

“Real Parent Voice – Real Parent Choice”
Parents Across America's National Parent Survey 2017



Executive Summary

August 15, 2017

Parents Across America (PAA) recently carried out its first national parent survey, “Real Parent Voice – Real Parent Choice.” Our goal was to hear directly from parents about what really matters to them in public education, and to share their voices with our political and policy making leaders. 584 people from more than 33 states responded to the survey. Nearly all of them were current (68%) or former (27.5%) public school parents.

Responses to our survey made it clear that there is little resemblance between what many parents think and want and what Congress or education entrepreneurs and philanthropists claim that we think and want – and how they act. PAA believes that too much of the current education policy making happens without any meaningful parent input, and often in complete opposition to parents' priorities and concerns.

The survey report highlights the issues that emerged in our survey as parents' top priorities and concerns. Because PAA's goal was to draw out and share authentic parent voices, much of the report consists of parents' written comments from the survey.

Parents' top priorities and concerns according to PAA survey

Consistent with other national polls on education, the largest number of respondents to our survey said that **adequate school funding** was very important or important. Coming in a close second in importance was the need for **programs beyond the so-called “core curriculum.”** Yet many states and districts have **cut school budgets**, some drastically, over the past few years. The current federal administration has proposed a 13% overall cut in federal school funding. A large percentage of respondents expressed concern that too much money was being directed towards **privatization** including charter schools and educational technology.

Comments on **charter schools** mirrored the national controversy. PAA recognizes that our education system is under duress. We believe that the underlying cause is poor policy making and inappropriate, ineffective use of public funds to privatize much of the system. But we also understand that the weakened status of public schools is a personal dilemma for many families, and we sympathize completely with parents who choose to opt out of their neighborhood school.

Somewhat ironically, comments about the value of parent involvement were mixed. Many of the comments were the “yes...but” variety, with many adding a strong statement of trust in educators to do what's best for students. In the same vein, many respondents raised concerns about **elected**

PAA survey executive summary, p. 2

school boards, though some of this seems to be based on recent money-fueled efforts by corporate reformers to place their allies in school board seats.

Because it's an issue that many of PAA's members have raised lately, we set aside one section for comments about **personalized learning**, or what PAA calls **EdTech**. PAA adopted a position statement (<https://tinyurl.com/y8zbywyst>) on EdTech a year ago. We feel that schools, school districts, states and the federal government are requiring ever-increasing technology time without informed input from parents, and with little oversight of the effects of these devices and programs on children's health and even less monitoring of their academic effectiveness. We are concerned that educational publishers, software marketers, and others are pushing EdTech to further monetize schooling and gather and use private student data for their own benefit. The vast majority of survey comments reflected parents' growing alarm and anger about the EdTech takeover.

Conclusion

The key take-away from this survey is that parents have strong opinions about public education which are formed in the context of their deep love for their children. For that reason alone, parents' opinions matter, and are worthy of being taken into serious consideration when decisions are being made that affect their children.

But PAA believes that too much of the current education policy making happens without any meaningful parent input, and often in complete opposition to what many parents want for their children. This is due to in large part to the misguided directives of the Obama administration's education department, and to the arrogance of a handful of wealthy philanthropists who have had far too much influence on the direction of public schooling. Both have had the effect of moving important school decision making away from the local community where most parent participation happens, and into distant hands – with too many negative consequences.

PAA's role is to help promote an ***informed*** parent voice. We will take into account the results of this survey – the parent voices that it has gathered – as we continue to create informational materials, fact sheets and position papers that can be used in our advocacy work, and that more accurately reflect the concerns and hopes of parents whose input is too often neglected. Well-informed and well-supported parents are the best equipped to challenge threats to our children's educational opportunity, well-being and happiness. And when parents join together, we are definitely a force to be reckoned with.

PAA is a grassroots organization that connects parents of all backgrounds across the United States to share ideas and work together to improve our nation's public schools. PAA is committed to bringing the voice of public school parents – and common sense – to local, state, and national education debates. PAA has 47 chapters and affiliates in 26 states.