

New Education Survey Delves Into Americans' Views on Choice, Quality, and Control

When asked who should control education, 16 percent say the federal government; 47 percent the states; and 36 percent local communities.

CHICAGO, May 12, 2017 — About 4 in 10 Americans think there is too little school choice in their state or their own community, and more than half say the amount of school choice parents have is about right, according to a new survey by [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#). The survey also found that when it comes to school assignment, the idea of schools continuing to give preference to children living in nearby areas is more popular than several alternate proposals that would give families more choice using lotteries or criteria other than residence in the community.

“This survey provides important data on one of society’s most important issues – education,” said Trevor Tompson, director of The AP-NORC Center. “These results indicate a strong preference for greater local control and more school choice but there is little support for several proposals to provide options in elementary and secondary education.”

Key findings from the poll include:

- About 55 percent say parents in their state and locally have the right amount of alternatives in deciding which school their children attend, but nearly 4 in 10 say parents have too little choice. Only 4 percent think parents have too much choice in their state or local community when it comes to where their children will be educated.
- A third of Americans regard the quality of charter schools—both in their own community and nationally—as excellent or good, and less than 10 percent consider them to be substandard. However, about a third of Americans were unable to give an assessment, and 6 in 10 have heard little or nothing about charter schools.
- Nearly half, 47 percent, favor more charter schools, defined in the survey as “public schools that function independently of local school district control,” and 23 percent oppose. Thirty percent neither favor nor oppose. Among those who consider the amount of school choice available in their community for parents insufficient, about 6 in 10 support additional charter schools.
- The public is even less familiar with school voucher programs. Two-thirds of the public have heard little or nothing about school vouchers. Forty-three percent favor the idea of giving low-income parents tax-funded vouchers they can use to help pay for tuition for their children to attend private or religious schools of their choice, and 35 percent oppose. Twenty-one percent are ambivalent about the idea. But, about 6 in 10 of those who would say parents have too little school choice in their community favor voucher programs.
- Seven in 10 Americans say charter schools and private schools that receive tax-funded vouchers should be held to the same standards as other schools, rather than setting their own standards.

- In general, only 26 percent of Americans consider the nation's public schools to be excellent or good. Typically, the public has a better impression when they have some first-hand knowledge, and so 45 percent regard the quality of education at their local schools to be excellent or good. And 52 percent of people whose children actually attend public school say the quality of education at their local public schools is excellent or good.
- Parents are more positive about the school they know best, but still a third of parents are not particularly enthusiastic about the quality of their child's education. Although 67 percent say the quality of their child's school is excellent or good, 27 percent describe the education their child receives as fair, and 5 percent say the quality of their child's school is poor.
- Beyond the overall quality of schools, Americans don't give particularly high marks for the job that is done in preparing students for life after high school. Only about a third say students are well prepared to join the workforce or be good citizens. About 4 in 10 say their local schools do an excellent or good job of college preparation.

Complete survey findings are available at www.apnorc.org.

About the Survey

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Interviews for this survey were conducted between April 20 and 23, 2017, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,036 completed the survey—852 via the web and 184 via telephone. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.0 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

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About AmeriSpeak Omnibus

AmeriSpeak Omnibus is a once-a-month, multi-client survey using a probability sample of at least 1,000 nationally representative adults age 18 and older. Respondents are interviewed online and by phone from NORC's AmeriSpeak Panel—the most scientifically rigorous multi-client household panel in the United States. AmeriSpeak households are selected randomly from NORC's National Sample Frame, the industry leader in sample coverage. The National Frame is representative of over 99 percent of U.S. households and includes additional coverage of hard-to-survey population segments, such as rural and low-income households, that are underrepresented in other sample frames. More information about AmeriSpeak is available at AmeriSpeak.NORC.org.

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