



EDUCATION WEEK
RESEARCH CENTER

Educator Political Perceptions

A National Survey



About Editorial Projects In Education

Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization based in Bethesda, Md. Its primary mission is to help raise the level of awareness and understanding among professionals and the public of important issues in American education. EPE covers local, state, national, and international news and issues from preschool through the 12th grade. Editorial Projects in Education publishes *Education Week*, America's newspaper of record for precollegiate education, the online Teacher, EdWeek Market Brief, and the TopSchoolJobs employment resource. It also produces periodic special reports on issues ranging from technology to textbooks, as well as books of special interest to educators.

The Education Week Research Center conducts surveys, collects data, and performs analyses that appear in *Education Week* and special reports such as *Quality Counts*, and *Technology Counts*. The center also conducts independent research studies and maintains the Education Counts online data resource.

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Executive Summary

In Fall 2017, the non-partisan Education Week Research Center surveyed 1,122 teachers, school, and district leaders about their political behaviors and perceptions. The nationally-representative survey had a margin of error of plus or minus five percent.

The educators are no more likely to consider themselves liberal than conservative. But they are more likely to report that they are Democrats (41 percent) than Republicans (27 percent), with 30 percent labeling themselves Independents. Half of all educators report voting for Hillary Clinton in the most recent presidential election while nearly a third (29 percent) voted for Donald Trump; 13 percent selected a third-party candidate; and 8 percent did not vote.

One year after that election, educators remain deeply divided on some issues while demonstrating relatively strong levels of agreement on others. For example, 80 percent of Trump voters give him a favorable rating as compared to 0.2 percent of Clinton voters. But when it comes to Trump's Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, both Trump and Clinton voters assign low favorability ratings. Thirty percent of Trump voters and 2 percent of Clinton voters hold a favorable view of DeVos.

Trump and Clinton voters alike overwhelmingly oppose two of the marquis policies of the Trump administration's Education Department. Eighty percent of Clinton voters and 64 percent of Trump voters oppose the formation of charter schools. And 85 percent of Clinton voters and 70 percent of Trump voters oppose vouchers that help pay students' tuition at private schools. The picture is more nuanced when it comes to tuition tax credits that pay for scholarships to help low-income parents send their children to private schools. A majority of Clinton voters (56 percent) oppose this type of tax credit. Just under half (44 percent) of Trump voters oppose tuition tax credits while 42 percent support them and 14 percent neither support nor oppose them.

Educators also fail to split starkly along partisan lines when it comes to the grades they give their own schools and the schools in the nation as a whole. A majority of educators (72 percent) assign their own district's schools an A or a B, just 35 percent allot those grades to schools in the nation as a whole. Trump and Clinton voters also agree that funding for their district's schools could be improved. A majority (73 percent) rate the amount of funding their schools receive as poor or fair.

In addition to assigning similar ratings for school quality and funding, Trump and Clinton voters demonstrate similar levels of support for the idea that states should use common standards to hold public schools accountable in reading and math. Seventy-six percent of Clinton voters and 63 percent of Trump voters support common standards.

Although they agree on some issues, Trump and Clinton voters diverge sharply on others, especially when it comes to immigration, LGBTQ rights, and issues related to minorities. For example, 91 percent of Clinton voters and 37 percent of Trump voters support DACA, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, an act that gave temporary legal status to otherwise law-abiding children and young adults brought to the United States at a very young age by parents who were undocumented. A plurality of Trump voters (44 percent) oppose DACA while the remainder (20 percent) neither support nor oppose the program, which has been rescinded by the Trump administration.

One of the starkest partisan divides relates to so-called bathroom laws. Eighty-five percent of Trump voters say that transgender students should be required to use the school restrooms and locker rooms of the gender they were born into. By comparison, 78 percent of Clinton voters say that transgender students should be allowed to use the school restrooms and locker rooms of the gender with which they currently identify. Educators also split starkly along partisan lines when it comes to whether or not students of color have the same educational opportunities as whites in our country. While 76 percent of Trump voters say they do, 59 percent of Clinton voters say they do not.

Like the nation as a whole, educators are split along partisan lines. But when it comes to some core issues related to the jobs they do every day (common standards, school quality, school funding), they are not always so far apart in their beliefs.

Introduction

K-12 educators comprise a large and influential presence in American politics. Not only do they vote in significant numbers, but they also, at least in theory, possess the power to shape a new generation of young voters, not least by encouraging informed civic participation. When it comes to myriad issues related directly to education, their views are of particular interest. Not only do they vote on these issues as citizens but they experience them from the front row seats that their jobs in public education afford.

Yet, on a national level, we possess relatively limited information on educators' political beliefs and behaviors. In order to gather information on this topic, in Fall 2017, the Education Week Research Center set out to survey a nationally-representative sample of teachers, school-based leaders (e.g., principals and vice principals), and district leaders such as school superintendents. The survey is especially timely given the divisions that currently exist in our nation in the wake of a 2016 Presidential election that revealed deep chasms in American political beliefs.

This report presents findings from the survey.

Methodology

This report is based on an online survey of a nationally-representative sample of teachers, school-based leaders, and district leaders. The 38-question survey was administered in Fall 2017 to 1,122 educators including 555 teachers, 266 school leaders, 202 district leaders, and 99 other school or district employees. The margin of error was plus or minus 5 percent.

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were promised confidentiality. Prior to three particularly sensitive questions, this promise of confidentiality was repeated. These questions requested that educators rank themselves on a scale of very liberal to very conservative, solicited information on party affiliation, and asked respondents who they voted for, if anyone, in the 2016 presidential election. The purpose of these additional reminders was to encourage honesty by reassuring educators that their responses would remain confidential.

Throughout this report, survey results are presented in whole percentage-point values and, therefore, may not sum to 100 percent.

Survey Details

Survey Administered: September 27 to October 17, 2017

Sample: Nationally-representative

Professional Roles of Respondents: K-12 teachers, school, and district leaders

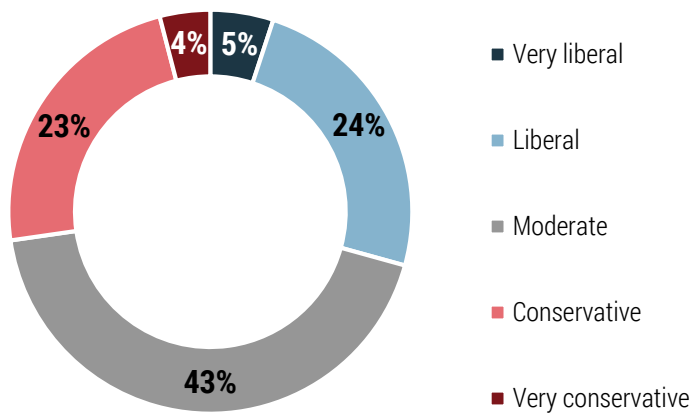
Total Respondents: 1,122

Educators' Political Beliefs and Behavior

Political Leanings

No one political belief dominates the educators surveyed for this study. Asked to identify their political leanings, educators were equally likely to describe themselves as liberal versus conservative.

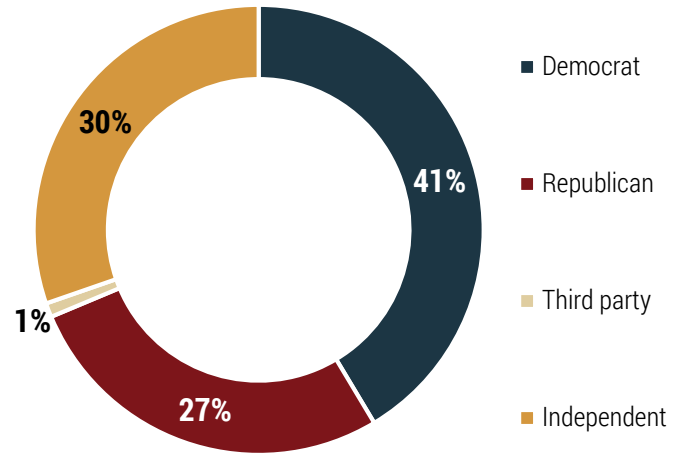
Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative, or very conservative?



Party Affiliations

Educators are more likely to define themselves as Democrats (41 percent) than as Republicans (27 percent). Nearly a third are Independents (30 percent).

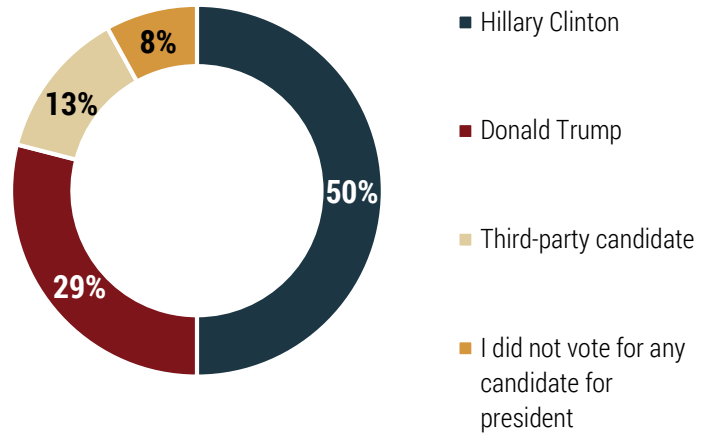
What is your party affiliation?



Presidential Vote

Educators are also more likely to report voting for Hillary Clinton than for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential elections.

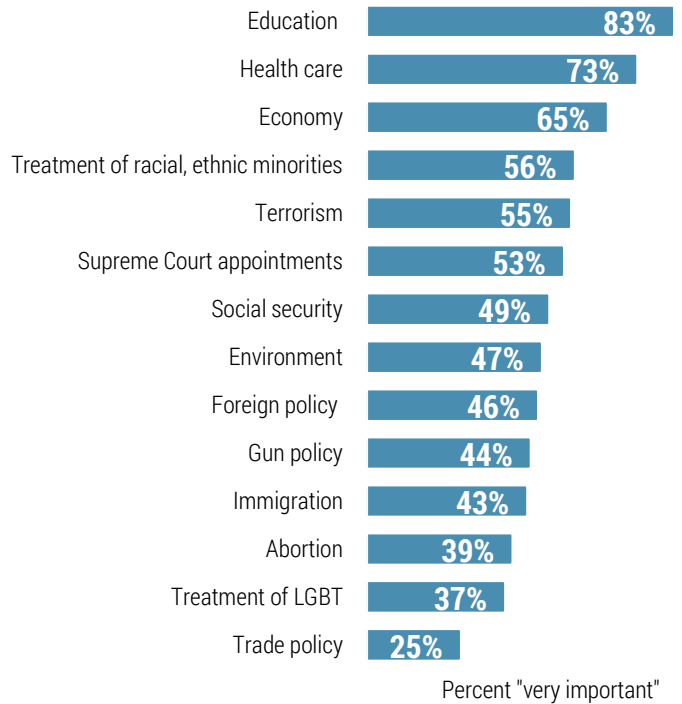
Which candidate for president (if any) did you vote for in the 2016 presidential election?



Influential Issues

Education was the issue that most heavily influenced educators as they voted in the 2016 presidential elections. Eighty-three percent of survey respondents said that education was very important to their vote. Second most influential was health care (73 percent), followed by the economy (65 percent).

How important were the following issues to you in deciding who to vote for in the 2016 presidential election?

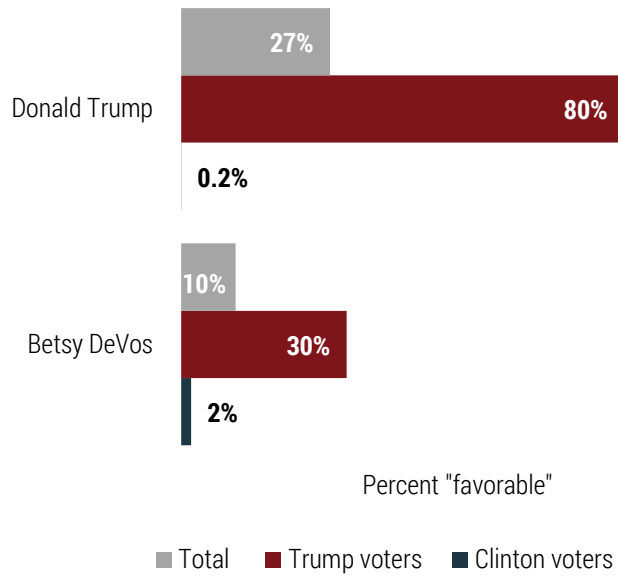


Favorability Ratings: Trump and DeVos

One year after the 2016 election, educators remain deeply divided in their ratings of Donald Trump. Trump's overall favorability rating among survey respondents was 27 percent. But it was 80 percent among Trump voters and 0.2 percent among Clinton voters.

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos has lower favorability ratings than Trump (10 percent). Even educators who voted for Trump mostly rate her unfavorably: Her favorability rating is 30 percent among Trump voters. Two percent of Clinton voters rate DeVos favorably.

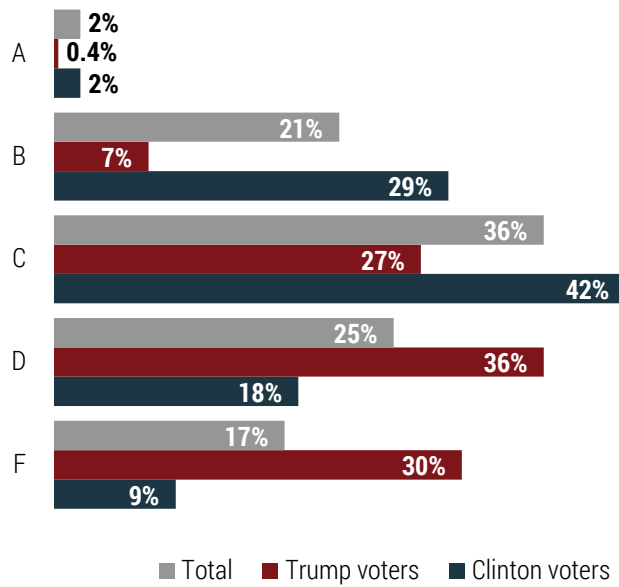
We'd like to get your overall opinion of some people in the news. Is your opinion currently favorable, or unfavorable?



Grading the Democratic Party

One year after the election, neither Clinton nor Trump voters give a ringing endorsement to the Democratic and Republican parties' approach to education. Only a small handful of total survey respondents assigned either party an A when asked to rate their handling of issues related to education.

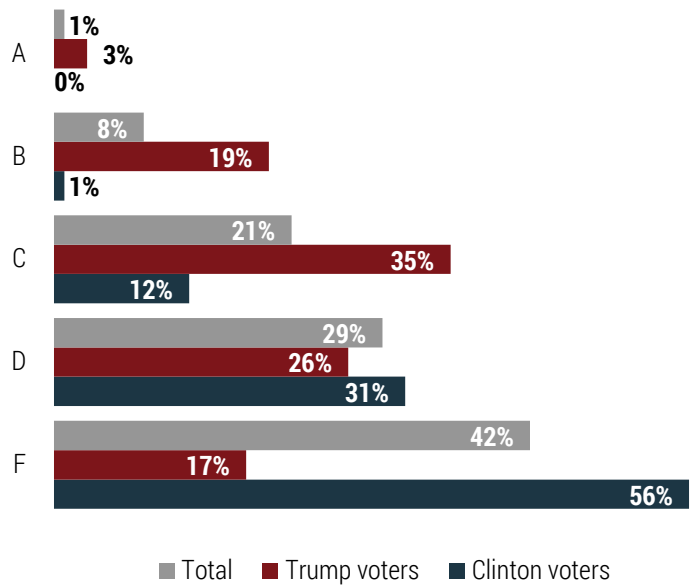
What grade would you give the Democratic party for its handling of issues related to education?



Grading the Republican Party

Clinton voters were more likely to assign Republicans an F than Trump voters were to assign Democrats an F.

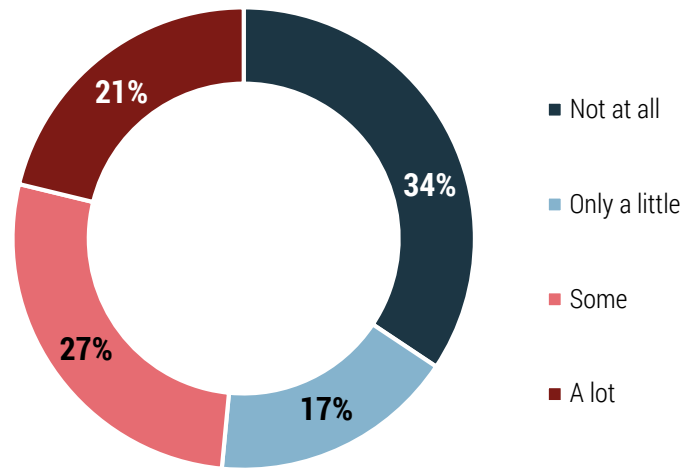
What grade would you give the Republican party for its handling of issues related to education?



Avoiding Political Activities

Despite the political divisions that exist, just 11 percent of school and district leaders say they have been called upon more frequently since the 2016 elections to handle partisan disputes involving employees of their school districts. However, that might be because educators are self-regulating their political activities. Sixty-five percent have avoided political activities at least a little out of a concern that they might create problems with their jobs in education.

To what extent have you avoided political activities out of a concern that they might create problems with your job in education?



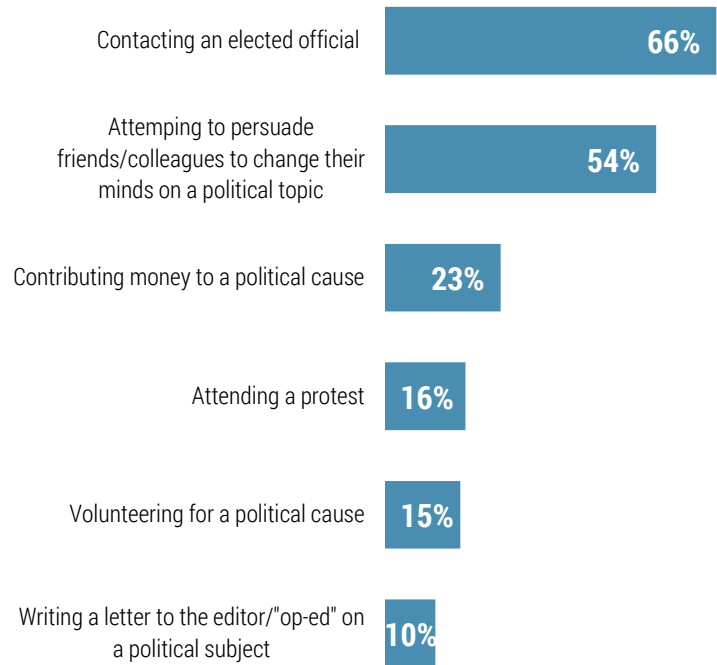
Types of Political Activity

Since the 2016 election, the majority of educators have engaged in some type of political activity. The most common (66 percent) is contacting an elected official.

Types of political participation varied significantly for teachers, school-based, and district leaders. Teachers were more likely to have attended a protest (20 percent) than school or district leaders (12 percent). Teachers were also significantly more likely to have attempted to persuade friends or colleagues to change their minds on a political topic (61 percent) especially when compared with district leaders (37 percent). School-based leaders fell in between at 52 percent.

District leaders were significantly more likely to have contacted an elected official (80 percent) as compared to teachers (61 percent) or school-based leaders (67 percent). District leaders were also more likely to have written a letter to the editor or “op-ed” on a political subject although relatively few did so. Seventeen percent of district leaders had written a letter or op-ed as compared to 9 percent of teachers and 7 percent of school-based leaders.

Which of the following activities have you engaged in since the 2016 Presidential election?

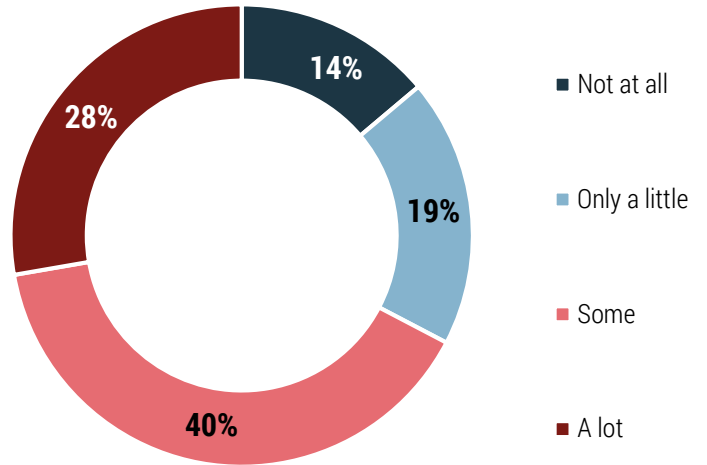


Note: Respondents were asked to select all answers that apply. Individual items do not sum to 100 percent.

Teachers and Unions

For teachers in particular, unions are often a vehicle for engaging in political activity. Sixty-one percent of teachers surveyed are dues-paying members of a teachers' union. Unions are sometimes accused of failing to represent the views of rank-and-file teachers. Regardless of whether they are members, most teachers (68 percent) report that the teachers' union that is most active in their district represents their political views some or a lot.

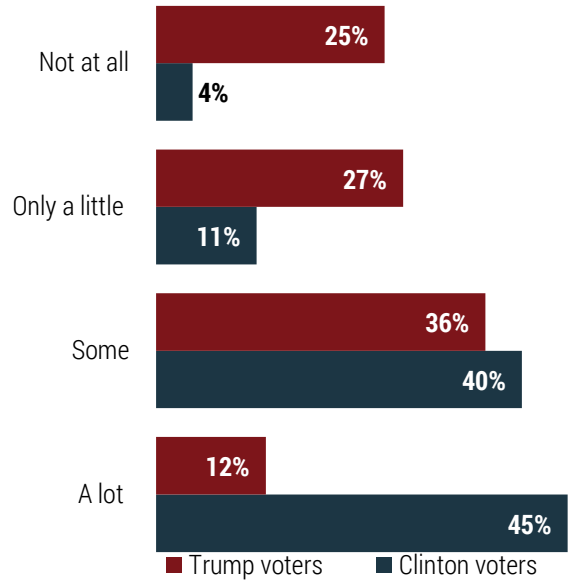
Thinking of the teachers' union that is most active in your school district, to what extent does that union represent your political views?



Partisan Split on Unions

When it came to unions, Clinton and Trump voters split along partisan lines. Most Trump voters (56 percent) are dues-paying members of a teachers' union. But Clinton voters are significantly more likely to be members (72 percent). Clinton voters are also significantly more likely to perceive that the teachers' union that is most active in their school district represents their political views. Eighty-five percent of Clinton voters say their union represents their political views some or a lot as compared to less than half (48 percent) of Trump voters. Fully a quarter of Trump voters say their unions do not represent their political views at all as compared to 4 percent of Clinton voters.

Thinking of the teachers' union that is most active in your school district, to what extent does that union represent your political views?

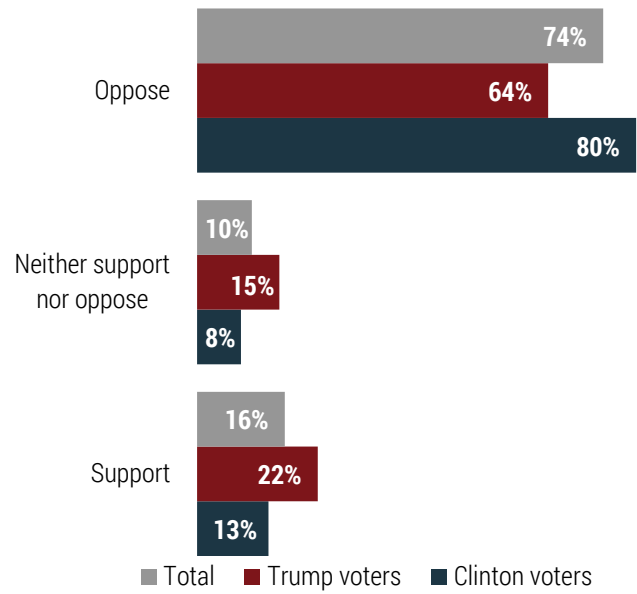


Focus on Issues

School Choice

On balance, Clinton and Trump voters alike overwhelmingly oppose two of the current administration's most prominent education policies: charter schools and vouchers.

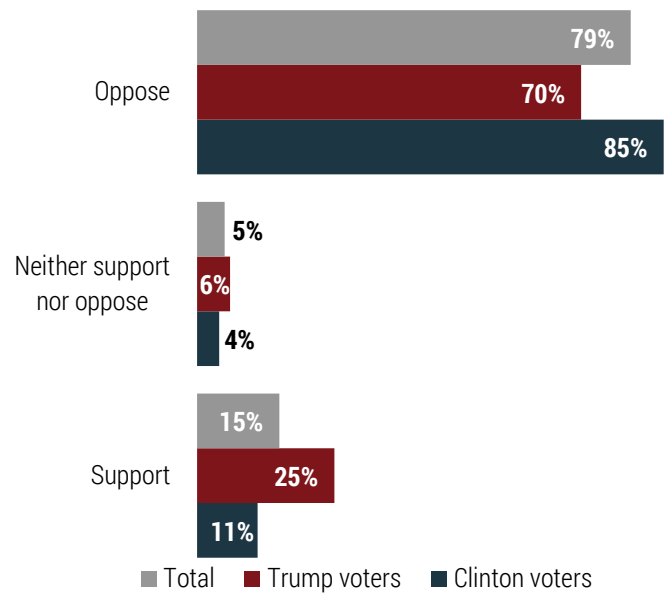
Do you support or oppose the formation of charter schools?



Vouchers

A vast majority of Clinton and Trump voters oppose the use of government funding to help pay students' tuition at private schools.

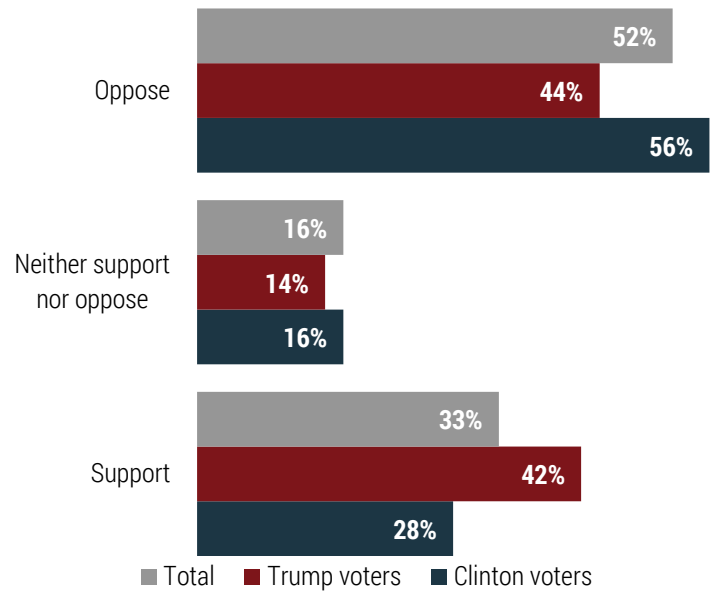
Do you support or oppose government funding to help pay for students' tuition at private schools?



Tuition Tax Credits

While Clinton voters oppose tuition tax credits, Trump voters are split. Slightly more oppose (44 percent) than support tax credits (42 percent). But neither supporters nor opponents comprise a majority.

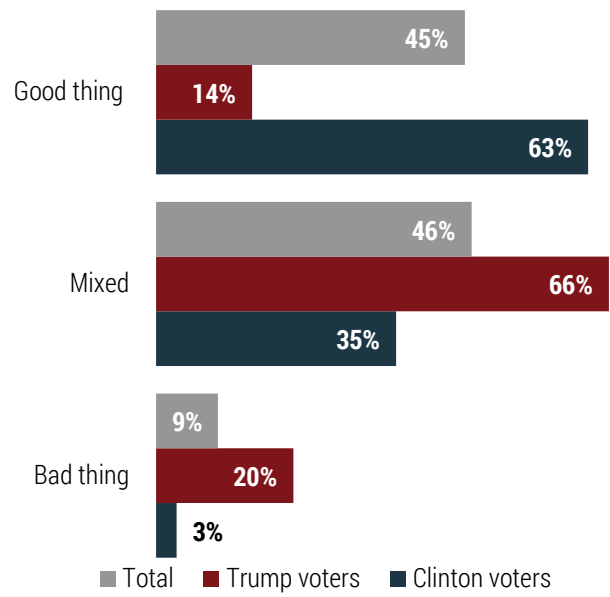
Do you support or oppose tuition tax credits?



Immigration

On immigration, educators split along party lines. Most Clinton voters say immigration has been a good thing for the nation's schools. Most Trump voters perceive that the impact has been mixed.

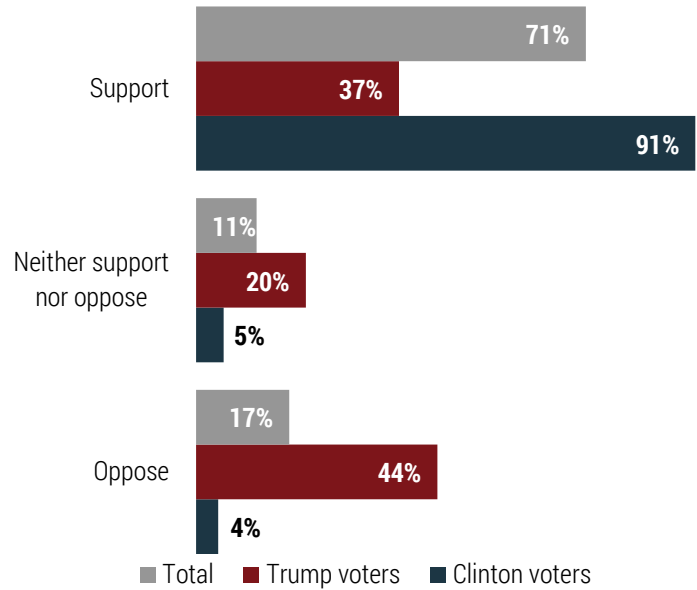
On the whole, do you think immigration is a good thing or a bad thing for schools in this country today?



DACA

Educators also split along party lines when it comes to DACA, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which granted temporary legal status to otherwise law-abiding citizens brought to the United States by parents who were undocumented. An overwhelming majority of Clinton voters support DACA, which was recently rescinded by the Trump administration. More Trump voters oppose (44 percent) than support the program (37 percent) but neither side comprised a majority.

Do you support or oppose DACA?

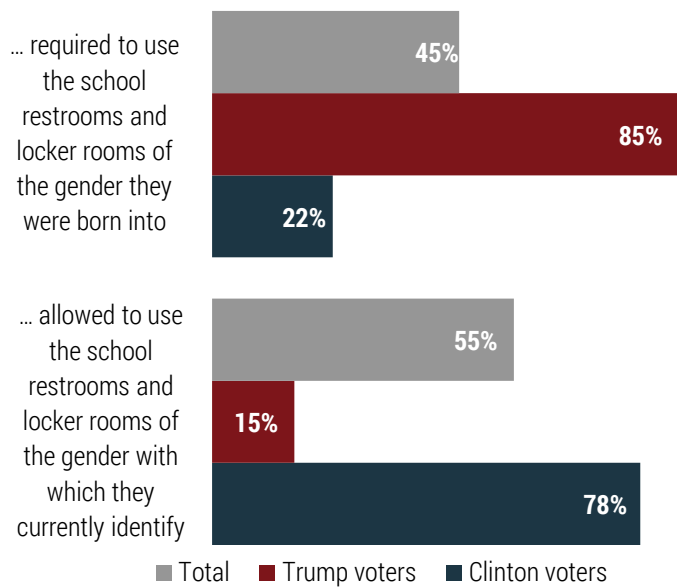


Transgender Students

Trump and Clinton voters split along partisan lines when it comes to issues related to treatment and perceptions of minority groups.

Among the most polarizing issues included on the survey was a question about transgender students' access to school restrooms and locker rooms. A vast majority of Clinton voters say that students should be allowed to use the restrooms and locker rooms of the gender with which they currently identify. Conversely, a vast majority of Trump voters say transgender students should be required to use the restrooms and locker rooms of the gender they were born into.

**If you had to choose, which comes closest to your view?
Transgender students should be ...**

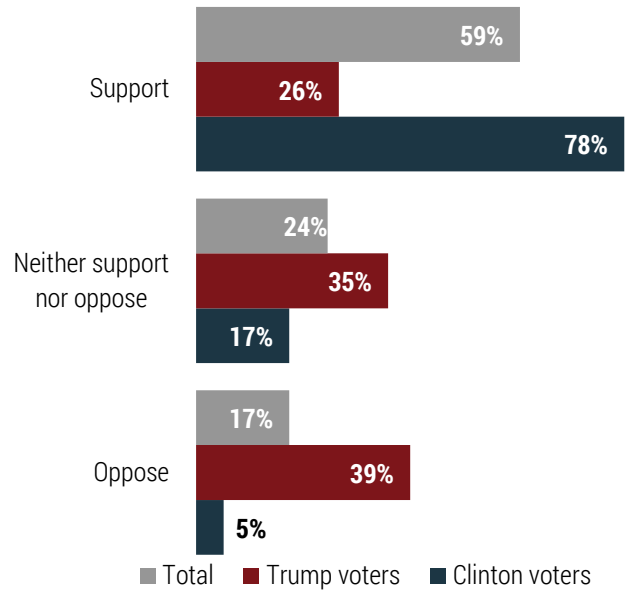


Voters and Sexual Orientation

Trump vs. Clinton Voters

Trump and Clinton voters also diverged on whether a gay, lesbian, or bisexual teacher should be “out” to colleagues or students. A vast majority of Clinton voters (78 percent) support having teachers “out” at school as compared to 26 percent of Trump voters. However, it is worth noting that the remaining Trump voters are relatively evenly split between opposition (39 percent) and neither supporting nor opposing (35 percent). In other words, less than a majority of Trump voters opposes teachers who are “out” at school.

To what extent do you support or oppose having gay, lesbian, or bisexual teachers who are “out” to their students and colleagues at school?

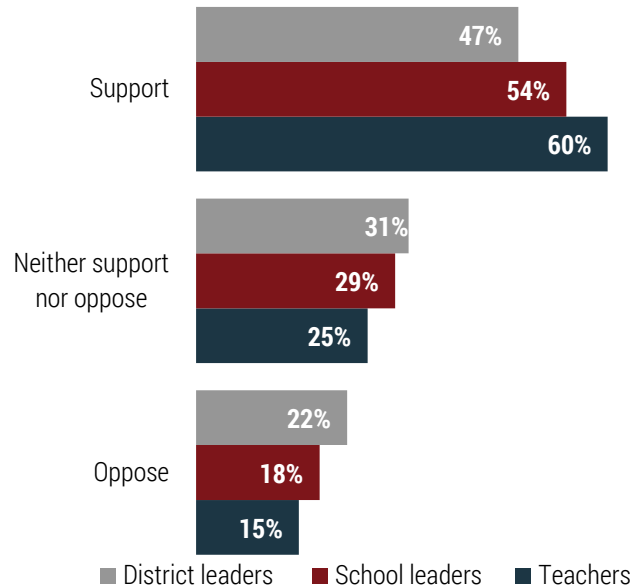


School Roles and Sexual Orientation

Views By Professional Role

When it comes to teachers being “out” at school, educators also split along the lines of their professional roles. Teachers are significantly more likely than school or district leaders to support educators being “out” at school. More than half of teachers (60 percent) support having teachers “out” at school as compared to less than half of district leaders (47 percent) and just over half of school leaders (54 percent).

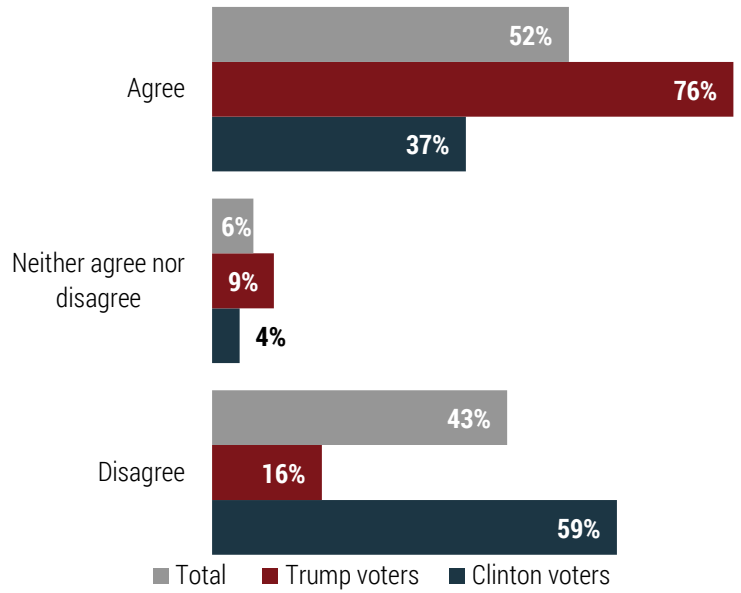
To what extent do you support or oppose having gay, lesbian, or bisexual teachers who are “out” to their students and colleagues at school?



Equal Educational Opportunities

Trump and Clinton voters sharply diverge on whether students of color have the same educational opportunities as whites in our country. While a majority of Trump voters (76 percent) say they do, a majority of Clinton voters (59 percent) perceive that they do not.

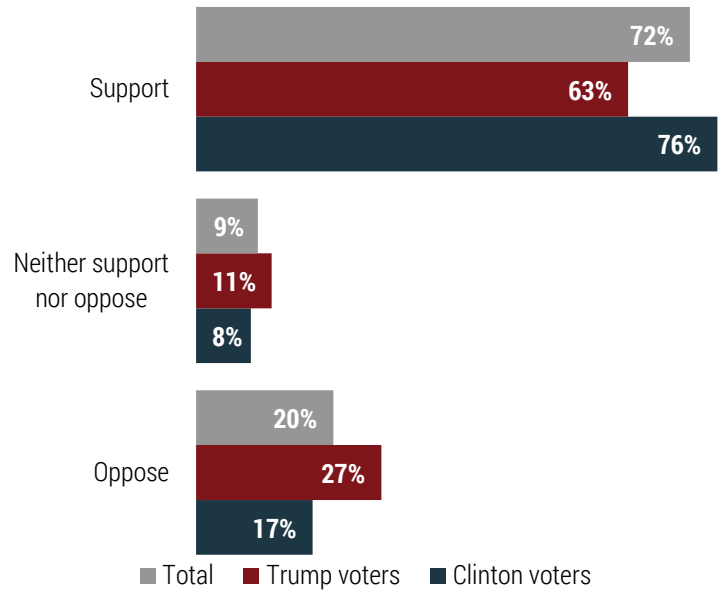
To what extent do you agree or disagree that students of color have the same educational opportunities as whites in our country?



Common Standards

Clinton and Trump voters alike support the idea of different states using the same standards to hold public schools accountable in reading and math. Overall, 72 percent of educators support common standards. However, Clinton voters are more supportive of common standards (76 percent) than Trump voters (63 percent). It is important to note that the survey question did not mention the phrase “Common Core State Standards” but, rather, for the sake of clarity, simply defined the standards. It is possible that use of those standards’ official name might have led to different results as the term “common core” has become politicized.

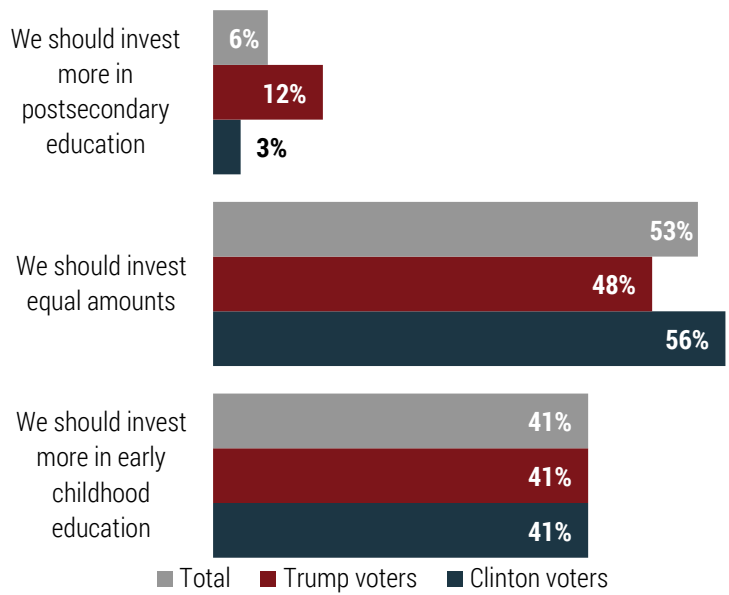
Do you support or oppose the idea that different states should use the same standards to hold public schools accountable in reading and math?



Early Childhood Education vs. Postsecondary

Most educators (53 percent) who responded to the survey believe that our nation should invest equal amounts of money in early childhood and postsecondary education. However, Trump voters are roughly four times more likely than Clinton voters to say we should invest more in postsecondary than in early childhood education. This trend is counterbalanced by the fact that very small percentages of Trump voters (12 percent) and Clinton voters (3 percent) perceive that we should invest more money in postsecondary education.

How much should our nation invest in early childhood education versus postsecondary?

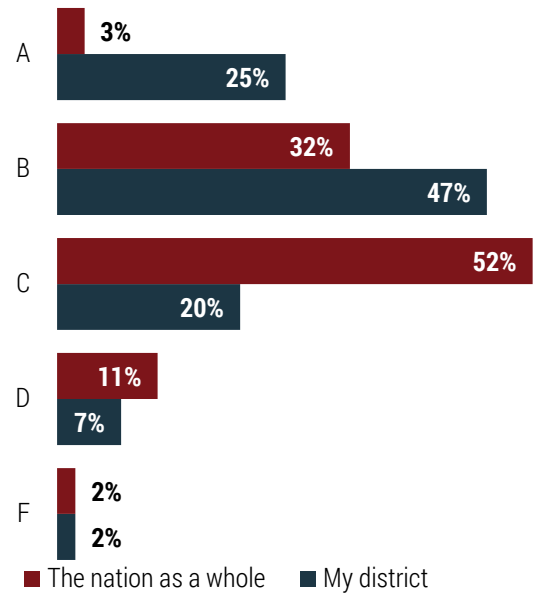


Perceptions of Schools

Grading Schools

Across the board, educators give the public schools in their district better grades than those in the nation as a whole. While 25 percent assign A's to public schools in their districts, just 3 percent allot that grade to schools in the nation as whole. Clinton and Trump voters assign similar grades both to their own schools and the nation's schools. Compared to teachers and school-based leaders, district leaders are slightly easier graders of both their districts' schools and schools in the nation as whole. For example, 34 percent of district leaders assign their districts' schools an A as compared to 24 percent of teachers and school-based leaders.

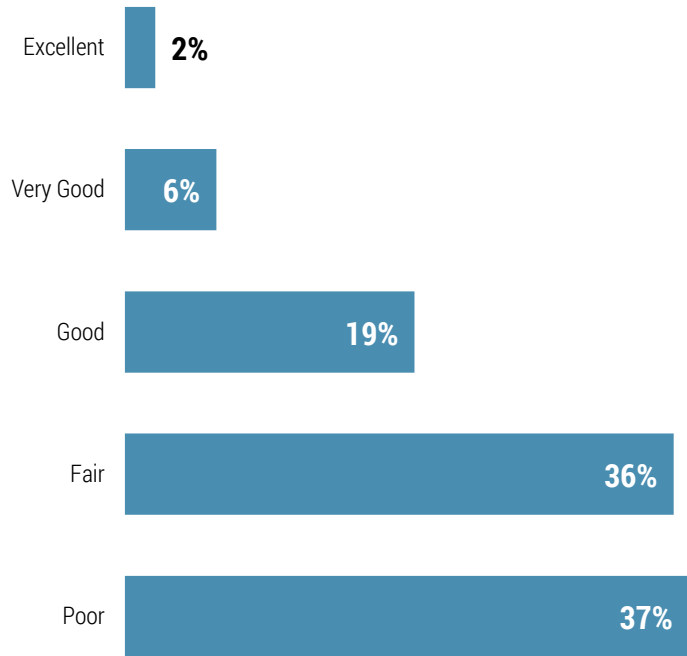
What grade would you give the public schools in your district and the nation as a whole?



School Funding

Educators are not satisfied with the amount of funding that public schools in their districts receive. A majority (73 percent) rate the amount of funding as poor or fair. The assessment of district funding crosses party lines: Clinton and Trump voters alike largely rate their school districts' funding as inadequate.

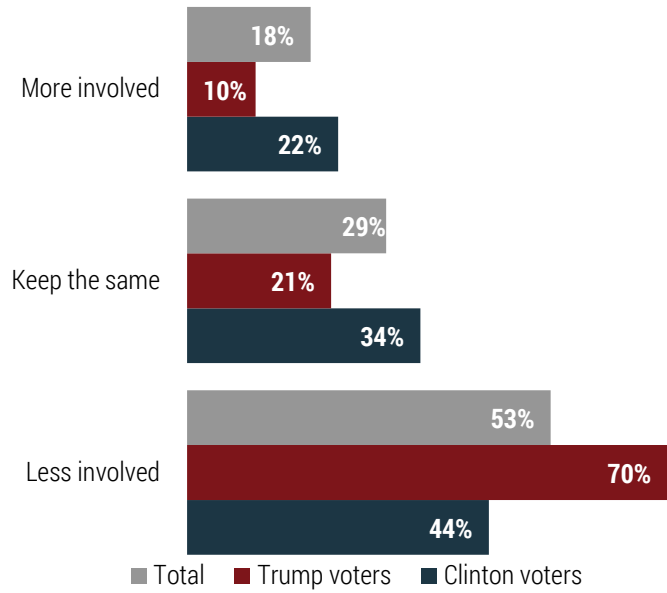
How would you rate the amount of funding that public schools in your district receive?



Federal Involvement In Education

Overall, most educators (53 percent) would like the federal government to be less involved with education than it currently is. However, Trump voters are significantly more likely to call for less involvement (70 percent) than Clinton voters (44 percent). Even so, Clinton voters are more likely to call for less involvement than for more involvement or for maintaining the status quo. This suggests that perceptions of federal over-reach in education cross party lines even if they are weaker among Clinton's supporters.

Do you think the federal government should be more involved in education, keep its involvement about the same, or be less involved than it currently is?

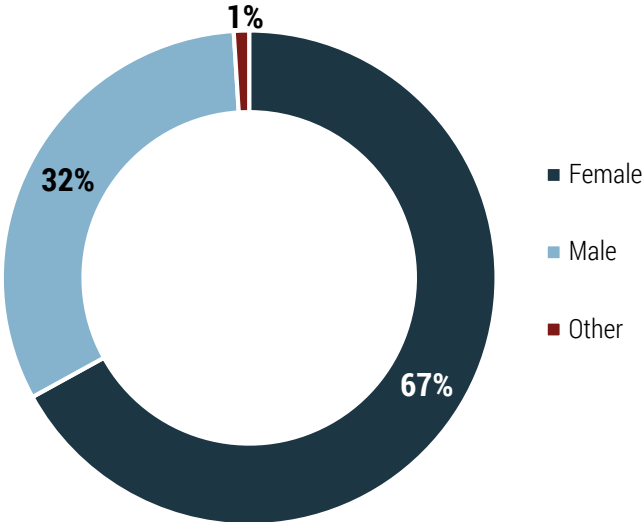


Respondent Background

Gender

The educator political survey attracted a large, diverse, and nationally-representative sample of 1,122 educators. Given the demographic make-up of the education profession, it is not surprising that the sample was majority female.

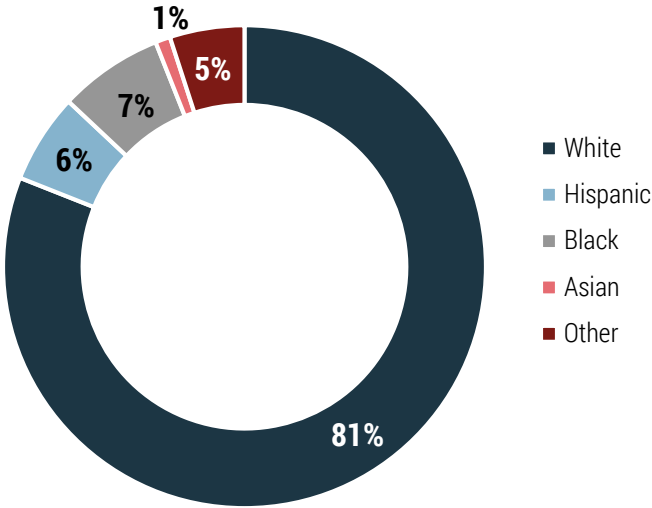
Which of the following best describes your gender?



Race and Ethnicity

Like educators in the nation as a whole, the survey sample was majority white.

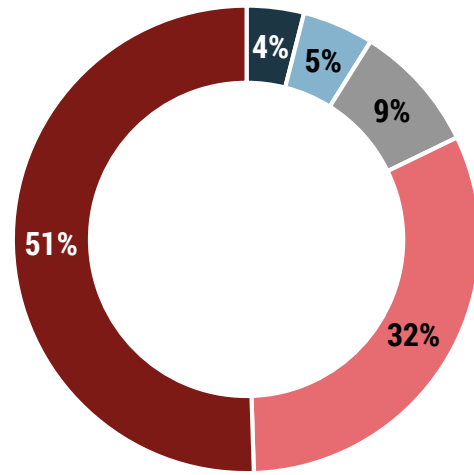
Which of the following terms best describes your ethnicity or race?



Years of Experience

The sample skewed toward more experienced educators. This makes sense given that half of the respondents were school and district leaders, who typically have more experience in education than teachers since they often serve as teachers prior to becoming administrators. Just over half of respondents had more than 20 years of experience in K-12 education. The average age of the survey respondents was 49.

How long have you worked in K-12 education?

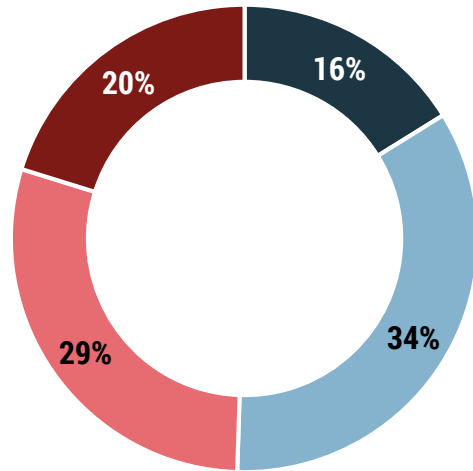


- 3 years or less
- 4-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- More than 20 years

District Poverty

Educators who took the survey represented a socio-economically diverse range of environments, as measured by the percentage of students in their districts who qualified for free or reduced-priced meals.

What percentage of students receive free and reduced-price meals in your school district?

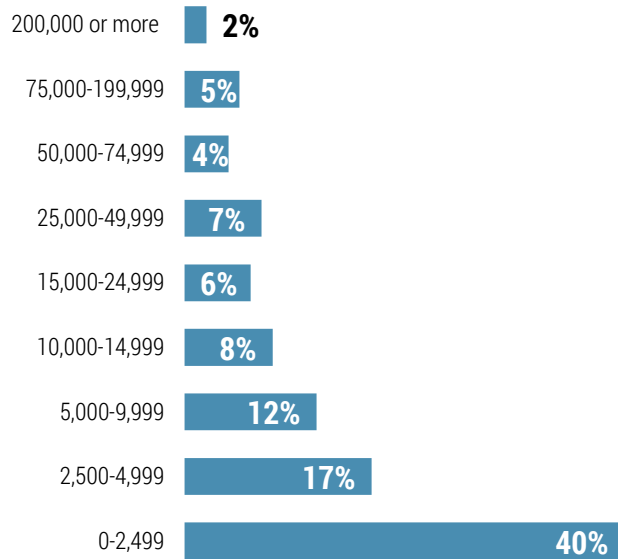


■ Less than 25% ■ 25 to 50% ■ 51 to 75% ■ More than 75%

District Size

Most school districts in the nation are small. Accordingly, most educators surveyed came from smaller districts with fewer than 5,000 students.

How many students does your school district serve?



Regional Diversity

Survey respondents hailed from every region of the nation.

In which state do you work?

