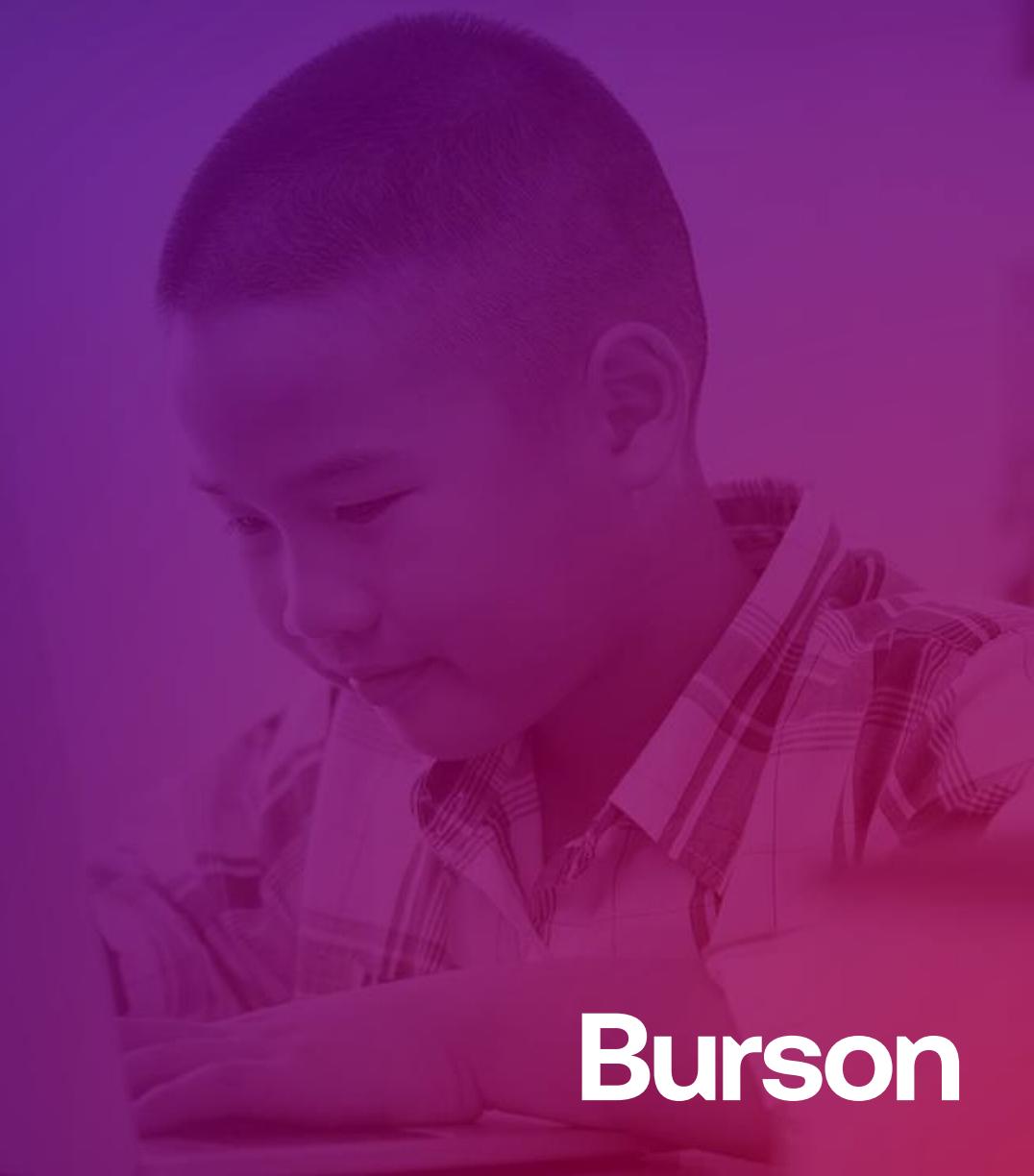




# ACROSS THE AISLE

**2026 Nationwide Education Survey**

Among Likely Voters



**Burson**

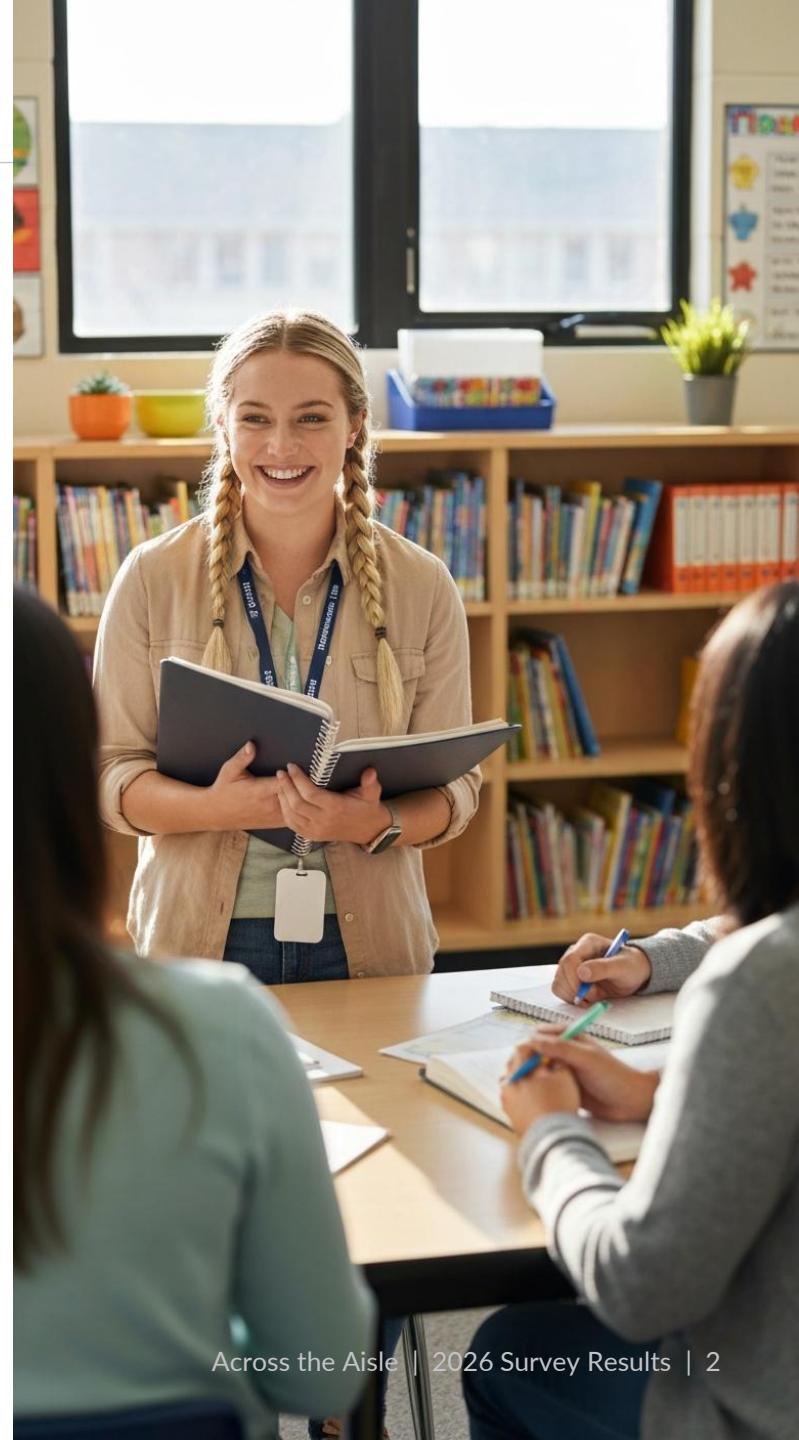
# About Across the Aisle

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Now in its fifth year, *Across the Aisle* (formerly The Covid Constituency) was developed in partnership with The Honorable Bob Wise (Governor, 2001–2005, and U.S. House of Representatives, 1983–2001, West Virginia). *Across the Aisle* seeks to build on the unprecedented political will for educational innovation that emerged in the shadow of the pandemic and connects public needs to policymakers by collecting firsthand experiences, perceptions, and priorities from the public – ultimately translating them into actionable, nonpartisan policies that will fundamentally change education for the better.

As part of this work, The Hunt Institute partnered with Burson Insights, Data & Intelligence to conduct a nationwide survey of voters and parents to learn about their priorities and concerns in education.

In the following slides, please find findings from our 2026 survey.





# Methodology

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## Phase 1: Online Ethnographic Journals

- Burson conducted online ethnographic journals, which allow participants to share reflections and experiences over time in their own words and environments.
  - The sample included:
    - 15 likely voters
    - 10 K-12 public school teachers and educators
  - Participants submitted their responses between October 16-21, 2025. The insights from these journals were used to inform the quantitative phase of the research.

## Phase 2: National Survey

- Burson designed and administered a nationwide online survey between November 20-24, 2025. The survey reached a total of 1,100 likely 2026 voters, with representative samples across all key groups. The margin of error for the entire sample is 2.7%.
- Survey respondents were drawn from online panels and screened to be likely 2026 voters. The sample was weighted to be representative of 2022 likely voters.
- Note: From an interpretive standpoint, differences of 5 to 10 percentage points should be understood as relatively narrow. Differences below 10% fall within a range that typically reflects marginal variation rather than a meaningful divergence in political behavior, outlook, engagement, or popularity.

# KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS



# KEY FINDINGS

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01

**Voters across the political spectrum overwhelmingly agree on a student-and teacher-centered education agenda,** demonstrating bipartisan alignment on core priorities. What's more, there's an expectation among voters for elected officials to elevate education in the national conversation.

02

**The education system is at an inflection point.** With many voters viewing public schools as performing only "just okay," there's a heightened need to double-down on investments and resources to secure stronger outcomes.

03

**Educators need more support.**

Educators balance a deep love and commitment to the profession with a sense of mounting pressure, bureaucracy, and burnout.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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01

**Voters seek an education system that prepares students with the skills required for tomorrow and provides teachers with the support necessary to deliver high-quality instruction today.** The meta-ask is that schools serve as strong community anchors that foster opportunity and strengthen family and community resilience.

02

**The most strongly favored policies include the following:**

- Teach students skills like communication, decision-making, financial literacy, or personal responsibility (78% strongly favor)
- Increase job skills and workforce training opportunities in high school, like apprenticeships and internship opportunities (76%)
- Ensure every teacher has the development, resources, and support they need to do an outstanding job (75%)

03

**Empower teachers but don't exclude parents.** Voters agree that teachers should have the most oversight on education, but a majority also agree that there's an important role for parents of school-aged children to have some input into what's going on in classrooms. There's also appetite for local government involvement.

04

**Voters support how technology has been integrated into classrooms, but worry about the state of students' mental health, labor market preparedness, and ability to engage different views.** In this way, most stress that it's incumbent upon educators to teach soft skills and supports—critical thinking, problem solving, and empathy.

# CORE EDUCATION VALUES



## Americans agree on three key education values: equality, hard work, and freedom.

**Equality** is broadly understood as ensuring that all students have an opportunity to succeed. Democrats and Independents often used the language of “equity” whereas Republicans often discussed equality in terms of “fairness.”

**Hard work** speaks to the deep consensus that education requires effort and commitment. Democrats framed hard work in terms of “dedication” and “work ethic,” often emphasizing that both teachers and students must be held to high standards. Republicans also highlighted hard work as a key education value but were more likely to describe it through the lens of “responsibility” and “accountability.”

**Freedom** (of thought) was described as essential to education among voters — schools should be spaces for free thinking, open communication, and the exploration of multiple viewpoints. In some ways, voters see freedom as a “meta-value,” encompassing related goals such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creating room for discussion, debate, and understanding differences.

**Learning to get along with one another**, show respect for different viewpoints, showing empathy and being a good, honest person who takes responsibility for themselves.

— WOMAN, DEMOCRAT, WHITE (VOTER)

**For education, I think our values need to center around equity, justice, and flexibility.** Schools can promote equity by teaching students about what it means to be equitable and privilege.

— WOMAN, DEMOCRAT, WHITE (VOTER)

**I think truth, honesty, and integrity are most important.** They should be providing an unbiased space for facts to be presented on and students to discuss their opinions and beliefs and learn from others and why they think a certain way about a certain thing.

— MAN, INDEPENDENT, WHITE (VOTER)

**School should make every classroom equal** and not single anybody out just because of how they are.

— MAN, REPUBLICAN, AAPI (VOTER)

## WHAT ARE CORE EDUCATIONAL TALKING POINTS?

### A set of universally shared beliefs undergirds voters' education outlook and priorities.

Beyond its practical implications, voters see education as a moral imperative. Voters want an education system that looks ahead, equips students with the skills tomorrow demands, and ensures teachers have the support required to deliver excellence. They expect schools to be strong anchors for families and communities, driving opportunity and resilience.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree **Net agree**

It's essential that our education system prepares students to succeed in the job market.

80 91

Investing in our children is not a political choice, it is a moral choice, it is the right choice, and it is a smart choice.

77 86

We should all support our neighborhood public schools, be on the side of our teachers, and make things better for all our kids.

72 88

We need strong public schools because they maintain property values, support our economy, and strengthen the quality of our communities.

67 88



Q19. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. Select one for each option.  
Q20. Here are some statements about education today. For each, please indicate whether you agree or disagree. Select one for each option.

## TOP EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES

### Voters from across the aisle are in alignment on what they most want public officials to prioritize.

Nearly 9-in-10 from across the ideological spectrum believe that officials must prioritize strengthening the education system from multiple angles.

Across concerns, from hiring quality teachers and investing in their training, to providing aides, support staff, and mental health services, the pattern is clear: students can't succeed without a stable, well-resourced school workforce.

Voters also want schools equipped for today's challenges, including modern facilities, real-world skill-building, fair funding across districts, and focused support for students who are behind or have disabilities. Together, these themes underscore an urgent mandate: elevate classroom capacity, close learning gaps, and build an educational environment where every student can thrive.

Importance of Education Issue <i>Showing % "Important"</i>	Overall	Dem	Ind	Rep
Hire quality teachers	<b>93</b>	95	93	91
Teach real-world skills for the future workforce	<b>92</b>	95	92	89
Address students not reading at grade level	<b>92</b>	92	91	93
Invest in teacher training and retention	<b>92</b>	92	94	89
Provide support and resources for children with disabilities	<b>91</b>	94	92	86
Improve school facilities and classroom materials	<b>90</b>	94	91	84
Access to mental health and other support services for all students	<b>88</b>	94	88	82
Ensure funding fairness between school systems	<b>87</b>	87	86	87
Hire staff in schools, including classroom aides, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers	<b>87</b>	90	85	85
Address learning loss among students	<b>87</b>	87	89	87



Q18. Here is a list of different issues related to public education. For each one, please indicate how personally important it is to you that public officials and education leaders address the issue.

## TIER TWO EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES

Still popular, though with less consistent pull across the ideological spectrum, are education policies that ensure both equity and student success.

Voters want schools to provide personalized learning that meets individual needs, as well as meaningful investments to close widening gaps between low-income and high-income students.

Early intervention also matters: expanding access to pre-K and early childhood education is viewed as essential to long-term readiness.

Notably, voters show far less enthusiasm for integrating AI into public education, indicating a preference for a more cautious, measured approach while broader debates about its impact on teaching and learning continue.

Importance of Education Issue <i>Showing % "Important"</i>	Overall	Dem	Ind	Rep
Access to mental health and other support services for teachers and other educators	<b>86</b>	92	86	80
Invest in personalized learning focused on individual needs	<b>85</b>	92	85	80
Address the widening learning gap between students from low-income families and students from high-income families	<b>85</b>	91	83	81
Reduce the number of students who are chronically absent	<b>81</b>	78	83	83
Expand access to pre-K and early childhood education	<b>81</b>	86	84	72
Increase public or private school choice options	<b>68</b>	62	67	76
Integrate Artificial Intelligence	<b>52</b>	51	45	62



Q18. Here is a list of different issues related to public education. For each one, please indicate how personally important it is to you that public officials and education leaders address the issue.

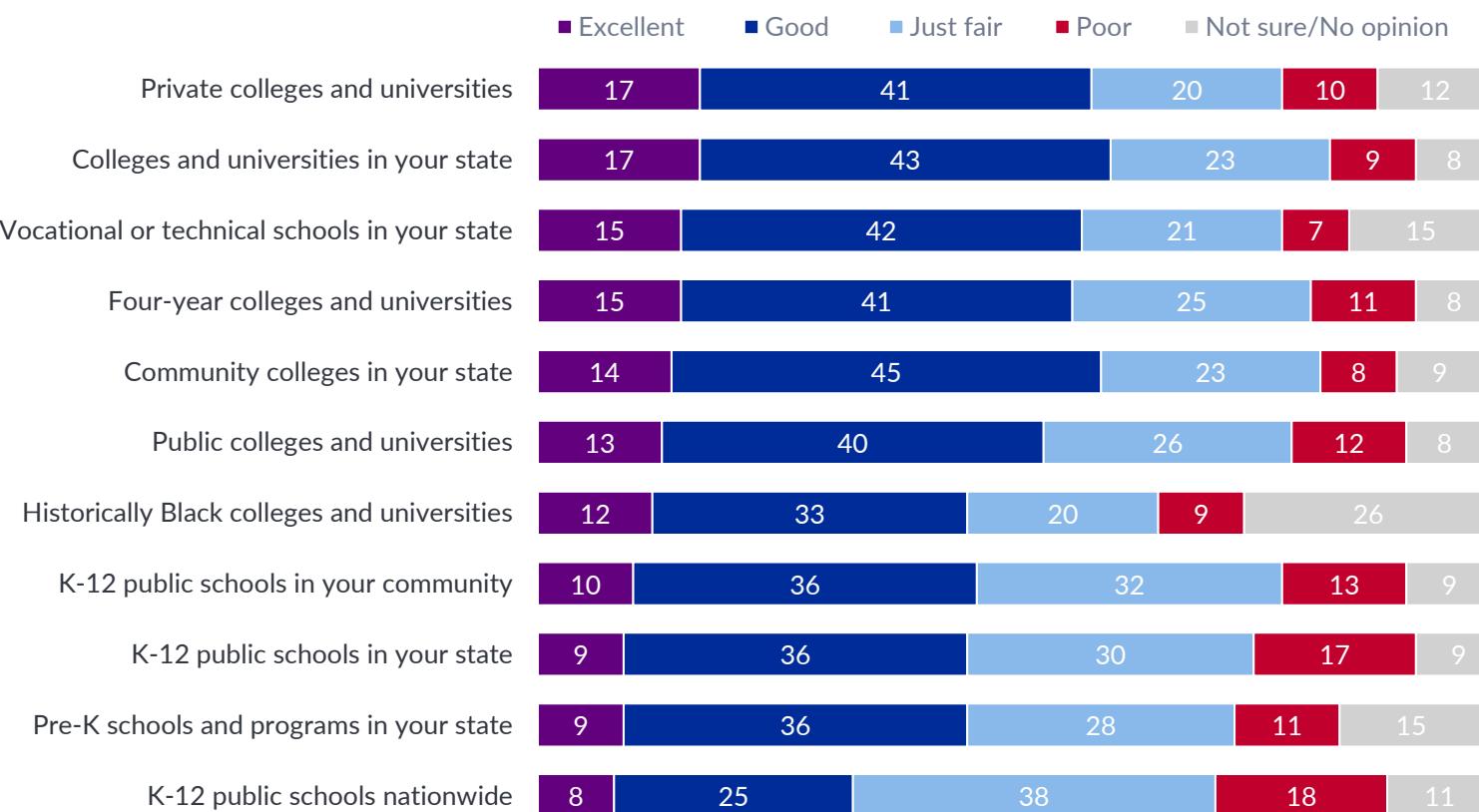
# THE STATE OF EDUCATION



## Across the educational landscape, voters draw a sharp distinction between the performance of K-12 and post-secondary entities.

Although few voters describe any education provider as doing an “excellent” job, perceptions clearly tilt in favor of colleges, universities, and vocational or community colleges. Voters are roughly twice as likely to rate higher education entities as “excellent” compared with K-12 schools, signaling a belief that younger students are being less effectively served than older learners. Importantly, the perceived shortcomings of K-12 education are more acute at the national level. Voters believe their local and state pre-K and K-12 systems outperform the national average, suggesting a disconnect between national narratives about education and the on-the-ground reality families experience.

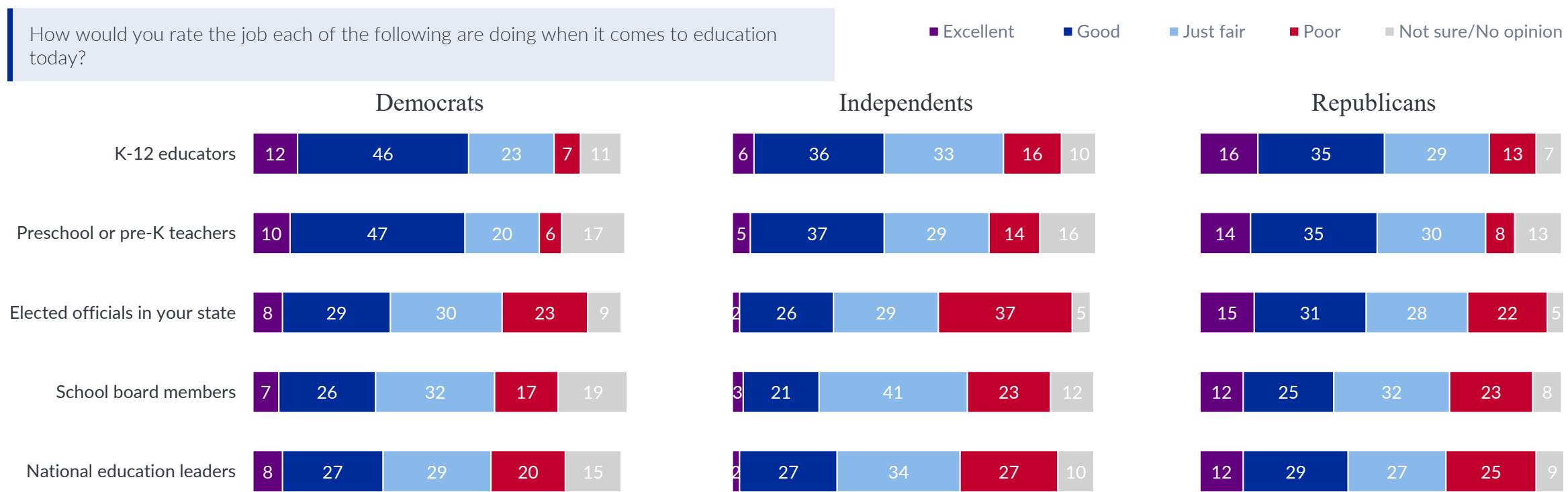
How would you rate the job each of the following are doing when it comes to education today?



## HOW DO VOTERS FEEL ABOUT EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS?

Across party lines, voters express substantially stronger confidence in educators than in elected officials or senior education leaders.

This reinforces a persistent dynamic: voters place greater trust in the practitioners who deliver education every day than in the policymakers who shape the system. More than one in five voters rate elected officials as doing a “poor” job. Negative sentiment is especially pronounced among Independent voters, signaling a critical audience to engage and demonstrate value heading into next year’s midterms.



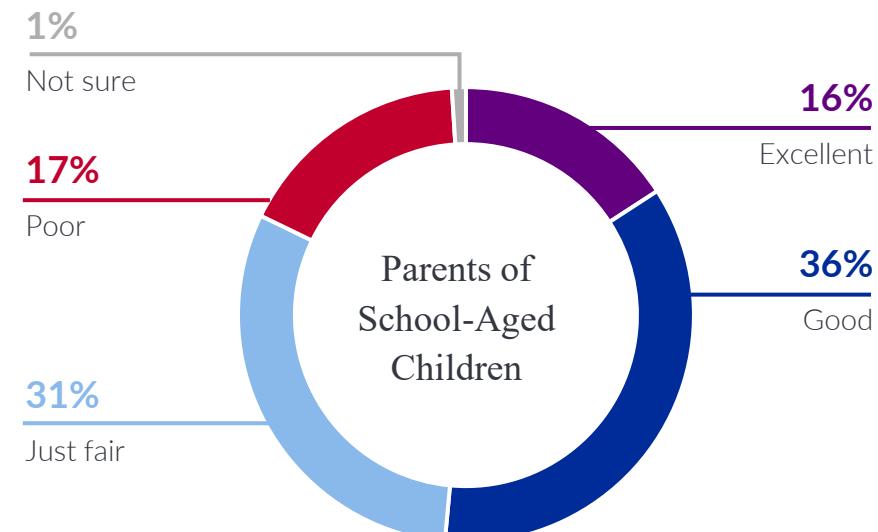
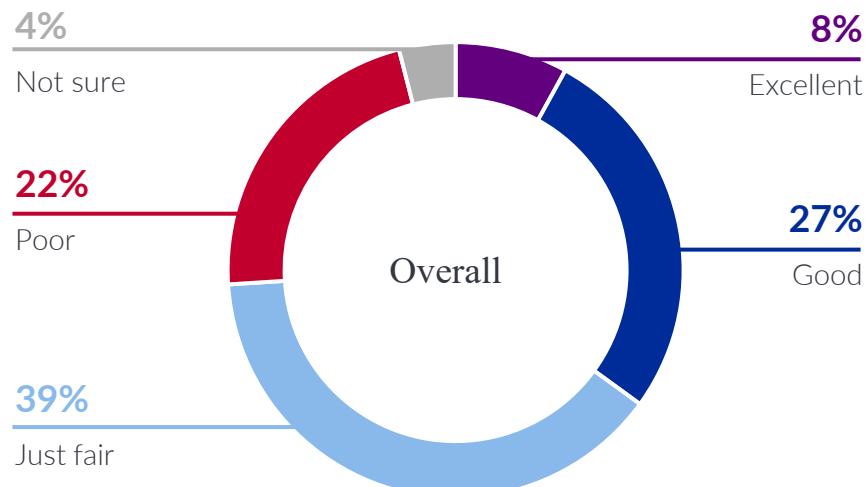
Q14. How would you rate the job each of the following are doing when it comes to education today?

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## Voters broadly believe that public schools are insufficiently equipping students to succeed.

Nearly a quarter rate public schools as doing a “poor” job in preparing for the future. Importantly, however, there’s a significant disconnect between voters in general and parents specifically. Parents of school-aged children rate public schools as doing a considerably better job of preparing their students – demonstrating the dichotomy between perception and reality and the need to communicate value to those who aren’t “direct stakeholders” in the current education system.

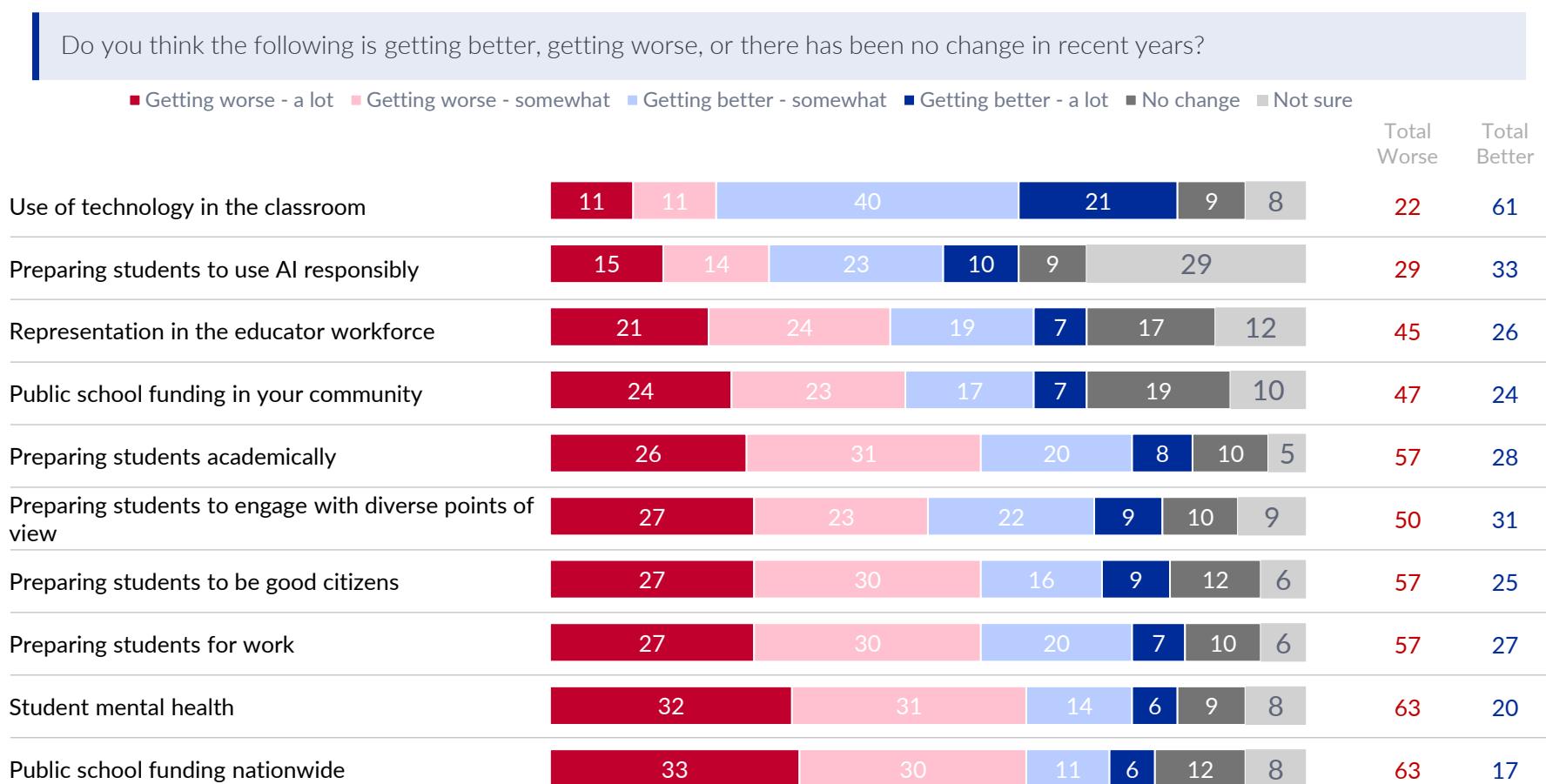
How would you rate the job public schools are doing to prepare our children for the future?



## WHAT IS GETTING BETTER OR WORSE IN THE EDUCATION LANDSCAPE?

Educational entities are credited with bringing tech into classrooms and tech responsibility into curricula – but significant backsliding is seen elsewhere.

A majority of voters believe that national education funding is deteriorating, and alongside it a broad set of downstream challenges including declines in students' mental health, academic performance, and overall readiness for the workforce. Voters also express concern that students are becoming less prepared to engage constructively with diverse perspectives and to participate as "good citizens," suggesting that they see funding shortfalls as undermining not only academic outcomes but the broader civic mission of public education.



Q13. For each of the following items related to education in the United States, please indicate whether you think it is getting better, getting worse, or there has been no change to the item in recent years.

In their own words, voters described alarm with the perception that schools are falling short on several core dimensions of student preparation: providing strong academic foundations, equipping students to engage respectfully with diverse points of view, and fostering the skills and dispositions needed to be responsible, contributing citizens.

**Voters have concerns about academic backsliding**, with schools not evolving or adapting, favoring rigid curricula that disadvantage students who need more tailored learning. Because of this, they believe basic communication skills (reading, writing, oral expression) are at risk.

**I think young people today will have problems, expressing themselves orally, and in writing.** I think that we need to focus on making sure that our young people are writing and reading in standard English.

– MAN, DEMOCRAT, BLACK (TEACHER)

**Support every child – so many kids are falling behind** (something like 70% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders aren't reading at grade level). More early intervention needs to take place to ensure kids can read.

– WOMAN, DEMOCRAT, WHITE (VOTER)

**In an environment of rising polarization and social division, voters increasingly look to schools as a potential counterweight**, capable of teaching the next generation how to engage constructively with differing ideas and ideologies. When schools fall short in this role, the public sees it as a consequential failure, undermining their ability to prepare students for meaningful participation in a diverse and pluralistic society.

**I think kids know how to communicate better with one another when they attend school and interact with kids their own age.** They have opportunities to learn from teachers in person, interact and learn from other students, attend field trips and learn new things, and play sports and join extra curricular clubs.

– WOMAN, DEMOCRAT, WHITE (TEACHER)

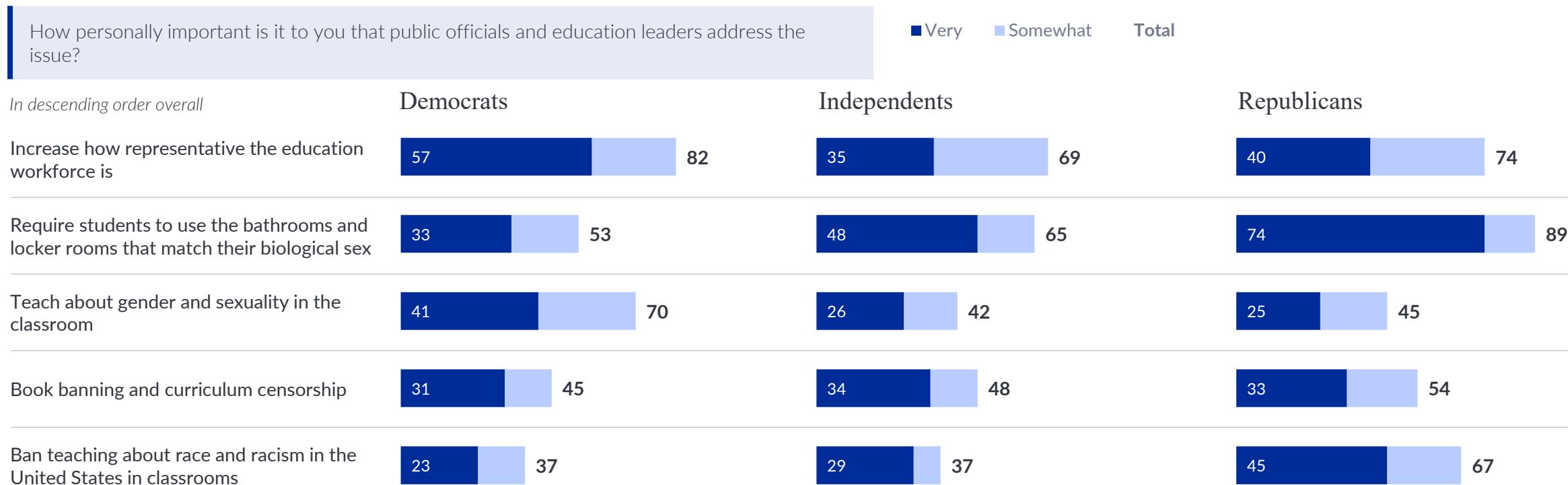
**I think we need to be raising children to be problem solvers and to have the ability to have tough conversations** rather than relying on technology alone to communicate.

– WOMAN, REPUBLICAN, WHITE (TEACHER)

## WHERE DO VOTERS DISAGREE ON EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES?

Voters align on much about the education landscape but tend to diverge on issues tied to key cultural debates.

Topics such as gender identity and curriculum censorship show pronounced partisan splits. One notable area of consensus, however, is the desire for greater representation within the teaching workforce. Because this agreement is so strong and relatively unpolarized, it presents an opportunity to advance goals typically associated with DEI by framing the issue around concepts that are not yet politically charged like “representation,” in lieu of those which are, including “diversity” or “inclusion.”

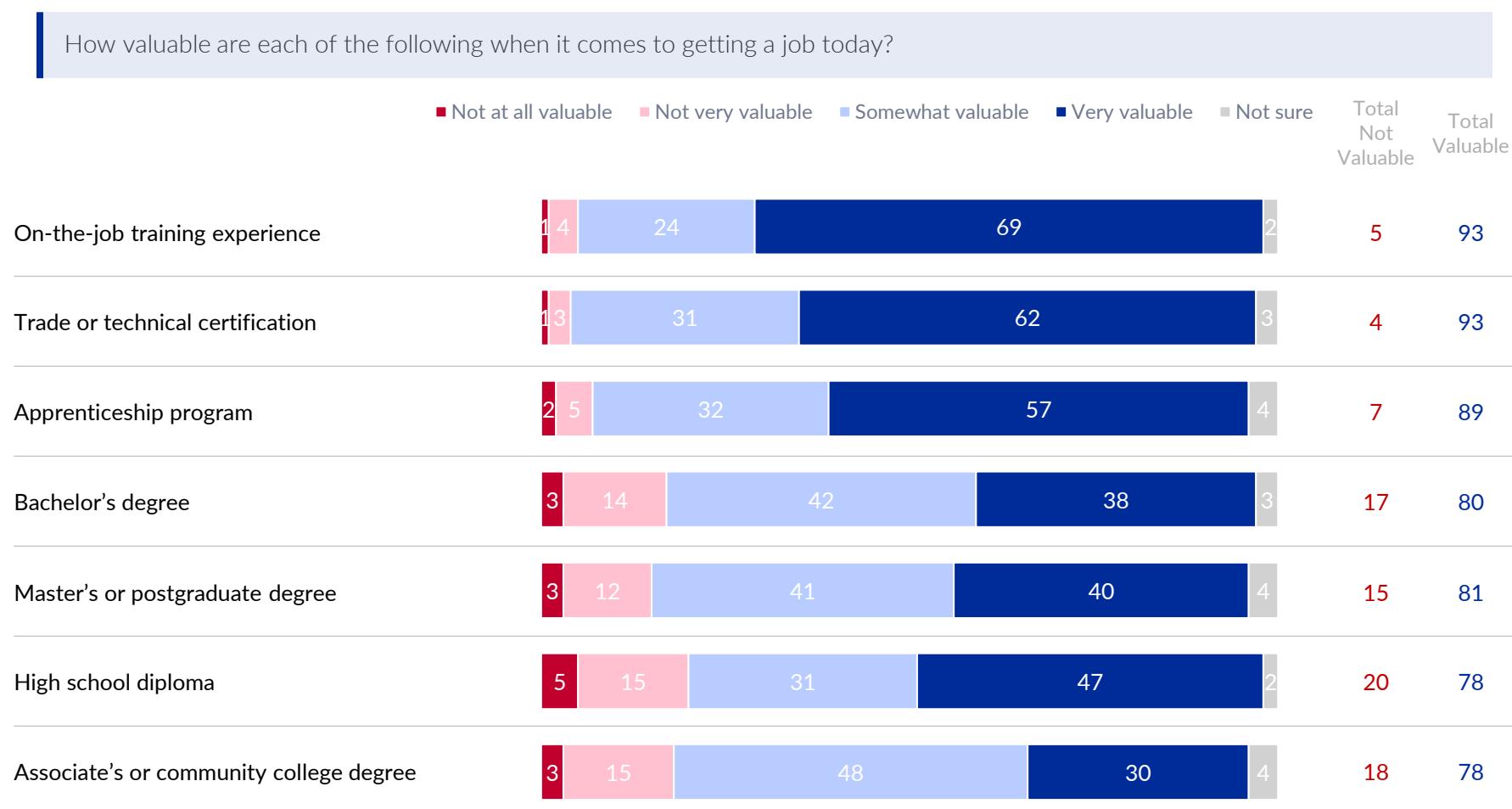


Q18. Here is a list of different issues related to public education. For each one, please indicate how personally important it is to you that public officials and education leaders address the issue.

## HOW DO VOTERS VALUE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT?

Voters view learning as universally valuable, yet when it comes to career prospects, greater weight is placed on applied learning than classroom learning.

Apprenticeships, technical certifications, and on-the-job training are broadly perceived as the most advantageous pathways to career advancement, outpacing both four-year degrees and even high school diplomas in perceived value. Still, despite ongoing public debate about the “value of a college degree,” confidence in higher education remains resilient: 8-in-10 continue to believe that a college or community college degree provides meaningful value, though the intensity with which they hold these views wanes.



Q17. How valuable are each of the following when it comes to getting a job today?

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# SUPPORTING STUDENTS



## WHAT DO VOTERS AGREE ON WHEN IT COMES TO STUDENTS?

Voters articulate a clear set of priorities for improving the education system, centered on accuracy, relevance, equality, and individualized support.

Nearly 9-in-10 voters believe that schools must provide comprehensive instruction in history and current events and agree curricula must equip students with academic and practical life skills. More than 8-in-10 agree there's a need for learning that meets students where they are, acknowledging that children learn at different paces and have diverse needs. Underpinning these views is a recognition of systemic shortcomings, particularly inequities in access and opportunity, which voters see as barriers to ensuring that all students receive quality education.

Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about education today?

Strongly agree

Not so strongly agree

Net agree

We need to make sure students learn the things they need to know to be successful both in school and life.



Schools should teach history and current events accurately so that our students don't have an incomplete understanding compared to other students around the world.



Our schools, educators, and the entire education system should meet students where they are because each child learns differently and has different needs.



The U.S. education system has many shortcomings, including unfairness in access and opportunities that many students experience.



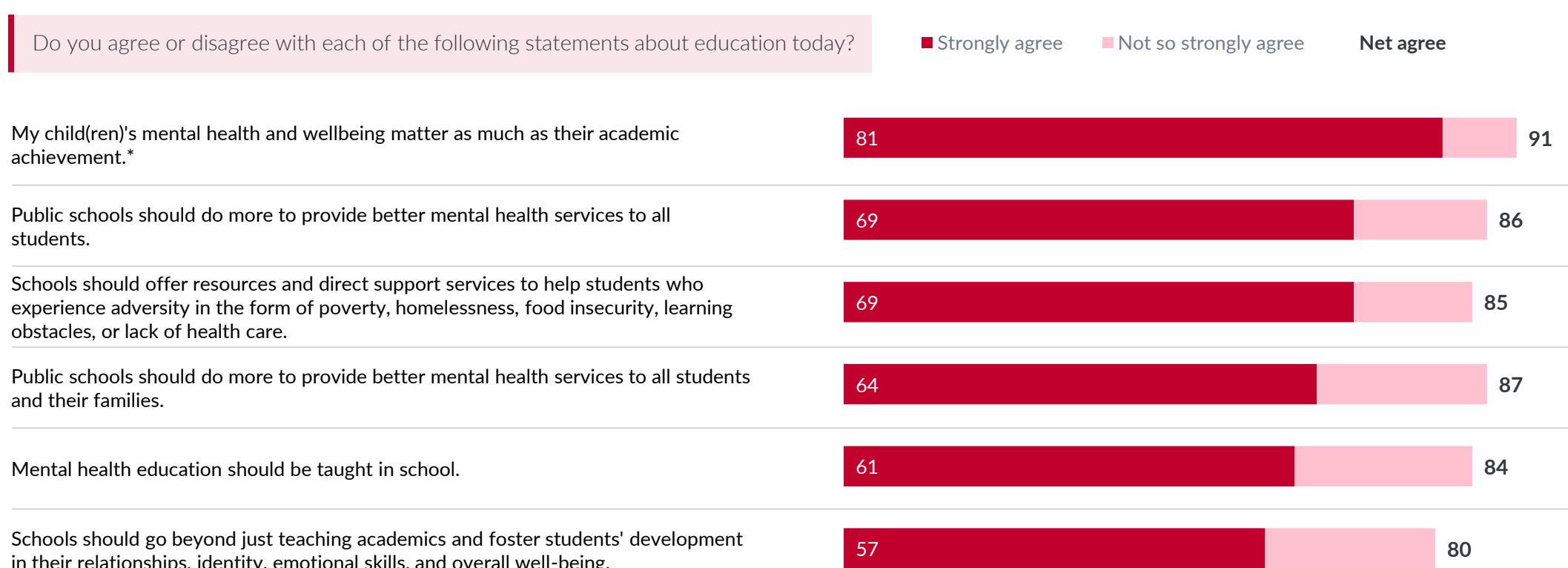
Q20. Here are some statements about education today. For each, please indicate whether you agree or disagree.

Across the Aisle | 2026 Survey Results | 21

## WHAT DO VOTERS AGREE ON WHEN IT COMES TO STUDENTS?

### Providing robust supports to students is seen as essential, not optional.

Voters, and especially parents, express a strong desire for schools to invest more substantially in mental health services; nine in ten parents believe their child's mental health is as important as academic achievement. There is similarly broad agreement that schools should offer additional resources for students facing adversity or structural barriers. In this way, voters view schools as institutions responsible not only for academic instruction but also for delivering a broader network of social, emotional, and developmental supports that enables students to thrive.



\*Only asked of parents with school-aged children

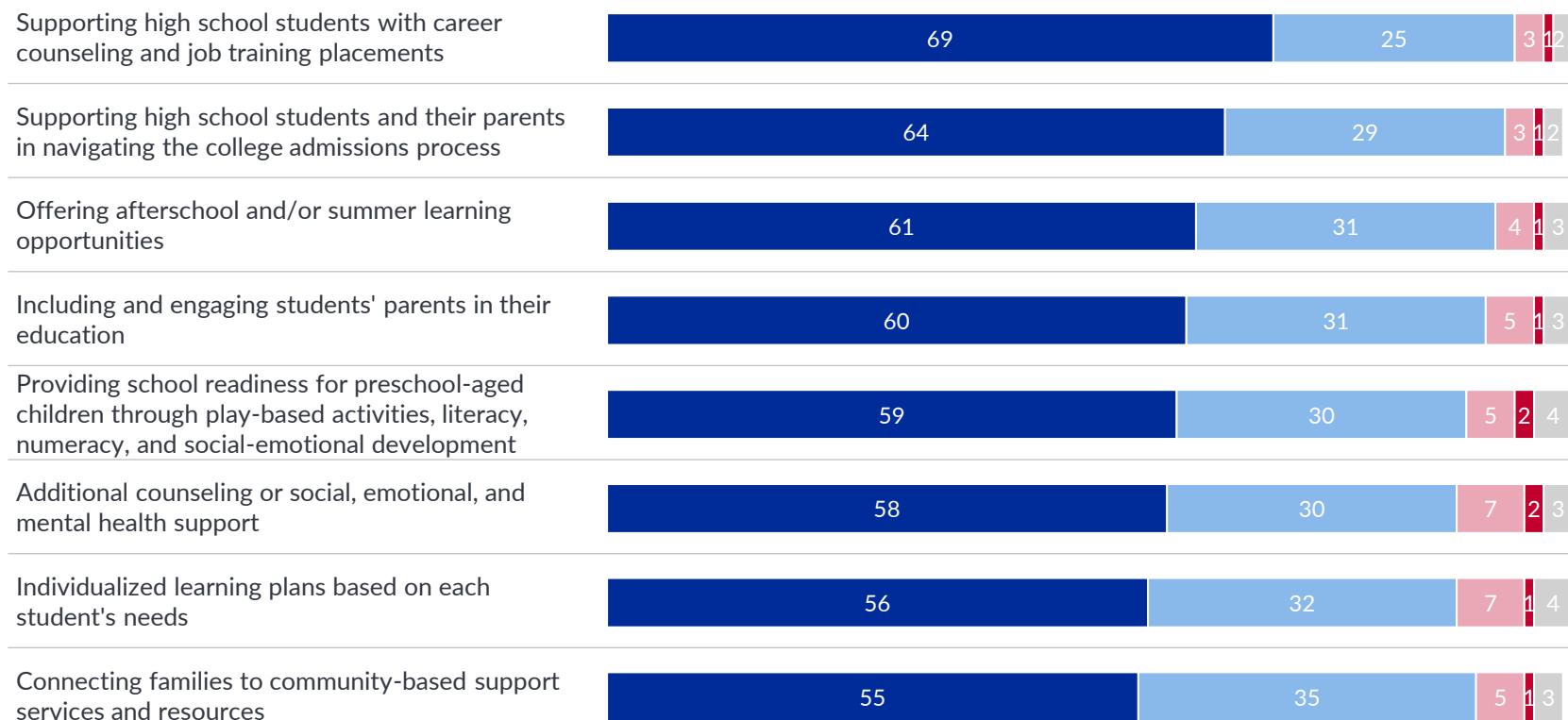
Q19. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. Select one for each option.

## When considering how best to support students' futures, voters emphasize that meaningful assistance extends beyond the traditional K-12 mandate.

More than 3-in-5 believe the most helpful resources to a student's future are supports that help students and families navigate life beyond the classroom, such as career counseling, job training placements, summer learning opportunities, and guidance through the college admissions process. At the same time, voters place equal importance on early supports, including school readiness initiatives for preschool-aged children. Together, these views reflect a broad expectation that the public education system should provide a continuum of supports that prepare students not only for academic success, but for long-term economic and social mobility.

How helpful do you think the following are to supporting a student's future?

■ Very helpful ■ Somewhat helpful ■ Not that helpful ■ Not helpful at all ■ Not sure



Q29. How helpful do you think the following are to supporting a student's future? Select one for each option.

## HOW TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE WORKPLACE AND SOCIETY AT LARGE?

### Voters emphasize the importance of “soft skills” in preparing students for both the workforce and society at large.

Problem-solving and critical thinking are viewed as the most essential competencies, forming the foundation for success in an increasingly complex labor market. As voters noted directly in qualitative interviews, equipping the next generation for a technology- and AI-driven future requires a renewed focus on strengthening students' aptitude in these areas, alongside other core soft skills such as empathy and adaptability.

These capabilities are seen as critical not only for navigating rapidly evolving technologies, but also for helping young people make sense of a polarized and divided societal landscape.

**I believe in critical thinking and ability to problem solve.** We are reliant on technology to provide answers constantly and we're losing the ability to understand tasks and procedures or the how and why of the world around us. **Students will thrive in discussion within peers and guiding these conversations is a critical component of effective communication.**

- WOMAN, REPUBLICAN, WHITE (TEACHER)

Which skills are most important for students to learn in school to achieve workplace readiness?



Q25. From the list below, which skills do you think are MOST important for students to learn in school in order to achieve workplace readiness?

# SUPPORTING TEACHERS



## Educators are facing challenges with pressure, bureaucracy, and burnout.

Interviewed educators said their workloads have become unmanageable. They described a profession consumed by administrative red tape, compliance tasks, and unrealistic expectations, often completed off-hours, eroding work-life balance and mental health. Many feel unsupported by administrators and criticized by parents while being asked to fill multiple roles beyond teaching.

A growing share of teachers described worsening classroom behavior as a primary stressor, characterized by disrespect, lack of accountability, and diminished parental partnership.

Teachers remain profoundly committed to their students, but many feel they are working in systems that erode that commitment over time. The profession is sustained by purpose and connection but strained by bureaucracy, burnout, and a sense of declining respect. Without visible support and relief, schools risk losing even their most passionate educators.

**I feel awful being a teacher right now... I can no longer maintain good physical and mental health as a teacher. The numerous additional paperwork and meetings make it impossible to ever complete all the tasks.**

— WOMAN, INDEPENDENT, WHITE, (TEACHER)

**It's a mix of exhaustion, purpose, frustration, and resilience.** Teachers are carrying more than ever – academic gaps, mental health challenges, pressure to meet standards, adapting to tech, and often, a lack of support.

— MAN, INDEPENDENT, BLACK/NATIVE AMERICAN, (TEACHER)

**The most challenging part is dealing with administrative red tape.** I spend so much time doing things that don't help students because the state or local government demands it.

— MAN, DEMOCRAT, WHITE, (TEACHER)

**It is stressful to be a teacher now because the kids aren't like they used to be ten years ago.** Parents make excuses for behaviors and teachers are blamed more and more.

— WOMAN, DEMOCRAT, WHITE, (TEACHER)

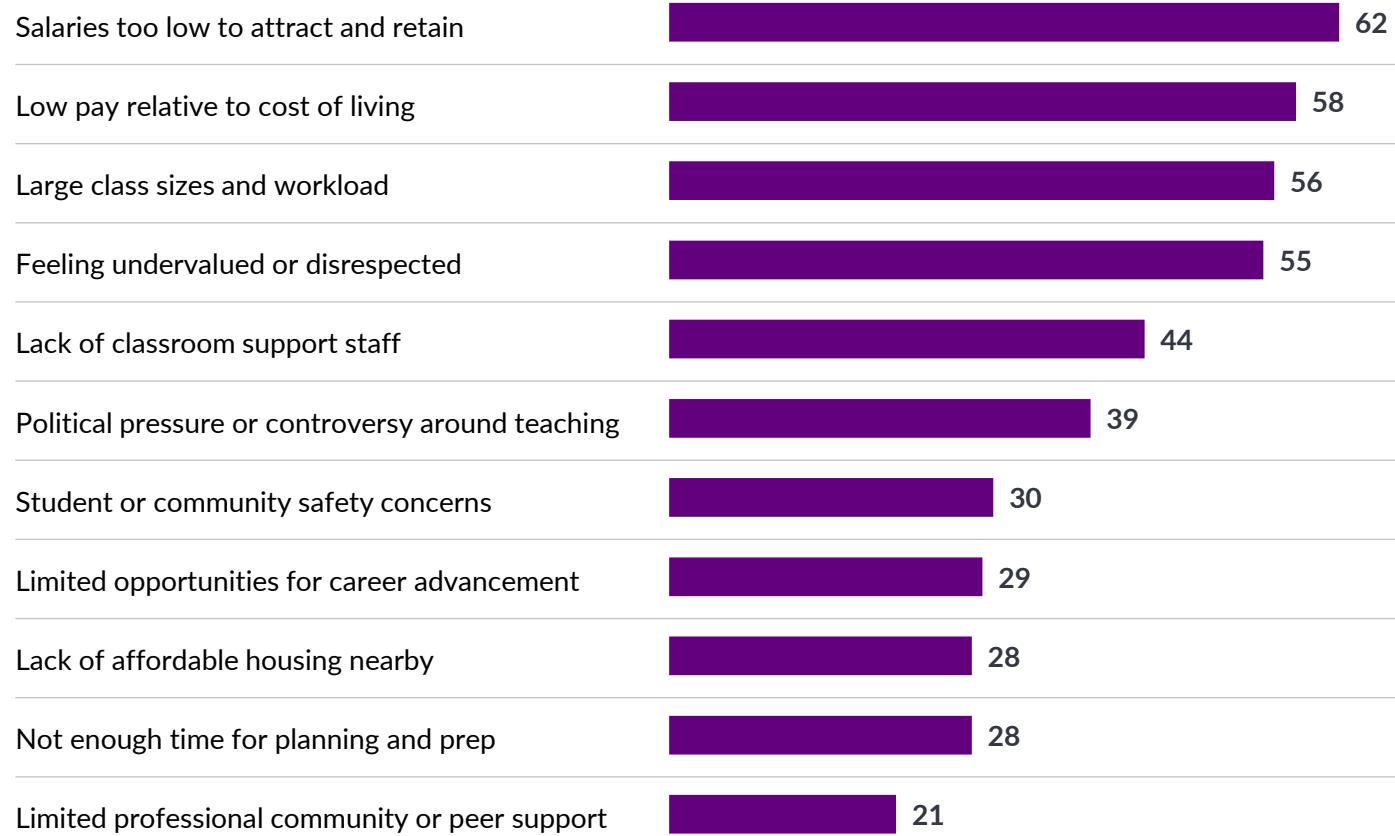
## Voters are increasingly concerned about the sustainability of the teaching profession.

A majority see both material and emotional pressures undermining educators' ability to continue teaching in their communities.

About 3-in-5 identify financial strain, especially low pay relative to local cost of living, as the leading driver of attrition.

Voters also highlight workplace stressors, including large class sizes and a sense that educators are undervalued, as meaningful contributors to turnover. Political pressure is seen by 2-in-5 as a reason driving educators away from the profession.

Which of the following make it difficult for teachers in your community to stay working in local schools?



Supports to alleviate administrative duties and rebuild trust between educators, parents, and policymakers will be essential to keeping great teachers in the classroom, including:

- **Fewer, better-integrated systems.** Many described a sense of exhaustion from seemingly redundant digital tools, constant paperwork, and forced trainings that crowd out lesson planning and creativity.
- **Better mental health supports for students and educators alike.** Teachers are increasingly expected to fill emotional and behavioral support roles without the proper training or resources.
- **Targeted professional development that is practical, relevant, and scheduled within protected time.** Areas of interest include classroom management, differentiation, and curriculum design for diverse learners.

**I feel so inundated with forced career development requirements that sometimes it seems like the actual job of teaching takes a backseat.**

— MAN, INDEPENDENT, WHITE, (TEACHER)

**More planning time, reasonable class sizes, and protected time for professional development that doesn't add to an already overburdened schedule.**

— MAN, INDEPENDENT, BLACK/NATIVE AMERICAN, (TEACHER)

**Access to counselors, social workers, and psychologists for students, so teachers aren't bearing the weight alone.**

— MAN, INDEPENDENT, BLACK/NATIVE AMERICAN, (TEACHER)

## WHAT DO VOTERS AGREE ON WHEN IT COMES TO TEACHERS?

### Voters believe that public schools must be resourced and representative.

Nearly 9-in-10 believe teachers require adequate classroom resources, such as personalized learning tools, and up-to-date technology, to meet student needs effectively. Three-in-four also say the public-school workforce should reflect the demographics of the student body and local community. Notably, a focus on representation appears to avoid backlash commonly sparked by DEI or “diversity” mentions. Elsewhere, partisan divisions emerge around identity-related issues. While most voters agree that honoring student-chosen pronouns helps create welcoming school environments, a substantial portion of Republicans (though not all) express discomfort or opposition.

Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

■ Strongly disagree ■ Not so strongly disagree ■ Not so strongly agree ■ Strongly agree ■ Not sure

Our public-school teachers need resources in the classroom that allow for personalized learning, up-to-date textbooks, and technology.



The teacher workforce of public schools should be representative of the student body and the local communities.



When teachers use the names and pronouns that transgender students want to be called, it makes those students feel safe and welcome at school.



**43% of Republicans** disagree, compared to **11% of Democrats**



Q20. Here are some statements about education today. For each, please indicate whether you agree or disagree.

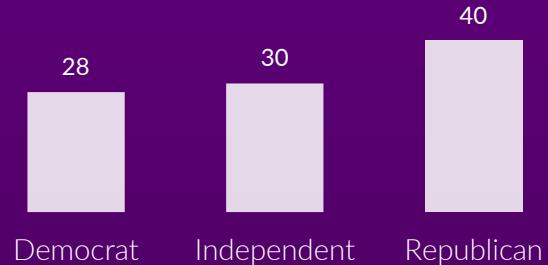
# MAPPING THE PARENTAL ROLE IN EDUCATION TODAY



# IN PROFILE: AMONG PARENTS SURVEYED



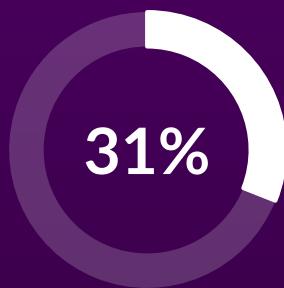
**Two-thirds of voting parents send their children to traditional public schools.** Otherwise, 12% send children to public charter schools and 13% send children to private schools.



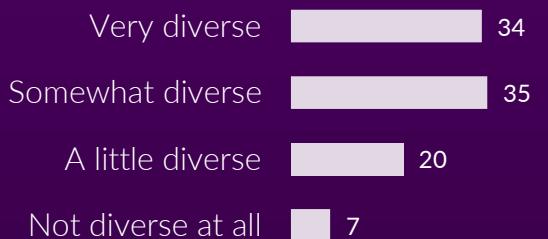
Voting parents **lean slightly Republican.**



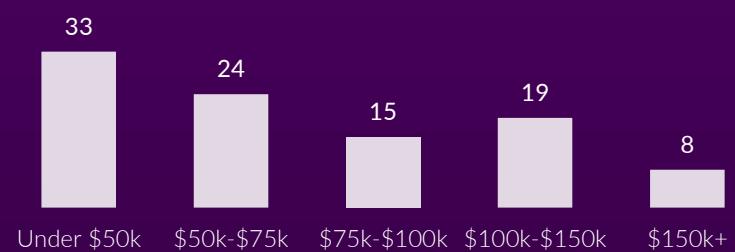
**1-in-3 voting parents have children with a disability** such as a physical, mental health, sensory, learning, cognitive, social/emotional, or other disability that impacts daily living.



1-in-3 voting parents have children who are on an **Individualized Education Plan.**



Nearly 7-in-10 voting parents say they live in a **diverse school district.**



1-in-3 voting parents have a **household income of less than \$50,000/yearly.**

## WHAT DO PARENTS AGREE ON WHEN IT COMES TO EDUCATION?

There's a tension in voting parents' minds between how public schools are serving students – their children.

On the one hand, around 7-in-10 agree that "public schools provide a good education for every student" and nearly that same ratio believe their children are provided "rigorous learning opportunities." At the same time, more than 8-in-10 voters still raise concerns that children are falling behind academically. The seeming contradiction between these two sentiments is a testament to the malleability of voting parents' perceptions over the current educational landscape; the responsibility to assuage concerns and the opportunity to raise the stakes.

Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about education today? Asked among Parents of School-Aged Children

■ Strongly disagree ■ Not so strongly disagree ■ Not so strongly agree ■ Strongly agree ■ Not sure

I am afraid children have fallen behind academically in recent years.



Our public schools provide a good education for every student.



My child(ren) are being exposed to standards-aligned, rigorous learning opportunities.



Q19. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. Select one for each option.

Q20. Here are some statements about education today. For each, please indicate whether you agree or disagree.

## HOW DO VOTERS THINK ABOUT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, GENERALLY?

Voters more generally also see a clear role for parents in the classroom.

At least 7-in-10 agree (with notable intensity) that parents should be included in what their children are taught and treated as educational “partners.”

Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about education today?

■ Strongly disagree ■ Not so strongly disagree ■ Not so strongly agree ■ Strongly agree ■ Not sure

Parents are included in their child's education and what they are taught.



Parents are treated as partners in educating their children.



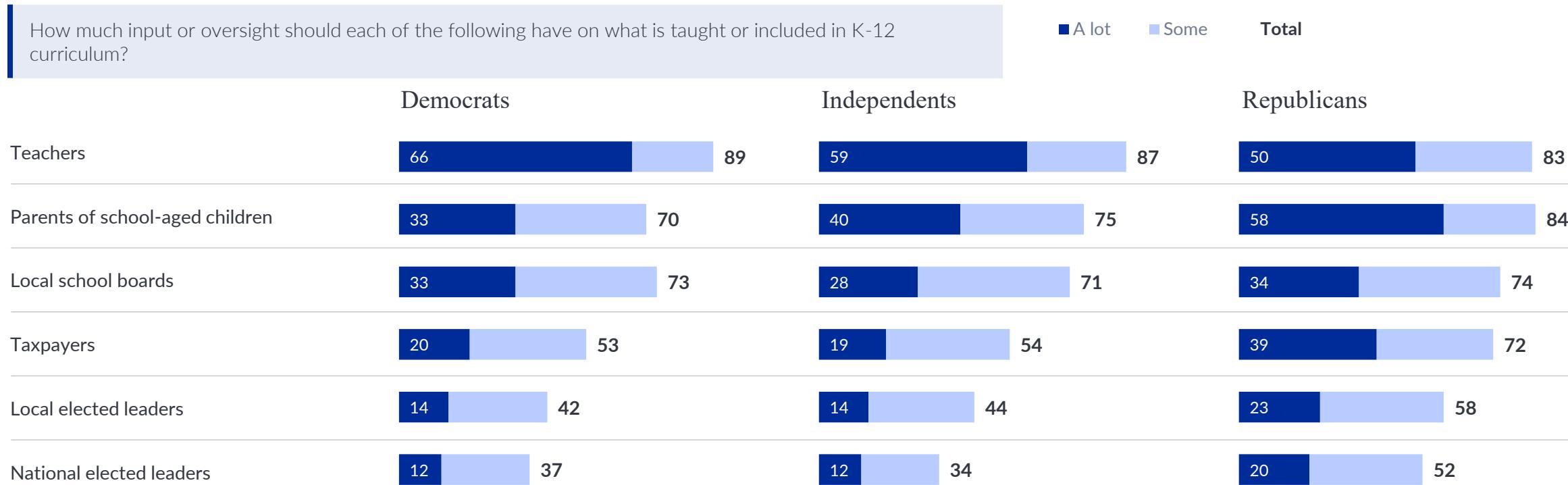
Q20. Here are some statements about education today. For each, please indicate whether you agree or disagree.

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## HOW DO VOTERS THINK ABOUT CURRICULA INVOLVEMENT, SPECIFICALLY?

### Polarized lines cut across public school curricula oversight.

In broad strokes, voters across the aisle agree on the prime role of teachers in formulating K-12 curricula (albeit to varying degrees of intensity). Disagreements arise around parental and electoral influence. An overwhelming majority of Republicans believe parents should have “a lot” of say in what is taught, compared with only about 1-in-3 Democrats, with Independents splitting the difference. Republicans also favor a more active role for themselves (as taxpayers) and for elected officials at both the national and local levels, likely reflecting current political power dynamics. Though voters across the aisle find common ground across educational priorities and values in many places, curriculum oversight stands out as an ideologically charged and divisive issue.



Q16. How much oversight or input, if any, should each of the following have on what is taught or included in K-12 curriculum?

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# MAPPING SUCCESSFUL EDUCATION MESSAGING



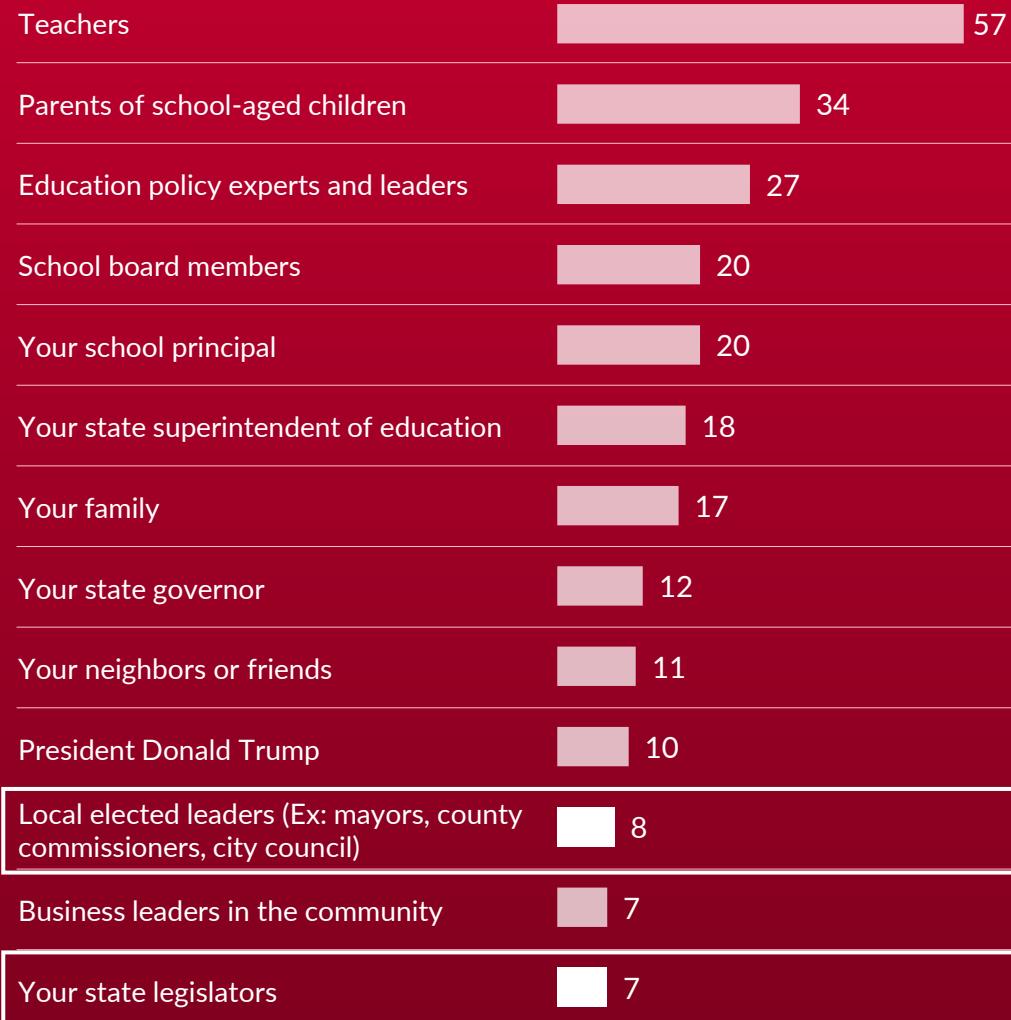
## WHO ARE TRUSTED EDUCATION MESSENGERS?

Teachers are far-and-away the most trusted voice for public school transformation, followed by parents, while local elected leaders and state legislators register considerably lower confidence levels.

**Teachers are trained and have a college degree**, where they learned how to teach children and strategies to adapt to different styles of learning. **I think parents should trust that teachers are doing what they need to**, and only step in if they see or hear something that is not being addressed. If a student reports of being bullied and the teachers and administrators aren't doing anything, that is a type of scenario where parents could and should step in.

- WOMAN, REPUBLICAN, WHITE (TEACHER)

### Public Figure Trust in Education



Q31. Here are some public figures and organizations that you might hear from about efforts to transform public schools in the U.S. Choose the two or three entities you trust the most as a source of information on this topic.

## MESSAGES TESTED: Shown in Order of Performance

### Invest in Schools

Investing in our children is not a political choice, it is a moral choice, it is the right choice, and it is a smart choice. We must equip every school with the resources necessary to deliver quality education that prepares every child for the future, no matter who they are, what they look like, or where they come from.

### Early Childhood Education

Every child deserves a strong start and early childhood education is where that story begins. In classrooms filled with curiosity and care, young children learn how to learn. Pre-school and pre-K don't just nurture young minds; they uplift families, strengthen local economies, let parents work, and give everyone the chance to succeed. Investing in early childhood education creates opportunity, stability, and a stronger future for us all.

### Mental Health + Resources

Every child deserves the chance to learn, grow, and dream - but that starts with meeting basic needs. Real learning can't happen when students are hungry or struggling with anxiety. Schools must support children by providing healthy meals, counselors, and educators trained to recognize mental health needs - because caring for students' minds and bodies builds stronger communities and brighter futures.

### Values – Hard Work, Fairness, Freedom

Education is built on shared values: hard work, freedom of thought, and fairness. Every student deserves the chance to succeed; every teacher should have the respect to set high expectations, and every classroom should have the freedom to explore ideas openly. When we nurture responsibility and curiosity together, we prepare the next generation to think critically and lead with purpose.

### Great Equalizer

Quality public education is a great equalizer. No matter what we look like, where we live, or what's in our wallets, most of us want our public schools to inspire imagination, cultivate critical thinking, and ensure our children can live fulfilling lives. That's why it is so important to support our public schools and our public-school teachers and invest in hiring more educators and the technology resources they need to support learning and make sure every child can thrive.

### Education x Election

Education isn't just another issue: it's the thread that ties our economy, our communities, and our democracy together. When we fail to invest in education, we see the consequences everywhere: higher unemployment, rising homelessness, deepening polarization, and declining trust. Strong schools mean stronger communities - healthier, safer, and more united. In this moment of chaos and division, investing in education is how we restore stability, opportunity, and hope.

### Higher Education

There's no single road to success. Whether it's a college degree, community college, or a skilled trade, every path to learning builds opportunity - for individuals, families, and communities. We must invest in all forms of education and training, to empower students to find their purpose, strengthen our workforce, and grow an economy and labor force that works for everyone.

### Respect + Invest in Teachers

Teachers are heroes in every community. Yet today, they're stretched thin by endless bureaucracy, overcrowded classrooms, and political attacks. Low morale, heavy workloads, and uncompetitive pay are driving teacher turnover and contributing to student learning loss. It's time we give educators the respect and resources they deserve, so they can focus on what matters most: helping every student learn, grow, and thrive.

### Representation

Our schools should reflect who we are as a nation – our shared history and the many perspectives that shape us. Learning from different points of view builds empathy, honesty, and unity. When classrooms mirror the world around them, students thrive, achieve more, and learn to lead with respect. Now more than ever, classrooms must be places where the next generation learns from one another and embraces the richness of different experiences and ideas.

### Workforce

We are failing to provide too many children with a quality public education. As a result, America is producing a workforce that isn't keeping up. Because the health of our communities and the competitiveness of our nation's workforce depend on a quality education, we need to invest in our schools and ensure today's students can compete in the global economy of tomorrow.

### Diversity in Education – Teachers

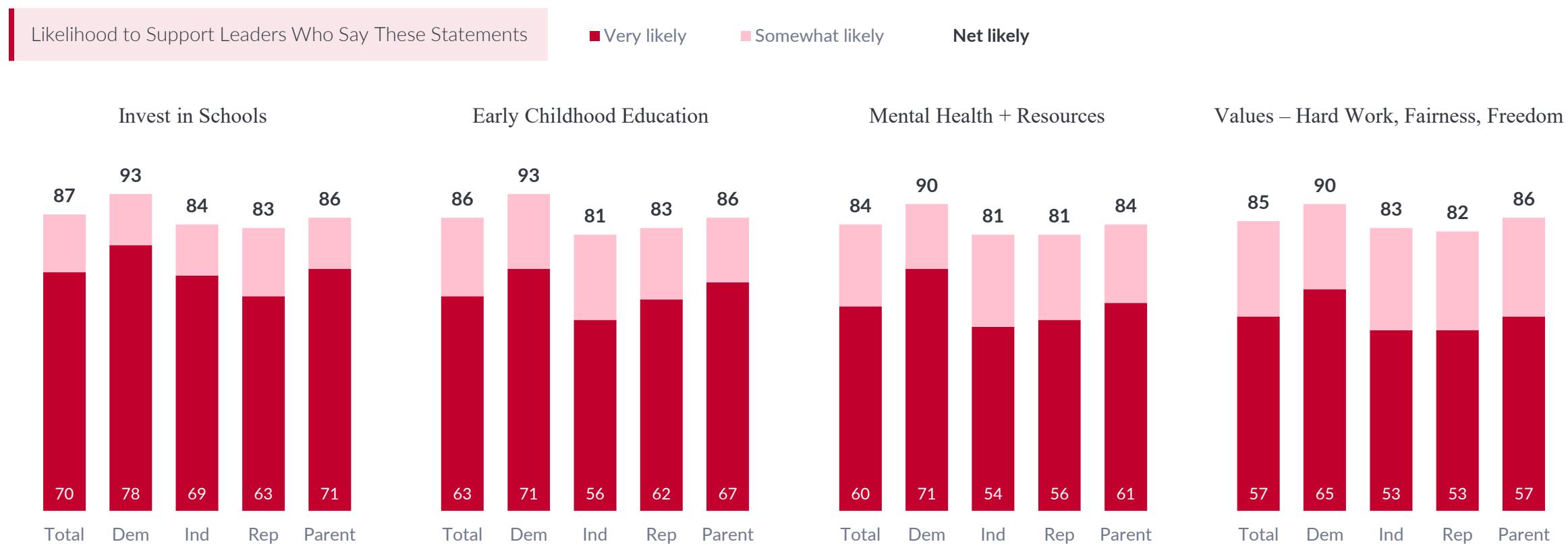
Every child, regardless of race, ability, or zip code, needs a neighborhood school with well-prepared teachers that reflect the student body they are teaching. When students are taught by teachers of a similar background to them, they are less likely to be suspended, more likely to graduate high school and more likely to enroll in education after high school. Districts should address the disparity and prioritize representation in the teacher-hiring process.



## OVERALL TOP PERFORMING MESSAGES

The strongest performing messages (with over 8-in-10 voters across party lines likely to support someone who said it) rise above partisan conflict and are anchored in broadly shared values.

These messages emphasize the need for greater resources and sustained investment, framing educational advancement as a way to strengthen the social contract for students, families, and communities writ large.

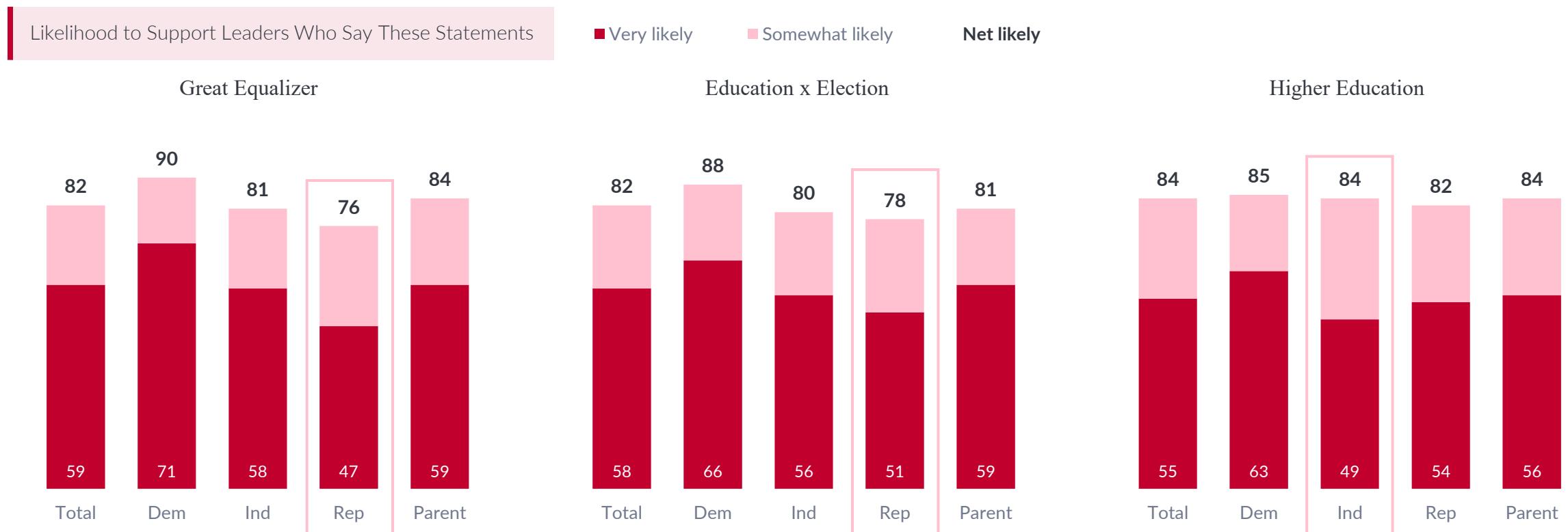


Q30. For each one, please indicate how likely you would be to support someone who made that statement.

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## Messages centered on investment remain broadly effective, but certain framings trigger ideological resistance.

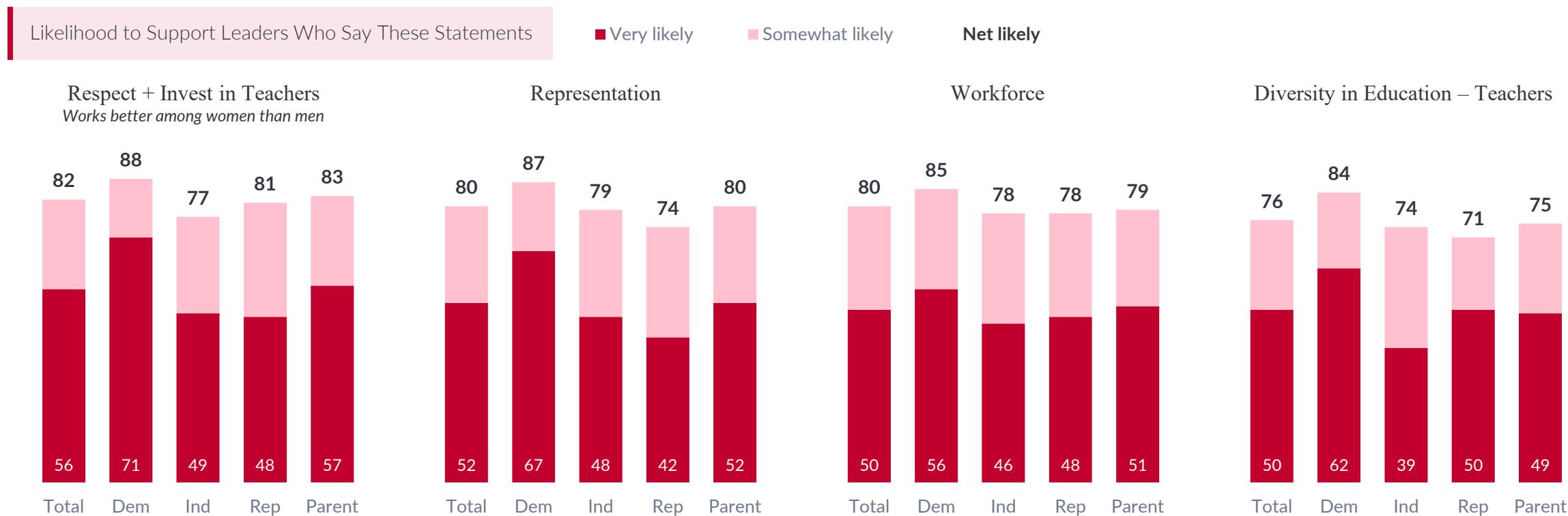
Messages that explicitly speak to “equalizing” or discuss the role of education in democracy as an electoral issue evoke less enthusiasm among Republicans, suggesting some sensitivity to rhetoric perceived as partisan or tied to electoral politics. Similarly, messages focused on multiple educational pathways into the workforce, while generally popular, fail to generate strong intensity among Independents, indicating that practicality alone is not enough to motivate this group. Overall, the data points to the importance of value-based, non-ideological framing when making the case for investment in education.



## STRONG MESSAGES WITH KEY GROUPS

While not *not* strong, there is generally the least intensity in message resonance on messages that focus primarily on teachers – not students or their wider communities – or when the messaging is driven by a diversity or representation argument.

This suggests that voters across the aisle (namely Independents and Republicans) respond more strongly to messages that foreground student outcomes and community impact, rather than those framed around workforce or identity considerations alone.



Q30. For each one, please indicate how likely you would be to support someone who made that statement.

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# EDUCATION ELECTORAL PRIORITIES



## Voters Want Leaders to Elevate Education

67%

OF VOTERS

BELIEVE THAT ELECTED OFFICIALS  
TALK ABOUT EDUCATION  
TOO LITTLE



# What Do Voters Want From Education Leaders and Elected Officials?

Voters prioritize practical skills and workforce readiness in public education.

Top policy proposals emphasize equipping students with essential life skills (communication, finance literacy, personal responsibility), increasing job skills/workforce training opportunities, and teaching critical workplace skills – all underscoring a pragmatic approach to preparing students for adult life and economic participation.

More robust resources for teachers is also highly valued, with 3-in-4 voters prioritizing adequate development, resources, and support for educators. Policies concerning literacy programs, teacher salaries, recruitment, extracurriculars, early childhood education, and school attendance are also highly prioritized.

## Policy Priorities To Improve Public Schools

*Showing % "Favor - Strongly" Policy Proposal*

Overall

Teach students skills like communication, decision-making, finance literacy, or personal responsibility.

**78**

Increase job skills and workforce training opportunities in high school, like apprenticeships and internship opportunities.

**76**

Ensure every teacher has the development, resources, and support they need to do an outstanding job.

**75**

Teach critical skills for the workplace in schools, such as problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and professional etiquette.

**72**

Implement evidence-based literacy programs in classrooms to improve student reading levels.

**69**

Increase teacher salaries to be more competitive with industries that require similar levels of education and skillsets.

**66**

Make sure that all schools offer students extracurricular opportunities like sports, art, and music so that kids can get involved and follow their interests.

**64**

Invest in strategies and programs to hire more teachers in hard-to-staff subject areas and regions, like rural areas.

**64**

Invest in early childhood education, including preschool or pre-K.

**64**

Create a culture of school attendance by taking a positive approach centered on belonging and engagement that helps everyone understand why daily attendance matters in pre-K-12th grade education.

**61**

Invest in early childhood family support, including affordable childcare resources.

**61**



Q23. Now you will see a list of different proposals people say could improve public schools if our public officials and education leaders prioritized them. For each, indicate whether you would favor or oppose the proposal.

## What Do Voters Want From Education Leaders and Elected Officials?

The next tier of voter priorities in public education focuses on creating a positive public school culture that encourages strong attendance. This encompasses personalized learning, work-based learning opportunities, and a supportive environment with enough school safety officers and mental health professionals.

The objective of these policies is to establish a safe, welcoming, and supportive setting, ensuring students have the necessary resources and curriculum for informed career decisions and post-graduation planning.

A lower-ranked priority – with reticence driven by Republican voters' opposition – involves preventing schools from “indoctrinating” students on topics of race, sexuality, and transgenderism. While it has a lower ranking relative to the others in this middle tier, one-in-two voters strongly supports this measure.

### Policy Priorities To Improve Public Schools

*Showing % "Favor - Strongly" Policy Proposal*

**Overall**

Create a culture of school attendance by taking a positive approach centered on belonging and engagement. **59**

Provide incentives to employers, such as financial support, so that they can offer paid internships and other work-based learning opportunities to students. **58**

Invest in personalized learning focused on each student's individual needs. **58**

Train school safety officers to interact in a school environment, including anti-bias training, disability awareness, and cultural awareness training. **57**

Hire additional school counselors, social workers, and licensed mental health professionals in every school. **56**

Ban cell phones in schools to improve student focus, academic performance, and mental health by reducing distractions from social media and texts. **56**

Hire additional school counselors to assist students in career exploration and preparation. **55**

Hire additional school counselors to assist students in college and career exploration and preparation. **53**

Provide mentorship, professional development opportunities, and leadership pathways so that teachers can move into principal and other school leadership positions. **53**

Provide students, as early as elementary school, with opportunities to explore different career and job options, such as job shadowing, employer site visits, roleplaying jobs, etc. **53**

Implement curricula that takes into account students' educational, cultural, and social background and experience, and engages students across a wide array of subject areas. **52**

Prevent schools from indoctrinating students with ideas about race, sexuality, and transgenderism. **51**



Q23. Now you will see a list of different proposals people say could improve public schools if our public officials and education leaders prioritized them. For each, indicate whether you would favor or oppose the proposal.

## What Do Voters Want From Education Leaders and Elected Officials?

Relative to other policy proposals, there is the lowest support for policies concerning the integration of Artificial Intelligence into schools, proposals for increased taxes to boost public education funding, and investments in programs aimed at increasing the racial and cultural representation within the teacher workforce. Ensuring parental involvement in curriculum planning also falls into this lowest tier, on account of lower support for the concept among Democratic voters.

The policies that perform best suggest a voter focus on the tangible, direct student experience. Concerns such as equipping students with skills for workforce readiness and providing comprehensive mental health support appear to take precedence over technological advancements in the classroom or initiatives emphasizing teacher diversity.

### Policy Priorities To Improve Public Schools

*Showing % "Favor - Strongly" Policy Proposal*

Overall

Ensure parents are involved in setting the curriculum around what their children are taught.	49
Invest in strategies and programs to increase the racial and cultural representation of the teacher workforce.	44
Increase funding for public schools by increasing taxes, such as property or sales tax.	38
Ensure public schools are ready to incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) programs into the learning environment to make sure our students stay competitive in the global workplace.	33
Ensure public schools are ready to incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) programs into the learning environment.	32

## WHAT MOTIVATES SUPPORT FOR THE EDUCATION SYSTEM?

### Reasons to Support Education Policies

Enhancing education entities' capacity to produce critical thinkers and problem-solvers is the north star of education reform, as well as promoting fairness.

The most compelling reasons for voters to support education policies are enabling students to become critical thinkers and problem-solvers (30%), and allowing all students, regardless of their skin color or zip code, to follow their dreams (22%).

Despite a similar underlying sentiment, the concept of "creating opportunities for social mobility" ranks significantly lower at 2%. This disparity highlights the critical impact of specific language choices on voter reception. Messaging that emphasizes the need for "fairness" (a core education value) appears to resonate more broadly than terms like "social mobility" – which might sound too wonkish to voters.

### Top Tier (priority)

To enable students to become critical thinkers and problem-solvers  30

To allow all students, regardless of the color of their skin or zip code, to follow their dreams  22

Prepare all students for good paying jobs  12

To teach students to be good citizens  8

Expose students to new experiences, ideas, and perspectives  8

Help students catch up academically  7

To improve the economy  5

To create a shared American culture  3

To create opportunities for social mobility  2



Q24. From the list below, what is the most compelling reason to support policies that improve the education system nationwide?

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## DO VOTERS SUPPORT SCHOOL VOUCHERS?

Support for school vouchers is divided across voters, with disagreement falling neatly into partisan camps: Republicans support school vouchers, Democrats oppose it, meanwhile Independents and parents are largely divided.



I am not in favor of school choice as I think it strips resources from the mainstream public schools that are tasked with educating everyone including those that have higher needs (and therefore costs)... I think this plan is a give away to upper income and religious families who want to bypass the public system yet still get public support. It hurts the rest of the students.

– WOMAN, DEMOCRAT, WHITE (VOTER)

This is a good idea. My state already does this. It props up good schools with good staff and shines light on schools that underperform. It helps families that want their children to receive a quality education, but it does hurt schools that don't do as well.

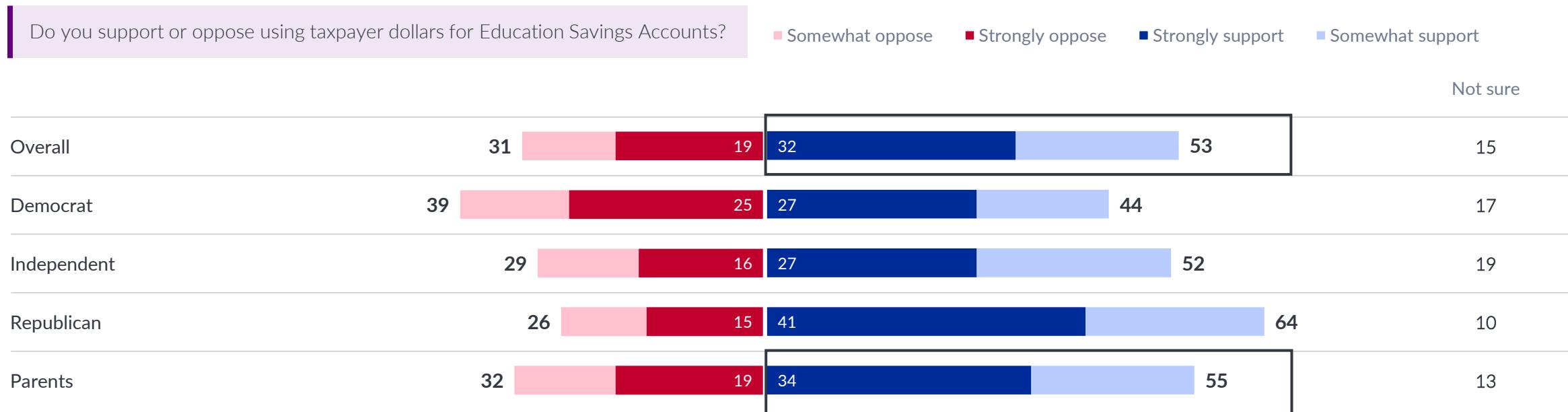
– MAN, INDEPENDENT, WHITE (VOTER)



Q27. Some states are considering using public taxpayer dollars for school vouchers to pay for students to attend private or religiously affiliated schools. Do you support or oppose states using taxpayer dollars for school vouchers?

## DO VOTERS SUPPORT EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS?

A majority of voters support taxpayer-funded ESAs. Support for ESAs is largely driven by Republicans and voting parents, though even a plurality of Democrats at least somewhat support the proposal.



Q28. Some states are considering using public taxpayer dollars for Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) that parents could use for K-12 private school tuition and fees, online learning programs, private tutoring, and other approved learning services and materials. Do you support or oppose using taxpayer dollars for Education Savings Accounts?



Burson

# THANK YOU

**Jacqueline Scott-Douglas**

Vice President

[jacqueline.scott-douglas@bursonglobal.com](mailto:jacqueline.scott-douglas@bursonglobal.com)

**Sarah Gudger**

Senior Analyst

[sarah.gudger@bursonglobal.com](mailto:sarah.gudger@bursonglobal.com)

**Kate Norton**

Senior Analyst

[kate.norton@bursonglobal.com](mailto:kate.norton@bursonglobal.com)