

THE POLLS—TRENDS

VEIL OF VALENCE: CONSENSUS AND DISAGREEMENT IN PUBLIC OPINION TOWARDS SCHOOL FUNDING, 1998–2016

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Abstract Studies examining public opinion toward the education system long have reported consensus in favor of increasing school funding, teacher salaries, and school choice. Despite this apparent agreement, government reform of the US public school system has proven contentious and challenging for both political parties. New data from a diversity of sources allow us to examine the more contentious aspects of school-funding policy and offer insight as to why education-funding reform has been difficult. We find that from 1998 to 2016, citizens were remarkably consistent in their opinions on general questions of school funding. However, there has been substantial disagreement and change in the public opinion toward national versus local school funding, tying teacher salaries to student performance, and specific methods of increasing school choice. This macro-level stability and consistency and micro-level instability and inconsistency may help explain why implementing reform remains difficult even though the desire for reform is widespread.

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That there is ample room to improve in the national education system is a consistent refrain in the public-policy discourse. While K–12 policies have long been considered the responsibility of state and local governments, both political parties have recently professed a desire to improve the education system through federal legislation (see [Henig 2013](#)). Of particular importance in this national debate is school funding. How large should public school budgets be? Should the money be used to increase teacher salaries? Should the government fund greater school choice? Studies long have reported consensus on these questions—in favor of increasing school funding, teacher salaries, and school choice (see [Hochschild and Scott 1998](#)). However, opinion consistency on these “valence” issues masks important disagreement and change on more granular school-funding questions. New data have become available since Hochschild and Scott last tracked public attitudes toward education in their review of a broad expanse of surveys. Data from Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)/Gallup, EdNext/PEPG, and a series of other polling organizations¹ allow us to examine the more contentious aspects of school-funding policy, explaining why education-funding reform has proven difficult despite widespread agreement on general funding questions. We find that from 1998 to 2016, citizens were indeed remarkably consistent in their willingness to increase school funding. However, there has been substantial change in the public’s opinions toward national- versus local-school funding, tying teacher salaries to student performance and specific methods of increasing school choice.

Spending on Schools

Support for increasing school funding is widespread in the United States, eroding only slightly in the past decade and a half. However, this agreement does not extend to more specific aspects of spending attitudes. The General Social Survey (NORC/GSS), conducted every two years, includes two variants of the education spending question in each survey. Respondents are asked whether they think too little, too much, or about the right amount is being spent on either “education” or “improving the nation’s education system.” In 1998, 73 percent of GSS respondents thought too little was being spent on “education”; this support dipped slightly to 70 percent in 2014 ([table 1](#)). The same support can be observed when the “nation’s education system” wording is used ([table 2](#)), though in absolute terms, responses of “too little” are slightly less frequent than when education is asked about in the abstract ([table 1](#)). Since 1998, few people report that they believe the government is spending “too much” on education in either

1. All included survey data was collected using probability samples. For more information about the Gallup/PDK polls, please see <http://pdkpoll.org/about>. For more information about the EdNext/PEPG survey, please see [Peterson, Henderson, and West \(2014\)](#).

Table 1. GSS spending levels: education

NORC/GSS: We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I’m going to name some of these problems, and for each one I’d like you to tell me whether you think we’re spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on education?

	02/98 (%)	02/00 (%)	02/02 (%)	08/04 (%)	03/06 (%)	04/08 (%)	03/10 (%)	03/12 (%)	03/14 (%)	03/16 (%)
Too little	73	75	76	77	74	74	75	74	70	74
About right	19	19	18	17	19	19	19	17	22	18
Too much	6	4	5	5	6	6	6	8	6	7
Don’t know	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
<i>N</i>	2,832	1,408	1,382	1,411	1,508	1,019	1,021	987	1,269	1,430

NOTE.—Only asked of half of the sample after 2006, and one-third before.

Table 2. GSS spending levels: improving the nation’s education system

NORC/GSS: We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I’m going to name some of these problems, and for each one I’d like you to tell me whether you think we’re spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on improving the nation’s education system?

	02/98 (%)	02/00 (%)	02/02 (%)	08/04 (%)	03/06 (%)	04/08 (%)	03/10 (%)	03/12 (%)	03/14 (%)	03/16 (%)
Too little	70	71	73	72	72	71	72	74	70	71
About right	22	23	21	22	21	23	22	18	22	22
Too much	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	8	6	6
Don’t know	2	*	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
<i>N</i>	2,832	1,409	1,358	1,401	1,484	1,003	1,015	996	1,273	1,436

NOTE.—* < 0.5%.

wording—consistently fewer than 10 percent—though this seems to have increased slightly in the past few years, possibly due to perceived increases in spending levels (Wlezien 1995; Stimson 2004).

Though widespread support exists for increased spending when respondents are asked about schools in the abstract, new data sources allow us to investigate

more specific aspects of spending attitudes. Respondents often underestimate actual spending levels (see Peterson, Henderson, and West 2014; Schueler and West 2016). To evaluate how spending awareness interacts with spending attitudes, the PEPG surveys asked half the sample in each year how much they believe should be spent on education in their school districts, and the other half the same question after informing them how much is actually spent. The PEPG data (table 3) also show that there has been little support for decreasing spending when no information about actual spending levels is offered. One difference is that the levels of support for increasing funding are lower, which might be explained by the fact that in all years except 2011, the PEPG surveys asked exclusively about increasing spending for schools in *one's own district*, whereas other surveys asked about increasing funding *nationally* (for more information about the effect of this wording variation, see Jacobsen and Saultz [2012]). Bali (2016) shows that people are more reluctant to increase local than national education funding, suggesting that they may more closely connect this spending to local and state taxes. Similarly, a question in the 2016 PDK poll gauging support for raising local taxes to improve schools in the community found fully 45 percent of respondents opposed.

When informed about spending levels in their local school system, respondents are less supportive of increasing spending, with support hovering around 45 percent since 2009 (table 4). People underestimate funding levels; given accurate information, their support for increasing spending falls about 15 percentage

Table 3. Education spending: local district (no information provided)

PEPG (2007): Keeping in mind that the money for public education has to be paid by taxes, do you think that government funding for public schools in your district should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

PEPG (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016): Do you think that government funding for public schools in your district should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Greatly decrease	2	2	2	1	2	3	2	2	3	1
Decrease	8	5	7	4	11	6	7	5	5	4
Stay about the same	38	32	46	33	38	29	35	33	35	34
Increase	38	43	37	48	38	47	41	47	43	45
Greatly increase	13	19	9	15	11	16	16	14	14	16
<i>N</i>	1,979	1,629	1,677	909	1,231	727	2,666	1,746	1,022	2,065

Table 4. Education spending: local district (information provided)

PEPG (2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2016): According to the most recent information available, in your district \$XXXX is being spent each year per child attending public schools. Do you think that government funding for public schools in your district should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

PEPG (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015): As it turns out, according to the most recent information available, \$XXXX is being spent each year per child attending public schools in your district. Do you think that taxes to fund public schools should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

	2008 (%)	2009 (%)	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)	2016 (%)
Greatly decrease	2	2	2	3	3	2	4	2
Decrease	5	8	8	11	10	8	7	8
Stay about the same	36	53	45	44	45	46	48	45
Increase	40	31	36	34	33	35	31	36
Greatly increase	17	7	10	9	9	9	11	10
<i>N</i>	1,738	1,539	1,306	767	2,532	1,699	1,042	2,099

points. The consensual nature of attitudes toward education spending seems at least in part driven by misinformation about actual spending levels.

Reported willingness to increase school funding on the national level has remained remarkably consistent over the past two decades. However, the precise degree of support appears to vary based on question wording and knowledge of current spending levels. As we discuss below, this general pattern describes public opinion on both teacher pay and increasing school choice.

Teacher Salaries and Accountability

Data from three different polls at three different time points in the past two decades suggest some consensus in public attitudes toward teachers’ salaries. Once again, though, when specific elements of pay are considered, greater disagreement emerges. In 2003, the annual PDK poll asked respondents whether they believe public school teachers in their communities are paid too much or too little. As the first column of [table 5](#) demonstrates, very few people in 2003—only about 6 percent—felt their local teachers were overpaid. The majority of respondents that year (59 percent) believed teachers were paid too little, and about a third believed salaries were adequate. In 2010, a CBS News Poll asked about public school teachers in the country, and in 2013, an Associated Press/NORC survey asked about teachers without specifying geographic scope. In both surveys, 66 percent said teachers were paid too little. And in the 2003 PDK poll, the proportion of people who thought teachers

Table 5. Teacher salaries: community

PDK/Gallup (2003): Do you think salaries for teachers in this community are too high, too low, or just about right?

CBS News Poll (2010): As far as you know, do you think, on average, public school teachers in this country are paid too much, too little, or about the right amount?

Associated Press-NORC Parents' Attitudes on Education Quality Survey (2013): Do you think public school teachers get paid too little for the work they do, too much for the work they do, or about the right amount? Do you think they get paid far too much or just somewhat too much? Do you think they get paid far too little or just somewhat too little?

	09/03 (%)	01/10 (%)	06/13 (%)
Too much	6	4	4
Too little	59	66	66
Right amount	33	24	25
Don't know	2	6	4
<i>N</i>	1,011	1,216	1,025

were paid too little nationally was 7 percentage points higher than when people were asked about local teachers, mirroring trends for school funding at local and national levels.

From 2008 to 2013, with the exception of 2011, PEPG surveys asked whether respondents believed the salaries of teachers in their *state* should increase. In 2008, respondents favored increasing teacher salaries at the state level; the “increase” or “greatly increase” categories together totaled 62 percent (table 6). This sentiment waned somewhat in the subsequent three years, however, hovering at 50 percent before dropping below 40 percent in 2013. The shift seems mainly to have entailed people tempering their support rather than withdrawing it entirely. In 2011, the PEPG survey asked the national-level question to half the sample and the local-level one to the other half. About 52 percent of respondents favored increasing local teachers' salaries (table 6), while a similar 55 percent favored increasing the salaries of teachers in the country generally (table 7). Overall, levels of support for raising salaries observed in both the PEPG data and in table 5 suggest that the geographic level citizens are asked about matters. When mentioning the national level explicitly or just “teacher salaries” without regional qualification, support for increasing salaries tends to be greater.

Again, the interpretation of these results is qualified by the fact that people likely have limited information about how much teachers are actually paid. When PEPG respondents are given this information, their support for

Table 6. Teacher salaries: state

PEPG (2008, 2009, 2010, 2013): Do you think that teacher salaries in your state should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

PEPG (2011): Do you think that teacher salaries at your local schools should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

	2008 (%)	2009 (%)	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2013 (%)
Greatly decrease	1	*	1	2	2
Decrease	3	5	4	4	8
Stay about the same	35	47	45	42	54
Increase	44	39	41	42	30
Greatly increase	18	9	9	10	7
<i>N</i>	3,231	3,191	2,749	1,347	2,633

NOTE.—* < 0.5%.

Table 7. Teacher salaries: United States

PEPG (2011): Do you think that teacher salaries in the United States should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

PEPG (2012, 2014, 2015): Do you think that teacher salaries should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

PEPG (2016): Do you think that public school teacher salaries should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)	2016 (%)
Greatly decrease	2	1	1	1	1
Decrease	5	3	4	4	4
Stay about the same	39	32	33	32	30
Increase	41	51	50	48	47
Greatly increase	14	13	11	15	18
<i>N</i>	1,290	1,524	2,562	1,035	1,002

increasing salaries declines (table 8). This is consistent with the fact that people have been shown to underestimate teacher pay (Peterson, Henderson, and West 2014). A majority tends to report that salaries should stay about the same, but the percentage supporting an increase has ranged between 36 and 40 percent from 2009 to 2014. The 2008 anomaly of 54 percent may reflect a

Table 8. Teacher salaries: state (information provided)

PEPG (2008): According to the most recent information available, in your state public school teachers receive on average an annual salary of \$XX,XXX. Do you think that teacher salaries in your state should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

PEPG (2009, 2010): In your state, teachers are paid an average annual salary of \$XX,XXX. Do you think that these teacher salaries should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

PEPG (2011): According to the most recent information available, teachers in your state are paid an average annual salary of \$XX,XXX. Do you think that teacher salaries at your local schools should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

PEPG (2012): As it turns out, teachers in your state are paid an average annual salary of \$XX,XXX. Do you think that teacher salaries should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

PEPG (2013, 2014, 2015): As it turns out, public school teachers in your state receive, on average, salaries of \$XX,XXX. In your view, should their salaries increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

PEPG (2016): As it turns out, public school teachers in your state are paid an average annual salary of \$XX,XXX. Do you think that teacher salaries should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

	2008 (%)	2009 (%)	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)	2016 (%)
Greatly decrease	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	1	1
Decrease	4	5	6	7	6	8	6	6	7
Stay about the same	41	53	53	50	55	54	54	48	50
Increase	40	32	32	34	30	30	33	36	33
Greatly increase	14	8	8	7	6	7	6	9	9
<i>N</i>	1,738	1,539	902	1,306	767	2,532	1,699	990	1,060

wording difference (“public school”). From 2013 to 2015, support for increasing spending rose from 37 to 45 percent before holding at 42 percent in 2016.

Given that real funding for both education and salaries has increased, how can the public ensure that funds are spent efficiently? Accountability debates have often focused on teachers’ relatively high job security, with widespread support for tying teachers’ salaries to students’ performance. [Table 9](#) shows that the percentage believing pay should be based on students’ test scores has increased over the past eight years, from 44 percent in 2007 to 52 percent in 2016. Yet a substantial portion has opposed tying teacher salary to student learning (35 percent in 2016), suggesting significant disagreement about merit-based pay. Teacher pay, like education funding, is an issue on which

Table 9. Tying teacher salaries to test scores

PEPG (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015): Do you favor or oppose basing a teacher’s salary, in part, on students’ academic progress on state tests?

PEPG (2011): Do you favor or oppose basing the salaries of teachers around the nation, in part, on their students’ academic progress on state tests?

PEPG (2016): Do you favor or oppose basing part of the salaries of teachers on how much their students learn?

	2007 (%)	2008 (%)	2009 (%)	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2013 (%)	2015 (%)	2016 (%)
Completely oppose	15	12	12	11	9	16	13	14
Somewhat oppose	17	16	15	15	18	23	21	21
Neither favor nor oppose	24	28	30	25	26	14	16	13
Somewhat favor	29	31	30	34	33	34	36	37
Completely favor	15	13	13	15	14	13	15	15
<i>N</i>	988	1,574	1,033	1,366	2,560	5,203	4,065	4,171

there appears to exist widespread agreement, in this case in favor of higher salaries. Once again, however, this semblance of consensus hides significant and important variation in terms of salaries at a local versus a national level and whether pay increases should be tied to student performance on state tests.

School Choice: School Vouchers and Charter Schools

It has been consistently documented since at least the late 1980s that the public favors increasing the range of education choices available to parents. Like the other issues examined here, surface-level agreement on school choice masks significant heterogeneity. Widespread agreement on the abstract principle of increasing school choice exists alongside meaningful disagreement on specific methods of increasing this choice. When asked whether parents should be able to send their children to any school in the district between 1987 and 1997, about 70 percent of people agreed (Hochschild and Scott 1998). In 2013, 74 percent favored the expansion of choice through the use of school vouchers or support for charter schools—publicly funded schools managed by non-governmental organizations.² In the past 20 years, vouchers—tax subsidies enabling parents to send their children to private or parochial schools—have been proposed as a means of increasing parents’ range of education choices. School vouchers have been a difficult issue on which to gauge opinions, as

2. Democracy Corps/Women’s Voices, Women Vote Poll, July 2013. Sample is representative of the population, not just women.

Table 10. School vouchers

GALLUP/PDK (1993–2014): Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?

	05/93 (%)	06/95 (%)	05/96 (%)	08/97 (%)	08/98 (%)	08/99 (%)	08/00 (%)	08/01 (%)	08/02 (%)	08/03 (%)
Favor	24	33	36	44	44	41	39	34	46	38
Oppose	74	65	61	52	50	55	56	62	52	60
Don't know	2	2	3	4	6	4	5	4	2	2
<i>N</i>	1,306	1,311	1,329	1,517	1,151	1,103	1,093	1,108	1,000	1,011
	08/04 (%)	08/05 (%)	08/06 (%)	08/07 (%)	08/08 (%)	08/11 (%)	08/12 (%)	08/13 (%)	08/14 (%)	
Favor	42	38	36	39	44	34	44	29	37	
Oppose	54	57	60	60	50	65	55	70	63	
Don't know	4	5	4	1	6	1	1	1	0	
<i>N</i>	1,003	1,000	1,007	1,005	1,002	1,002	1,002	1,001	1,001	

small differences in question wordings or context lead to noticeable differences in responses (Schuman and Presser 1996).

As seen in table 10, support for publicly funded private schooling increased from 24 percent to 44 percent from 1993 to 1997. It then fell from 44 percent in 1997 to 34 percent in 2001. Favorability toward public funding for private school then jumped to 46 percent in 2002, an all-time high. Support for what were in effect private school vouchers remained the minority opinion. Though support for these nearly doubled from 1993 to 2002, rising from 24 percent to 46 percent, it then declined despite receiving election-year boosts in 2008 and 2012 (table 10). Support for vouchers bottomed out in 2013, when 29 percent of respondents favored public funds for private school, before rebounding somewhat in 2014. Opposition to publicly funded private schooling has increased since the early 2000s, from a low of 50 percent to a high of 70 percent in 2013, while exhibiting election year declines in 2004, 2008, and 2012.

PEPG data since 2011 show increasing opposition to policies that promote this kind of “wider choice” “for families with children” “with government helping to pay the tuition.” Opposition to universal vouchers increased every year from 2011 to 2015, from 27 percent to 42 percent (table 11); support dropped from 49 percent to 42 percent from 2013 to 2015. Opposition to means-tested vouchers increased every year but one from 2007 to 2015 (table 12). In addition, the proportion of respondents who neither favor nor oppose vouchers has decreased significantly over the time frame for each question. Looking at change based on identically worded questions from 2014 to 2015 in table 11, we see an increase in opposition from 37 to 42 percent, and a decline in support

Table 11. School vouchers: wider choice

PEPG (2011, 2012, 2013): A proposal has been made that would give families with children in public schools a wider choice, by allowing them to enroll their children in private schools instead, with government helping to pay the tuition. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?

PEPG (2014, 2015): A proposal has been made that would give families with children in failing public schools a wider choice, by allowing them to enroll their children in private schools instead, with government helping to pay the tuition. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?

	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)
Completely oppose	11	16	16	16	23
Somewhat oppose	16	13	17	21	19
Neither favor nor oppose	26	28	18	14	17
Somewhat favor	28	26	31	33	27
Completely favor	19	17	18	16	15
<i>N</i>	1,308	744	2,553	1,733	1,011

Table 12. School vouchers: low-income

PEPG (2007, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2015): A proposal has been made that would use government funds to pay the tuition of low-income students who choose to attend private schools. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?

PEPG (2009, 2010, 2011): A proposal has been made that would use government funds to help pay the tuition of low-income students whose families would like them to attend private schools. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?

	2007 (%)	2008 (%)	2009 (%)	2010 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)
Completely oppose	20	22	21	23	24	27	28
Somewhat oppose	15	18	21	20	23	26	22
Neither favor nor oppose	20	20	24	27	15	11	17
Somewhat favor	24	26	21	22	26	23	22
Completely favor	21	14	14	9	11	13	12
<i>N</i>	1,988	774	789	916	2,620	1,718	1,050

NOTE.—From 2013 onward, the “Neither favor nor oppose” response option was offered at the end, instead of the middle.

from 49 to 42 percent. In [table 12](#), the decline in the middle category led to the increase in both the favor and oppose categories, but there was a clear drop in support and rise in opposition after 2007 for paying private school tuition for low-income students (see also [Henderson, Peterson, and West 2016](#)).

Charter schools are another option for increasing school choice, providing an alternative to both traditional public and private schools. The PEPG data suggest that opinions toward charter schools have also polarized in recent years. While 42 percent of respondents neither favored nor opposed them in 2007, by 2016 that figure had dropped to about 21 percent ([table 13](#)). Though some of this decline can be attributed to the shift in response ordering, the drop in undecided responses observed here is far larger than the drops seen in other questions that underwent similar changes, suggesting opinion change on the issue. Over this time frame, opposition to charter schools increased from 14 percent to 27 percent, while support increased from 44 to 51 percent. While support dropped

Table 13. Charter schools

PEPG (2007): Many states allow for the formation of charter schools, which are privately managed under a renewable performance contract that exempts them from many of the regulations of other public schools. Do you support or oppose the formation of charter schools?

PEPG (2008, 2009): Many states permit the formation of charter schools, which are publicly funded but are not managed by the local school board. These schools are expected to meet promised objectives, but are exempt from many state regulations. Do you support or oppose the formation of charter schools?

PEPG (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016): As you may know, many states permit the formation of charter schools, which are publicly funded but are not managed by the local school board. These schools are expected to meet promised objectives, but are exempt from many state regulations. Do you support or oppose the formation of charter schools?

	2007 (%)	2008 (%)	2009 (%)	2010 (%)	2012 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)	2016 (%)
Completely oppose	6	7	7	6	6	7	8	9	9
Somewhat oppose	8	10	10	13	10	18	20	18	18
Neither favor nor oppose	42	42	44	37	41	19	18	22	21
Somewhat favor	25	26	25	33	26	37	34	32	34
Completely favor	19	16	14	12	17	19	19	19	17
<i>N</i>	1,994	1,129	1,069	1,440	1,478	5,177	5,199	2,055	2,075

NOTE.—From 2013 onward, the “Neither favor nor oppose” response option was offered at the end, instead of the middle.

from 56 percent in 2013 to 51 percent in 2015 (the middle category was the last response category offered in each of these years), the main finding is that support for charter schools greatly surpassed opposition to them from 2007 to 2016.

While the public appears to be consistent in its preference for increasing school choice, there has been substantial movement in what is seen as the best way to accomplish that goal. Although school vouchers increased in popularity in the 1990s and early 2000s, subsidizing private schooling has become less popular in recent years. Charter-school support has been substantial and stable, offering more diverse education options while preserving the traditional divide between the government and private or religious schools. Over the years, charter schools have garnered meaningful support among Republican and, at times, Democratic leaders (Bifulco and Ladd 2006; Sass 2006; Malkus 2016). While increasing school choice in general may be a valence issue, opinion on how to best achieve increased choice is divided and mutable.

Conclusion

Examining public opinion toward funding for the education system using abstract question wording tells us little about how opinions toward education funding have changed over time. Increasing school funding, teacher salaries, and school choice have long been considered valence issues. However, recent surveys enable us to peer beneath the veneer of consistency and consensus. Opinions toward specific funding reforms exhibit less unity overall and are unstable over time. Indeed, public opinion appears markedly divided and inconsistent when we consider local versus national spending on school funding and teacher salary, tying teacher pay to student evaluations, and specific methods of increasing school choice.

The data examined here demonstrate the challenges faced by politicians attempting to pass education reforms that align with public opinion. Although there is agreement on the goals of school reform, there is no consensus on the means by which it should be achieved. Ultimately, when examining a long period of time and a diversity of questions, we find stability and agreement when it comes to “macro-level” or general issues but instability when it comes to more “micro-level” or specific considerations. In light of these dynamics, public education will surely continue to be an area of contested reform, pressed on by a desire for improvement but complicated by fluid opinions about the best methods of achieving it.

Appendix

Sources and Abbreviations

SOURCES

The data were collected from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research's online iPOLL archive, Phi Delta Kappa International, and the Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University.

ABBREVIATIONS

AP/NORC: Associated Press/National Opinion Research Center

EdNext: *Education Next* Journal

Gallup: Gallup Organization

GSS: General Social Surveys

NORC: National Opinion Research Center

PEPG: Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University

PDK: Phi Delta Kappa (with Gallup through 2015)

PDK/Gallup: Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Organization

Data Sources and Response Rates

Data presented in this article were obtained from the iPOLL databank and the National Opinion Research Center's (University of Chicago) General Social Survey, as well as the Harvard University Program on Education Policy and Governance. Unless otherwise indicated in the table notes, all surveys involved national adult samples and were conducted via telephone, and households were selected via random-digit dialing.

Associated Press/NORC Parents Attitudes on Education Quality Survey: 2013, 17% (AAPOR RR3). This survey was available in Spanish; translation text was unavailable.

CBS News: 2010; response rates for this survey were unavailable.

NORC/GSS: 1998, 75.6%; 2000, 70.0%; 2002, 70.1%; 2004, 70.4%; 2006, 71.2%; 2008, 70.4%; 2010, 70.3%; 2012, 71.4%; 2014, 69.2%; 2016, 61.3% (AAPOR RR3; personal interviews). This survey was available in Spanish from 2006 to 2016; translation text was unavailable.

PDK/Gallup: Response rates for these surveys were unavailable. This survey was offered in Spanish for the first time in 2016; results here assemble data from English-only surveys.

PEPG: 2007, 46.7% (AAPOR RR3, probability sample was drawn from a KnowledgeNetwork panel); 2011, 7,969 panel members were drawn from GfK's KnowledgePanel as a part of general population, teacher, or parent samples; 5,469 completed the survey, yielding a final-stage completion rate of 68.8%. The recruitment rate for this study, reported by GfK, was 17.7% and the profile rate was 60.6%, for a cumulative response rate of 7.4%. In 2012, 4,151 panel members were drawn from GfK's KnowledgePanel as a part of general population, teacher, or parent samples; 2,993 completed the survey, yielding a final-stage completion rate of 72.2%. The recruitment rate for this study, reported by GfK, was 16.0% and the profile rate was 63.5%, for a cumulative response rate of 7.4%. In 2013, 8,120 panel members were drawn from GfK's KnowledgePanel as a part of general population, teacher, or parent samples; 5,569 completed the survey, yielding a final-stage completion rate of 68.6%. The recruitment rate for this study, reported by GfK, was 14.6% and the profile rate was 63.2%, for a cumulative response rate of 6.3%. Response rates for other dates were unavailable. These surveys were available in Spanish beginning in 2007; translation text was unavailable.

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