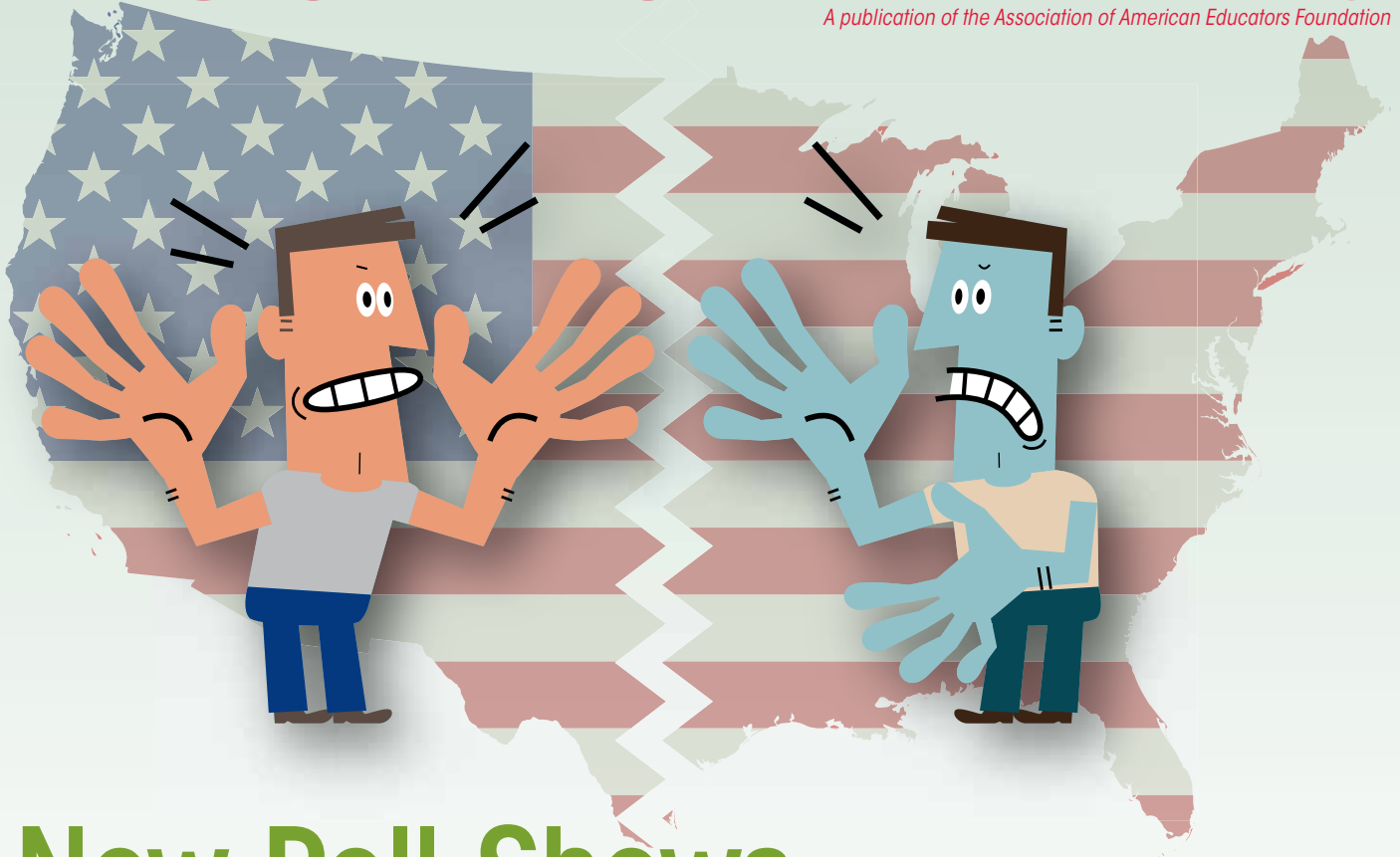


EDUCATION MATTERS

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation



New Poll Shows a Nation Divided Over Public Education Issues

Poll reveals conflicts over educating children of illegal immigrants, school vouchers, teacher evaluations, and which presidential candidate will most positively influence public education.

Americans have a number of conflicting viewpoints in their preferences for investing in schools, going head-to-head on issues like paying for the education of the children of illegal immigrants, according to the 2012 annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools.

There are clear partisan divides over whether children of illegal immigrants should receive free public education, school lunches, and other benefits, with 65 percent of Democrats versus 21 percent of Republicans favoring it. Overall, sup-

port for providing public education to these children is increasing. Forty-one percent of Americans favor this, up from 28 percent in 1995.

Americans are also more divided across party lines than ever before in their support for public charter schools, with Republicans more supportive (80 percent) than Democrats (54 percent). However, approval declined overall to 66 percent this year from a record 70 percent last year. Additionally, the public is split in its support of school vouchers,

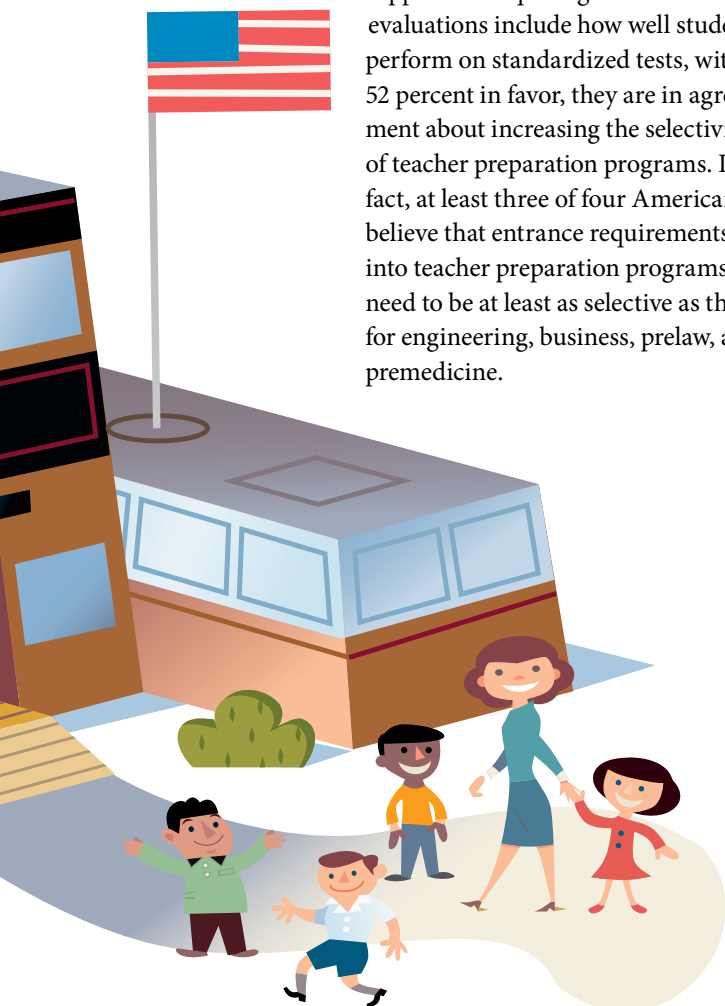
with nearly half (44 percent) believing that we should allow students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense, up 10 percentage points from last year.

Though Americans clearly have opposing stances on many education issues, when the poll—conducted annually by Phi Delta Kappa International (PDK) in conjunction with Gallup—asked Americans whether they believe common core state standards would provide more consistency in the quality of education between school districts and states, 75 percent said yes. In fact, more than half of Americans (53 percent) believe common core state standards would make U.S. education more competitive globally.

Ninety-seven percent of the public also agrees that it is very or somewhat important to improve the nation's urban schools, and almost two of three Americans (62 percent) said they would pay more taxes to provide funds to improve the quality of urban schools. Eighty-nine percent of Americans agree that it is very or somewhat important to close the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students.

And though Americans are almost evenly split in their

support for requiring that teacher evaluations include how well students perform on standardized tests, with 52 percent in favor, they are in agreement about increasing the selectivity of teacher preparation programs. In fact, at least three of four Americans believe that entrance requirements into teacher preparation programs need to be at least as selective as those for engineering, business, prelaw, and premedicine.



“While Americans are divided on many issues regarding the direction of our education system, they stand united in agreement on some very important issues,” said William Bushaw, executive director of PDK International and co-director of the PDK/Gallup poll. “Most important, it is reassuring to know that, despite the recognition that our schools need improvement, more than 70 percent of Americans do have trust and confidence in our public school teachers.”

The 2012 poll also reveals that President Barack Obama holds a slight lead (49 percent) over Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney (44 percent) as the candidate who would strengthen public schools. Overall, 50 percent of Americans view the Democratic party as more interested in improving public education in the U.S., while 38 percent view the Republican party as more supportive.

Other key findings:

- **Balancing the federal budget is more important than improving the quality of education.** Sixty percent of Americans believe balancing the federal budget is more important, even though they said funding is the biggest problem facing public schools.
- **Schools should discipline children for bullying.** Three of four Americans believe that bullying prevention should be part of a school's curriculum, and 58 percent believe schools should investigate and discipline students when bullying occurs outside of school, including over the Internet.
- **Parents want more control over failing schools.** Seventy percent of Americans favor giving parents whose children attend a failing school the option to mount a petition drive requesting that the teachers and principal be removed.
- **Americans view their local schools more favorably than the nation's schools as a whole.** Consistent with recent years, almost half of Americans give the schools in their community a letter grade of A or B, while almost 50 percent give a C to the nation's schools.

PDK, a global association of education professionals, has conducted this poll with Gallup annually since 1969. The poll serves as an opportunity for parents, educators, and legislators to assess public opinion about public schools. The 2012 findings are based on telephone interviews conducted in May and June 2012 with a national sample of 1,002 American adults. Visit www.pdkpoll.org for a full report. ■

The Power of the Positive Phone Call Home

When I first started teaching and was overwhelmed by the demands and complexity of the job, my survival strategy was simply to take all the advice that came my way and implement it. So when my wise mentor suggested that after the first day of school I call all of my second graders' parents, I did so.

In spite of my exhaustion, I called each family and introduced myself. I asked a few questions about their child. I said that their kid had had a good first day. I said I looked forward to working together.

Throughout that year, and the years that followed, I continued this practice—I had an intuitive feeling that it was key: the positive phone call home. After the first days, as soon as I'd identified the kids who might be challenging, I made it a goal to call home with positive news every week. I'd share this goal with my students, greeting them at the door with something like: "I'm so excited to see you this morning, Oscar! I am going to be watching you really closely today so find some good news to share with your mom this evening. I can't wait to call her and tell her what a good day you had!"

When I taught middle school, this strategy made the difference between an unmanageable group of kids and an easy group. You'd be surprised, perhaps, how desperately an eighth grade boy wants his mom (or dad or grandma or pastor) to get a positive call home. On the first day of school I'd give students a survey that included this question, "Who would you like me to call when I have good news to share about how you're doing in my class? You're welcome to list up to five people. And please let them know I might call—even tonight or tomorrow!"

First I'd call parents of the kids who I knew would be challenging, those I suspected rarely got positive calls. When an adult answered the phone, I'd say, all in one long breath, "Hi Mrs. ____? I'm calling from ____ middle school with great news about your son, _____. Can I share this news?" If I didn't immediately blurt out the "great news" pieces, sometimes they'd hang up on me or I'd hear a long anxious silence.

Some of these kids were difficult, extremely difficult. However, I was always able to find something sincerely



positive about what he or she had done. As the days followed, I kept calling—"I just wanted to share that today when ____ came into my class, he said 'good morning' to me and opened his notebook right away. I knew we'd have a good day!" Sometimes I'd stop in the middle of class and in front of all the students I'd call a parent. The kids loved that. They started begging for me to call their parent too. It was the first choice of reward for good behavior—"just call my mama and tell her I did good today."

What shocked and saddened me were the parents who would say, "I don't think anyone has ever called me from school with anything positive about my child." I occasionally heard soft sobbing during these calls.

I'd first used this phone call as a strategy for managing behavior and building partnerships and it worked. However, after ten years of teaching, I became a parent and my feelings shifted into some other universe. As a parent, I now can't think of anything more I want a teacher to do—just recognize what my boy is doing well, when he's trying, when he's learning, when his behavior is shifting, and share those observations with me.

I know how many hours teachers work. And I also know that a phone call can take three minutes. If every teacher allocated 15 minutes a day to calling parents with good news, the impact could be tremendous. In the long list of priorities for teachers, communicating good news is usually not at the top. But try it—just for a week—try calling a few kid's parents (and maybe not just the challenging ones—they all need and deserve these calls) and see what happens. The ripple effects for the kid, the class, and the teacher might be transformational. ■



A former teacher and instructional coach, **Elena Aguilar** is now a transformational leadership coach in the Oakland, CA Unified School District.



AAE Code of Ethics For Educators

In an effort to bring the education profession into a new era of professionalism, the AAE Code of Ethics for Educators was developed by the distinguished AAE Advisory Board and by the Executive Committee of AAE. As we settle into a new school year, we hope that all of our members will keep this Code of Ethics handy. As you know, we are educators by calling, professionals by choice!

OVERVIEW

The professional educator strives to create a learning environment that nurtures to fulfillment the potential of all students.

The professional educator acts with conscientious effort to exemplify the highest ethical standards.

The professional educator responsibly accepts that every child has a right to an uninterrupted education free from strikes or any other work-stoppage tactics.

PRINCIPLE I: Ethical Conduct toward Students

The professional educator accepts personal responsibility for teaching students character qualities that will help them evaluate the consequences of and accept the responsibility for their actions and choices. We strongly affirm parents as the primary moral educators of their children. Nevertheless, we believe all educators are obligated to help foster civic virtues such as integrity, diligence, responsibility, cooperation, loyalty, fidelity, and respect—for the law, for human life, for others, and for self.

The professional educator, in accepting his or her position of public trust, measures success not only by the progress of each student toward realization of his or her personal potential, but also as a citizen of the greater community of the republic.

“As a new school, our administrative team had been discussing professional standards for our teachers. Fortunately, we were introduced to the AAE Code of Ethics. As we reviewed it, we realized it was what we needed and wanted at Endeavor Hall. It provided our teachers with our expectations for their professionalism and did it in a manner that displays their vital importance as professionals.”

—Jennifer Perry, Principal
Endeavor Hall, Utah

1. The professional educator deals considerately and justly with each student, and seeks to resolve problems, including discipline, according to law and school policy.
2. The professional educator does not intentionally expose the student to disparagement.
3. The professional educator does not reveal confidential information concerning students, unless required by law.
4. The professional educator makes a constructive effort to protect the student from conditions detrimental to learning, health, or safety.
5. The professional educator endeavors to present facts without distortion, bias, or personal prejudice.

PRINCIPLE II: Ethical Conduct toward Practices and Performance

The professional educator assumes responsibility and accountability for his or her performance and continually strives to demonstrate competence.

The professional educator endeavors to maintain the dignity of the profession by respecting and obeying the law, and by demonstrating personal integrity.

1. The professional educator applies for, accepts, or assigns a position or a responsibility on the basis of professional qualifications, and adheres to the terms of a contract or appointment.
2. The professional educator maintains sound mental health, physical stamina, and social prudence necessary to perform the duties of any professional assignment.
3. The professional educator continues professional growth.
4. The professional educator complies with written local school policies and applicable laws and regulations that are not in conflict with this Code of Ethics.
5. The professional educator does not intentionally misrepresent official policies of the school or educational organizations, and clearly distinguishes those views from his or her own personal opinions.
6. The professional educator honestly accounts for all funds committed to his or her charge.
7. The professional educator does not use institutional or professional privileges for personal or partisan advantage.



PRINCIPLE III: Ethical Conduct toward Professional Colleagues

The professional educator, in exemplifying ethical relations with colleagues, accords just and equitable treatment to all members of the profession.

1. The professional educator does not reveal confidential information concerning colleagues unless required by law.
2. The professional educator does not willfully make false statements about a colleague or the school system.
3. The professional educator does not interfere with a colleague's freedom of choice, and works to eliminate coercion that forces educators to support actions and ideologies that violate individual professional integrity.

PRINCIPLE IV: Ethical Conduct toward Parents and Community

The professional educator pledges to protect public sovereignty over public education and private control of private education.

The professional educator recognizes that quality education is the common goal of the public, boards of education, and educators, and that a cooperative effort is essential among these groups to attain that goal.

1. The professional educator makes concerted efforts to communicate to parents all information that should be revealed in the interest of the student.
2. The professional educator endeavors to understand and respect the values and traditions of the diverse cultures represented in the community and in his or her classroom.
3. The professional educator manifests a positive and active role in school/community relations. ■

Teacher Dress Codes

Dress codes for educators—or lack thereof—vary by district and even school environment. Whether you come to class in jeans or a tie, many teachers this fall might need to reevaluate their wardrobe choices in the new school year. Due to complaints about teachers dressing inappropriately in states across the country, many school districts are pushing for stricter dress codes.

For students, policies are clearly established and leave little room for confusion. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 56 percent of public schools enforce a dress code for students. However, appropriate apparel for teachers has yet to be defined in many schools and administrators argue that many teachers are abusing the privilege of the traditionally lax policies.

This spring, Litchfield Elementary School District in Arizona piloted a policy designed to prohibit “rubber-sole flip-flops, visible undergarments, any visible

cleavage, bare midribs, clothes that are deemed too tight, too loose or transparent, bare shoulders, short skirts and exercise pants.” Administrators in the district also suggested guidelines for natural hair color, limiting piercings, and covering tattoos—all of which can come across as unprofessional.

The Wichita School District in Kansas has banned cutoff shorts, pajama pants, and flip-flops. Similarly, school officials in Milwaukee recently concluded that dress codes would consider athletic wear and T-shirts unacceptable for the classroom setting.

In most cases, schools are taking action because they believe some teachers are dressing inappropriately and cre-

ating distractions that could impact student learning. Arizona Superintendent Julianne Lein stressed that the school board policies were created to curb growing complaints from parents and that she will work with teachers to find a workable standard. “Staff members will first be counseled by their supervisor to brainstorm options in ways to meet the code,” Superintendent Lein says. “Further noncompliance will be dealt with through the normal disciplinary channels.”

While many of these guidelines seem obvious, teachers are quick to point out that different positions call for different wardrobe choices. Obviously, a physical education teacher working with third graders might need to dress differently than the high school Spanish teacher. Sarah, a veteran kindergarten teacher told one fashion blog, “My concerns are practical: things need to be washable and comfortable. I can have a little fun with jewelry or, yes, the infamous holiday sweater. But my highest priority is wash-and-wear—and comfortable shoes.”

Still, while most teachers just need to use a little common sense, the need for such policies is discouraging to professional educators who wouldn’t dream of wearing pajamas to school. While the AAE Code of Ethics for Educators doesn’t specifically mention appropriate dress, it does mention maintaining the “social prudence” necessary to perform job duties. Further, “The professional educator complies with written local school policies and applicable laws and regulations.” As a professional educator, it is critical to present yourself well, limit distractions for students, and follow all dress code policies. ■



“As a professional educator, it is critical to present yourself well, limit distractions for students, and follow all dress code policies.”

Letters to the Editor: Member Feedback

Dear Editor:

In education, I believe we have lost the basic common sense objective of teaching children and helping to prepare them for life. Society has changed, education methodologies have changed, technology has abounded, and paperwork for teachers has increased exponentially. Many of the “improvements” (NCLB, Common Core, etc.) have been mandated by politicians who are out of touch with the classroom. While many of these ideas sound good on paper, in practice they are not realistic.

Ideally, I would like to say that I have reached every child that has come through my classroom—realistically, I have not. Too many factors are involved to make it realistic for every teacher to reach every child.

I have taught in several different schools—rural, urban, and suburban, upper-end students (gifted and talented) to special education on the opposite end of the spectrum. Every child who wanted to learn, has learned in my classes, those who decided not to learn did not learn very much. Does that mean I am a bad teacher? I don’t think so.

The fallacy that every child is college bound is part of the problem. Students should have the option of learning a trade (plumbing, auto mechanics, carpentry, etc.) so they can become a productive member of society after high school if they are not interested in the academia of college prep.

Every child should have the opportunity for an education; however, if the child refuses to cooperate and becomes a habitual disrupter, schools should have the option of dismissing such a student without the fear of retribution. The adage “one bad apple spoils the barrel” is true in the classroom as well. One disruptive student can hinder an entire class from learning.

Sincerely,

David Branton, AAE Member
Denham Springs, LA

Have something to say?

Email us today: editor@aaeteachers.org

Dear Editor,

Each time I read articles and publications on education reform, I find myself slightly frustrated. I ask myself, “By what measure are researchers coming to these conclusions?”

Enacting educational reform must be based on decade models, not yearly or quarterly. If an institution endorses a new reading program for elementary children, then that program needs to be in place for a minimum of 6-10 years to truly measure its effectiveness. Allow those kids to live with the program into their high school years and beyond, then examine the true results.

Further, isn’t it interesting how many of these folks, whether they be part of an institute, a foundation, an office, or a think tank, have never actually taught children. The plethora of “experts” in education, with very little or no educational experience actually working with children and young adults, is staggering. By comparison, I drive over dozens, if not hundreds, of bridges every month. I don’t believe I’m qualified to be a bridge engineer and you wouldn’t want me advising other bridge engineers or contractors on how to build them. How is it there are so many experts in education who seldom stepped into a classroom since their days in school? Perhaps, these experts don’t have the answers they claim to have.

My advice: dig deeper. The actual results could stagger you more than the initial sound bites and title pages.

Respectfully,

Scott Wheeler, AAE Member
Fort Collins, Colorado



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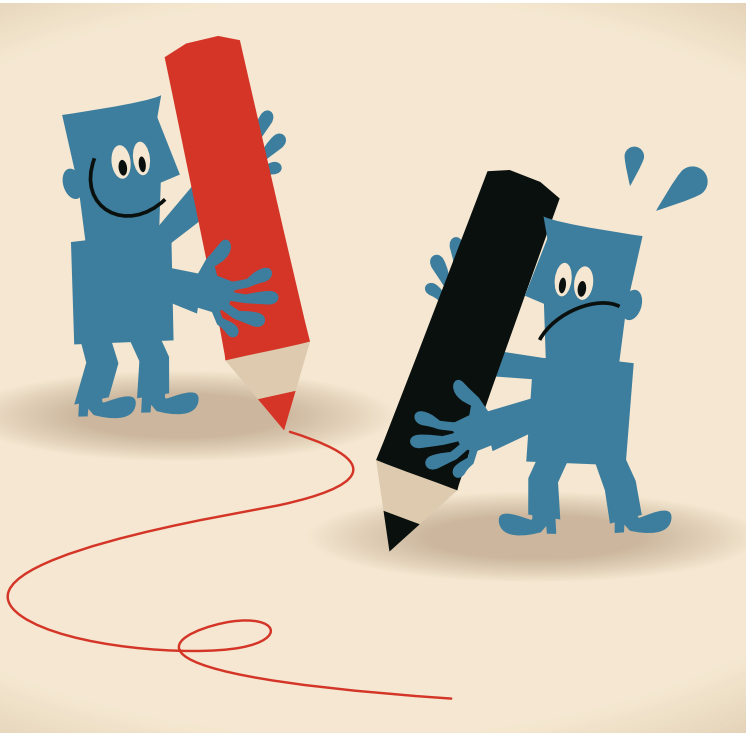
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You Speak Out: Write for AAE!

Do you have strong opinions about an education policy issue? Would you like to respond to an article you've read in *Education Matters*? Are you implementing a new program in your classroom, school, or district that you would like to share with your fellow members? Write an article or letter for the Association of American Educators! AAE is constantly looking for new material to share in *Education Matters* or on the AAE blog. We would love to hear from real classroom teachers and members interested in sharing their experiences. Whether you are interested in class size, teacher choice, education reform, cutting-edge curriculum, or anything in between, don't hesitate to contact AAE's editorial staff. Email AAE today at Editor@aaeteachers.org

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