

Nationwide Survey of 800 Adults in America on Charter Schools

Introduction and Methodology

the polling company TM, inc. is pleased to present to the **Center for Education Reform** the results and analysis of a nationwide telephone survey of 800 adults in the United States and three statewide surveys of 700 adults in California, 500 adults in Georgia, and 500 adults in Missouri regarding charter schools. Interviews were conducted January 5-11, 2005 at a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) facility by telephone and with live callers.


The survey sample was drawn utilizing a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) method where phone numbers were generated by a computer to ensure that every household had an equal chance to be surveyed. Once a household was selected for participation, a trained interviewer asked to speak with a person over the age of 18.


The original survey instrument contained 47 questions, including 2 open-ended and 21 demographic questions, and was approved by the client prior to data collection.

Interviewers administered the same survey to all participants. Sampling controls were used to ensure that a proportional and representative number of people were interviewed from such demographic groups as age, race, and gender. Topline data is attached as Appendix A.

The margin of error for the national survey is $\pm 3.5\%$ at a 95% confidence interval, meaning that the data obtained would not differ by any more than 3.5 percentage points in either direction had the entire population of adults had been surveyed. The margins of error for the states are as follows: California ($\pm 3.7\%$), Georgia ($\pm 4.38\%$), Missouri ($\pm 4.38\%$). Margins of error for subgroups are higher.


Key Findings

 **Americans Need an Education on Charter Schools.** The lack of a clear understanding about the nature, purpose and “charter” of charter schools remains the threshold challenge. A majority of Americans are of an ironic, yet promising, type of two minds on the matter: they support the concept of charter schools, but they just don’t realize it yet.

 **Support for the Tenets of Charter Schools.** Respondents indicated agreement with several of the key principles that govern charters including:

- Allowing communities to come together and form schools to meet the needs of their children.
- Tying teachers’ pay to the academic performance of their students.
- Granting schools flexibility to set their own educational programs so long as they still meet government standards.
- Giving parents the option of sending their children to a number of different public schools, not just the one assigned based on where they live.

Americans embrace some of the most important pillars of the charter school movement, some with pronounced intensity. Again the problem is the current disconnect in respondents’ minds between the concept and the reality.

 **Hyper-hypotheticals: Situations that Resonate.** Respondents were most likely to say they would pull a child out of his or her current school in the event of any of the following circumstances:

- The child feels unsafe while at school.
- You are not able to regularly communicate with the teachers.
- The school building and facilities are not well-maintained or in need of repair.

These situations bested other options, including negative media coverage of the school, a lack of after-school activities, and other parents transferring their children. Though different in nature, all of the top three most compelling circumstances share a common theme: a direct threat to the child’s well-being, whether physical, mental or emotional, that the parent is less able to remedy on his or her own

📖 **Building a “Buzz.”** Survey respondents would react most favorably towards a public school emphasizing any of these three concepts:

- “ACCOUNTABILITY”
- “STANDARDS”
- “INNOVATION”

This unique “top three” is a perfect summation of the survey’s findings: respondents demand meaningful and measurable change to the current education system, and are open to new ideas, but insist that schools produce results and comply with reasonable rules and guidelines in so doing. These terms trumped other buzz words such as “choice,” which has already been co-opted by other movements, and “autonomy,” which seemed to suffer from a lack of understanding.

📖 **The Audience is as Important as the Message¹.** Through analysis of the cross-tabular data collected in this survey, respondents fell into the following three main categories:

ALREADY ON BOARD:

(Consistently support concepts and messages relating to School Choice and Charter Schools)

Not-Yet-Moms²

Southerners & South-Central Dwellers

“GET”ABLES:

(Respond positively to most aspects of Charter Schools, but nagging doubts or misperceptions are keeping them from fully embracing the concept).

Blacks

Hispanics

Single Moms

Parents of Children who Attend Public School

“FORGET”ABLES:

(Significantly less supportive of most aspects of school choice and oppose any change to the current education system)

Senior Citizens

Grandparents

¹ For indepth analysis of these groups, see Appendix B.

² Women who do not currently have children but say they are “very” or “somewhat” likely to have them in the next five years.

Analysis

“Charter Schools” Through the Eyes of the Public. In order to evaluate respondents’ unbiased thoughts and opinions about charter schools, they were asked in an open-ended fashion for their top-of-mind reactions to the following simple and straightforward questions: “When you hear the term ‘charter schools’ what is the first thing that you think of? How would you define or explain a charter?”

Remarkably, the most common reply was no response at all—31% of those surveyed either failed to answer or admitted that they did not know enough about charters to hazard a guess. Other responses fell into a few broad categories. Nearly one-quarter (24%) of respondents described the **type of school** they believed charters to fit into—just 2% said “public,” while 13% declared them “private.” Descriptions of the **structure** of charter schools, both accurate and inaccurate, were given by 16%. A matching 16% had something **positive** to say about the schools—eight times the number that offered a **negative** judgment (2%), while 6% referenced **money or funding**.

More than anything else, the answers highlighted the lack of basic information or facts and the preponderance of misconceptions that exists about charter schools.

Open-Ended Question: When you hear the term “charter schools” what is the first thing that you think of? How would you define or explain a charter school?

Selected Examples of Respondents’ Verbatim Responses...

“A school that parents put their children in when they are not satisfied with their current school.”

“A step above public school that offers specialized education for college preparatory.”

“An independent operation that's established to provide an alternative to state education.”

“They're smaller and the teachers get to know their students on a one-to-one basis.”

“Parents having more control of the school in deciding curriculum.”

“Charter schools still go by guidelines of state but a bit more diverse than other schools.”

“First, I think about smaller class sizes, better education. They (charter schools) are for upper-middle income and higher people. They have an atmosphere that is more conducive for learning.”

“Excellent. They (charter schools) don't have to listen to the Teachers Union or anyone else. They have complete independence.”

“They (charter schools) address behavioral and educational difficulties that regular schools can't.”

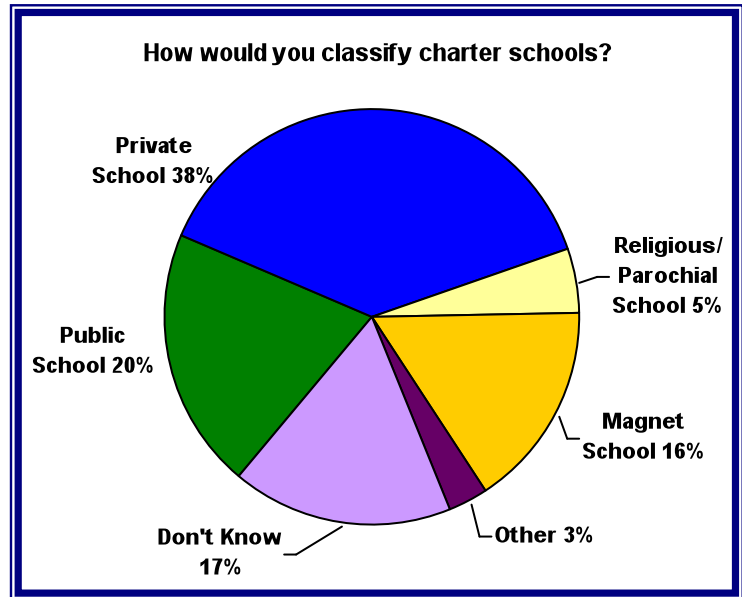
“The last effort to maintain people in the public school system.”

“It's a school that is not accountable as a regular school. I hear they don't have end-of-year tests.”

“An unfavorable impression. Not a good record or history of performing well in cities where they've been in place.”

“A charter school completely depletes the neighborhood schools from the students who are capable of higher learning and it takes away the interested parents that would have helped in the classrooms of the public schools.”

Charter Schools 101: Teaching the Basics. Only one-in five respondents (20%) correctly identified charter schools as “public” schools when asked to pick from a list that also included private, religious or parochial, and magnet schools. On the other hand, nearly twice as many (38%) incorrectly defined charter schools as private schools. Sixteen percent believed them to be magnet schools, while most knew that “charter” is not synonymous with “religious.” A full 17% owned up to not knowing how to classify charters, declining to even hazard a guess.



- Notably, the only demographic group to select “public school” as their top response were those with less than a high school education – proving that the number of degrees one has does not necessarily represent the amount of knowledge they retain.
- Those more likely than most to know that charter schools are public included Blacks, Hispanics, suburbanites, 55-64 year olds, divorced parents, parents whose children attend private school or are home schooled, adults who attended private or religious school, and students.
- Men were 7-points more likely than women to classify charters as private schools (42% compared to 35%). Others more likely to select this definition were those earning \$70,000-\$89,999, Asians, rural residents, high school graduates, parents with one child, parents of public school children, and single parents.
- Select groups believed that charters are the same as magnet schools, namely, those earning \$70,000-\$89,999, Hispanics, parents with two children, Not-Yet-Moms, those “Single and Living It³,” and those who children attend private school.
- Although a plurality of residents in California, Georgia, and Missouri defined charter schools as private schools, they were above the national average in classifying them as public schools. Californians were the most likely of the three to correctly select “public,” followed by Georgia, then Missouri (29%, 26%, and 22%, respectively).

³ Single women, aged 18-34, with no children.

Harnessing the Power of Community. By more than a 5:1 margin, Americans support the creation of charter schools. **More than three-quarters (78%) supported “allowing communities to create new public schools – called charter schools – that would be held accountable for student results and would be required to meet the same academic standards/testing requirements as other public schools but not cost taxpayers any additional money.”** The intensity of agreement was pronounced, as a majority of respondents indicated they would “strongly” support the right of a community to form a charter. Only 15% opposed charter schools, with 6% “somewhat opposed” and 9% “strongly opposed.”

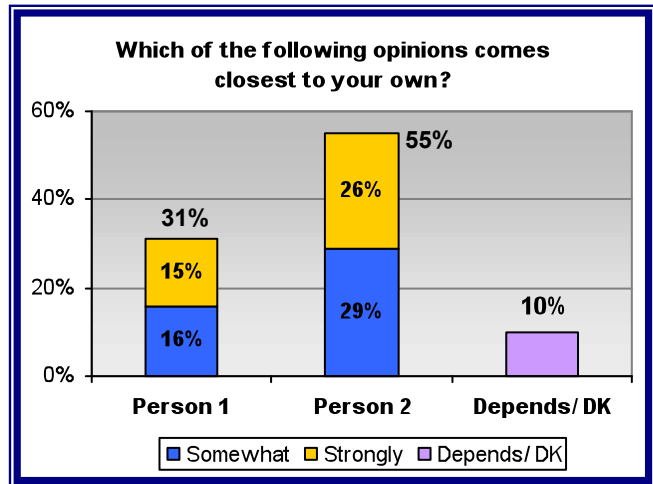
- Parents and respondents without children held limited variations in their advocacy of charter schools. Single moms, however, were 7-points more likely than parents generally and respondents overall to support them (85% compared to 78%).
- Not-Yet-Moms and those “Single & Living It” were also proponents of charter schools—perhaps hoping that such schools will be available when their future children are of the age to attend.
- Those with children who currently attend public schools **were least likely** among parents to support the formation of charters—perhaps believing the oft-repeated hype that traditional public schools are adversely impacted by the creation charters.
- Charter schools enjoyed the often-elusive tri-partisan support of all three major political party adherents: Republicans (87%), Democrats (74%)—especially woman Dems (77%), and Independents (70%) would all green light community efforts to create these “new public schools.”
- Others more likely to support the formation of charters included those earning less than \$30,000 per year, Hispanics—most notably Hispanics aged 44 years and younger, 18-34 year olds, singles, blue collar workers, and those who do not work outside the home.
- Georgians are nine-points more likely than the nation overall to support charter schools (87%- 78%, respectively), while Californians’ support falls within the margin of error (81%). Missourians, however, are less in favor of charters than the rest of the country, with only 73% in support (though, with 19% of Missourians against charters, supporters still outnumber the opposition by a margin of nearly 4:1).

Two Heads are Better than One. While the news media has been rife with commentaries that question the quality and validity of charter schools based on federal reports, Americans by and large seem unmoved by the same information.

Survey respondents were told that, “Recently there have been reports, based on information collected by the federal government, of students’ academic performance in conventional public and charter schools. These data show that students in charter schools are sometimes slightly behind students in other public schools academically.” They were then asked to rate the importance of these data by indicating agreement with one of the following opinions:

Person 1: Reports from the government that some charter school students are performing less well compared to conventional public school students concerns me when thinking about the quality of charter schools.

Person 2: There is other, more reliable information about charter schools besides government-based data that should be considered when thinking about the quality of such schools.



A majority of respondents (55%) aligned themselves with “Person 2.” This majority was of mixed intensity as 26% “strongly agreed” and 29% just “somewhat agreed” with the statement. A smaller, yet un-ignorable, segment of the population surveyed (31%) were concerned by the federal studies and would question the quality of charters based on these reports. One-in-ten respondents (10%) was unsure who or what to believe.

Within the broad demographic of “parents” there was significant variation:

- The differences in agreement with either statement between parents and non-parents were negligible. Parents of just one child were a bit *less* likely to agree that there were other, more reliable sources (49%) and a bit *more* likely to feel that government studies were valid and important (35%).
- Parents of two children, on the other hand, were the exact opposite: *more* likely to believe there was better information available than that from a federal study (62%), and *less* likely to be alarmed by the government data (29%). Parents of three or more children roughly tracked the topline results (55%-28%).
- Divorced parents were *more* likely than parents generally and respondents overall to agree the quality of charters should be based on more than government reports (65% vs. 56% and 55%, respectively).

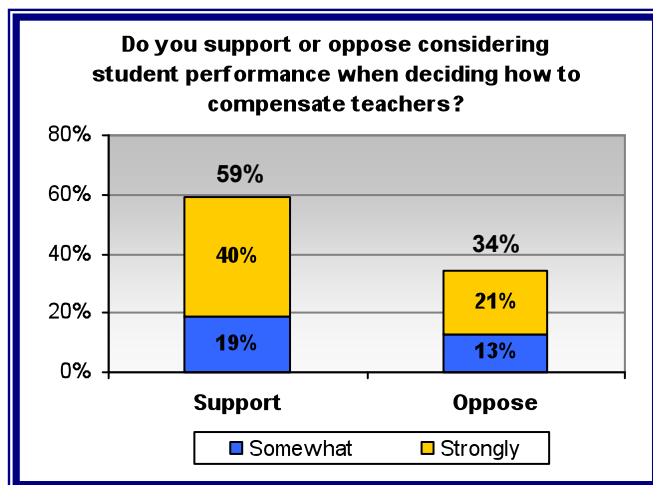
- Single parents were much *more* hesitant and tended to trust the federal studies (42% vs. 31% overall). Even more reliant on the government’s findings were single moms, as 50% professed to being concerned by the federal data—**making single moms one of the only demographic groups more likely to agree with this statement (Person 1) than the other which argued the merits of additional, non-government information (Person 2).**

Across the more general demographic classifications differences emerged as well:

- Groups most likely to believe that federal data should not be the only sources evaluating charters (Person 2) were those earning \$30,000-\$49,999 and \$50,000 and \$89,999 per year, suburbanites, residents of the south and south central regions, those who attend monthly religious services, white collar workers, blue collar workers, registered Republicans and self-identified conservatives.
- While Blacks generally were a bit less likely to agree with Person 2, as their annual household income increased, so did their openness to non-government data.
- Those more likely than respondents overall to report that the government studies on charter schools worried them about the schools’ quality (Person 1) were adults earning \$70,000-\$89,999 per year, those who were currently unemployed, students, and non-voters.
- Variations also emerged in the state studies. Californians and Missourians practically mirrored the national results, while Georgia residents were five-points more likely than the national population to agree with Person 2 (60%- 55%, respectively) and three-points less likely to agree with Person 1 (28%- 31%, respectively).

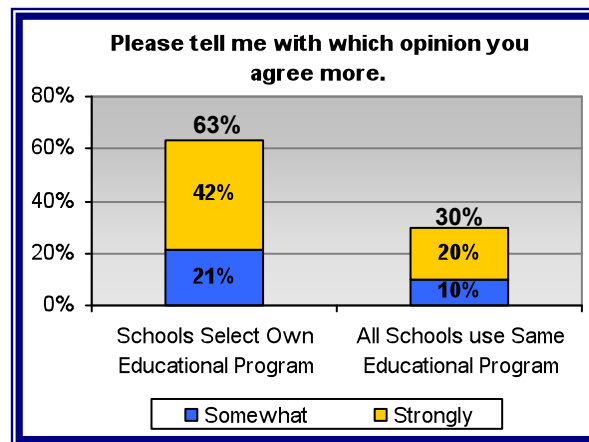
They *Should* Work Hard for the Money. A clear majority of respondents (59%) supported the concept of “considering student performance when deciding how to compensate teachers” and agreed with the idea that “a teacher whose students actually perform well would receive a higher salary and additional financial rewards.” The intensity of this support was pronounced, as 40% did so “strongly.” Just over one-third (34%) of respondents opposed such a measure, 21% of them “strongly.”

These results indicate that Americans want their greatest teachers to be compensated for their hard work and the not-so-great teachers to be hit where it hurts—in their paychecks.



- Parents were 8-points more likely than non-parents to advocate performance-based compensation for teachers (62%-54%). Single parents (67%), especially single moms (72%), and parents of school aged children (64%) were also highly supportive of this measure.
- Not-Yet-Moms and those “Single & Living It” were among the demographic groups most likely to *oppose* tying teachers’ wages to student achievement (60% and 51%, respectively).
- Groups more apt to argue that a teacher’s salary should be based, in part, on how his or her students perform included low income households (earning less than \$30,000 per year), urban dwellers, Blacks, Hispanics, 18-34 year olds, high school graduates, south central residents, Catholics, those who attend religious service just a few times per year, blue collar workers, and registered Republicans, with Republican men leading the charge.
- While overall, Whites supported performance-based pay at the same level as respondents generally, agreement with the idea was tied to household income: as Whites’ income increased, support for tying teachers’ paychecks to their students’ achievement decreased.
- Respondents more likely than average to *oppose* such a measure were those earning between \$70,000 and \$89,999 per year, Asians, college grads, union households, West coast dwellers, those who rarely or never attend religious services, students, retirees, registered Democrats, and self-identified liberals.
- Adults nationwide were more supportive of performance-based pay (59% support, 34% oppose) than those from California (54% support, 40% oppose) and Missouri (53% support, 43% oppose). Georgians, on the other hand, were twice as likely to support the concept, than to oppose it (62%-32%, respectively).

Different Paths Leading to the Same Destination. “Standards” are of the utmost importance to Americans when evaluating schools—at other points in this survey, 90% of respondents reported they would feel favorably towards a public school that emphasized “standards” and 65% said they would pull a child from a failing school that did not meet government standards. **Still, when it comes to the methods by which schools achieve those goals, respondents were willing to grant schools considerable leeway as 62% agreed (and 42% “strongly” agreed) that “as long as the school still meets the standards set by the state, schools should have the opportunity to select their own educational programs based on what might be best for the students, even if it differs from other schools in their area.”**



This sentiment was espoused by twice the number of respondents (30%) who believed that “in order to meet the required state standards, all schools should use the same educational program that is mandated by their local district of state so there is continuity among schools and students.”

Within the broad demographic of “parents” there were significant variations:

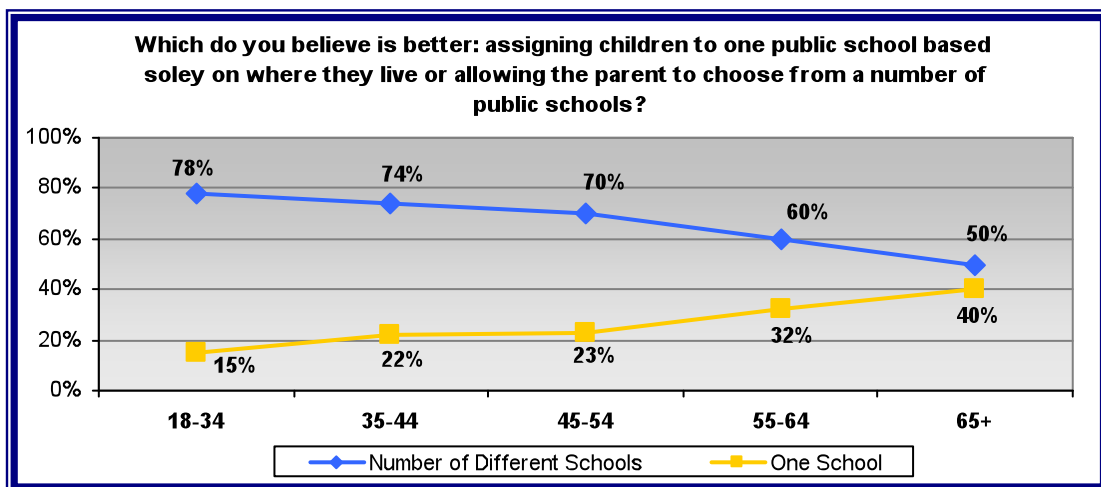
- Non-parents were 6-points *more* likely than parents to support schools setting their own educational programs (68%-62%).
- Parents of two children (65%), single parents, (66%) including single moms specifically (66%) broke from that trend and were *more* likely to believe schools should be allowed to deviate from the prescribed plan as long as they met the same standards.
- Parents with children who attended private schools were among the groups *most* likely to reject the idea of schools setting their own educational programs (36%). Parents with children who attended religious schools were *most* likely to embrace the self-determination strategy (65%).
- Not-Yet-Moms (84%) and the “Single & Living It” group (71%) offered some of the strongest support for schools seeking new ways to meet government standards.

Across the more general demographic classifications differences also emerged:

- Groups more likely than respondents overall to agree that schools should be able to set their own educational program included junior seniors (aged 55-64), 18-34 year olds, those earning \$90,000 or more per year, those who attend religious services a few times per year, executives, white collar workers, those who are currently unemployed, residents of the north central and western regions of the country, registered Independents, and self-identified liberals.
- While Democrat men were more likely to advocate flexibility in curriculum than their Democrat female counterparts, Republican women were more supportive than their male right-wingers.
- Those more likely than average to agree that schools should use the same district-mandated curriculums included Blacks, Asians, senior citizens (aged 65+), blue collar workers and retirees.
- Californians were the most likely of all the populations surveyed to feel that schools should have flexibility to set their own curriculums (69% compared to 67% of Missourians, 63% of adults nationwide, and 59% of Georgians). Georgians were more likely than the rest to believe all schools should stick to the same educational program set by the state or district (37% compared to 30% of adults nationwide, 29% of Missourians, and 27% of Californians).

Strength in Numbers. In most public school districts, where a child attends school is the function of only one variable: where he or she lives. Factors such as learning style, academic strengths and weaknesses, personality and behavioral issues are generally not considered. But, according to respondents, they should be. **By nearly a 3:1 margin, respondents were more likely to agree that “allowing the parent to choose from a number of public schools” was a superior option compared “assigning children to one public school based solely on where they live” (69%-24%).** This finding reaffirms the emphasis Americans place on their freedom to choose.

- Non-parents were 8-points more likely than parents to support the option of sending a child to a number of different public schools (75%-67%). However, divorced parents (76%), parents of school-aged children (75%), and single parents (74%) were more likely than parents and respondents overall to advocate choice.
- Not-Yet-Moms (81%) and those “Single & Living It” (80%) overwhelmingly voiced their opinion that geography should not be the only factor deciding where a child attends school.
- Those most likely to believe parents ought to have the option to pick the school that best suits their child included those earning \$30,000-\$49,999 per year, Blacks, Hispanics—most notably Hispanics aged 18-44 and those with household incomes less than \$50,000 per year, respondents with less than a high school education, those who attended religious services monthly or yearly, registered Democrats, south-central residents, blue collar workers, those that worked part time outside the home, and those that did not work outside the home at all.
- Group more likely than most to feel children should be assigned to one public school based on where they live included Asians, those earning between \$70,000 and \$89,999 per year, those who were unemployed and retirees.
- An interesting trend emerged across the age groups. As the nearby chart demonstrates, as a respondent’s age increased, so did the likelihood that he or she believed each child should be assigned to one public school; and as a respondent’s age decreased, support for the choice of a number of public schools increased.



- Adults nationwide (69%-24%), Californians (71%-22%), and Georgians (68%-27%) were all similar in the ratio those advocating the choice from a number of schools versus being assigned one school. Missourians, however, were noticeably more in favor of the one school approach (56% different schools vs. 38% one school).

Would you move your child out of a school if... One of the pillars of the Charter School movement is the concept of “choice.” All parents, it is presumed, should have the right to provide their children the best education possible, including by sending them to private or religious schools, without regard to their socioeconomic status.

The factors that may motivate a parent to choose to move a child out of a school are varied and complex. In order to assess such factors, each respondent was asked to imagine a child they knew or cared for in nine common situations that could compel parents or guardians to pull their child out of a particular school.

Each interviewee was asked to evaluate each hypothetical situation, which were rotated to avoid order bias. What follows is an analysis of all nine situations, rank-ordered from highest to lowest in terms of the number of respondents who would transfer a child after learning that information about his or her school.

Parental Threshold

Questions 1-9: Please think for a moment about the public schools in your area. For each of the following statements, please tell me whether knowing this fact would make you very, somewhat, just a little bit or not at all likely to move your child out of that school after learning this information. If you do not currently have children, please imagine a niece, nephew or child of a friend...

- The child feels unsafe while at school.
- You are not able to regularly communicate with the teachers.
- The school building and facilities are not well-maintained or in need of repair.
- The school is not meeting the standardized test score requirements set by the government.
- The child is performing poorly academically.
- The child expresses an interest in changing schools.
- There is negative media coverage of the school.
- There are not enough after-school activities.
- Other parents are transferring their children to different schools.

1. “The child feels unsafe while at school.” 78% Likely to Transfer

A child’s sense of security while at school is paramount, as parents and non-parents alike refuse to send a child to learn at an institution where fear prevails. **Nearly eight-in-ten (78%) respondents indicated that they would pull a child out of a school if he or she felt unsafe there and 62% would be “very likely” to do so.** Concern for a child’s safety received the strongest level of support amongst all the “situations” proposed in both scope and intensity. Indeed, the percentage of respondents “very” adamant about transferring the child to a different school was 17-points higher under this circumstance than any other tested. A relatively paltry 17% noted that they would be “just a little bit” or “not at all” likely to make the transition based on the child’s feelings of being unsafe while at school.

- Not-Yet-Moms and parents of school-aged children⁴ were more likely than both respondents overall and all parents to say a child feeling unsafe would lead them to remove that child from his or her current school.
- Parents with children who attend or attended private or religious institutions were more concerned about their child's sense of security at school than respondents overall and parents with children in public schools.
- Blacks were particularly motivated by a concern for the child's safety; some 8-in-ten (80%) said that they would be compelled to remove their child from the school in that instance. Blacks aged 18-34 were most adamant in their feelings (84%). Hispanics were a bit less likely than respondents overall to transfer a child that felt unsafe, however, as Hispanics grew older, their likelihood to act in response to this circumstance increased.
- Others more likely than most to identify with a child feeling unsafe at school included those earning \$70,000 or more per year, 35-44 year olds, residents of the south and south central regions of the country, college graduates, executives and white-collar workers, and those who reported attending religious services seldom or never.
- Respondents to the statewide studies in California, Georgia, and Missouri agreed with adults nationwide adults on the importance of a child feeling secure at school, as this circumstance garnered the most support in each (CA: 83%, GA: 78%, MO: 79%).

***II. "You are not able to communicate regularly with the teachers."
70% Likely to Transfer***

Remaining involved and informed about the current happenings at a child's school is a must for parents. One of the most effective ways to stay up to date on the key elements of a child's education is regular communication with his or her teachers. **Respondents were clear about their need for easy access to educators: 70% would move a child out of a school if teachers were unavailable or inaccessible, with 45% "very likely" to take such an action.** In comparison, 24% noted a lack of communication with teachers would not compel them to switch the child to another school.

- Even non-parents perceived the importance of a constant dialogue with educators: some two-thirds of them (65%) disclosed that poor communication would spur them into action (73% of parents agreed). Notably, parents of one child felt most strongly about the issue (80%).
- Unmarried parents and Not-Yet-Moms were more apt than parents and respondents overall to be "likely" to remove a child from a school for this reason (80% and 85%, respectively).

⁴ Children aged 4-18 years.

- An interesting pocket of support emerged among the “Single & Living It” demographic with 90% of these young, childless women reporting a lack of teacher communication would cause them to pull a child from the school. Perhaps their views on this issue have been informed by their more recent experiences as a student. In any event, this figure demonstrates the importance of reaching out to non-obvious constituencies within the broader population even where their current life circumstances do not include a directly vested interest in the public education system, e.g., a child of their own.
- Blacks, especially those aged 18-44, were again the racial group most responsive to this situation. Others emphasizing the importance of access to a child’s teachers were 35-44 year olds, those earning between \$70,000 and \$89,999 a year, Southerners, West Coast dwellers, executives and white-collar workers.
- An open line of communication with teachers was most valued by Californians (75%) and Georgians (75%)—capturing the second place slot in these states just as it did on the national survey. Missourians felt it a bit less important (65%), but still placed it among the top three reasons for transferring a child to a different school.

***III. “The school building and facilities are not well-maintained or in need of repair.”
68% Likely to Transfer***

A leaky roof, crumbling sidewalks, dingy paint: Americans would never want these problems where they live, nor do they want them where their children learn. **In fact, 68% of respondents indicated that, if a school fell into a state of bad repair, they would move a child out of that school, and with more than half (37%) of them adamant about doing so.** Again, only about one-quarter of those surveyed nationally (27%) felt differently.

- While there was no distinction between parents and respondents overall (68% apiece), single moms (77%) and Not-Yet-Moms (78%) were significantly more concerned with the upkeep of the buildings where their children (present or future) spend their days. Parents of school-aged children were also more likely (71%) to say they would move their children out of such a school as were parents who sent their children to private or religious institutions.
- Those at the upper end of the income spectrum (\$70,000+) were among the groups most likely to deem this circumstance unsatisfactory. Likelihood of transfer was directly linked to household income for Blacks and Whites—as income increased, so did respondents’ intentions to move a child out of the school. Blacks generally, residents of the South, suburbanites, 35-44 year olds, Independents, executives, and white collar workers were all more likely than respondents overall to agree.
- While Californians placed greater importance on the state of repair of their schools than did adults nationwide (71%), Georgians (66%), and Missourians (65%) ranked it a bit lower, yet still quite high.

IV. “The school is not meeting the standardized test score requirements set by the government.” 65% Likely to Transfer

There are a multitude of factors by which to judge a school’s performance, including but not limited to, teacher retention, the percentage of students failing a grade, graduation rate, and the one which forms the basis of considerable debate lately, standardized test scores. Children across the country learn very early in their schooling how to properly fill-in answer bubbles with a No. 2 pencil and the resulting scores are scrutinized by everyone from the government to the media. **Respondents were firm in their assertion that they would not stand for a school falling behind the government’s test score requirements; 65% reported this would be reason enough for them to pull a child out, with a sizeable 42% “very likely” to do so.** Nearly three-in-ten (29%) did not believe lagging test scores were reason enough to move a child out of such a school.

- Parents were seven-points more likely than non-parents to emphasize the importance of government testing standards (67%-60%). Not-Yet-Moms (70%), parents of school-aged children (69%), and single moms (68%) were also more likely than respondents overall to indicate they would transfer their child to another school. As well, the “Single & Living It” set again proved themselves in step with, or even outrunning, their older, more committed counterparts (78%).
- Among the racial groups, the notion of low test scores resonated best among Hispanics. Blacks and Hispanics, especially those at the upper end of the income spectrum were more likely than Whites and respondents overall to cite this as a reason to pull a child out of school.
- The nation’s wealthiest residents, those earning \$90,000 or more per year, were among those most likely to take action if their child attended a sub-par school by government standards as were 35-44 year olds, white collar and blue collar workers, Americans living in the south central region of the country, registered Republicans and self-identified conservatives.
- While Democrats overall tracked the topline results, Dem women were 8-points more likely than their male counterparts to transfer a child under this circumstance (67%-59%).
- At 65%, adults nationwide were actually the least likely among all the groups surveyed to move a child out of a school that was not meeting the standardized test score requirements—compared to 66% of Missourians, 71% of Californians, and 73% of Georgians.

V. “The child is performing poorly academically.” 53% Likely to Transfer

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, only **a slim majority of respondents (53%) stated that a child struggling academically would lead them to move that child to a school better suited to his or her needs. The reaction to this situation was of mixed intensity, as 27% would be “very likely” to change schools compared to 26% who would be just “somewhat likely.”** Those who did not feel a child’s poor performance justified pulling the child out of school were fewer in number (37%), but stronger in intensity (28% said they would be “not at all likely”).

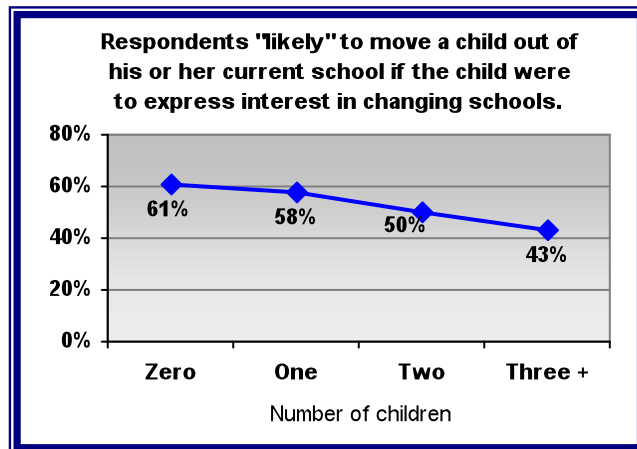
- Parents overall were 4-points more likely than non-parents to pull a child out of a school where he or she was performing poorly (54%-50%), with parents of one child feeling most strongly about the situation (59%).
- Whether a respondent would transfer a poorly performing child was tied to his or her annual household income: though the movements were small, as income increased, so did the likelihood of transfer.
- Marital status also played a role in the likelihood of a parent to transfer: divorced parents and those with school-aged children were also more likely to move their child to another school. **Single moms were again among the groups most apt to take action, with 68% likely to transfer a child who was struggling academically.** Their childless counterparts, those who are “Single & Living It” also felt strongly that a less-than-stellar assessment demanded a big adjustment (67%).
- Blacks, most notably Blacks aged 18-34, those living in urban neighborhoods, 35-44 year olds, registered Republicans (Republican men, in particular), conservatives, Catholics, residents of the South and south central regions, executives and white collar workers were all more likely than average to report they would pull their child out of such a school.
- Californians were a bit more likely than adults nationwide to act in this situation (56%), while Georgians and Missourians (each 51%) were slightly less likely.

VI. “The child expresses an interest in changing schools.” 53% Likely to Transfer

Most of the time, it seems that experience brings wisdom, at least when it comes to raising a child. At the same time, children are often surprisingly adept at determining what they themselves need. **A slight majority of respondents (53%) would take the child’s input into account when choosing where to send him or her to school, but with a noted lack of intensity—22% would be “very likely” to move a child out of a school at the child’s request while 31% would be just “somewhat likely.”** About four-in-ten respondents (38%) stuck to the theory that the parent knows best and would be “unlikely” to transfer a child simply because the child wanted to, with 25% of them “not at all likely.”

- Not-Yet-Moms were far and away the most apt to say they would transfer a child who expressed an interest (80%). Those who are “Single & Living It” expressed similar support (74%).

- An interesting trend emerged in the responses to this situation: as the nearby chart demonstrates, the more children a person had, the less likely he or she was to move a child at the child’s request. Respondents without children were most likely to transfer the child and those with three or more children were the least likely.



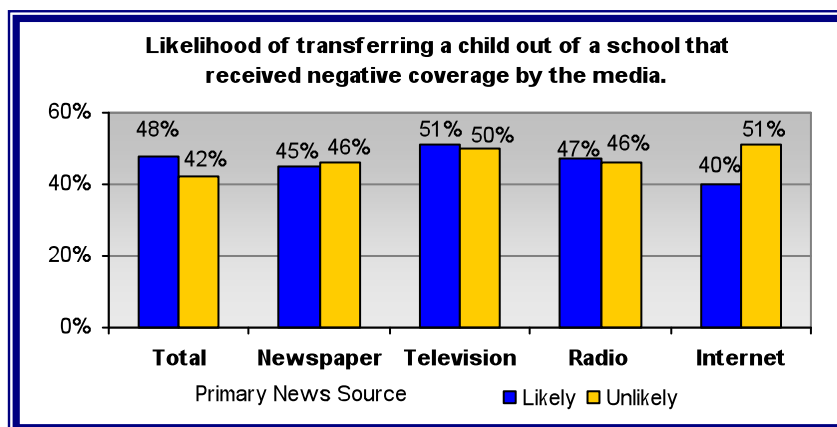
- Respondents earning \$70,000-\$89,999 per year, Blacks—18-34 year old Blacks in particular, 18-34 year olds generally, 35-44 year olds, respondents with less than a high school education, white collar workers, students, Southerners, and self-identified moderates were more likely than most to consider the child’s wishes.
- Compared to respondents of the statewide surveys, resonance with this situation of adults nationwide was roughly in the middle at 53%. Residents of California were more likely to identify (57%), while residents of Georgia (51%) and Missouri (51%) were a bit less so.

VII. “There is negative media coverage of the school.” 48% Likely to Transfer

Once an example of impartiality and integrity, the media have lost some respect these past few years. Questionable reporting, threadbare stories, and a tendency towards sensationalism have chipped away at the trust many Americans once had in the press as the purveyor of reliable information. In this series of questions, **negative media coverage of a school would not convince the majority of respondents to pull a child out that school—just under half of those surveyed (48%) indicated they would be likely to do so, with only 22% deeming themselves “very likely.”** A considerable 42% said that such a circumstance would not compel them to transfer, including 30% who claimed they would be “not at all likely” to act on such media accounts and change schools.

- Parents were 7-points more likely to move a child out of such a situation than not (48%-41%) and 3-points more likely to move him or her than non-parents (45%). Parents of school-aged children were even more stalwart in their stance as 51% declared themselves “likely” to transfer.
- Single parents, especially single moms, were significantly more likely than average to pull a child out of a school criticized by the press (56% and 66%, respectively).

- Groups more likely than most to suggest that negative media coverage would lead them to pull a child out of a school included Blacks, most notably Blacks aged 18-34 and those earning less than \$50,000 per year, suburbanites, Southerners and south central dwellers, 18-34 year olds, respondents with less than a high school education, those who were currently unemployed, white collar workers, registered Republicans (Republican women in particular), and conservatives.
- Some respondents were actually more apt to be *unlikely* than likely to move a child out of a school receiving negative media attention, including westerners, residents of rural areas, 55-64 year olds, those who stayed at home or worked just part-time, retirees, moderates and liberals.
- There was a 16-point variation in response to the situation of negative media coverage amongst the populations surveyed: 53% of Californians would transfer a child under this circumstance, followed by 49% of Georgians, 48% of Americans overall, and just 37% of Missourians.
- **It is interesting to note how a respondent’s primary news source affected his or her reliance on the media.** As the nearby chart demonstrates, those who relied on television news were most likely to transfer a child in this situation while internet users were the least.



VIII. “There are not enough after-school activities.” 43% Likely to Transfer

Soccer teams, science clubs, and debate squads are all very worthy pursuits that keep kids occupied and out of trouble until their parents get home from work. That said, an absence or paucity of such activities would not be enough to compel most respondents to move a child out of a school. **In fact, a slight majority (51%) responded that they would be unlikely to transfer a child for this reason—and with intensity as 39% would be “not at all likely.” More than four-in-ten (43%), however, stated a dearth of post-school day endeavors would be enough to send them searching for a new school (17% would be “very likely”).**

- Non-parents were 9-points more likely than parents and 6-points more likely than respondents overall to indicate a lack of after-school activities would cause them to move a child out of his or her school (49% vs. 40% and 43%, respectively).

- Not-Yet-Moms (58%) and the “Single & Living It” set (69%) were also more concerned with this situation than parents and respondents overall
- Those more likely than most to suggest they would *not* move a child out of such a school included Westerners, rural residents, 45-54 year olds, Whites, those who stayed at home or worked part-time, registered Democrats, and conservatives.
- Though the majority declared that a lack of things to do after school was not reason enough to pull a child out of a school, some groups remained more likely transfer including Blacks, those earning between \$70,000 and \$89,999 per year, 18-34 year olds, those with a high school diploma or less, white collar workers, and registered Independents.
- This circumstance generated more of a fervor among nationwide adults than the other populations surveyed—43% of all Americans would be likely to move a child out of school if there were not enough after-school activities compared to 41% of Californians, 36% of Georgians, and 32% of Missourians.

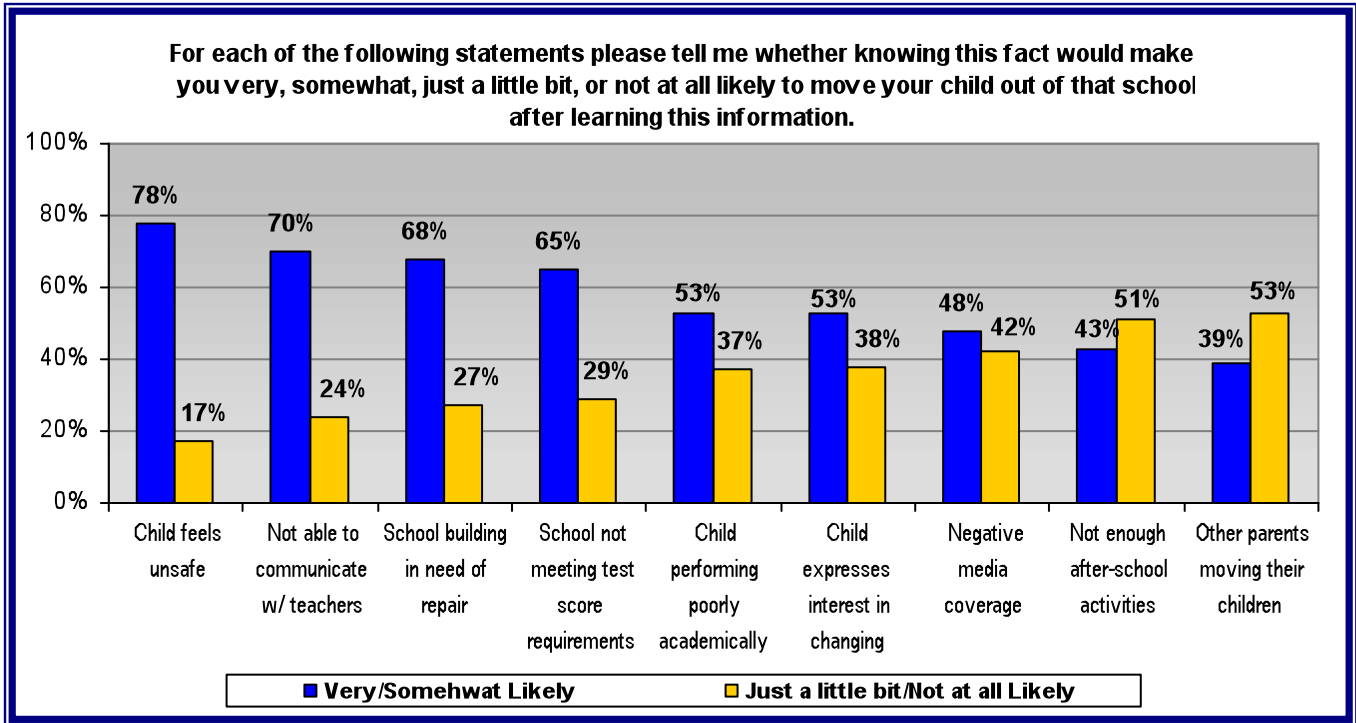
***IX. “Other parents are transferring their children to different schools.”
39% Likely to Transfer***

The perennially persuasive consideration that “everybody’s doing it” rings hollow to most survey respondents with respect to transferring children to a different school.

Refusing to cede to “parental peer pressure,” a majority of adults surveyed (53%) reported that other parents moving their children out of a school *would not* lead them to move their own child and 42% would be “not at all likely” to do so. Not to be ignored, however, are the 39% who would take the decisions of other parents into account in making their own choices, though just one-third of them (13%) would be “very likely” to respond in this way.

- Parents remained a bit more likely than non-parents to consider the actions of their child-rearing counterparts (40% vs. 36%), with parents of two children most likely to do so (44%). Single moms were also more likely to trust the judgment of other parents and transfer their child (44%).
- Not-Yet-Moms and those “Single & Living It” were more likely to rely on their own judgment and *not* pull a child out of a school just because other parents were removing their children (58% and 70%, respectively would be “unlikely”).
- Among those most likely to declare the actions of other parents *would not* influence their own decision to switch a child’s school were 55-64 year olds, those earning \$50,000-\$69,999 per year, respondents who rarely or never attend religious services, white collar workers, part-time workers, registered Democrats, self-identified moderates, and liberals.
- Groups who suggested they *would* pull a child out of his or her school if other parents were doing so included those earning upwards of \$90,000 per year, Blacks, blue collar workers and conservatives.

- National adults were not alone in ranking this circumstance at the bottom of their list as each of the surveyed populations did the same—along with 39% of adults nationwide, just 40% of Californians, 34% of Georgians, and 32% of Missourians would pull remove a child from a school from which other parents were removing their children.



It's all in the details... Sometimes the difference between a campaign that succeeds and one that flops is as small as a single word. The connotation and association of that word is why choosing exactly the right message is so crucial to the Charter School movement. In order to uncover the nuances that will convert shrugged shoulders into raised eyebrows, respondents were asked to evaluate nine “buzz” words attached to the alternative education movement and indicate whether they would feel favorably or unfavorably towards a public school that emphasized the concept.

By and large, these data confirmed the suspicion that while several words may have the same basic meaning, the everyday understanding of them within the context of education can produce drastically different outcomes. For example, though “freedom” and “autonomy” may seem to refer to the same rudimentary concept of one’s ability to act without external restraints, respondents to this survey clearly did not feel the terms were interchangeable. In fact, there was a double-digit difference in how favorably they regard each one. Every respondent evaluated each of the nine terms, which were rotated to avoid any order bias. Following are analyses of each term, rank ordered by “favorability.”

Level of Impact of “Buzz” Words

Questions 10-18: I am now going to read to you a list of descriptive terms. For each, please tell me if you would feel favorable or unfavorable towards a public school that emphasized it.

“ACCOUNTABILITY”

“STANDARDS”

“INNOVATION”

“OPTIONS”

“CHOICE”

“REGULATION”

“FREEDOM”

“CONTROL”

“AUTONOMY”

I. “ACCOUNTABILITY” 92% Favorable

Among the golden rules that parents try to teach their children very early in life is that actions have consequences. When it comes to a child’s schooling, respondents expect the same rules to apply. **A whopping 92% would feel favorably towards a public school that emphasized “accountability” with 74% reporting they would feel “strongly” favorably.** *A miniscule 3% would feel unfavorably towards such a school, which is less than the margin of error for the survey.* Whether this “accountability” refers to schools and teachers being held responsible for the performance of their students, or to the students being taught to accept the consequences of their own action is not known, but either way, it is clear from this result that Americans are tired of children slipping through the cracks of the public school system.

- Non-parents were slightly more likely than their child-rearing counterparts to respond positively to the term “accountability” (94%-91%). While there was little distinction amongst parents whose children attended public, private, or religious schools, parents who had attended private school when they were young were more likely than other parents to emphasize the term’s importance (95%).

- Though not currently personally responsible for children, Not-Yet-Moms reacted with great enthusiasm towards a school emphasizing such a concept (96%).
- A public school emphasizing “accountability” got extremely high marks across the board. There were, however, some demographic groups even more likely to feel favorably than respondents overall. These included Asians, those earning \$70,000-\$89,999 per year, those who had completed some college coursework, white collar workers, students, conservatives and registered Republicans.
- The favorability ratings of “accountability” by adults nationwide were matched by those surveyed in the three statewide studies: 91% of Californians, 92% of Georgians, and 92% of Missourians felt very positively towards the term.

II. “STANDARDS” 90% Favorable

In some situations, it is acceptable, if not advisable, to “go with the flow” and take things as they come without a codified set of rules or objectives. The education of America’s youth, according to these survey respondents, is not one of those situations. **Nine-in-ten of those surveyed (90%) reported they would feel favorably towards a public school that put emphasis on “standards,” eighteen times the number that would feel unfavorably (5%).**

This positive reaction came with considerable intensity, as more than two-thirds (68%) of adults surveyed would feel “strongly favorably.” With something as important as a child’s future at stake, respondents don’t want schools to have a laissez-faire attitude; rather, they expect a school to set, work towards, and live up to certain goals of accomplishment.

- Parents were six-points more likely than non-parents to favor a school that emphasized “standards” (92%-86%). Married parents (93%) were similarly more inclined than their divorced (88%) and single (91%) counterparts with children.
- Those with children who attended public or private school were more likely than parents of children attending religious institutions or being home-schools, to indicate the importance of “standards.”
- While “standards” enjoyed almost universal appeal, there were some groups more likely to feel favorably towards the term including those earning between \$70,000 and \$89,999 per year, Asians, students, self-identified conservatives, and residents of the south central and north eastern parts of the country.
- While Hispanics overall reacted to “standards” with no more intensity than respondents generally, an eye-popping 100% of Hispanics aged 18-34 would feel favorably towards a school emphasizing the concept.
- Adults nationwide (90%) were mostly in step with residents of Georgia (91%), California (89%), and Missouri (89%) regarding the favorability of “standards.”

III. “INNOVATION” 86% Favorable

As the old saying goes, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” But when the old way of doing things is no longer effective, it is definitely time for a “fix” or perhaps even an overhaul in the form of fresh, cutting-edge ideas and methods. **This notion appealed greatly to Americans nationwide when tested in this survey; in fact, some 86% would be favorably towards a public school that emphasized “innovation,” with 59% of them “strongly” so.** A meager 6% would react unfavorably to a school implementing ideas that were “outside the box.”

Though respondents made it clear in other questions that they expect a school to remain accountable and comply with certain standards, they also understand that employing the methods of the past is not necessarily the best approach for the future.

- There was little distinction between parents and non-parents, but single parents were more likely than both respondents overall and parents generally to emphasize the importance of “innovation” in schools (91%-86%).
- **Not-Yet-Moms were fully on board with this concept as a stunning 100% indicated they would feel favorably towards a school employing new and creative methods.**
- Men were 6-points more likely than women to favor “innovation” (89%-83%). Others with whom “innovation” positively resonated included those earning \$70,000+ per year, 18-34 year olds (especially 18-34 year old Blacks) and 45-54 year olds (most notably 45-54 year old Whites), moderates, students, blue collar workers, and respondents who do not work outside the home.
- Enthusiastic margins of Californians (87%), Georgians (85%), and Missourians (86%) generally agreed with the green light conclusions drawn by adults nationwide (86%) with respect to a scholastic focus on “innovation.”

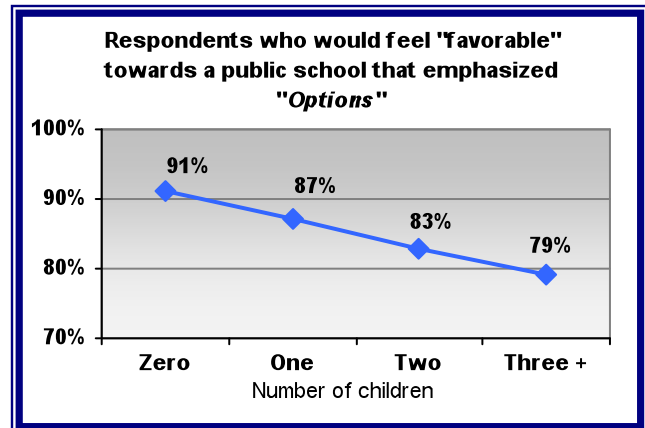
IV. “OPTIONS” 85% Favorable

Arguably, each student’s strengths and weaknesses, learning styles and study habits could be as personal and unique as his or her very fingerprints. What works for one child may not work for another. Therefore, a “one-size-fits-all” approach to education is simply not acceptable, let alone attainable. It follows, then, that **85% of respondents indicated they would nod in agreement with a school that emphasized “options.” This feeling was held with remarkable intensity: 56% of those surveyed said they would regard such a school in a “strongly” favorable light.**

Just 5% of Americans would reject the “options” option, leaving them outnumbered 17-to-1. Whether “options” refers to a choice in which school a child attends or which subjects he or she is taught, it is clear that respondents expect a school to nimble and responsive when dealing with the needs of students, which are as diverse and individual as the students they are meant to serve.

- Not-Yet-Moms and those unmarried, childless women gave their vote of support for “options,” each more likely than parents and respondents over all to react favorably towards the term (89% and 90%, respectively).

- Non-parents were 8-points more likely than parents to feel favorably towards a school that embraced “options” (91%-83%). In fact, as the nearby chart demonstrates, the more children a parent had, the less favorably they regarded the concept. To them, “options” may connote more choices, thereby interrupting the routines and habits upon which they rely to manage their large broods.



- Those cohorts most attracted to a school emphasizing “options” were younger adults (18-34 year olds) high-income earners, residents of the north-central region of the country, white collar workers and students.
- “Options” was a popular concept across all populations surveyed as both Georgians and Missourians favored the concept equally with adults nationwide (85%), and Californians just a tiny bit more (86%).

V. “CHOICE” 84% Favorable

“Choice” is more than a simple six-letter word to most Americans. It is the core value according to which a free society operates. Still, “choice” has been adopted, if not co-opted, in significant ways in other public policy debates. This may account for a slightly higher number of interviewees reacting unfavorably toward “choice” than “options” (8%-5%). Even so, Americans fiercely support the concept within the context of education, and with gusto similar to their embrace of “options.” **Among the 84% who said that they would feel favorably towards a school emphasizing “choice,” 53% of them would feel so without reservation.**

- By a four-point margin, non-parents were more likely than parents to favor “choice.” Additionally, and as was the case with “options,” the preference for a school that emphasized “choice” decreased as the number of children a respondent had increased: 87% of respondents without children would feel favorably, compared to 86% of those with one child, 84% of those with two children, and 79% of those with three children or more.
- Tomorrow’s parents of school-aged children (Not-Yet-Moms) were clear proponents of “choice,” with 92% agreeing that schools should embrace the concept.

- Groups more likely than most to feel favorably towards a school incorporating “choice” included 18-34 year olds, Southerners, Independents—Independent men in particular, adults not registered to vote, self-identified liberals, and people of varying levels of annual household income from \$30,000 to \$90,000.
- Adults surveyed as part of the national study were just a bit more likely than those in any of the three statewide studies to respond positively to “choice”—84% of nationwide respondents, 81% of Californians, 83% of Georgians, and 83% of Missourians reported they would feel favorably towards a school that emphasized “choice.”

VI. “REGULATION” 83% Favorable

Though many people view government regulations as an impingement on their freedom, others recognize their usefulness in keeping the peace or promoting the greater good. When it comes to public education, respondents want reassurance that their children will be given the tools they need to succeed in the real world. **More than eight-in-ten (83%) of those surveyed would feel favorably towards a school that emphasized “regulation,” with 52% indicating feeling “strongly” favorably.** A mere 9% would look upon a school that embraced “regulation” with an unfavorable opinion. Respondents have proven that they are open to change and want some flexibility in public schools, but at the same time they feel it is important for schools to adhere to a consistent set of guidelines.

- Parents were 5-points more likely than non-parents to be favorable toward “regulation” (84%-79%), with single moms leading the charge (87%).
- Those more inclined to favor a school emphasizing “regulation” included respondents earning between \$50,000 and \$69,999 per year, Hispanics, those with less than a high school education, students, white collar workers, residents of the south-central region, those who do not work outside the home or are unemployed, and self-identified conservatives.
- A stunning 100% of Hispanics earning less than \$70,000 per year would feel favorably towards a school emphasizing “regulation” compared to just 72% of those earning \$70,000 or more.
- Adults nationwide were 5-points more likely to respond positively towards the concept of “regulation” than in Georgia, Missouri and California (83% compared to 78% of residents in each of the three states surveyed).

VII. “FREEDOM” 80% Favorable

“Freedom” is the cornerstone on which the United States of America is founded. **80% of respondents would feel favorably towards a school that emphasized “freedom,” and with notable intensity as 52% would be “strongly” so.** Just one out of every ten respondents (10%) reported feeling unfavorably towards the term.

The resistance to embrace “freedom” in the context of public education as readily as related concepts like “choice” and “options” may rest in the broad associations connected to freedom, including the idea that allowing students too much latitude contravenes the purpose of and compliance with standards, regulation and accountability. To the extent that this is true, talk of “freedom” in education should make clear that that freedom allows greater self-determination by the individual school and schooled individuals associated with it, in peaceful harmony with rather than against, reasonable regulations and standards.

- Non-parents were 3-points more likely than parents to feel favorably towards a school that embraced “freedom” (82%-79%). However those with three or more children are mostly to blame for this divide as just 72% of them would favor such a school compared to 82% of parents with one child and 84% of parents with 2 children.
- Parents with children who attended public school were more likely than parents who send their kids to private or religious institutions to value the concept of “freedom” (80% compared to 69% and 66%, respectively).
- Not-Yet-Moms (96%) and the “Single & Living It” (90%) crowd were both far more likely than respondents overall and parents of any number of children to report they would favor a school that emphasized “freedom.” Of course, their current enjoyment of the kind of “freedom” that comes with a child-free lifestyle may have biased their views a bit.
- Others more apt to respond positively to this term included respondents earning between \$50,000 and \$89,999 per year, Asians, 18-34 year olds, residents of the north-east and north-central states, those who did not work outside the home or were unemployed, and students.
- Interestingly, while Blacks have generally felt a bit less favorably than most towards the other “buzz” words tested, they were 8-points less likely than Hispanics, 10-points less likely than Whites, and 17-points less likely than Asians to report they would favor a school that emphasized “freedom.” However, favorability of “freedom” amongst Blacks grew stronger as household income increased.
- There was solid agreement across the populations surveyed in regards to the favorability of “freedom” in schools: 80% of adults nationwide, Georgians, and Missourians and 78% of Californians judged the term positively.

VIII. “CONTROL” 76% Favorable

Kids can do some crazy things—from eating paste in kindergarten to cutting class in high school. If left to their own devices, many children may not reap all the benefits an education is intended to afford them. Respondents recognized the importance of a school exercising a certain level of “control” over its students, with 76% indicating they would feel favorably towards a school that emphasized just that and 45% “strongly” favorably. Just about one-fifth that many (15%) would react unfavorably. **Though still supported by a clear and sizeable majority, the term “control” doesn’t seem to have quite the punch that other terms have; in fact, more respondents reported they would feel unfavorably towards a school embracing “control” than any towards any other “buzz” word tested in the survey.**

- Parents were more likely than their childless counterparts to report they would feel favorably towards a school embracing “control” (77%-74%). Married parents and single moms were even more forceful in their endorsement (both 79%).
- Parents whose children attended private school were more likely than those with children in any other type of school to favor “control” (88% vs. 76% of parents sending kids to public school, and 77% of those educating their children at a religious school).
- Groups who responded more positively than most to the concept of control included Hispanics (especially those aged 18-34), those earning greater than \$70,000 per year, registered Republicans, West Coasters, adults who did not work outside the home, and students.
- The popularity of a school that emphasized “control” hovered around three-quarters across all populations surveyed with 76% of adults nationwide, 74% of Californians, 77% of Georgians, and 74% of Missourians inclined to favor it.

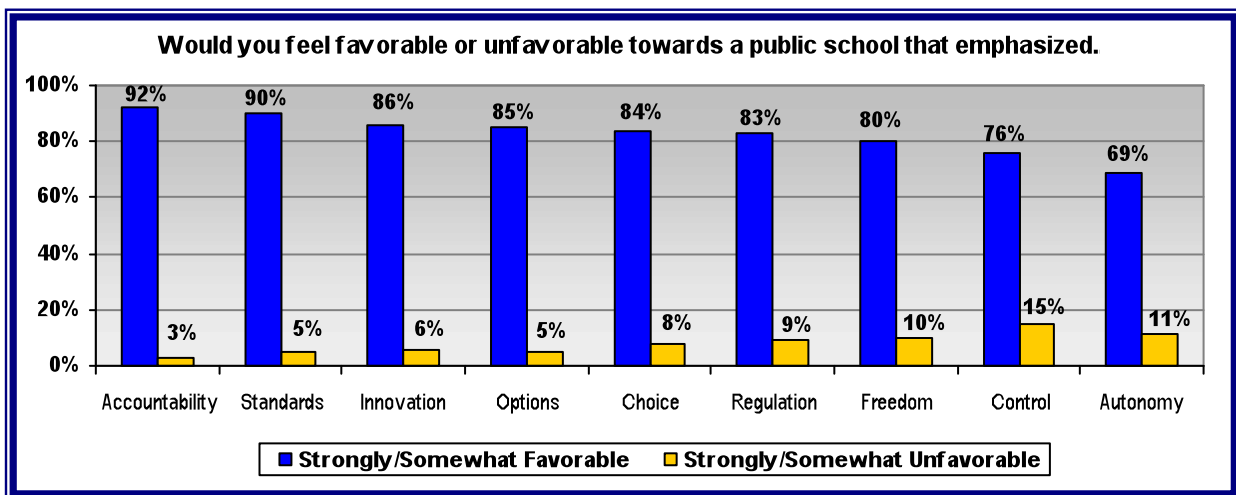
IX. “AUTONOMY” 69% Favorable

Even as notions of independence and self-direction appeal to many, there is no independent evidence that the word “autonomy” captures or conveys this to those same individuals. A clear majority (69%) of respondents would feel favorably towards a school that emphasized “autonomy,” but this majority is lacking in the intensity demonstrated with respect to other words tested. Here, only 34% would feel “strongly” favorably toward a school that placed a focus on autonomy, and 35% would feel as such just “somewhat.”

Indeed, the reluctance to more fully embrace the term “autonomy” may have less to do with the unfavorably feelings it engenders (just 11% of respondents) than the confusion it causes. One in five respondents (20%) volunteered that they simply “did not know” when asked for their evaluation of “autonomy”—twice the number who said so in response to any other “buzz” word.

In moving forward with the lexicon of education, this lack of familiarity with “autonomy” may be regarded as a limiting factor OR it may be regarded as an opportunity to take a less popular, little-known word and inject it into the debate on your own terms.

- Single moms were the only parent group to really break away from the pack with respect to a school emphasizing “autonomy” (81% of single moms compared to 69% of parents overall who would feel favorably towards such a school).
- Though not more likely than respondents overall, parents with children who attended public school (68%) were more apt to embrace the concept of “autonomy” than parents with children in either private (65%) or religious (63%) schools.
- Others who would respond positively to “autonomy” in schools included Asians, Hispanics, most notable Hispanics aged 18-34, 18-34 year olds generally, those earning between \$50,000 and \$89,999 per year, students, and those who do not work outside the home.
- Groups more likely to be unsure of the concept included Southerners, those earning less than \$30,000 per year, Blacks, respondents aged 55 years or older, blue collar workers and those not registered to vote.
- Respondents to the national survey were more likely than respondents to the three statewide surveys to report they would feel favorably towards a school emphasizing this concept of self-rule: 69% of adults nationwide compared to 67% of both Californians and Georgians, and 66% of Missourians.



Strategic Recommendations

Education is Key: Correct America’s “Information Underload”

Much of the resistance toward charter schools is based on unfounded “facts” and misperceptions. When asked to define charter schools in their own words, Americans demonstrated their lack of knowledge regarding the fundamental principles of charter schools. In fact, in some instances their perceptions of the doctrines espoused by charters were the exact opposite of what the schools actually support: they believe that charters lack accountability, don’t meet government standards, and are only for the wealthy. Americans are unmoved by flashy graphics or fancy turn-of-phrase—and even by federal government data. Rather, they respond to straight-forward, easy-to-understand information. People fear the unknown—make Charter Schools “known.”

Every Word is Important: Find the Message that Resonates

In the search for words to “attach” to the charter school movement, it is crucial to find terms that Americans will embrace within the context of education. They already favor the concepts charter schools champion, such as “accountability” and “standards,” but they do not yet associate them with Charter Schools. At the same time, while the concept of “autonomy” is clearly embraced, the term enjoyed the lowest level of support due, in large part, to a lack of understanding—which could be corrected. The word is, as of yet, “unbranded” and may present a unique opportunity. It is crucial that Americans learn to associate “charter schools” with a clear and positive message.

Expand Outreach Efforts to Include Some Non-Traditional Supporters

Single Moms, Blacks and Hispanics, and parents of children who attend public school proved themselves one of the most important blocs of support for the concepts of charter schools—yet they were among the groups most concerned over the federal government’s data on charters and most suspicious that the formation of charters would hurt traditional public schools. A bit of extra reassurance will convert these “would-be” supporters, into unrestrained advocates.

Not-Yet-Moms and those “Single & Living It” were often more supportive of the defining aspects of charter schools than parents themselves. More able to identify with the school experience as students than parents, these young women have a unique perspective and a desire to help. The mothers of the children of tomorrow can be an asset to the charter school movement today.