current Expenditures Per Pupil in Fall Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Function and State or Jurisdiction: 2013-14 [web page], last modified July 2016, retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_236.75.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_236.75.asp)

## DATA AND METHODS

The “2017 Schooling in America Project,” developed by EdChoice and conducted by Braun Research, Inc., interviewed a statistically representative national sample of adults (ages 18+) in the 50 United States and District of Columbia. Data collection methods included probability sampling and random-digit dial. The unweighted national sample includes a total of 1,000 telephone interviews completed in English from August 18 to September 2, 2017, by means of both landline and cell phone. Statistical results were weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the national sample is  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points.<sup>2</sup>

During our study, we oversampled the following demographic groups to increase our confidence in the reliability of the reported results:<sup>3</sup>

- African Americans, N = 168. This subgroup sample comprised n = 120 from the national sample dialing and n = 48 from oversample dialing. The margin of sampling error for the African American sample is  $\pm 7.6$  percentage points.
- Latinos, N = 150. This subgroup sample comprised n = 86 from the national sample dialing and n = 64 from oversample dialing. The margin of sampling error for the Latino sample is  $\pm 8.0$  percentage points.
- Parents of School-Aged Children, N = 500. This subgroup sample comprised n = 269 from the national sample dialing and n = 231 from oversample dialing. The margin of sampling error for this “Current School Parent” sample is  $\pm 4.4$  percentage points.
- Small Town/Rural, N = 506. This subgroup sample comprised n = 368 from the national sample dialing and n = 138 from oversample dialing. The margin of sampling error for the Small Town/Rural sample is  $\pm 4.4$  percentage points.

We have a brief note about describing the current school parents results. When we report the aggregate results combining responses of *current school parents and former school parents*, those percentages are based only on the national sample. We report all other survey results of current school parents based on the oversample.

We included several split-sample experiments. An experimental design allows for comparing the effects of two or more alternative wordings for a given subject and question. The purpose of these experiments was to see if providing a new piece of information—or alternative wording—about certain aspects of K–12 education and school choice policies can significantly influence opinion on certain topics. We developed a “composite” average for one of these experiments regarding the “type” of school someone would select to provide the best education to their child. We are still able to maintain trend observations because at least one question version has been used in our previous surveys.

For more information about our survey specifications and methods, see Appendices 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

## SURVEY RESULTS

### Organization and Ground Rules

We report response levels for the national sample (N = 1,000) as well as statistically significant findings based on demographic subgroup comparisons.<sup>4</sup> When we detect those significant differences, we also briefly describe those corresponding response levels or margins. Table 1 displays the summary statistics—unweighted and weighted—for the national sample.

We have some brief ground rules on our reporting protocol before describing the survey results.<sup>5</sup> Generally, we note the raw response levels for the overall sample on a given question for each survey

topic. Several questions had multiple versions, and so we focus on the composite response levels and differences based on the averaging of responses to all versions of the question. We then examine the response differences (i.e. margins) within a given sample or population. If noteworthy, we also discuss the “strongly” held positive or negative responses to a question. Sometimes we refer to the difference between strong positive and strong negative responses as the “net intensity” or simply intensity. We do not infer causality with any of the observations in this report.

We present the survey results by general topic, and for each topic there is a certain sequence for describing results. First, we note the raw response levels for the national sample on a given question. Second, we consider the national sample’s margin, strong response levels, and the net intensity computed from the latter. Third, for those questions that we have asked in previous years, we briefly note the annual trend lines. Fourth, if we detect statistical significance when comparing subgroups on a given item, then we report those subgroup results that have the largest/smallest margins and intensities. Any noted subgroup comparisons/differences are statistically significant with 95 percent confidence, unless otherwise clarified in the narrative. In the latter case, we orient any listing of subgroups’ levels based on “most/least likely” to respond one way or the other, so we are highlighting the propensity to be more/less positive. Lists of subgroups with respect to margins and intensities are meant to be suggestive for further exploration and research beyond this project.<sup>6</sup>

We organized our results in four parts: (1) parents’ local schooling experiences and preferences, (2) educational choice policies and reforms, (3) national direction and K–12 education spending, and (4) critical issues and the roles of the federal government. The report appendices detail the survey’s methods, summarizes response statistics, and provides additional technical information on call dispositions for landline and cell phone interviews and weighting.

**TABLE 1**

## Summary Statistics for National Sample, Compared to U.S. Census

	Unweighted %	Weighted %	Census %
<b>AGE GROUP</b>			
18 to 34	26.9	30.9	30.6
35 to 54	31.1	34.5	34.8
55 and Over	40.3	33.7	34.6
<b>COMMUNITY (SELF ID)</b>			
Urban	22.5	23.5	N/A
Suburban	39.5	39.4	N/A
Small Town/Rural	36.8	36.2	N/A
<b>EDUCATION</b>			
< College Graduate	60.6	63.6	72.8
≥ College Graduate	38.7	36.0	27.2
<b>GENDER</b>			
Male	48.2	49.0	48.6
Female	51.8	51.0	51.4
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>			
Under \$40,000	36.5	38.4	37.8
\$40,000 to \$79,999	29.8	30.1	26.6
\$80,000 and Over	26.4	25.8	35.6
<b>POLITICAL PARTY (SELF ID)</b>			
Democrat	32.9	34.6	N/A
Republican	26.4	24.5	N/A
Independent	28.1	27.8	N/A
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>			
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.0	5.4	5.3
Black/African American	12.0	12.1	12.1
Hispanic/Latino	8.6	15.4	15.0
Native American	1.8	1.2	0.8
White, Not Hispanic	72.2	66.6	65.4
Other	6.6	1.6	6.5
<b>REGION</b>			
Northeast	19.1	18.0	18.1
Midwest	21.9	21.2	21.3
South	37.3	37.5	37.3
West	21.7	23.3	23.3

Notes: We do not include percentages for "Don't Know" responses or refusals. U.S. Census categories for household income are: Less than \$40,000; \$40,000 to \$74,999; \$75,000 & Over.

Sources: EdChoice, *2017 Schooling in America Survey* (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), tables S1, S2, CENSUSDIV, D1 and D2. 2015 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau.

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# PART I

## Parents' Local Schooling Experiences and Preferences

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In this section, and in most instances, we discuss the current and former school parent results as a single group, allowing us to make more reliable observations about American parents' K–12 schooling experiences and their supporting activities. When we report the aggregate results combining responses of *current school parents and former school parents*, those percentages are based only on the national sample (N = 544)<sup>7</sup>. We report all other survey results of current school parents based on the oversample (N = 500).

## Rating Local School Districts

We asked current and former school parents to gauge the effectiveness and performance of their local public school districts when it comes to serving students and families. Figure 1 shows school districts fare pretty well. School districts earn the highest ratings for keeping parents informed about school activities. About six out of 10 gave positive marks. Parents are nearly twice as likely to give a positive rating than a negative rating (61% excellent/good vs. 32% fair/poor). More than half of current and former school parents gave positive ratings to school districts for communicating effectively with parents (55%), and about half

said the same about providing school counseling services (52%), being responsive/proactive to unique situations (52%), and providing additional academic supports outside the classroom (49%). However, the positive-negative margins vary depending on activity. For example, current and former school parents are much more likely to be positive about districts keeping parents informed (margin = +29 points) than providing academic supports (margin = +5 points). Districts appear to be doing a better job at communications-related activities compared to support or responsive activities.

However, there still appears to be quite a bit of room for improvement. At least one-third of current and former school parents gave low marks on the following performance categories: providing academic support outside the classroom (44%), being responsive/proactive to unique situations (41%), providing counseling services (39%), and communicating effectively with parents (40%).

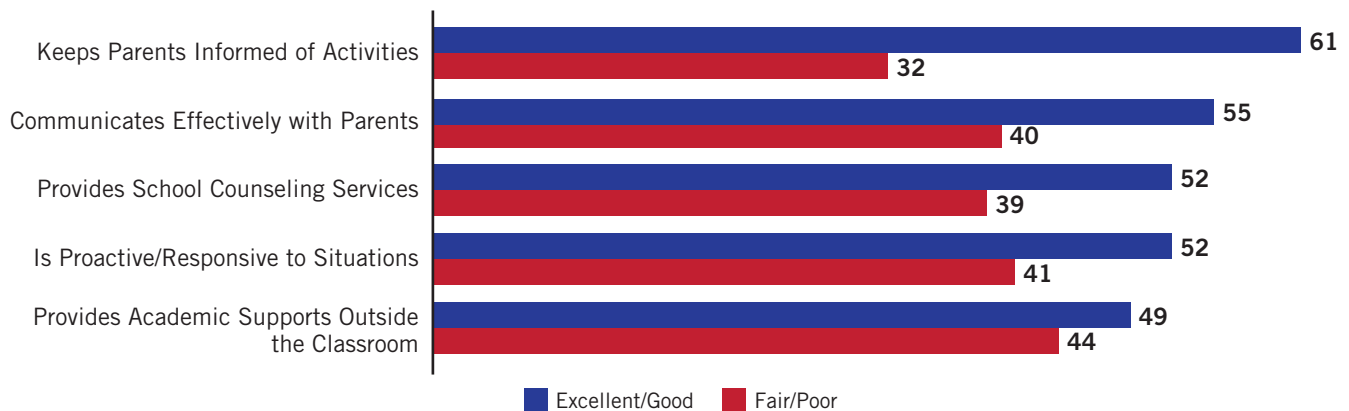
Current school parents are more positive than former school parents and the overall national average. We see significant, large differences between the views of current and former school parents on all five indicators, producing a consistent pattern. The comparative margins between the

**FIGURE 1**

### Parents' Ratings of Local Public School Districts

*Current and former school parents are more likely to give their school district positive ratings, but one-third give low marks in most categories.*

*(Percentage of Current and Former School Parents, N = 544)*



Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q4.

two parent populations range 10 to 15 percentage points across indicators. Former school parents are also more likely than current school parents to respond “don’t know” to any one particular item, by at least 8 percentage points.

## School Type Enrollments and Satisfaction

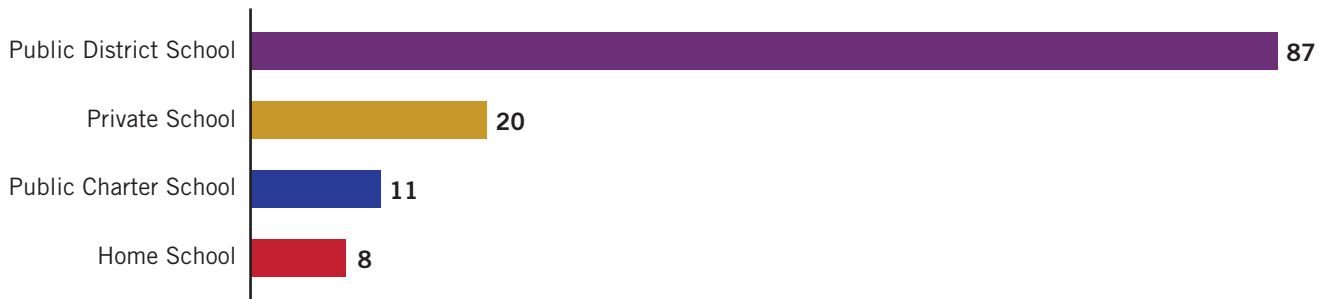
Figure 2 shows the proportions of parents that have had experiences—for at least one school year—with various types of schooling. By far, most current and former school parents said they had enrolled their children in a public district school (87%). That is an expected result based on what we know regarding enrollment patterns in K–12 education.<sup>8</sup>

Current and former school parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with all school types. The private school and home school satisfaction margins (+86 points and +79 points, respectively) were much wider than the margins observed for district schools (+48 points) and charter schools (+53 points). There is some variation across school types when considering only those parents who said they were “very satisfied”: private schools (58%), homeschooling (54%), charter schools (45%), district schools (29%).<sup>9</sup> As you can see in Figure 3, parents were twice as likely to say they were very satisfied with their private school experience compared to the proportion who said they were very satisfied with district schools.

**FIGURE 2**

### School Types Children Have Attended for at Least One Year

*The vast majority of parents' schooling experiences have been with public district schools. (Percentage of Current and Former School Parents, N = 544)*



Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q5, Q7, Q9, and Q11.

**FIGURE 3**

### Parents' Satisfaction with Schools

*Most parents are satisfied with their children's schools, though parents report higher levels of satisfaction with private and home schools than public charter or district schools.*

*(Percentages of Current and Former School Parents who have enrolled a child in a given school type)*



Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q6, Q8, Q10, and Q12.

## Grading Local Schools

Parents of school-aged children are more likely to give grades A or B to private/parochial schools in their communities than they are to do the same for their local public schools. Figure 4 shows the results of only those current school parents who actually gave a grade to schools. They were much more likely to give higher grades to area private schools (75% gave an A or B) than public charter schools (61% gave an A or B) or public district schools (50% gave an A or B). Higher proportions of current school parents did not express a view about local private schools (16%) or public charter schools (13%), compared with the proportion that did not grade regular public schools (3%). Also see Appendix 6 for responses based on the full sample, including those who did not give grades to one or more school types.

## School Type Preferences

A plurality of current and former school parents would choose a private school (42%) as a first option for their child. One-third of parents (33%) would select a regular public school. Nearly equal proportions said they prefer a public charter school (15%) or opt to homeschool their child (7%). Those results reflect the composite average of two question versions in our split-sample experiment.

The responses we heard in our phone interviews stand in stark contrast with actual school enrollment patterns in the United States. About 83 percent of K–12 students attend public schools across the country. Only about 10 percent of students enroll in private schools. Roughly 4 percent of students currently go to public charter schools. It is estimated that just under 3 percent of the country’s students are homeschooled. See Figure 5.

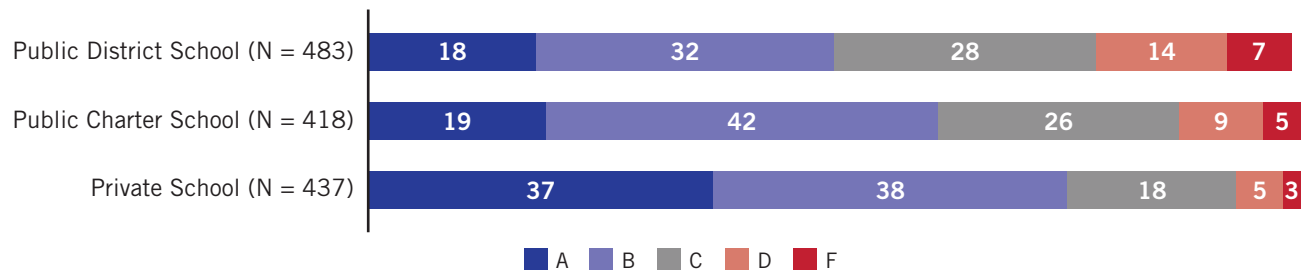
Our experiment produced a few standout findings. The alternative version, which we started asking last year, inserts a phrase basically asking respondents to consider that “financial costs and transportation were of no concern.” What happens when we compare the two versions in this experiment? Insertion of that language appears to increase the preference for private schools while decreasing the preferences for public charter schools or homeschooling. The preference for public district schools is unchanged. The proportion of parents who chose private school jumped 10 percentage points when finances and transportation are held constant. The frequency of parents saying public charter school and home school reduced by five points and four points, respectively. There is barely a change among those who select district school (down one point). The pattern difference between the two question versions suggests that financial and transportation considerations may affect decisions about mobility between private, charter, and home school sectors, more than it does

**FIGURE 4**

### How Current School Parents Grade Their Local Schools

*Current school parents are about twice as likely to give "A" grades to local private schools than local district or charter schools*

*(Percentage of Only Current School Parents That Gave Grades)*



Note: Volunteered "Don't Know" and "Not Applicable" responses not shown nor reflected in this chart.  
Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q15.



for mobility between private and public sectors. Exploring these patterns more deeply could be an area for further research beyond the scope of this project. See Figure 6.

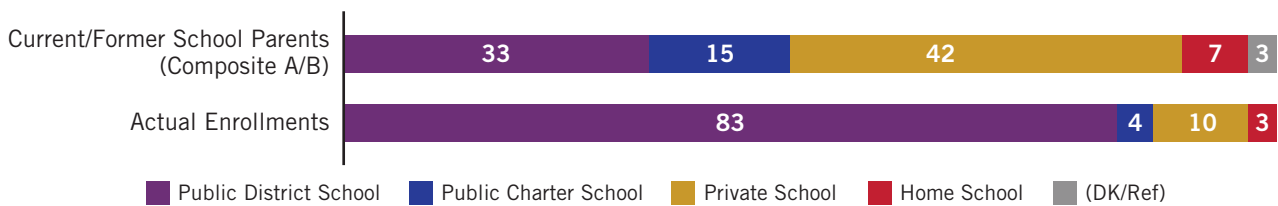
We have asked one version of our “selecting school type” question for more than five years. Roughly similar proportions of current school parents prefer public district schools and private schools, and that finding has changed little in the past four years. See Figure 7 on page 21 and Appendix 7.

We asked survey respondents a follow-up question for the main reason they chose a certain type of school. Respondents who chose charter school or private school were most likely to prioritize “personalized attention/individual attention/one-on-one/class size” above all else as a top reason for selecting a type of school. Roughly one-third in each of those groups gave this kind of response. See Table 2 on page 22. Respondents that preferred regular public schools would most frequently say some aspect of “socialization” was a key reason for making

**FIGURE 5** Parents' Schooling Preferences by School Type

More than eight out of 10 American students attend public district schools, but only about three out of 10 parents said they would prefer a district school.

(Percentage of Current and Former School Parents, N = 544)



**Q16-Split A.** If it were your decision and you could select any type of school, what type of school would you select in order to obtain the best education for your child?

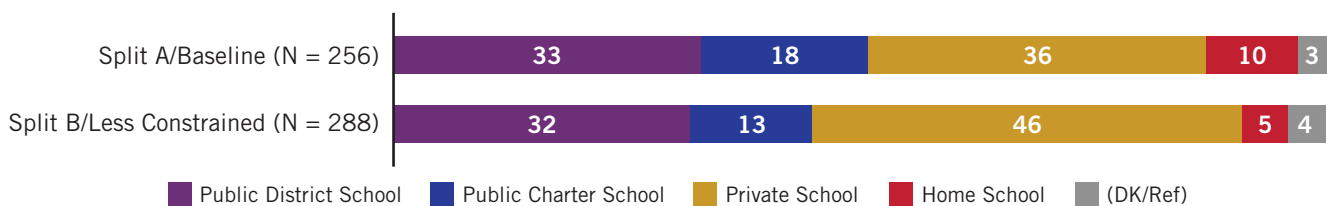
**Q16-Split B.** If it were your decision and you could select any type of school, and financial costs and transportation were of no concern, what type of school would you select in order to obtain the best education for your child?

Notes: The percentages in this chart reflect a composite that averages split samples' responses to two slightly different versions of this question (16A/B). Responses within parentheses were volunteered: "DK" means "Don't Know." "Ref" means "Refusal." For enrollment data sources, see National K–12 Profile and Context on p. 9. Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q16A and Q16B.

**FIGURE 6** Comparing Parents' Schooling Preferences Based on Question Wording

When respondents are given question wording that discounts “financial costs and transportation,” that language appears to increase preferences for private schools while decreasing preferences for charter schools or homeschooling.

(Percentage of Current and Former School Parents)



**Q16-Split A.** If it were your decision and you could select any type of school, what type of school would you select in order to obtain the best education for your child?

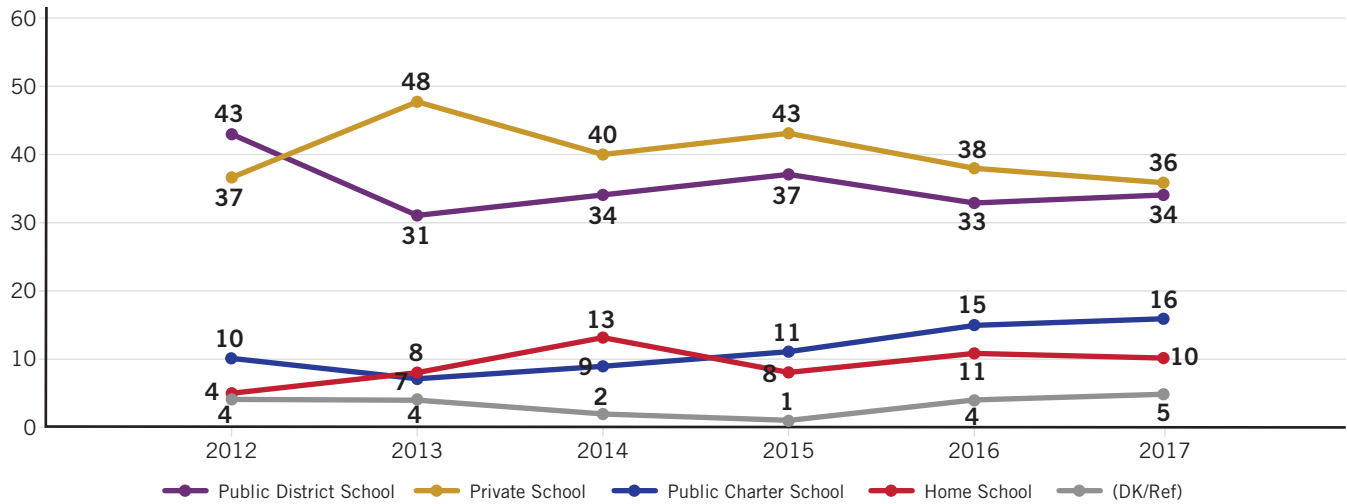
**Q16-Split B.** If it were your decision and you could select any type of school, and financial costs and transportation were of no concern, what type of school would you select in order to obtain the best education for your child?

Notes: Responses within parentheses were volunteered: "DK" means "Don't Know." "Ref" means "Refusal." Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q16A and Q16B.

**FIGURE 7****Current School Parents' Preferences for School Type, 2012–2017**

Similar proportions of school parents prefer public district schools and private schools, and that finding has changed little in the past four years.

(2012–2015: Percentage of Current School Parents; 2016–2017: Percentage of Split-Sample of Current School Parents)



Notes: The sample sizes of split-samples are: N = 107 for 2016; N = 238 for 2017. Responses within parentheses were volunteered. "DK" means "Don't Know." "Ref" means "Refusal."

Sources: EdChoice, *2017 Schooling in America Survey* (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q16A; EdChoice, *2016 Schooling in America Survey*; Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, *Schooling in America Survey*, 2013–2015.

their choice. We encourage readers to cautiously interpret this survey item because sample sizes were relatively small for the charter school and home school-choosing parents. However, we also see similar patterns when considering responses based on the national sample and the patterns have held up over the course of years. See Table 2.<sup>10</sup>

**TABLE 2****Top Five Reasons for Choosing a Specific School Type***Percentage of All Respondents by School Type*

<b>Public District School (N = 322)</b>	
16%	Socialization / Peers / Other Kids
12%	Diversity / Variety
11%	Better Education / Quality
10%	Better Teachers / More Professional
5%	Cost / Tuition / Affordability
<b>Private School (N = 390)</b>	
18%	Individual Attention / One-on-One
15%	Class Size / Student-Teacher Ratio
15%	Better Education / Quality
9%	Discipline / Structure
6%	Religion / Religious Reasons
6%	Better Teachers / More Professional
<b>Public Charter School (N = 135)</b>	
19%	Individual Attention / One-on-One
16%	Better Education / Quality
8%	Academics / Curriculum / Courses
8%	Class Size / Student-Teacher Ratio
5%	Better Teachers / More Professional
<b>Home School (N = 88)</b>	
21%	Safety / Less Drugs, Violence / Bullying
16%	Better Education / Quality
7%	Parents / Parental Involvement
6%	Individual Attention / One-on-One
5%	Discipline / Structure

*Notes:* Lists cite the total number of unweighted interviews (N) per school type grouping. However, all percentages reflect the count of coded responses divided by the total number of weighted interviews. Unweighted N's are provided so the reader can roughly assess the reliability of reported percentages. Volunteered "Don't Know" or "Other" responses not included in this table.

*Source:* EdChoice, *2017 Schooling in America Survey* (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q17.



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# **PART II**

## Educational Choice Policies and Reforms

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## How we describe various educational choice policies in our descriptive survey questions:

### Education Savings Accounts (ESAs)

An "education savings account" in K–12 education—often called an ESA—establishes for parents a government-authorized savings account with restricted, but multiple uses for educational purposes. Parents can then use these funds to pay for: school tuition, tutoring, online education programs, therapies for students with special needs, textbooks or other instructional materials, and/or future college expenses.

### School Vouchers

A school voucher system allows parents the option of sending their child to the school of their choice, whether that school is public or private, including both religious and non-religious schools. If this policy were adopted, tax dollars currently allocated to a school district would be allocated to parents in the form of a "school voucher" to pay partial or full tuition for the child's school.

### Tax-Credit Scholarships

A tax credit allows an individual or business to reduce the final amount of a tax owed to government. In a "tax-credit scholarship system," a government gives tax credits to individuals or businesses if they contribute money to nonprofit organizations that distribute private school scholarships. A nonprofit organization gives a scholarship to a qualifying student who would like to enroll in a private school of their choice, including both religious and non-religious schools. The student's parent then uses the scholarship to pay partial or full tuition for the chosen private school.

### Public Charter Schools

Charter schools are public schools that have more control over their own budget, staff, and curriculum and are exempt from many existing public school regulations.

## Education Savings Accounts (ESAs)

Given a description of ESAs, Americans are much more inclined to support this choice-based education reform than they are to oppose it. Seven out of 10 Americans (71%) said they favor ESAs, compared to the much smaller percentage that were in opposition (19%). The margin of support is very large (+52 points), and the proportion who said they "strongly favor" ESAs (33%) is four times as large as the number that said they "strongly oppose" such a program (8%).

We asked a pair of questions about ESAs. The first question asked for an opinion without offering any description. On this baseline question, 45 percent of respondents said they favored ESAs and 12 percent said they opposed the idea. In the follow-up question, interviewers gave respondents a description for an ESA. With this basic context, support rose by 26 points (71%), and opposition increased 7 points to 19 percent. Table 3 displays the differences in response levels, comparing the baseline item and descriptive item. The proportion of "don't know" or "no answer" responses also shrank by 31 points (41% to 10%).

Survey results point to a big jump in support for ESAs from last year to this year, regardless of question wording.<sup>11</sup> The ESA policy model has been an evolving concept over the last decade, and recognizing the need for adaptation, we have asked an ESA question several ways since 2013. See Figure 8. In the first three years of asking about ESAs, we had generally observed support for the concept in the high 50s to low 60s. Last year was a low point for ESA support (52%) and because of the high proportion of "don't know" responses (23%), that finding may have been an anomaly.

To better understand this most recent year-to-year change, we conducted a follow-up online split-sample experiment to check if last year was indeed unusual. We also wanted to see how

**TABLE 3****Views on ESAs: Baseline vs. Descriptive Versions***Percentage of All Respondents*

	Favor %	Oppose %	Margin (net)	Intensity (strong net)
Baseline	45	12	33	15
With Description	71	19	52	24

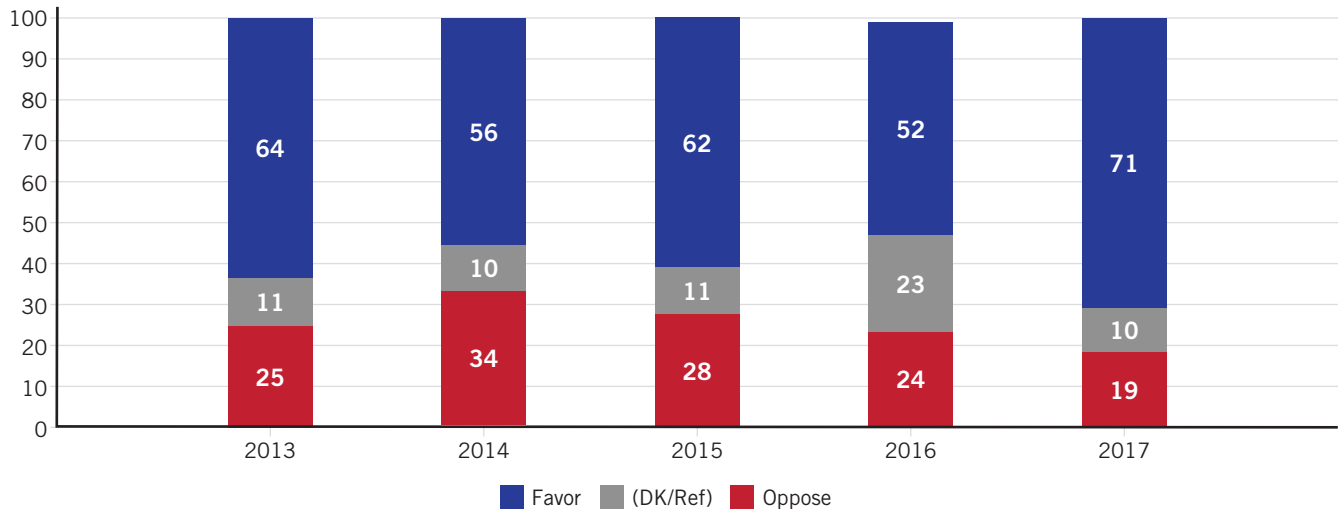
Notes: All statistical results reported in this table and report reflect weighted data, a standard procedure to correct for known demographic discrepancies. Margins and intensities are calculated using percentages to the nearest tenth.

Sources: EdChoice, *2017 Schooling in America Survey* (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q22 and Q23.

**FIGURE 8****The Public's Views on ESAs, with Description, 2013–2017**

*We have asked slightly different ESA questions over the past five years, but despite isolated wording changes, we see Americans tend to be twice as likely to support ESAs than to oppose them.*

*(2013–2015: Percentage of All Respondents; 2016–2017: Percentage of Subsample Respondents)*



Notes: Since 2013 we have asked a descriptive ESA question in our annual survey. Over time we have recognized that some previous terms were either using potentially loaded words or limiting ESA uses. Responses within parentheses were volunteered. "DK" means "Don't Know." "Ref" means "Refusal."

Sources: EdChoice, *2017 Schooling in America Survey* (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q23; EdChoice, *2016 Schooling in America Survey*; Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, *Schooling in America Survey*, 2013–2015.

much the slightly modified wording this year could have affected item responses. If we had included the 2016 ESA question in this year's survey instrument, we interpolate net support for ESAs to stand at 65 percent—a jump of about 12 percentage points from 2016 to 2017—while controlling for survey design, timing, and other administration factors. That interpolated 65 percent level represents a very cautious 2017 estimate of support for ESAs. See Appendix 8 for more information about this split-sample experiment.

In a follow-up question, the top two reasons for supporting ESAs “access to better academic

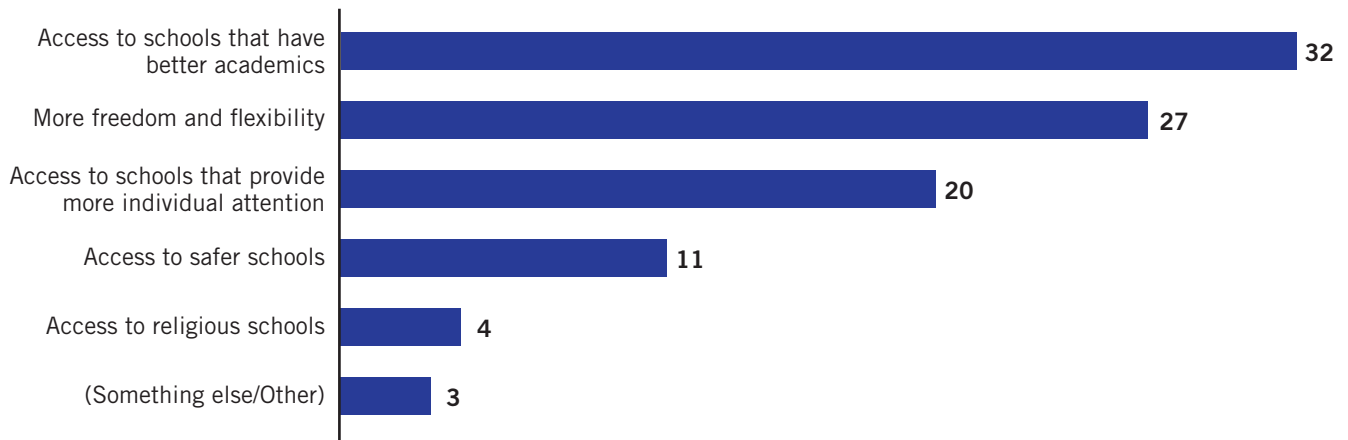
environment” (32%) and “more freedom and flexibility for parents” (27%). See Figure 9 on page 27. We also asked a similar follow-up to respondents who said they were opposed to ESAs. As shown in Figure 10, the most common reason for opposing ESAs is the belief they “divert funding away from public schools” (33%). Another one out of five (19%) said they thought the policy would “cause fraudulent behavior.”

In a split-sample experiment, we observe that Americans preferred universal access to ESAs rather than means-tested eligibility that would be based solely on financial need. See Figure 11 on page 28.

**FIGURE 9****The Most Important Reason for Favoring ESAs Among Supporters**

*More than half of supporters either said access to schools that have better academics or increased freedom and flexibility for parents was the most important reason they favor ESAs.*

*(Percentage of All "Strongly/Somewhat Favor" Responses from Previous Question Subsample, N = 700)*

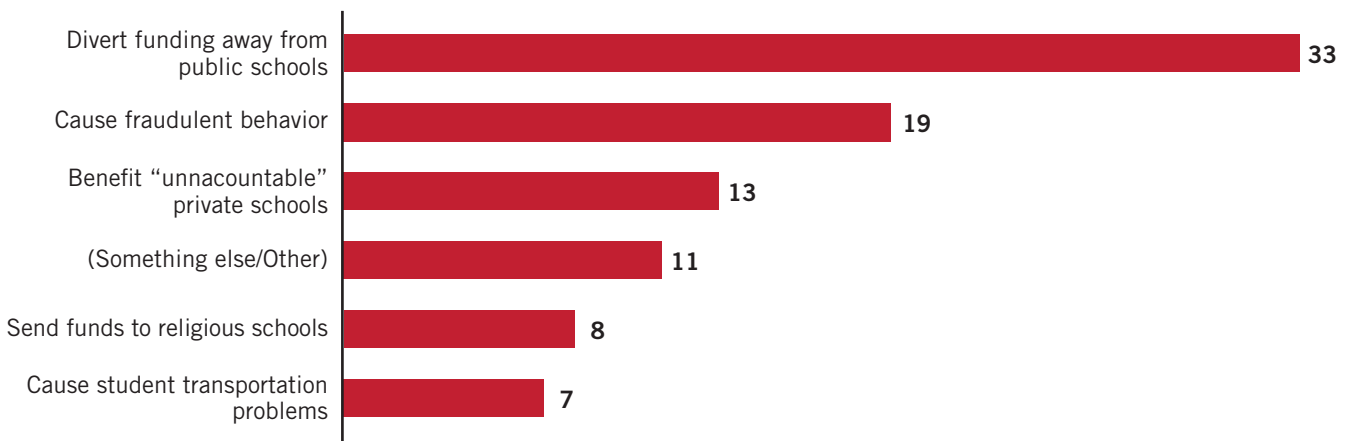


*Notes:* Responses within parentheses were volunteered. "Don't Know" and Refusals not shown nor reflected in this chart.  
*Source:* EdChoice, 2017 *Schooling in America Survey* (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q24.

**FIGURE 10****The Most Important Reason for Opposing ESAs Among Opponents**

*One-third of opponents said taking funds away from public schools was their biggest concern with ESAs.*

*(Percentage of All "Strongly/Somewhat Oppose" Responses from Previous Question Subsample, N = 192)*



*Notes:* Responses within parentheses were volunteered. "Don't Know" and Refusals not shown nor reflected in this chart.  
*Source:* EdChoice, 2017 *Schooling in America Survey* (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q25.

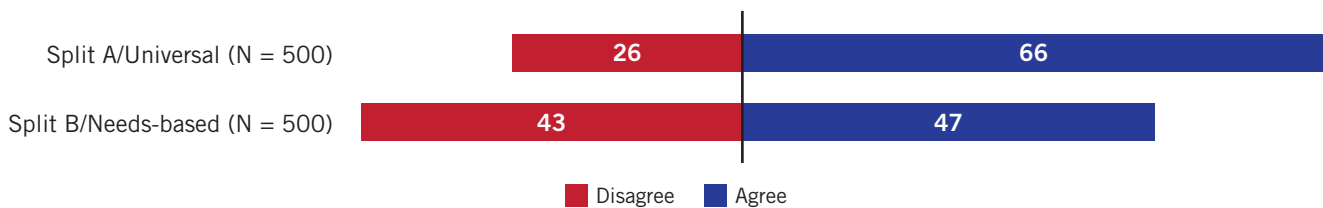
- In Split A, two-thirds of respondents (66%) said they agree with the statement, “ESAs should be available to all families, regardless of incomes and special needs.” About 37 percent said they “strongly agree” with that statement. Fewer than one out of four (26%) disagreed, and 12 percent said they “strongly disagree.”
- In the comparison sample, Split B, interviewers asked respondents whether they agree with the statement “ESAs should only be available to families based on financial need.” About one-third (47%) agreed with that statement, and 20 percent said they “strongly agree.” About two out of five disagreed with means testing ESAs (43%), and 24 percent said they “strongly disagree.”



**FIGURE 11****Comparing Support for Different Approaches to ESA Eligibility**

*Our question wording experiment indicates Americans are much more likely to favor universal ESA eligibility than limited, needs-based eligibility.*

*(Percentage of Split-sample Responses)*



**Q26-Split A.** Some people believe that ESAs should be available to all families, regardless of income and special needs. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?

**Q26-Split B.** Some people believe that ESAs should be available only to families based on financial need. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?

*Notes:* Responses within parentheses were volunteered. "Don't Know" and Refusals not shown nor reflected in this chart.  
*Source:* EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q26A and Q26B.

**TABLE 4****Views on School Vouchers: Baseline vs. Descriptive Versions**

*Percentage of All Respondents (N = 1,000)*

	Favor %	Oppose %	Margin (net)	Intensity (strong net)
Baseline	37	24	13	6
With Description	62	31	31	11

*Notes:* All statistical results reported in this table and report reflect weighted data, a standard procedure to correct for known demographic discrepancies. Margins and intensities are calculated using percentages to the nearest tenth.

*Source:* EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q20 and Q21.

Nearly all demographic groups within the national sample increased their positive responses by at least 20 points after progressing from baseline item to the description item.

The largest margins are among low-income earners (+65 points), middle-aged adults (+60 points), southerners (+58 points), Millennials (+58 points), Generation X (+57 points), and those with less than a college education (+57 points). Latinos and African Americans signal the strongest support for ESAs (43% each saying “strongly favor”). The Silent Generation (20%) is the largest proportion to have said it “strongly opposes” ESAs. That generation of Americans (30%), high-income earners (28%), and seniors (22%) are the most inclined to oppose ESAs. However, on average, all observed subgroups are supportive of ESAs. The subgroups with the highest proportions of respondents with no opinion

or who said “don’t know” to the baseline item were: females (49%), former school parents (48%), small town/rural residents (46%), and those living in the Midwest (46%) or Northeast (46%). See Appendix 9.

## School Vouchers

More than six out of 10 Americans (62%) said they support school vouchers, compared with 31 percent who said they oppose such a school choice system. The margin of support (+31 points) is large, indicating the public is twice as likely to be supportive of vouchers. The intensity is net positive (+11 points) as respondents are more likely to express a strongly favorable view toward vouchers (28% “strongly favor” vs. 18% “strongly oppose”).

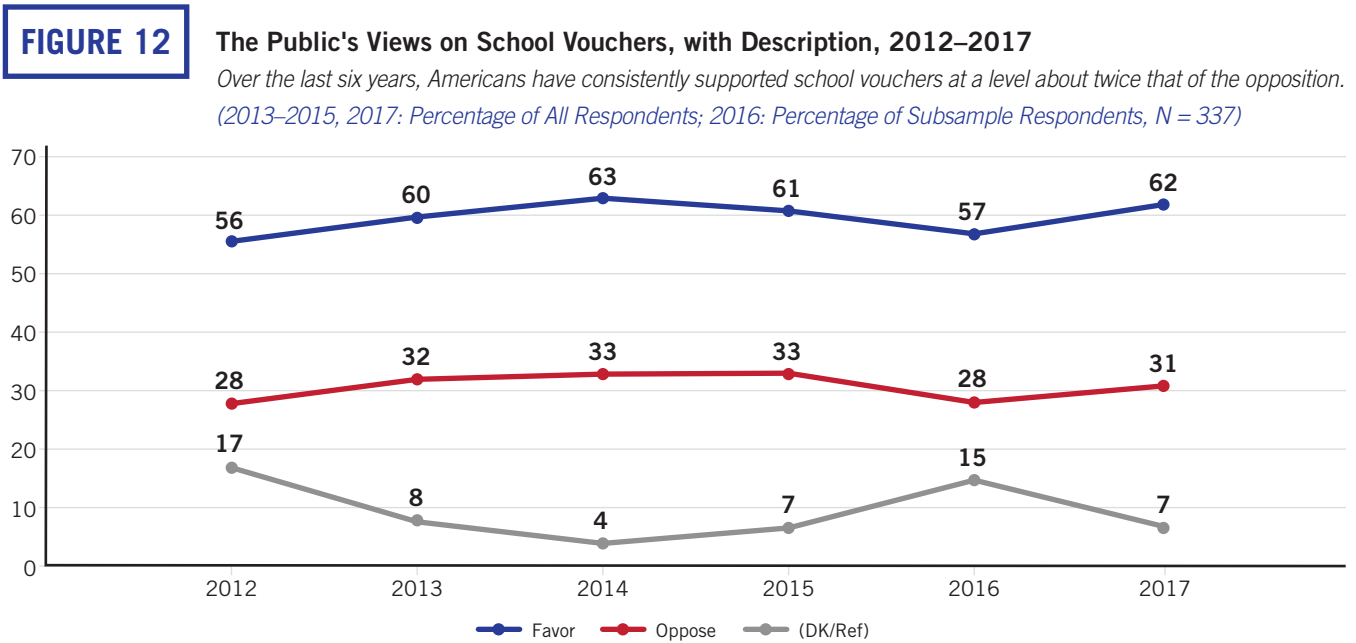
Similar to the ESA question set, our interviewers asked baseline and follow-up description questions about school vouchers. In the first question, we asked respondents for their views on school vouchers without a definition or any other context. More than a third (37%) said they favored vouchers, and 24 percent said they opposed such a policy. When provided a follow-up question with a basic description for a school voucher system, support moved upward by 25 points (62%), while opposition increased eight points to 31 percent. See Table 4.

A large proportion of respondents (37%) were initially unfamiliar or had never heard of school vouchers. The proportion of “don’t know” or “no answer” responses shrunk by 32 points (39% to 7%) after respondents were provided a description. Westerners (50%) were the most likely demographic group to have said they “have never heard of school vouchers,” “don’t know,” or “no answer.”

Figure 12 shows trend lines on our standard voucher question. On the trend version, the margin has hovered right below this year’s (+31 points). Over the last four years, Americans generally have

been about twice as likely to support vouchers than to oppose them. Last year was a low point for voucher support since the first year of this national survey (57%), and because of the high proportion of “don’t know” responses, that finding may have been a modest anomaly. Having said that, we saw an increase in both voucher support (+5 points) and opposition (+3 points) from last year. Though support is higher than two years ago (+1 point), opposition is lower (-2 points).

All observed demographics register majorities of support for school vouchers, although we do see some differences across subgroups. Subgroup margins are substantially large in the positive direction: +20 percentage points or more for most subgroups. The largest margin is among African Americans (+57 points), who also show the most positive intensity of all demographic groups (+31 points). The smallest margin is among high-income earners (+9 points), and this subgroup is the only one where the proportion of respondents who “strongly oppose” school vouchers (25%) exceeds the proportion who “strongly favor” them (22%). See Appendix 10.



Notes: Responses within parentheses were volunteered. "DK" means "Don't Know." "Ref" means "Refusal."  
 Sources: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q21; EdChoice, 2016 Schooling in America Survey (conducted April 30–May 26, 2016), Q11A; Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, Schooling in America Survey, 2013–2015.

# Tax-Credit Scholarships

Americans are more than twice as likely to say they support a tax-credit scholarship system than they are to oppose one. Sixty-two percent said they support such a reform, whereas 26 percent said they oppose it. The margin is +36 percentage points, which is a little larger than what we detected for school vouchers. However, the tax-credit scholarship margin is smaller compared to the margin for ESAs. The general public is twice as likely to express strong positive responses toward tax-credit scholarships (23% “strongly favor” vs. 11% “strongly oppose”).

Figure 13 shows the five-year trend lines on our standard tax-credit scholarship question. On the trend version, the margin has hovered around this year’s (+36 points), except last year (+28 points). Over the last four years, Americans generally have been at least twice as likely to support tax-credit scholarships than to oppose them. Similar to ESAs and vouchers, last year’s findings may have been a modest outlier because of the high proportion of “don’t know” responses. Keeping that in mind, tax-credit scholarship support (+9 points) and opposition (+1 point) increased over last year.

Compared to two years ago, support increased two points and opposition decreased three points.

All observed subgroup margins are +22 percentage points or greater, at least for subgroups with large enough sample sizes to be confident in the findings. The largest margins are among: Latinos (+56 points), young adults (+50 points), Southerners (+48 points), those with less than a college degree (+44 points), Republicans (+44 points), suburbanites (+43 points), African Americans (+41 points), and low-income earners (+40 points). Young adults show the most positive intensity of all demographic groups (+23 points). The smallest margins are among seniors (+22 points) and college graduates (+22 points). All subgroups have a higher proportion of respondents who strongly favor tax-credit scholarships than who strongly oppose them. See Appendix 11.

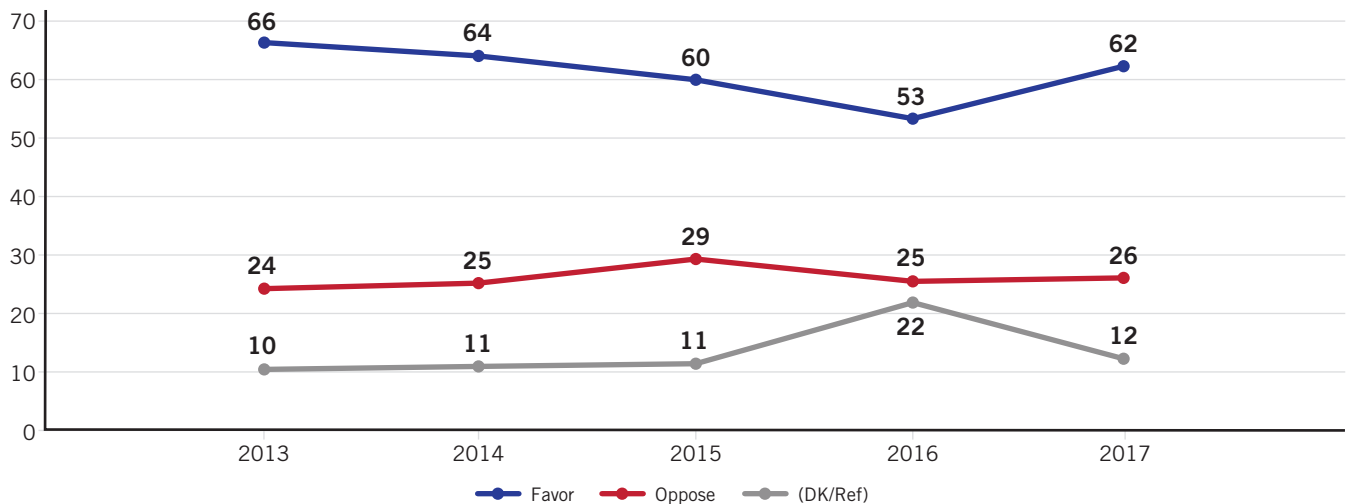
Republicans (68%) were more likely to support tax-credit scholarships than Independents (55%). Southerners (68%) were more favorable than Midwesterners (55%). Both young adults (71%) and middle-age adults (62%) were more likely to support tax-credit scholarships than seniors (53%). Latinos (76%) were significantly more likely to voice support than whites (59%).

**FIGURE 13**

**The Public's Views on Tax-Credit Scholarships, with Description, 2013–2017**

After an increase in “don’t know” responses in 2016, public support for tax-credit scholarships appears to have bounced back to the response levels and wider margins observed in previous years.

(2013–2015, 2017: Percentage of All Respondents; 2016: Percentage of Subsample Respondents, N = 337)



Notes: We used slightly different question wording in 2013, 2014, and 2015, compared with the question version used in 2016 and 2017. Responses within parentheses were volunteered. “DK” means “Don’t Know.” “Ref” means “Refusal.”

Sources: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q27; EdChoice, 2016 Schooling in America Survey (conducted April 30–May 26, 2016), Q17B; Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, Schooling in America Survey, 2013–2015.

# Public Charter Schools

More than three-fifths of Americans (61%) support charter schools, while less than one-third (29%) oppose them. The margin of support for charter schools is large (+32 points), indicating the public is twice as likely to be supportive of public charter schools. Americans are nearly twice as likely to express intensely positive responses toward charters (21% “strongly favor” vs. 11% “strongly oppose”).

Similar to the ESA and voucher question sets, our interviewers asked baseline and follow-up description questions about charter schools. In

the first question, we asked respondents for their views on charter schools without a definition or any other context. Fifty percent said they favored charter schools, and 24 percent said they opposed them. When given a follow-up question with a basic description for a public charter school, support increased by 11 points (61%), and opposition increased four points to 29 percent. See Table 5.

Nearly one-fourth of respondents (23%) were initially unfamiliar or had never heard of charter schools. After we provided a description, the proportion of “don’t know” or “no answer” responses shrunk by 16 points (26% to 10%). Low-income earners (32%) and Midwesterners (32%)

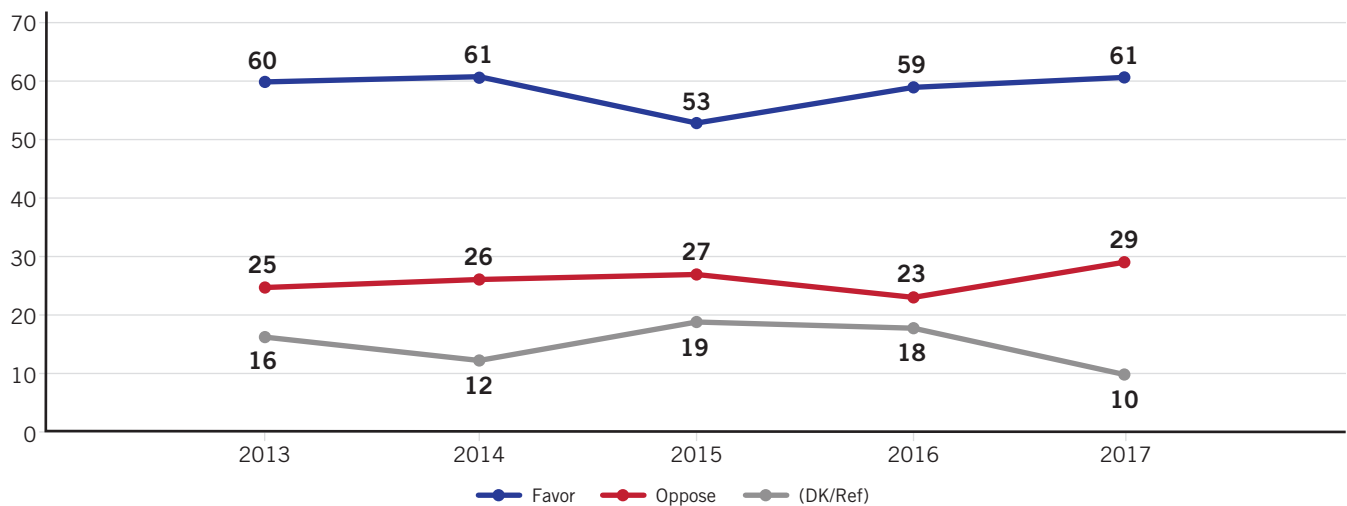
**TABLE 5** Views on Charter Schools: Baseline vs. Descriptive Version  
*Percentage of All Respondents (N = 1,000)*

	Favor %	Oppose %	Margin (net)	Intensity (strong net)
Baseline	50	24	26	8
With Description	61	29	32	11

*Notes:* All statistical results reported in this table and report reflect weighted data, a standard procedure to correct for known demographic discrepancies. Margins and intensities are calculated using percentages to the nearest tenth.  
*Source:* EdChoice, 2017 *Schooling in America Survey* (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q18 and Q19.

**FIGURE 14** The Public's Views on Public Charter Schools, with Description, 2013–2017

*With the exception of 2015, support for charter schools has hovered around 60 percent over the past five years. We did see a moderate increase in opposition since last year—an increase of six points.*  
*(Percentage of All Respondents)*



*Notes:* Responses within parentheses were volunteered. "DK" means "Don't Know." "Ref" means "Refusal."  
*Sources:* EdChoice, 2017 *Schooling in America Survey* (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q19; EdChoice, 2016 *Schooling in America Survey* (conducted April 30–May 26, 2016), Q9; Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, *Schooling in America Survey*, 2013–2015.

were the most likely demographic groups to say they “have never heard of charter schools,” “don’t know,” or “no answer.”

Figure 14 shows trend lines on our standard charter school question. On the trend version, the margin has hovered right around this year’s (+32 points). Over the last four years, Americans generally have been about twice as likely to support charter schools than to oppose them. We saw an increase in charter school support (+2 points) and opposition (+6 points) from last year, and support (+8 points) and opposition (+2 points) are higher than two years ago. Support for charter schools matches the highest we have seen (61%, also in 2014).

All observed demographics have majorities of support for charter schools, although we do see some differences across subgroups. Subgroup margins are substantially large in the positive direction: +30 percentage points or more for most subgroups. The largest margin is among African Americans (+48 points). Republicans show the most positive intensity of all demographic groups (+21 points). The smallest margin is among Westerners (+22 points). See Appendix 12.



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# PART III

## National Direction and Education Spending

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## Perceived Direction of K–12 Education

Americans are much more likely to think K–12 education is on the “wrong track” (55%) than they are to think it’s headed in the “right direction” (27%). Negative sentiment has decreased since last year (2016: 62% wrong track).

We see some trend changes this year. Positive attitudes toward the direction of education have increased, albeit slightly, during the past year (2016: 24% right direction). The decrease in Americans who think education is on the wrong track is a departure from the trend over the previous three years. However, the percentage of Americans that have positive attitudes has not risen above 2015 levels (2015: 32% right direction). “Don’t know” responses (18%) are at their highest in five years, and have more than doubled in a two-year span. See Figure 15.

As a group, current and former school parents were slightly more likely (58%) to indicate K–12 education is headed on the wrong track than

the general public. Former school parents (61%) were more likely to have negative attitudes about educational direction than current school parents (55%). There was a 12-point difference among current (33%) and former (21%) school parents who said K–12 education is going in the right direction.

Majorities of subgroups expressed pessimism about K–12 education nationally. That finding cuts across demographics based on region, political party, age, generation, race, household income, and gender. One out of five Independents (20%), Gen Xers (21%), Asian-Americans (20%), and low-income Americans (20%) did not know, or have an opinion. See Appendix 13.

## Knowledge and Opinion Changes about Education Spending

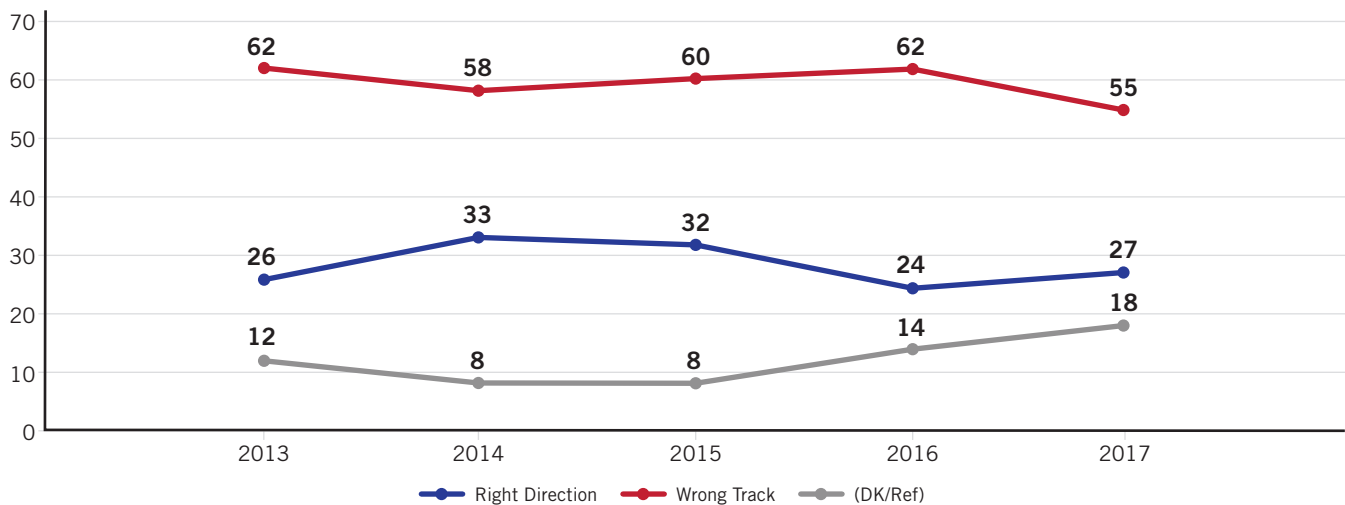
On average, the United States spends more than \$11,000 on each student in America’s public schools, but only 11 percent of respondents

**FIGURE 15**

**The Public's Views on the Direction of K–12 Education, 2013–2017**

*About one out of four Americans believe K–12 education is heading in the right direction—a slight increase since last year.*

*(Percentage of All Respondents)*



Notes: Responses within parentheses were volunteered. "DK" means "Don't Know." "Ref" means "Refusal."

Sources: EdChoice, *2017 Schooling in America Survey* (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q2; EdChoice, *2016 Schooling in America Survey* (conducted April 30–May 26, 2016), Q2; Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, *Schooling in America Survey, 2013–2015*.



could estimate the correct range for that average spending statistic ( $\geq \$8,000$  and  $< \$12,000$ ). We see a similar proportion of respondents estimating the correct range each year of our survey.<sup>12</sup>

Respondents tend to underestimate rather than overestimate. Nearly three-fourths of respondents (74%) either underestimated educational spending per student (with a cautious definition citing “current expenditures”) or could not give an answer or guess. About 31 percent of respondents believed our country spends \$4,000 or less per student in the nation’s public schools. Another 29 percent of the national sample either said they “don’t know” or could not offer a spending number. See Figure 16.

When considering “total expenditures” per student (\$12,496 in 2013–14), which is another

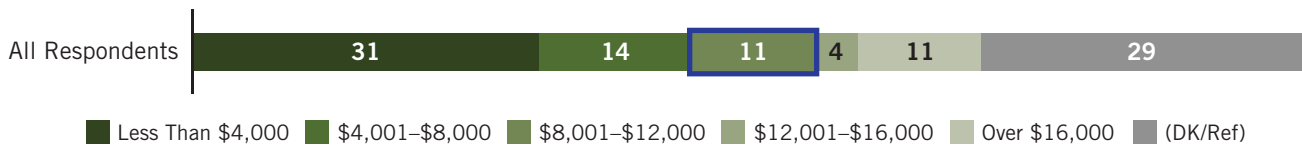
federal government definition for spending in K–12 education, it is even more likely Americans’ estimates would be further off.<sup>13</sup>

Given an actual per-student spending statistic, Americans are less likely to say public school funding is at a level that is “too low.” In a split-sample experiment, we asked two slightly different questions. On the baseline version, 54 percent of respondents said public school funding was “too low” (up slightly from 52% in 2016). However, on the version where we included average national public per-student spending information (\$11,392 in 2014–15), the proportion that said spending was “too low” shrank dramatically by 16 percentage points to 38 percent (the same level reported in 2016). See Figure 17.

**FIGURE 16**

**The Public's Awareness of K–12 Education Funding**

*Only one in 10 Americans can estimate the correct range of public per-student spending in K–12 education. Nearly half underestimate spending by at least \$3,000 per student.  
(Percentage of All Respondents)*

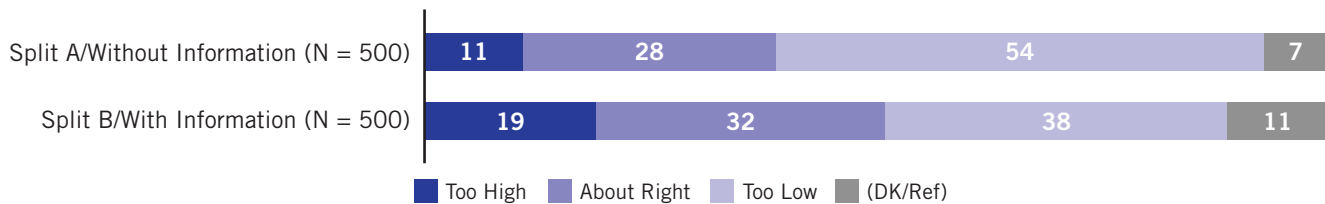


Notes: Responses within parentheses were volunteered. "DK" means "Don't Know." "Ref" means "Refusal."  
Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q13.

**FIGURE 17**

**How Information Affects Americans' Views on K–12 Education Funding**

*When given an actual per-student spending statistic, Americans are less likely to say public school funding is at a level that is “too low.” The proportion giving that response shrinks from 54 percent to 38 percent between the two question versions—a decrease of 16 percentage points.  
(Percentage of Split-Sample Responses)*



**Q14-Split A. Do you believe that public school funding in the United States is at a level that is:**

**Q14-Split B. According to the most recent information available, on average \$11,392 is being spent per year on each student attending public schools in the United States. Do you believe that public school funding in our country is at a level that is:**

Notes: Responses within parentheses were volunteered. "DK" means "Don't Know." "Ref" means "Refusal."  
Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q14A and Q14B.



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# PART IV

## Public Affairs Interest and Preferences for the Role of the Federal Government

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## Interest in Public Affairs

This is the first time our annual survey asked respondents whether and to what degree they follow government public affairs and to what degree they trust the federal government.

Three-fourths (75%) of respondents indicated they follow what is going on in government and public affairs on a regular or semi-regular basis. High-income earners (48%) and middle-income earners (41%) were more likely than low-income earners (28%) to follow government and public affairs “always or most of the time,” and high-income earners were more likely than the national average (38%) to provide that response. Those gaps narrow for respondents of all income levels who said they follow government and public affairs “some of the time.”

Demographic differences are most visible when considering respondents’ age groups or generation groups. Seniors (86%) are easily the most engaged and more likely to regularly follow government and public affairs than middle-aged respondents (76%) and younger respondents (62%). The latter group was the most likely to say they follow “only now and then.” We observe a similar progression from younger to older generations. The Silent Generation and Boomers were the most likely to follow public affairs (88% and 84%, respectively). Both of those generations and Gen Xers (78%) were more likely to engage than Millennials (62%). See Appendix 14.

## Trust in the Federal Government

At the time we interviewed, respondents expressed a low-level of trust in the activities of the federal government. A majority (53%) said they trust it “only now and then” or “never.” Slightly more than two-fifths (42%) said they can trust the federal government to do what is right all or some of the time. About a third (34%) said they can trust it only now and then, while almost one-fifth (19%) said they can “never” trust the federal government to

do what is right. Only one out of 10 (10%) said they could trust the federal government to do what is right “always or most of the time.”

Demographic groups’ margins reveal some stark differences. Self-described Independents (-27 points) are much less likely to trust the federal government than Republicans (-6 points) or Democrats (+3 points). Relative comparisons show Millennials (-8 points) and Baby Boomers (-6 points) appear to be more trusting of the federal government than Gen Xers (-25 points). Urbanites (+3 points) are more likely to trust the federal government than those who live in the suburbs (-17 points) or small town/rural areas (-18 points). College graduates are more trusting than respondents without a college degree (-2 points vs. -20 points, respectively). High-income earners are more likely to trust than low-income earners (+4 points vs. -23 points, respectively). African Americans and Latinos are more trusting than whites (+1 point and +3 points vs. -20 points, respectively). See Table 6.

## Prioritizing Federal Involvement on Household, Public Policy Issues

At the outset of our survey interviews, we split our national sample and asked each half-sample of 500 respondents slightly different questions about which issue they consider to be the first priority for the federal government. We framed the first question in two ways, either as a “public policy issue” or as a “problem facing you and your family.” Respondents were free to give an open-ended phrase or description of the issue, and then our team coded the responses into broad categories.

The split-sample experiment produced an interesting comparison. Respondents were more likely to say the federal government should address issues related to the economy when it was framed as a public policy issue (24%) than when it was framed as a household or family “problem” (24% vs.

**TABLE 6****To What Extent Do Americans and Demographic Groups Trust the Federal Government***Percentage of All Respondents or Demographic Groups*

	Always or Most/ Some of the Time %	Only Now and Then/Never %	Margin (net)	N =
<b>ALL RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>-12</b>	<b>1,000</b>
Current/Former School Parent	39	59	-19	544
Current School Parent	40	56	-16	500
Former School Parent	38	60	-22	275
<b>AGE GROUP</b>				
18 to 34	44	50	-6	269
35 to 54	36	57	-20	311
55 and Over	45	53	-8	403
<b>GENERATION</b>				
Millennial	43	51	-8	319
Generation X	34	59	-25	226
Baby Boomer	46	52	-6	324
Silent	39	59	-21	102
<b>COMMUNITY</b>				
Urban	50	47	3	225
Suburban	39	56	-17	395
Small Town/Rural	38	56	-18	506
<b>EDUCATION</b>				
< College Graduate	38	57	-20	606
≥ College Graduate	47	49	-2	387
<b>GENDER</b>				
Male	41	55	-14	482
Female	42	52	-10	518
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>				
Under \$40,000	35	58	-23	365
\$40,000 to \$79,999	41	55	-14	298
\$80,000 and Over	50	46	4	264
<b>PARTY ID</b>				
Democrat	50	47	3	329
Republican	45	51	-6	264
Independent	34	62	-27	281
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>				
Asian/Pacific Islander	49	47	2	20
Black/African American	45	45	1	168
Hispanic/Latino	46	43	3	150
White	37	58	-20	722
<b>REGION</b>				
Northeast	39	57	-19	191
Midwest	42	54	-12	219
South	41	51	-10	373
West	43	53	-9	217

Notes: Please consider that each subgroup has a unique margin of error based on its adult population size in the United States and the sample size (N) obtained in this survey. We advise strong caution when interpreting results for subgroups with small sample sizes. The subgroup sample sizes displayed in the far right column represent the unweighted number of interviews. All other statistical results reported in this table and report reflect weighted data, a standard procedure to correct for known demographic discrepancies. Margins are calculated using percentages to the nearest tenth. Sample sizes for Blacks, Hispanics, Current School Parents, and Small Town/Rural reflect unweighted respondent counts that include oversamples.

Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q29.

**TABLE 7****How Americans Prioritize Federal Involvement in Household and Public Policy Issues***Percentage of Split-Sample Responses*

	Household Problem (N = 500) %	Public Policy Issue (N = 500) %
Economy	24	8
Healthcare / Health Issues	22	26
No Problems	12	13
Government	12	15
Other / Specific Issues	8	11
Inequality / Racism	7	10
National Security / Defense	5	10
Taxes	5	4
Education	3	3
Retirement Savings / Social Security	3	2
Crime / Safety	3	2
Environment	2	1
Infrastructure / Transportation	<1	<1

*Notes:* The composite percentages in this chart reflect composites that average the split samples' responses to two slightly different versions of this question (1A/B). All statistical results reported in this table and report reflect weighted data, a standard procedure to correct for known demographic discrepancies. Volunteered "Don't Know" or other responses not included in this table.

*Source:* EdChoice, *2017 Schooling in America Survey* (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q1A and Q1B.

8%, respectively). We also see that the public policy framing increases the chances respondents will mention issues along the lines of national security or defense—doubling from 5 percent to 10 percent. Otherwise the response frequencies and relative ordering of issues look very similar regardless of the framing experiment.

Healthcare and health issues garnered the most attention among respondents. Twenty-two percent said it was a top household issue, and 26 percent said the category was a top public policy issue. Regardless of framing, more than one out of 10 respondents said there were no problems or issues where they would want the federal government involved. It is also clear that Americans do not see education as a top priority issue for the federal government. Just 3 percent said it was a top issue on either version. See Table 7.

## Views on the Role of the Federal Government

The last substantive part of our survey explored to what extent Americans think the federal government should play a role in 18 public policy areas, including K–12 education.

Majorities of respondents believe the federal government should play a major role in 14 policy areas:

- National Security/Defense (83%)
- Terrorism (82%)
- Natural Disasters (78%)
- Immigration (71%)
- Food and Medicine Safety (70%)
- Infrastructure, e.g. Roads, Bridges (66%)
- Civil Rights (65%)

- Elderly Care, e.g. Social Security, Medicare (63%)
- Economy (62%)
- Poverty, e.g. Medicaid, Food Stamps (62%)
- Environment (60%)
- Energy (58%)
- Healthcare, e.g. Obamacare/Affordable Care Act (56%)
- Workplace Safety (53%)
- Providing funding so low-income students can access a quality education (61%)
- Providing funding to local and state education agencies (60%)

There is comparatively less consensus among Americans in four other policy domains, two of those being in education. Forty-seven percent want a major federal role in K–12 education, but a statistically similar proportion (48%) indicated the role should be minor or there should be no role at all. On matters dealing with higher education/college, a majority (52%) said there should be either a minor role or no role at all. See Figure 18 on page 43.

Americans are much more likely to say the federal government should play a major federal role in ensuring access to a quality education via funding provisions. They also saw it playing a major federal role in safeguarding students’ civil rights. However, respondents were much less likely to want the federal government playing a major role in the regulation of schools, districts, and education agencies. A plurality (40%) said they prefer it play a minor role, compared to the 37 percent that said it should play a major role or the 17 percent that said it should have no role. See Figure 19 on page 44.

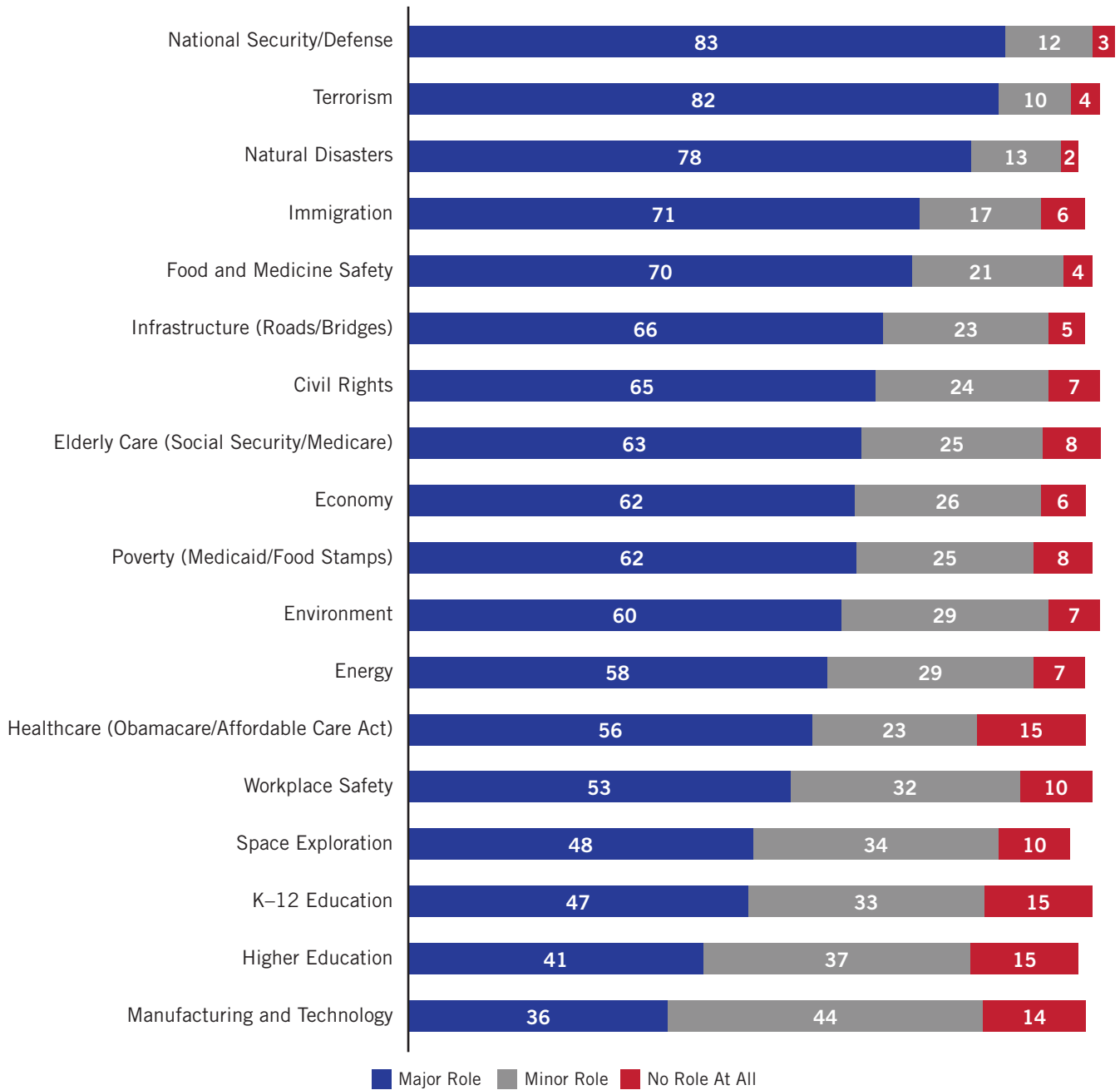
## Views on the of the Federal Government’s Role in K–12 Education

Our interviews further narrowed respondents’ focus on federal involvement in K–12 education. When we asked about more specific types of activities, we observed more openness to a major federal role in a cluster of areas, with two exceptions. At least six out of 10 respondents said the federal government should play a major role in each of the following:

- Providing funding so students in U.S. military families can access a quality education (72%)
- Providing funding so students with disabilities can access a quality education (68%)
- Ensuring students’ civil rights are protected (66%)
- Providing funding so all students can access a quality education (64%)

**FIGURE 18****The Public's Preferences for the Role of the Federal Government**

Americans are much less likely to see a major federal role in K–12 education than in most other public issues.  
*(Percentage of Split-Sample Responses)*



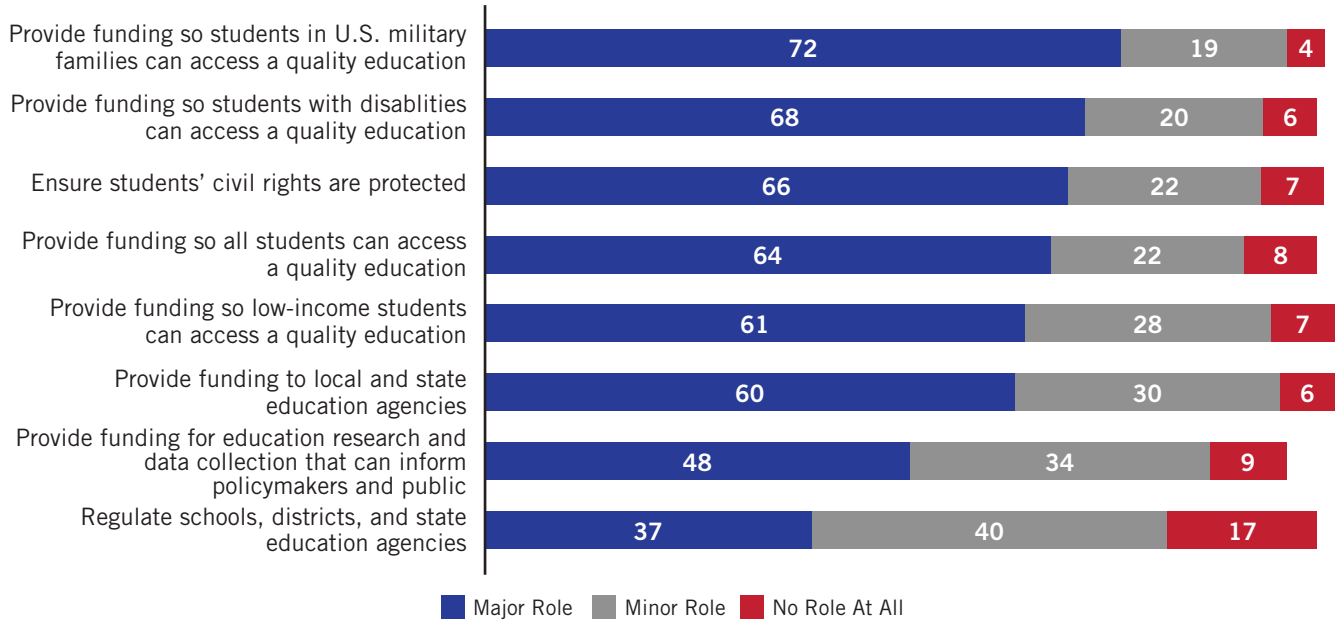
Notes: Each split sample of this question consisted of 500 interviews. "Don't Know" and Refusals not shown nor reflected in this chart.  
 Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q30.



**FIGURE 19****The Public's Preferences for the Role of the Federal Government in K–12 Education**

Americans see a major federal role in expanding student access to a quality education as well as safeguarding students' civil rights. Nearly six out of 10 indicate a minimal federal role for setting regulations.

(Percentage of Split-Sample Responses)



Notes: Each split sample of this question consisted of 500 interviews. "Don't Know" and Refusals not shown nor reflected in this chart.  
Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q31.

# APPENDIX 1

## Survey Project & Profile

**Title:** 2017 Schooling in America Survey

**Survey Funder and Developer:** EdChoice

**Survey Data Collection and Quality Control:** Braun Research, Inc.

**Interview Dates:** August 18 to September 2, 2017

**Interview Method:** Live Telephone (Cell Phone = 60% | Landline = 40%)

**Interview Length:** 16 minutes (average)

**Language(s):** English

**Sample Frames:** National sample of adults (age 18+) living in the 50 United States and District of Columbia

**Sampling Methods:** Dual Frame, Probability-based, Random Digit Dial (RDD)

**Sample Size and Margins of Error:** National/General Population (N = 1,000): ± 3.1 percentage points

**Response Rate:** Cell Phone = 4.6%; Landline = 4.1%

**Weighting?:** Yes (Cell/Landline for National, then Age, Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Census Division/Region)

**Oversampling?:** Yes

*African Americans*, N = 168. This subgroup sample comprised n = 120 from the national sample dialing and n = 48 from oversample dialing.

*Latinos*, N = 150. This subgroup sample comprised n = 86 from the national sample dialing and n = 64 from oversample dialing.

*Parents of School-Aged Children*, N = 500. This subgroup sample comprised n = 269 from the national sample dialing and n = 231 from oversample dialing.

*Small Town/Rural*, N = 506. This subgroup sample comprised n = 368 from the national sample dialing and n = 138 from oversample dialing.

**Project Contacts:** Paul DiPerna, [paul@edchoice.org](mailto:paul@edchoice.org)

The authors are responsible for overall survey design; question wording and ordering; this report's analysis, charts, and writing; and any unintentional errors or misrepresentations.

EdChoice is the survey's sponsor and sole funder.

## APPENDIX 2

### Additional Information About Survey Methods

#### Phone Interviews

Braun Research’s live callers conducted all interviews via computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) using a survey instrument developed and scripted by the authors.

For the phone portion of this project to achieve the national sample Braun Research made 29,700 total phone calls by landline phone (13,100) and cell phone (16,600). Of these calls 9,854 (4,517 landline; 5,337 cell phone) were unusable phone numbers (disconnected, fax, busy, or non-answers, etc.); 674 (302 landline; 372 cell phone) phone numbers were usable but not eligible for this survey; and 18,125 (7,858 landline; 10,267 cell phone) phone numbers were usable numbers but eligibility unknown (including callbacks, refusals and voicemail). Forty-seven people (21 landline; 26 cell phone) did not complete the survey.

For the phone portion of this project to achieve the Total Sample including oversampling: 49,605 total phone calls were made by landline phone (14,500) and cell phone (22,700). Of these calls 11,378 (5,008 landline; 6,370 cell phone) were unusable phone numbers (disconnected, fax, busy, or non-answers, etc.); 945 (364 landline; 581 cell phone) phone numbers were usable but not eligible for this survey; and 23,318 (8,669 landline; 14,649 cell phone) phone numbers were usable numbers but eligibility unknown (including callbacks, refusals and voicemail). Seventy-three people (28 landline; 45 cell phone) did not complete the survey.

Appendix 3 shows the phone sample dispositions and response rates.

#### *Phone Sample Design*

Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) used a combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples to represent the General Population (adults age 18+ in the 50 United States and District of Columbia) who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. SSI provided both samples according to BRI specifications.

SSI starts with a database of all listed telephone numbers, updated on a four- to six-week rolling basis, 25 percent of the listings at a time. All active blocks—contiguous groups of 100 phone numbers for which more than one residential number is listed—are added to this database by SSI. Blocks and exchanges that include only listed business numbers are excluded.

SSI draws numbers for the landline sample with equal probabilities from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

#### *Contact Procedures*

Braun Research conducted live telephone interviews from August 18 to September 2, 2017. Their callers made as many as eight attempts to contact every sampled phone number. The sample was released for interviewing

## APPENDIX 2

### *Continued*

in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger sample. Using replicates to control the release of sample ensures that complete call procedures are followed for the entire sample. Calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chance of making contact with potential respondents. Each phone number received at least one daytime call.

The Hagan-Collier Method guided respondent selection. Braun Research recruited respondents in the landline sample by asking for the youngest adult male who is now at home. If the youngest male was not home, then the next step would be to request an interview with the youngest female at home. Regarding the cell sample, Braun Research callers interviewed the person who answered the phone, as long as that person was an adult 18 years of age or older.

Response rates have been declining for surveys and polls since the 1990s. Generally, running a survey over a longer period of time will boost response rates to some degree. Affirming prior research, Pew Research recently published a report that concluded a lower response rate is not a reliable indicator for bias or skewing of survey results.<sup>i</sup>

In addition to sampling error, question wording, ordering, and other practical difficulties when conducting surveys may introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion research.

## Weighting Procedures

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for sample designs and patterns of non-response that might bias results. In this study, Braun Research balanced the sample demographics to population parameters.

Research provides evidence that participation in surveys tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. Subgroup participation and cooperation may also vary because of substantive interest regarding a survey's topics and questions. To compensate for these known and potential biases, the sample data were weighted for analysis.

Braun Research weighted the initially drawn national sample (N = 1,000) by using population parameters from the U.S. Census Bureau's *2015 American Community Survey (ACS), Five-year Estimates*, for adults 18 years of age or older living in the 50 United States and the District of Columbia. The initial weighting to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones are based on the Center for Disease Control's *Early Release of Estimates From the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), July–December 2013*.

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<sup>i</sup>Scott Keeter, Nick Hatley, Courtney Kennedy, and Arnold Lau (2017, May 15), What Low Response Rates Mean for Telephone Surveys, retrieved from Pew Research Center website: <http://www.pewresearch.org/2017/05/15/what-low-response-rates-mean-for-telephone-surveys>; Robert M. Groves and Emilia Peytcheva (2008), The Impact of Nonresponse Rates on Nonresponse Bias: A Meta-Analysis, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72(2), pp. 167–189, <http://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfn011>

For the national sample results, we weighted to general population parameters based on Phone Type (Cell Phone/Landline), Age, Race, Ethnicity, Region and Gender. We weighted oversamples based on the following: African-Americans: Region, Gender and Age; Latinos: Region, Gender and Age; Less than College Graduates: Age and Region; Small Town/Rural: Region; Parents of School-aged Children: unweighted.

Weighted and unweighted results are available on request.

# APPENDIX 3

## Phone Call Dispositions and Response Rates

We use the American Association for Public Opinion Research’s “Response Rate 3” (AAPOR RR3) for computing response rates for landline and cell phone proportions of the sample. The response rate is the percentage of known or assumed residential households for which a completed interview was obtained.

National Sample Call Dispositions (N = 1,000)					
SUMMARY			DETAIL		
	Landline	Cell Phone		Landline	Cell Phone
Total	13,100	16,600	Disconnected	2,241	2,657
Released	13,100	16,600	Fax	16	0
Est. Response	4.1%	4.6%	Government/Business	117	112
			Cell Phone	0	.
			Landline	.	0
			Unusable	2,374	2,769
			No Answer	1,994	2,416
			Busy	149	152
			Usability Unknown	2,143	2,568
			Complete	402	598
			Break-Off	21	26
			Usable/Eligible	423	624
			Refused	892	1,024
			Language Barrier	58	77
			Voice Mail	3,239	3,528
			Call Back-Retry	3,544	5,489
			Strong Refusal	114	135
			Privacy Manager	11	14
			Usable/Eligible Unknown	7,858	10,267
			Terminates	302	372
			Usable/Ineligible	302	372
			<b>RESPONSE RATE</b>	<b>4.1%</b>	<b>4.6%</b>
			<b>COOPERATION RATE</b>	<b>40.7%</b>	<b>45.0%</b>
			<b>REFUSAL RATE</b>	<b>12.2%</b>	<b>10.7%</b>

**Total Sample Call Dispositions Including Oversampling (N = 1,486)**

<b>SUMMARY</b>		
	Landline	Cell Phone
Total	14,500	22,700
Released	14,500	22,700
Est. Response	3.9%	5.8%

<b>DETAIL</b>		
	Landline	Cell Phone
Disconnected	2,413	3,105
Fax	20	0
Government/Business	131	149
Cell Phone	0	.
Landline	.	0
Unusable	2,564	3,254
No Answer	2,268	2,941
Busy	176	175
Usability Unknown	2,444	3,116
Complete	431	1,055
Break-Off	28	45
Usable/Eligible	459	1,100
Refused	975	1,371
Language Barrier	73	112
Voice Mail	3,621	5,769
Call Back-Retry	3,856	7,218
Strong Refusal	129	158
Privacy Manager	15	21
Usable/Eligible Unknown	8,669	14,649
Terminates	364	581
Usable/Ineligible	364	581
<b>RESPONSE RATE</b>	<b>3.9%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>
<b>COOPERATION RATE</b>	<b>41.3%</b>	<b>51.0%</b>
<b>REFUSAL RATE</b>	<b>12.1%</b>	<b>9.7%</b>

# APPENDIX 4

## Phone Call Introductions for Interviews

### Cell Phone

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am calling for BR Interviewing, a national market research firm.

We are not selling anything and will not be asking you for money, all your answers will be kept confidential. We are calling nationwide to ask questions about things that have been in the news and would like to include your opinions.

If you are driving or doing anything that requires your full attention, I will need to call you back.

Please know these calls are randomly monitored for quality and training purposes.

### Weighting Procedures

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am calling for BR Interviewing, a national market research firm.

We are not selling anything and will not be asking you for money, all your answers will be kept confidential. We are calling nationwide to ask questions about things that have been in the news and would like to include your opinions.

I'd like to ask a few questions of the youngest male age 18 years or older who is now at home?

[IF NO]

May I ask a few questions of the youngest female age 18 years or older who is now at home?

Please know these calls are randomly monitored for quality and training purposes.



# APPENDIX 5

## Interview Screening Questions

**S1.** Are you under 18 years old, OR are you 18 or older?

- 1) Under 18 [Thank, and terminate]
- 2) 18 or older
- 3) (Refused) [Thank, and terminate]

**S2.** In what STATE do you currently live? [OPEN END. RECORD.]

- 1) [Record U.S. State]
- 2) Outside of USA [Thank, and terminate]
- 3) (Refused) [Thank, and terminate]

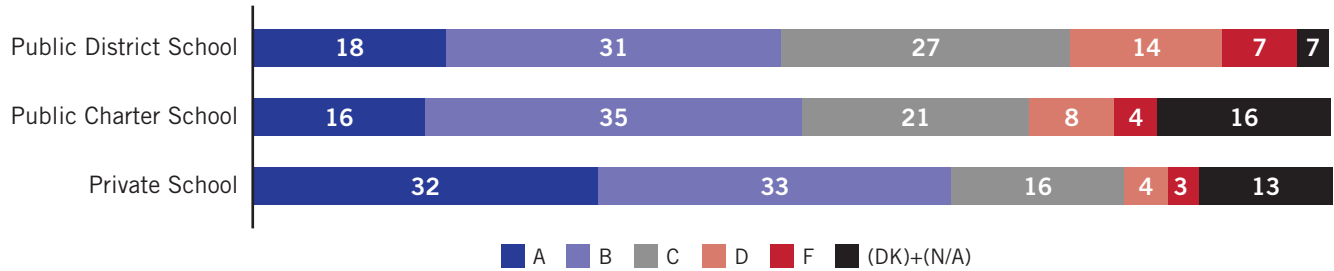
# APPENDIX 6

## Current School Parents' Grades by School Type

### How Current School Parents Grade Schools, All Responses

Current school parents are twice as likely to give "A" or "B" grades to local private schools than local district or charter schools, despite a quarter of respondents abstaining from giving grades.

(Percentage of All Current School Parents)



Notes: Responses within parentheses were volunteered. "DK" means "Don't Know." "N/A" means "Not Applicable."  
 Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q15.

# APPENDIX 7

## Preferences for School Types: Composite Results

Composite Averages Based on Two Question Versions with Corresponding Split-Sample Responses

Percentage of All Respondents or Demographic Groups

	Private School %	Public District School %	Public Charter School %	Home School %	N =
<b>ALL RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1,000</b>
Current/Former School Parent	42	33	15	7	544
Current School Parent	42	31	14	9	500
Former School Parent	40	32	15	8	275
<b>AGE GROUP</b>					
18 to 34	35	34	16	10	269
35 to 54	41	29	14	9	311
55 and Over	40	31	15	9	403
<b>GENERATION</b>					
Millennial	35	33	17	11	319
Generation X	42	32	11	9	226
Baby Boomer	41	29	16	8	324
Silent	42	34	11	9	102
<b>COMMUNITY</b>					
Urban	46	31	13	6	225
Suburban	37	35	16	5	395
Small Town/Rural	35	28	14	15	506
<b>EDUCATION</b>					
< College Graduate	38	30	14	11	606
≥ College Graduate	39	34	15	5	387
<b>GENDER</b>					
Male	41	29	12	11	482
Female	36	34	17	8	518
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>					
Under \$40,000	37	27	17	13	365
\$40,000 to \$79,999	38	30	17	10	298
\$80,000 and Over	44	38	10	3	264
<b>PARTY ID</b>					
Democrat	39	39	12	6	329
Republican	40	30	16	8	264
Independent	40	28	17	10	281
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>					
Asian/Pacific Islander	44	24	29	0	20
Black/African American	39	26	19	10	168
Hispanic/Latino	38	32	14	11	150
White	37	33	14	9	722
<b>REGION</b>					
Northeast	42	31	8	12	191
Midwest	35	40	11	10	219
South	39	29	15	9	373
West	38	28	23	7	217

Notes: The "composite" percentages in this chart reflect a weighted average of the split samples' responses to two slightly different versions of this question (16A/B). Please consider that each subgroup has a unique margin of error based on its adult population size in the United States and the sample size (N) obtained in this survey. We advise strong caution when interpreting results for subgroups with small sample sizes. The subgroup sample sizes displayed in the far right column represent the unweighted number of interviews. All other statistical results reported in this table and report reflect weighted data, a standard procedure to correct for known demographic discrepancies. Sample sizes for Blacks, Hispanics, Current School Parents, and Small Town/Rural reflect unweighted respondent counts that include oversamples.

Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q16A and Q16B.

## APPENDIX 8

### Public Opinion Estimation on Education Savings Accounts, Based on an Online Survey Experiment

We observed a large jump from 2016 to 2017 in the proportion of respondents supporting support for education savings accounts (ESAs). For that reason we wanted to see to what extent a slight wording change in the question may have contributed to the increase in favorability.

To do this kind of assessment we conducted an online survey experiment—a split-sample experiment comparing identically drawn sample of 200 respondents—controlling for all survey design parameters and respondent conditions except for the actual wording of the two comparable ESA questions.

We implemented two key changes from 2016 to 2017. First we replaced the phrase “allows parents to take their child out of a public district or charter school, and receive a payment” with “establishes for parents” at the front of the question. Despite ESA program designs in some states, requiring parents to withdraw their child from a public school to enroll in an ESA. We do not view that as an essential program feature. A more universal policy design would be neutral regarding types of schools or education-related services in the public or private sectors. A more universal ESA policy would allow parents to use those public funds for educational services in an unencumbered process. Second, following this logic and concept, we dropped the word “private” that had previously modified “school tuition.” In a more universal ESA, parents would be able to use funds to enroll in any type of schooling environment.

At the outset of the online experiment we reviewed the weighted and unweighted results for Q13B from EdChoice’s 2016 national survey, the weighted and unweighted results for Q23 from this year’s national survey, and results from Q4A and Q4B from the online survey experiment.

- In the 2016 national survey, 52.3 percent of respondents either strongly/somewhat favored ESAs on Q13B. (weighted result, unweighted N = 442)
- In the 2017 national survey, 71.1 percent of respondents either strongly/somewhat favored ESAs on Q23. (weighted result, unweighted N = 1,000)

How did those questions fare in the online experiment? (conducted September 26 to October 1, 2017)

- On the 2016 ESA item, 75.6 percent of respondents either strongly/somewhat favored ESAs. (weighted result, unweighted N = 200)
- On the 2017 ESA item, 82.2 percent of respondents either strongly/somewhat favored ESAs. (weighted result, unweighted N = 200)

Based on the online experiment, we estimate the wording changes from 2016 to 2017 caused a 6.6 percentage point increase in overall support. Put another way, that result represented a 8.7 percent positive increase with the modified 2017 ESA item.

If we had included the 2016 ESA item (Q13B) in the 2017 Schooling in America Survey instrument, via interpolation we estimate 64.9 percent net support for ESAs—approximating a jump of about 12 percentage points from 2016 to 2017—while controlling for survey design and administration factors.

We do urge some caution while considering these comparisons and estimates. One way to think about using this experiment is to establish approximate upper and lower “bounds” for considering ESA support in 2017. It is our view that in past years’ surveys we have been asking ESA questions in such a way that established *lower bounds of ESA support* because wording was unnecessarily limiting and constraining. Because of the 2017 ESA question’s broader description, corresponding results can be viewed as an *upper bound of positive opinion toward ESAs*.

Online Survey Experiment, Sample Interview Dispositions (Online)			
Description	Total	Sample A	Sample B
Full Completes	400	200	200
Email Bouncebacks	80	41	39
Emails Unopened After Reminders	3,105	1,175	1,930
Terminated Early/Breakoffs	521	287	234
Screened Out/Disqualified	80	43	37
Refusals	314	165	149
Total Contacts	4,500	1,911	2,589
<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>9.0%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>7.8%</b>
<b>Cooperation Rate</b>	<b>32.4%</b>	<b>29.0%</b>	<b>34.3%</b>
<b>Refusal Rate</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>

# APPENDIX 9

## Views on ESAs: Descriptive Results

Views on ESAs: Descriptive Results

Percentage of All Respondents or Demographic Groups

	Favor %	Oppose %	Margin (net)	Intensity (strong net)	N =
<b>ALL RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>1,000</b>
Current/Former School Parent	72	19	53	25	544
Current School Parent	78	18	60	29	500
Former School Parent	70	18	51	20	275
<b>AGE GROUP</b>					
18 to 34	75	19	56	33	269
35 to 54	75	16	59	28	311
55 and Over	63	22	41	13	403
<b>GENERATION</b>					
Millennial	76	18	58	33	319
Generation X	74	17	57	26	226
Baby Boomer	69	20	50	20	324
Silent	48	30	19	4	102
<b>COMMUNITY</b>					
Urban	72	19	53	31	225
Suburban	71	20	52	19	395
Small Town/Rural	74	18	55	21	506
<b>EDUCATION</b>					
< College Graduate	74	16	57	28	606
≥ College Graduate	67	23	44	20	387
<b>GENDER</b>					
Male	73	22	51	21	482
Female	69	16	53	28	518
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>					
Under \$40,000	77	12	65	32	365
\$40,000 to \$79,999	73	20	53	20	298
\$80,000 and Over	65	28	37	21	264
<b>PARTY ID</b>					
Democrat	71	19	52	27	329
Republican	73	17	56	26	264
Independent	74	19	55	24	281
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>					
Asian/Pacific Islander	77	16	61	42	20
Black/African American	77	18	59	48	168
Hispanic/Latino	81	17	64	35	150
White	68	20	48	19	722
<b>REGION</b>					
Northeast	63	23	40	20	191
Midwest	74	18	57	23	219
South	74	16	58	30	373
West	70	22	48	21	217

Notes: Please consider that each subgroup has a unique margin of error based on its adult population size in the United States and the sample size (N) obtained in this survey. We advise strong caution when interpreting results for subgroups with small sample sizes. The subgroup sample sizes displayed in the far right column represent the unweighted number of interviews. All other statistical results reported in this table and report reflect weighted data, a standard procedure to correct for known demographic discrepancies. Margins and intensities are calculated using percentages to the nearest tenth. Sample sizes for Blacks, Hispanics, Current School Parents, and Small Town/Rural reflect unweighted respondent counts that include oversamples.

Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q23.

# APPENDIX 10

## Views on School Vouchers: Descriptive Results

Views on School Vouchers: Descriptive Results

Percentage of All Respondents or Demographic Groups

	Favor %	Oppose %	Margin (net)	Intensity (strong net)	N =
<b>ALL RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1,000</b>
Current/Formal School Parent	61	34	28	6	544
Current School Parent	67	31	36	15	500
Former School Parent	59	35	23	3	275
<b>AGE GROUP</b>					
18 to 34	68	28	40	18	269
35 to 54	64	28	36	12	311
55 and Over	55	37	18	3	403
<b>GENERATION</b>					
Millennial	69	27	42	19	319
Generation X	63	30	32	7	226
Baby Boomer	57	36	21	7	324
Silent	50	35	15	<1	102
<b>COMMUNITY</b>					
Urban	61	31	30	10	225
Suburban	61	33	27	8	395
Small Town/Rural	62	33	30	10	506
<b>EDUCATION</b>					
< College Graduate	66	27	39	20	606
≥ College Graduate	53	41	13	-5	387
<b>GENDER</b>					
Male	64	32	32	10	482
Female	60	30	29	12	518
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>					
Under \$40,000	67	23	45	19	365
\$40,000 to \$79,999	65	32	33	13	298
\$80,000 and Over	53	44	9	-3	264
<b>PARTY ID</b>					
Democrat	56	37	19	-2	329
Republican	67	29	38	26	264
Independent	64	29	35	12	281
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>					
Asian/Pacific Islander	76	16	60	<1	20
Black/African American	76	19	57	31	168
Hispanic/Latino	72	26	47	22	150
White	56	36	19	3	722
<b>REGION</b>					
Northeast	55	35	20	10	191
Midwest	59	33	26	9	219
South	66	28	37	16	373
West	63	31	32	6	217

Notes: Please consider that each subgroup has a unique margin of error based on its adult population size in the United States and the sample size (N) obtained in this survey. We advise strong caution when interpreting results for subgroups with small sample sizes. The subgroup sample sizes displayed in the far right column represent the unweighted number of interviews. All other statistical results reported in this table and report reflect weighted data, a standard procedure to correct for known demographic discrepancies. Margins and intensities are calculated using percentages to the nearest tenth. Sample sizes for Blacks, Hispanics, Current School Parents, and Small Town/Rural reflect unweighted respondent counts that include oversamples.

Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q21.

# APPENDIX 11

## Views on Tax-Credit Scholarships: Descriptive Results

### Views on Tax-Credit Scholarships: Descriptive Results

Percentage of All Respondents or Demographic Groups

	Favor %	Oppose %	Margin (net)	Intensity (strong net)	N =
<b>ALL RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1,000</b>
Current/Formal School Parent	60	28	32	9	544
Current School Parent	69	25	44	16	500
Former School Parent	59	27	32	3	275
<b>AGE GROUP</b>					
18 to 34	71	21	50	23	269
35 to 54	62	25	38	12	311
55 and Over	53	32	22	1	403
<b>GENERATION</b>					
Millennial	70	21	49	23	319
Generation X	61	26	35	8	226
Baby Boomer	57	29	28	6	324
Silent	41	36	4	-5	102
<b>COMMUNITY</b>					
Urban	60	26	34	21	225
Suburban	66	23	43	12	395
Small Town/Rural	60	30	30	7	506
<b>EDUCATION</b>					
< College Graduate	66	21	44	18	606
≥ College Graduate	56	34	22	5	387
<b>GENDER</b>					
Male	64	28	36	9	482
Female	60	24	37	14	518
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>					
Under \$40,000	61	21	40	15	365
\$40,000 to \$79,999	65	28	37	15	298
\$80,000 and Over	61	30	31	3	264
<b>PARTY ID</b>					
Democrat	63	25	38	13	329
Republican	68	24	44	19	264
Independent	55	31	24	4	281
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>					
Asian/Pacific Islander	52	32	21	21	20
Black/African American	66	25	41	18	168
Hispanic/Latino	76	20	56	26	150
White	59	28	31	6	722
<b>REGION</b>					
Northeast	61	24	37	13	191
Midwest	55	31	25	5	219
South	68	20	48	15	373
West	59	32	27	11	217

Notes: Please consider that each subgroup has a unique margin of error based on its adult population size in the United States and the sample size (N) obtained in this survey. We advise strong caution when interpreting results for subgroups with small sample sizes. The subgroup sample sizes displayed in the far right column represent the unweighted number of interviews. All other statistical results reported in this table and report reflect weighted data, a standard procedure to correct for known demographic discrepancies. Margins and intensities are calculated using percentages to the nearest tenth. Sample sizes for Blacks, Hispanics, Current School Parents, and Small Town/Rural reflect unweighted respondent counts that include oversamples.

Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q27.



# APPENDIX 12

## Views on Charter Schools: Descriptive Results

Views on Charter Schools: Descriptive Results

Percentage of All Respondents or Demographic Groups

	Favor %	Oppose %	Margin (net)	Intensity (strong net)	N =
<b>ALL RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1,000</b>
Current/Formal School Parent	60	28	32	11	544
Current School Parent	68	26	41	10	500
Former School Parent	59	27	32	12	275
<b>AGE GROUP</b>					
18 to 34	65	28	38	13	269
35 to 54	61	29	32	8	311
55 and Over	57	29	28	12	403
<b>GENERATION</b>					
Millennial	66	27	39	13	319
Generation X	57	32	25	3	226
Baby Boomer	60	29	31	14	324
Silent	55	29	26	10	102
<b>COMMUNITY</b>					
Urban	60	31	29	10	225
Suburban	64	28	36	12	395
Small Town/Rural	60	28	32	10	506
<b>EDUCATION</b>					
< College Graduate	64	24	39	16	606
≥ College Graduate	61	31	30	4	387
<b>GENDER</b>					
Male	61	32	30	8	482
Female	60	26	34	14	518
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>					
Under \$40,000	64	23	40	16	365
\$40,000 to \$79,999	63	30	33	11	298
\$80,000 and Over	58	33	25	4	264
<b>PARTY ID</b>					
Democrat	55	34	22	6	329
Republican	65	25	41	21	264
Independent	66	27	39	10	281
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>					
Asian/Pacific Islander	57	36	21	1	20
Black/African American	68	20	48	19	168
Hispanic/Latino	67	29	38	16	150
White	59	30	30	9	722
<b>REGION</b>					
Northeast	55	33	22	8	191
Midwest	57	30	27	8	219
South	68	21	47	18	373
West	57	37	21	4	217

Notes: Please consider that each subgroup has a unique margin of error based on its adult population size in the United States and the sample size (N) obtained in this survey. We advise strong caution when interpreting results for subgroups with small sample sizes. The subgroup sample sizes displayed in the far right column represent the unweighted number of interviews. All other statistical results reported in this table and report reflect weighted data, a standard procedure to correct for known demographic discrepancies. Margins and intensities are calculated using percentages to the nearest tenth. Sample sizes for Blacks, Hispanics, Current School Parents, and Small Town/Rural reflect unweighted respondent counts that include oversamples.

Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q19.

# APPENDIX 13

## Views on the Direction of K–12 Education

Views on the Direction of K–12 Education

Percentage of All Respondents or Demographic Groups

	Right Direction %	Wrong Track %	Margin (net)	N =
<b>ALL RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>-28</b>	<b>1,000</b>
Current/Former School Parent	27	58	-32	544
Current School Parent	33	55	-22	500
Former School Parent	21	61	-40	275
<b>AGE GROUP</b>				
18 to 34	30	53	-23	269
35 to 54	25	55	-29	311
55 and Over	26	58	-32	403
<b>GENERATION</b>				
Millennial	31	53	-22	319
Generation X	24	55	-31	226
Baby Boomer	26	58	-32	324
Silent	25	61	-36	102
<b>COMMUNITY</b>				
Urban	33	54	-21	225
Suburban	26	55	-29	395
Small Town/Rural	24	58	-33	506
<b>EDUCATION</b>				
< College Graduate	26	54	-29	606
≥ College Graduate	27	59	-32	387
<b>GENDER</b>				
Male	31	53	-22	482
Female	23	58	-35	518
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>				
Under \$40,000	29	52	-23	365
\$40,000 to \$79,999	25	57	-32	298
\$80,000 and Over	26	61	-35	264
<b>PARTY ID</b>				
Democrat	32	56	-24	329
Republican	31	54	-23	264
Independent	21	59	-37	281
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>				
Asian/Pacific Islander	48	25	23	20
Black/African American	30	50	-20	168
Hispanic/Latino	31	52	-21	150
White	25	57	-33	722
<b>REGION</b>				
Northeast	27	58	-31	191
Midwest	27	57	-30	219
South	27	55	-28	373
West	27	52	-25	217

Notes: Please consider that each subgroup has a unique margin of error based on its adult population size in the United States and the sample size (N) obtained in this survey. We advise strong caution when interpreting results for subgroups with small sample sizes. The subgroup sample sizes displayed in the far right column represent the unweighted number of interviews. All other statistical results reported in this table and report reflect weighted data, a standard procedure to correct for known demographic discrepancies. Margins are calculated using percentages to the nearest tenth. Sample sizes for Blacks, Hispanics, Current School Parents, and Small Town/Rural reflect unweighted respondent counts that include oversamples.

Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q2.

# APPENDIX 14

## Frequency of Following Public Affairs and Government

Frequency of Following Public Affairs and Government

Percentage of All Respondents or Demographic Groups

	Always or Most/ Some of the Time %	Only Now and Then/Never %	Margin (net)	N =
<b>ALL RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>1,000</b>
Current/Former School Parent	78	19	60	544
Current School Parent	76	22	54	500
Former School Parent	81	17	64	275
<b>AGE GROUP</b>				
18 to 34	62	30	32	269
35 to 54	76	18	58	311
55 and Over	86	13	73	403
<b>GENERATION</b>				
Millennial	62	30	32	319
Generation X	78	15	63	226
Baby Boomer	84	14	70	324
Silent	88	10	78	102
<b>COMMUNITY</b>				
Urban	76	22	54	225
Suburban	72	20	52	395
Small Town/Rural	76	20	57	506
<b>EDUCATION</b>				
< College Graduate	71	23	47	606
≥ College Graduate	82	14	68	387
<b>GENDER</b>				
Male	75	19	56	482
Female	75	21	54	518
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>				
Under \$40,000	68	24	44	365
\$40,000 to \$79,999	78	20	58	298
\$80,000 and Over	82	13	69	264
<b>PARTY ID</b>				
Democrat	77	17	59	329
Republican	80	16	64	264
Independent	77	20	56	281
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>				
Asian/Pacific Islander	68	14	54	20
Black/African American	67	26	42	168
Hispanic/Latino	65	25	40	150
White	78	17	60	722
<b>REGION</b>				
Northeast	78	18	59	191
Midwest	74	22	51	219
South	72	22	50	373
West	79	15	63	217

Notes: Please consider that each subgroup has a unique margin of error based on its adult population size in the United States and the sample size (N) obtained in this survey. We advise strong caution when interpreting results for subgroups with small sample sizes. The subgroup sample sizes displayed in the far right column represent the unweighted number of interviews. All other statistical results reported in this table and report reflect weighted data, a standard procedure to correct for known demographic discrepancies. Margins are calculated using percentages to the nearest tenth. Sample sizes for Blacks, Hispanics, Current School Parents, and Small Town/Rural reflect unweighted respondent counts that include oversamples.

Source: EdChoice, 2017 Schooling in America Survey (conducted August 18–September 2, 2017), Q28.

# NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research (2017), *Education in the United States: Choice, Control, and Quality* [issue brief], retrieved from [http://www.apnorc.org/PDFs/Education/APNORC\\_Education%20in%20US.pdf](http://www.apnorc.org/PDFs/Education/APNORC_Education%20in%20US.pdf); Martin R. West, Michal B. Henderson, Paul E. Peterson, and Samuel Barrows (2017), The 2017 EdNext Poll on School Reform: Public Thinking on School Choice, Common Core, Higher Ed, and More, *Education Next*, 18(1), retrieved from <http://educationnext.org/2017-ednext-poll-school-reform-public-opinion-school-choice-common-core-higher-ed>; Phi Kappa Delta (2017), *The 49th Annual PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*, retrieved from [http://pdkpoll.org/assets/downloads/PDKnational\\_poll\\_2017.pdf](http://pdkpoll.org/assets/downloads/PDKnational_poll_2017.pdf); Cathy J. Cohen, Matthew Fowler, Matthew D. Luttig, Vladimir E. Medenica, and Jon C. Rogowski (2017), *Education in America: The Views of Millennials*, retrieved from GenForward website: [https://genforwardsurvey.com/assets/uploads/2017/09/GenForward-Education-Report\\_Final.pdf](https://genforwardsurvey.com/assets/uploads/2017/09/GenForward-Education-Report_Final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The survey's margin of sampling error (MSE) is the largest 95 percent Confidence Interval for any estimated proportion based on the total sample – the one around 50 percent. The national sample's margin of error for this survey is  $\pm 3.1\%$ . This means that in 95 of every 100 samples drawn using the same methodology, estimated proportions based on the entire sample will be no more than 3.1 percentage points away from their true values in the population. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance do not address any potential design effect due to weighting.

<sup>3</sup> For a useful description on the use of oversampling, see Pew Research Center, U.S. Survey Research: Sampling [web page], last updated December 2, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/sampling>

<sup>4</sup> EdChoice (2017), *Questionnaire and Topline Results*, retrieved from [edchoice.org/2017NationalSurvey](http://edchoice.org/2017NationalSurvey). The *Questionnaire and Topline Results* document allows the reader to follow the survey interview by question as well as item wording and ordering.

<sup>5</sup> For terminology: We use the label “current school parents” to refer to those respondents who said they have one or more children in preschool through high school. We use the label “former school parents” for respondents who said their children are past high school age. For terms regarding age groups: “younger” reflect military respondents who are age 18 to 34; “middle-age” are 35 to 54; and “seniors” are 55 and older. Labels pertaining to income groups go as follows: “low-income earners” < \$40,000; “middle-income earners”  $\geq$  \$40,000 and < \$80,000; “high-income earners”  $\geq$  \$80,000. We adapt the Pew Research Center's classifications of generational cohorts for this report: Millennial (born after 1980); Generation X (1965–1980); Baby Boomer (1946–1964); and Silent Generation (1928–1945). Pew Research Center, *The Generations Defined* [web page], accessed November 6, 2017, retrieved from [http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/11/millennials-surpass-gen-xers-as-the-largest-generation-in-u-s-labor-force/ft\\_15-05-11\\_millennialsdefined](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/11/millennials-surpass-gen-xers-as-the-largest-generation-in-u-s-labor-force/ft_15-05-11_millennialsdefined)

<sup>6</sup> All subgroups' response percentages are based on the national sample, except for the four subgroups that were oversampled: African Americans, Latinos, Current School Parents, and Small Town/Rural (community type). For those four subgroups we report the response percentages based on each respective total number of interviews (national sample draw plus oversample).

<sup>7</sup> Any reference to “parents” alone, and without adjective, is meant to describe the aggregate population of current and former school parents.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas D. Snyder, Cristobal de Brey, and Sally A. Dillow (2016), *Digest of Education Statistics 2015* (NCES 2016-014), retrieved from National Center for Education Statistics website: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/ch\\_1.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/ch_1.asp)

<sup>9</sup> We advise caution on interpreting the proportion of those parents satisfied with homeschooling experience. The sample size for this group is small (N = 47).

<sup>10</sup> Paul DiPerna (2013), *Schooling in America Survey: What Do Mothers Say About K-12?* (Polling Paper 15), retrieved from EdChoice website: <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Schooling-in-America-Survey.pdf>; Paul DiPerna (2014), *2014 Schooling in America Survey: Perspectives on School Choice, Common Core, and Standardized Testing* (Polling Paper 20), retrieved from EdChoice website: <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/2.-SIA-Poll-for-WEB-6-25-14.pdf>; Paul DiPerna (2015), *2015 Schooling in America Survey: Perspectives on School Choice, Common Core, and Standardized Testing* (Polling Paper 24), retrieved from EdChoice website: <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/SIA-Poll-Full-Report-WEB-6-29-15.pdf>; Paul DiPerna and Andrew D. Catt (2016), *2016 Schooling in America Survey: Public Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice* (Polling Paper 28), retrieved from EdChoice website: [https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2016-10\\_SIA-Poll-Update.pdf](https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2016-10_SIA-Poll-Update.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> We modified our education savings account (ESA) question this year so the description contained essential ESA features and minimized, simplified, or dropped elements viewed as non-essential policy features for a universal, broad ESA policy. We implemented two key changes. First we replaced the phrase “allows parents to take their child out of a public district or charter school, and receive a payment” with “establishes for parents” at the front of the question. Despite ESA program designs in some states, requiring parents to withdraw their child from a public school to enroll in an ESA. We do not view that as an essential program feature. A more universal policy design would be neutral regarding types of schools or education-related services in the public or private sectors. A more universal ESA policy would allow parents to use those public funds for educational services in an unencumbered process. Second, following this logic and

concept, we dropped the word “private” that had previously modified “school tuition.” In a more universal ESA, parents would be able to use funds to enroll in any type of schooling environment.

<sup>12</sup> United States Census Bureau (2017), *Public Education Finances 2015: Economic Reimbursable Surveys Division Reports* (G15-ASPEF), table 8, p. 20, retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2017/econ/g15-aspef.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> “Current Expenditures” data include dollars spent on instruction, instruction-related support services, and other elementary/secondary current expenditures, but exclude expenditures on long-term debt service, facilities and construction, and other programs. “Total Expenditures” includes the latter categories. Total current spending per student does not include capital outlay and interest on debt. National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Facts: Expenditures [web page], retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=66>

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### Paul DiPerna

Paul DiPerna is vice president of Research and Innovation for EdChoice. He joined the organization in 2006. Paul's research interests include surveys and polling on K-12 education and school choice reforms. He oversees the research projects either produced or commissioned by the organization. EdChoice has published more than 90 reports, papers, and briefs during his tenure leading the research program. Paul has traveled to 31 states for his work. He presents survey research findings and discusses school choice politics and policies with audiences, including public officials, policy professionals, academics, and advocates. Paul's professional memberships and activities include participation in the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) and Association for Education Finance and Policy (AEFP). Previously, Paul served as the assistant director for the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution. He was a research analyst for the first five issues of the Brown Center Report on American Education (2000-2004). He also managed and coordinated the activities of the National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education (2001-2005). A native of Pittsburgh, Paul earned an M.A. in political science from the University of Illinois (2000) and B.A. from the University of Dayton (1996). Paul currently lives in Zionsville, Indiana, with his wife and two daughters.



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Michael Shaw is the research assistant for EdChoice. In that role, he supports quality control as the organization's data collector, verifies its research, and analyzes data and policy issues. Before joining EdChoice, Mike worked as a reporter for news organizations in Colorado, Virginia, and Missouri. He holds degrees in economics and journalism as well as a minor in Spanish from the University of Missouri. While there, Mike researched parochial school consolidation in the St. Louis area. Mike grew up in Fenton, Missouri and currently resides on the north side of Indianapolis.



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Andrew D. Catt is the director of state research and policy analysis for EdChoice. In that role, Drew conducts analyses on private educational choice programs and conducts surveys of private school leaders and parents of school-aged children. Drew graduated from Vanderbilt University in 2008 with a bachelor's degree in Human and Organizational Development, specializing in Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness. During that time, he researched the effects of homeschooling on socialization. Drew received his Master of Public Affairs in Nonprofit Management at Indiana University's School of Public and Environmental Affairs in Indianapolis. He also received his Master of Arts in Philanthropic Studies through the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. While in graduate school, Drew's research focused on teacher performance incentives and cross-sector collaboration. Drew recently received a Graduate Certificate in Geographic Information Science (GIS) from IUPUI. Drew is a native of central Indiana and currently resides in downtown Indianapolis with his wife Elizabeth.

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## ABOUT THE SURVEY ORGANIZATION

### **Braun Research, Inc. (BRI)**

The Braun Research network of companies, founded in 1995, combined employ 34 full-time and more than 210 part-time employees engaged in data collection via telephone, and internet for various survey research firms, government and advertising agencies, local community organizations, local and national business groups, foundations, universities and academic entities, as well as religious organizations. In 22 years Braun Research has conducted more than 10,000 research projects by telephone, internet, and mail worldwide.

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The work we accomplish for other research firms requires us to perform all work up to standards required by the various research organizations where we enjoy membership and, in some cases, participate actively. Paul Braun is recognized as a leader in the field by colleagues who asked him to serve on these committees. He is a member of the MRA/CMOR committees on response rate improvement and in launching a seal of quality for the industry. He has served as President of the New Jersey Chapter of AAPOR, and he is currently a member of the International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) in North America.

Braun Research is a well-respected firm employing techniques and standards approved by various survey research associations and other affiliations including those with whom Braun is an active member, including AAPOR (The American Association for Public Opinion Research) and MRA/CMOR (Market Research Association/Council on Marketing and Opinion Research) and CASRO (Council on American Survey Research Organizations).





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All individuals have opinions, and many organizations (like our own) have specific missions or philosophical orientations. Scientific methods, if used correctly and followed closely in well-designed studies, should neutralize these opinions and orientations. Research rules and methods minimize bias. We believe rigorous procedural rules of science prevent a researcher's motives, and an organization's particular orientation, from pre-determining results.

If research adheres to proper scientific and methodological standards, its findings can be relied upon no matter who has conducted it. If rules and methods are neither specified nor followed, then the biases of the researcher or an organization may become relevant, because a lack of rigor opens the door for those biases to affect the results.

The authors welcome any and all questions related to methods and findings.

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