



The Public Schools Our Children Deserve?

North Carolina Residents React to State Legislative Changes

Results of a survey of over 2,350 residents in North Carolina

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A MESSAGE FROM THE RESEARCHERS

"I look to the diffusion of light and education as the resource to be relied on for ameliorating the condition, promoting the virtue, and advancing the happiness of man."

– Thomas Jefferson (1787)

North Carolina's commitment to public education has long been a national model. The state was one of the first to provide free, high-quality pre-K to many of its at-risk children. For nearly thirty years, North Carolina embraced the recruitment of talented teachers through the Teaching Fellows Program that offered substantial university scholarships to high-performing students willing to teach in the state. There are currently more National Board Certified teachers in North Carolina than any other state due to the state's endorsement of and financial support for this highly demanding certification program.

Unfortunately, nearly a decade of funding declines and a host of major policy changes passed by the NC Legislature in the summer of 2013 are raising concerns about North Carolina's education system. If the state's citizens are to be believed, North Carolina's reputation as an educational leader is becoming increasingly tarnished. Those who live, pay taxes, and educate their children in North Carolina have great concerns about the direction in which the state's education system is moving.

This report presents findings from a study of more than 2,350 North Carolina residents. (This report follows our previous study of nearly 700 teachers and administrators on this topic. See <http://people.uncw.edu/imigs/documents/SmithImigReport.pdf>) Residents were surveyed about the quality and direction of education in the state. Specifically, individuals were asked to react to recent legislative decisions passed by the General Assembly. These decisions included, among many others, the removal of additional funding for teachers who earn advanced degrees, implementation of a voucher program, removal of class size limits, and the abolishment of tenure. Participants were also asked about the level of trust they have in various groups to make educational decisions, and they were queried on whether recent changes have affected their intentions to apply for vouchers or to send their own children to private or charter schools.

In surveying citizens, we were particularly interested in hearing from parents with children in the NC public schools. Eighty percent of those who responded have children in NC public schools. Their views on the state and direction of public education are especially important as they see firsthand the impact on their children of educational changes. Parents understand how changes in class size affect learning, know the impact of programs such as Read to Achieve, and recognize the importance of having high-quality, licensed teachers. In reporting the results, we also recognize that respondents who have been or are public school employees might have different or stronger views than those who have never been employed by a public school. Consequently we have reported the data in two ways: 1) all respondents and 2) those who have never been employed by a public school.

The findings presented in this report indicate that North Carolina's citizens overwhelmingly disapprove of the direction of education in the state. Though many deem their own child's school worthy of an A or B grade, there is significant disapproval of nearly every financial and legislative decision signed by the governor in 2013. In fact, less than 1% of participants indicate that they hold a great deal of trust in the state's legislature or governor to make decisions related to public schools. Further, nearly one in three respondents indicate that recent legislative changes have made them consider pulling their children from their traditional public school in favor of a private or public charter school. The concerns voiced by this study's 2,300+ respondents are grave and consistent. Our findings may well indicate that the hope Jefferson held for public education as a means to ameliorate society's ills is a fading notion in North Carolina.

What follows is a summary of key findings, quantitative results, and participants' comments.

Special thanks to Caroline Courter, Kristine Wetherill, Catherine Miller, and Chris Wallace for their help in preparing the report.

KEY FINDINGS

- Over 94% of respondents said that they felt public education in North Carolina is headed in the wrong direction.
- Seventy-seven percent of respondents have a “great deal of trust” in teachers and administrators to make educational decisions for our public schools. This figure was just 11% for local school boards and 0.7% for the NC Legislature and Governor.
- Almost 30% of respondents indicated that the recent legislative changes have made them consider sending their child to a private or charter school.
- Over 94% of respondents agreed that raising teacher pay in North Carolina should be a top priority.
- Ninety-six percent of participants disagreed with the removal of additional pay for teachers earning a master’s degree in education.
- More than 76% of respondents disagreed with the elimination of teacher tenure.
- Ninety-six percent of participants disagreed with the removal of class size caps.
- A full 95% of respondents disagreed with the decision to not increase teacher salaries in 2013 for the fourth time in five years.
- In regard to the legislature’s plan to identify the top 25% of teachers for annual pay raises, 76% of respondents disagreed.
- More than 85% of respondents disagreed with the state’s decision to provide low-income families with private school vouchers.
- Almost 73% of respondents said they oppose the inclusion of students’ standardized test scores on teacher evaluations.
- Over 81% of respondents agreed that talented high school students interested in teaching in North Carolina should be awarded scholarships by the state legislature.
- Large numbers of respondents expressed concerns about the current curriculum, instruction, and assessment being implemented in our state’s public schools.

ADVANCED EDUCATION

Teachers who successfully complete a master's degree in education before June of 2014 will continue to receive a 10% increase in their annual salary. However, beginning this summer, North Carolina will become one of the first states to completely eliminate a salary supplement for earning advanced degrees (master's or doctoral). Participants were asked how they felt about this decision.

Findings

More than 96% of respondents disagreed with the decision to stop giving teachers additional pay for earning a master's degree.

Table 1. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the Legislature's decisions.

Teachers in North Carolina will no longer receive additional pay for earning a master's degree in education.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Respondents (N=2,495)	86.9%	9.5%	1.4%	1.5%	0.8%
Those Never Employed by Public Schools (N=904)	75.3%	17.0%	3.1%	3.1%	1.4%

Participant Commentary

"Until teachers are treated as the professionals they are, respected and supported by state government, nothing positive will come from any of the changes they have proposed or written into legislation."

"Do they want non educated people teaching the future of our country? This is a joke!"

"The cut to tenure and Master's pay has sent education as a career into the dark ages."

"No more pay for Master's, etc?? So we don't want our teachers to stay abreast of new ideas and technologies, but we expect our students to be successful in the 21st Century??? WOW!"

READ TO ACHIEVE

The Read to Achieve Program is intended to ensure that every student reads at or above grade level by the end of third grade. Students who do not reach this benchmark are remediated during the summer months following third grade or they are retained in third grade.

Findings

- Less than one third of respondents agreed with the implementation of the Read to Achieve Program.
- For those who have never been employed by a public school, 47% agreed with the implementation of the Read to Achieve Program with 16% neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Table 2. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the Legislature's decisions.

Implemented Read to Achieve Program to ensure every student reads at or above grade level by the end of third grade or they are remediated or retained.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Respondents (N=2,484)	31.7%	22.7%	12.9%	24.6%	8.1%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=896)	19.0%	18.0%	15.8%	35.2%	12.1%

Participant Commentary

"Read To Achieve sounds nice but pressures students way too much in reading, de-emphasizes other subjects, and places way too much stress on the teacher and child to earn a score or be doomed."

"[My son] and his peers are forced to take reading assessments 3 times a week in an effort to pad each student's portfolio with enough reading scores to be presented if and when the child fails the 3rd grade reading EOG. This takes approximately 45 min. of class time. Once my child finishes testing, he must sit at his desk and do busy work or silent reading while the teacher makes her rounds administering this test to every child in the classroom. So, 3 days a week he misses out on 45+ minutes of quality classroom time. How can we expect our students to learn and to improve themselves if teaching time is eliminated?"

"The kids are already tired of these passages and questions and are not putting forth their best effort...It is a morale slam to everybody involved. I fear for education in the state and for the lives of students."

TEACHER TENURE

Beginning in 2018, teacher tenure in North Carolina will be eliminated. At that point, all teachers will be placed on 1-, 2-, and 4-year contracts.

Findings

- More than 78% of respondents disagreed with the elimination of teacher tenure.
- For those who have never been employed by a public school system, 61% disagreed with the removal of teacher tenure.

Table 3. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the Legislature's decisions.

Teacher tenure has been eliminated with all teachers placed on 1-, 2-, or 4-year contracts by 2018.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Respondents (N=2,489)	61.8%	16.3%	7.6%	9.4%	4.8%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=903)	38.8%	22.5%	12.6%	17.2%	9.0%

Participant Commentary

"Teachers deserve their tenure. They have worked hard for it."

"I do agree with doing away with tenure, as I believe anyone in the public or private sector should remain employed based on merit and not tenure."

"We have stepped back in time in NC education. Rather than respecting training and skills, we have unrealistic expectations for job roles without compensation and essentially "blackmailed" employees by taking away job security."

"Doing away with tenure is the best thing to happen out of all of this--As an administrator for 7 years, I have found it incredibly disheartening to try and remove a teacher that shouldn't be in the classroom, but must be given chance after chance after chance--while students suffer."

CLASS SIZE CAPS

With the passage of NC Senate Bill 402, 4th-12th grade classrooms in North Carolina no longer have a limit on the number of students allowed.

Findings

- Almost 96% of respondents disagreed with the removal of class size caps, with 87% indicating strong disagreement.
- Over 92% of those who have never been employed by a public school system also disagreed with the removal of class size caps.

Table 4. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the Legislature's decisions.

Removed class size caps. (The state had previously limited the number of students in a classroom).	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Respondents (N=2,493)	87.0%	8.9%	1.4%	1.6%	1.1%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=906)	78.7%	14.2%	2.4%	2.8%	1.9%

Participant Commentary

"Bigger class sizes make it harder for kids to learn."

"Elementary school is the basis and foundation of EVERY child. We need lower class sizes and support staff (qualified GOOD staff) to help."

"I believe that the lawmakers should be required to spend time in a classroom with no size caps, students with special needs, limited supplies and a lack of freedom to teach creatively. Then they can decide if their rules are effective."

"Our legislators have completely slapped public education-teachers and students in the face. I am totally disgusted by the Legislature and Governor. I struggle just to pay my bills and have money for groceries. Students are losing because of the stupidity of people that have no idea what it is like to be in a classroom with 25-30 Kindergarteners or 30+ fifth graders."

RAISING TEACHER PAY

In the past five years, educators in North Carolina have seen a single raise of 1.2%. In dollars, this means a first-year teacher who began working in 2009 for \$30,400 is making \$30,880 in 2014—an increase of \$480 in five years. According to the National Education Association (2013), over the past decade teacher salaries in North Carolina have seen the smallest change of all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Findings

- Over 94% of respondents agreed that raising teacher pay in North Carolina should be a top priority.
- Over 90% of those who have never been employed by a public school agreed that raising teacher pay in North Carolina should be a top priority.

Table 5. Raising teacher pay in NC from our national ranking near the bottom should be a top priority.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Respondents (N=2,429)	3.2%	1.3%	1.4%	17.7%	76.4%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=878)	3.1%	3.0%	3.2%	25.4%	65.4%

Participant Commentary

“Teacher pay reflects the support that society has for its teachers. It appears that NC doesn’t respect or support its teachers.”

“With all of the unnecessary stress, coupled with LOW pay, North Carolina will lose great teachers, and I hate to think of who will replace them in the classrooms.”

“The education of our children should be the most important item in the State budget. We need to pay teachers a salary that will draw the best teachers to NC.”

“Pay teachers well and then the best will want to pursue teaching. Make it competitive to teach and you will get the best.”

“Teacher salaries are an abomination.”

“We will not get the best of the best to enter into the educational system until we pay a livable salary. I know too many great teachers who have left the profession because they cannot support a family on their salary.”

PER PUPIL FUNDING

Per pupil funding in North Carolina ranks near the bottom of all states. While overall funding was increased this academic year, the influx of students into our schools means that less money is being spent per pupil this year than was spent last year. In fact, North Carolina spends less per pupil today than it did in 2008. Of note: North Carolina is one of a handful of states with a funding formula in which the majority of funds come from the state government. In most states, local governments pay the majority of education funding.

Findings

- Less than 4% of respondents agreed with the reduction in per pupil funding.
- For those who have never been public school employees, 5% of respondents agreed with the reduction in per pupil funding.

Table 6. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the Legislature's decisions.

Per pupil funding was reduced – North Carolina ranks among the bottom few states in per pupil funding.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Respondents (N=2,487)	86.1%	7.6%	2.9%	1.6%	1.8%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=904)	78.4%	11.7%	4.9%	3.1%	1.9%

Participant Commentary

"Increased class sizes and reduced per-pupil spending is a recipe for disaster! Schools and teachers are already struggling to meet the needs of all the students in a classroom, and you want to give each teacher more students and schools less money to do so?"

"The Legislature cannot have it both ways---pay and advanced degree incentives cannot be cut/eliminated while simultaneously increasing classroom size and cutting per pupil funding. Fiscal responsibility is to be admired; however, current policy is both short sighted and sure to fail students throughout the state."

"I'm not convince[d] that per pupil spending is the solution to creating incentives for students, parents, or teachers."

TEACH FOR AMERICA

Teach for America (TFA) is a program that provides recent college graduates with six weeks of intensive education training and places them in many of our nation's most difficult classrooms to staff. This year, the NC legislature allocated \$6 million to expand TFA in North Carolina.

Findings

- Over 59% of respondents disagreed with the decision to provide Teach for America an additional \$6 million this year, while approximately 20% had no opinion on this issue.
- Almost 38% of those who have never been public school employees disagreed with the decision to provide Teach for American with an additional \$6 million this year. About 27% of respondents had no opinion on this issue.

Table 7. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the Legislature's decisions.

Teach for America, a program that recruits college graduates and trains them for six weeks, was provided an additional \$6 million to place teachers in North Carolina schools.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Respondents (N=2,478)	42.6%	17.0%	20.1%	14.3%	6.1%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=899)	20.8%	17.0%	27.4%	25.0%	9.8%

Participant Commentary

"The Teach For America decision is just bad form and reeks of corporate influence, since the "teachers" in the program are usually inexperienced college grads who have no prior interest in elementary education, do no education coursework in college and are not education majors. They don't do any student teaching and accept these teaching jobs that pay minimum salaries, taking the jobs from qualified educators."

"I don't understand why charter schools and Teach for America receive public funding when public schools and teachers are not adequately funded."

"Teach for America is a worthwhile program, and we need to train new teachers, but put some funding into across-the-board state employee raises to retain experienced teachers and state employees."

TOP 25% AND \$500 ANNUAL BONUS

Administrators are required to identify the top 25% of teachers in their schools beginning this spring. These teachers will be offered a four-year contract and \$500 annual salary supplement each year in exchange for giving up tenure.

Findings

- 76% of respondents disagreed with the decision to reward the top 25% of teachers with \$500 per year for four years.
- For those who have never been employed by a public school, 32% agreed with the decision.

Table 8. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the Legislature's decisions.

The top 25% of teachers in a school district will receive performance bonuses of \$500 a year for 4 years. Each school system will determine their own process to identify the top teachers.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Respondents (N=2,484)	62.7%	13.3%	9.1%	10.9%	4.1%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=901)	31.2%	19.3%	17.1%	24.3%	8.1%

Participant Commentary

"Many of these changes will create a dog-eat-dog atmosphere in our public schools in which teachers' focus will be making that 25% versus working as a team to improve education and help students progress."

"This is a disaster. Removing bonuses for Masters degrees and giving a measly \$500 performance bonus to top teachers is a shame and not reflective of their time or worth."

"I am concerned about the top 25% of teachers getting \$500 pay raise. This will make many teachers stop collaborating with others and sharing good ideas."

"What [if] we only valued 25% of the students in a classroom? What if we told them only 25% of them were worth anything? Would we expect any positive results?"

GRADING SCHOOLS

Beginning this academic year, schools in North Carolina will receive a single letter grade designation from the state. Governor McCrory addresses the method on his official website. McCrory's message reads, "Each school's test results will be evaluated for both proficiency and learning gains of students. Half the grade a school receives will be based on students' achievement levels – the percentage of students scoring at or above grade level in reading and math. The remaining half will be based on individual student learning gains – the percentage of students who made progress in reading and math from his or her achievement level the prior year."

Findings

- More than 81% of respondents disagreed with the decision to assign schools a grade of A-F based on student performance on standardized tests.
- More than 67% of those who have never been employed by a public school disagreed with the decision to assign schools a grade of A-F based on student performance on standardized tests.

Table 9. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the Legislature's decisions.

Schools will receive grades of A-F based on student performance on standardized examinations.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Respondents (N=2,486)	58.6%	22.5%	8.5%	7.3%	3.1%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=900)	41.0%	26.8%	12.2%	14.8%	5.2%

Participant Commentary

"The A-F grades would not be such a bad thing except they also have raised standards so that almost all of our schools will get bad grades. It is all a ploy to undermine support for traditional public schools."

"School grades should be based on more than standardized tests."

VOUCHERS

Included in the North Carolina 2013-2015 budget was \$10 million set aside for school vouchers, deemed “Opportunity Scholarships.” Qualifying families will receive \$4,200 annually to send their child to a private school of their choice. North Carolina residents were asked about this use of public education dollars. In addition, residents were asked if they have considered applying for a voucher for their own children.

Findings

- More than 85% of respondents disagreed with the state's decision to provide low-income families with \$4,200 vouchers to attend private school.
- Just over 9% of respondents indicated they have considered applying for a \$4,200 voucher. This number nearly doubles to 17.0% among those making less than \$40,000 annually.

Table 10. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the Legislature's decisions.

The state will provide low-income families with \$4,200 vouchers to attend private school, with \$50 million to be allocated in 2015.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Respondents (N=2,487)	74.6%	11.2%	6.6%	4.1%	3.5%
Participants making less than \$40,000 (N=359)	70.2%	13.2%	9.3%	3.9%	3.4%

Table 11. Have you considered applying for a voucher to send your child to a private school?

	Yes	No
All Respondents (N=2,121)	9.3%	90.7%
Participants making less than \$40,000 annually (N=256)	17.0%	83.0%

Participant Commentary

“I strongly believe that the Legislature is trying to gut the NC Public School System so that for-profit charters will have more business. As a strong believer in democracy and a free and equal education for all, that worries me.”

“Why can’t our state-funded public schools be sufficient? We have to give vouchers in order to provide kids a better education at a non-public school?”

“Strongly disagree with giving private school vouchers; rather improve public schools with that money or hold those schools accountable to the requirements that all public schools must meet.”

“No vouchers. Keep for profit charters out of NC. Slow charter growth so these schools have a chance of succeeding and educating our children. The state will be overwhelmed concerning oversight of the new charters.”

“Take the vouchers and put the money back into the public school system.”

“And as for the vouchers for the private school, well I just do not agree.”

VOUCHERS (CONTINUED)

"Who in the middle or lower socio-economic classes can afford to send their child to private school EVEN WITH this so-called voucher?"

"I am in the process of applying for scholarships to local private schools because I feel like I have no idea what else to do. My child is in first grade and is absolutely miserable. I feel like she is a totally different kid these days. Her teachers/principal seem like they couldn't care less that she is reading on a third grade level..."

"Public monies should be spent improving the Public schools we do have. Private schools are fine for those that can pay to attend them for ideological reasons."

"As long as it is not more than what we are paying to send them to public school. 10 years ago I would have opposed this but now I don't think the public schools are repairable."

"If taxpayer money is used to pay for children to go to school, then ALL students should have equal access to those schools. Public funding of private schools seems unconstitutional and discriminatory."

"You won't ever be able to give those teachers raises if it is considered for the public to pay for private schooling. Take the \$4,500 and put it back into the public school system."

"There should not be a push toward private or charter school. If that is what a parent wants for their child that is one thing, but to force it on us or force us to pay for others children is ridiculous and only hurts our state in the long run."

REQUIRED PERCENTAGE OF LICENSED TEACHERS IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

Recent legislation passed by the NC Legislature reduces the percentage of teachers at charter schools who must hold a valid North Carolina teaching license. As a result of the change, just 50% of teachers in charters must now be licensed—down from the previous 75%.

Findings

- 88% of respondents disagreed with lowering the required percentage of licensed teachers in charter schools from 75% to 50%.
- 81% of those who have never been employed by a public school disagreed with lowering the required percentage of licensed teachers in charter schools from 75% to 50%.

Table 12. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the Legislature's decisions.

The required percentage of licensed teachers in charter schools was lowered from 75% to 50%.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Respondents (N=2,481)	74.8%	13.2%	7.8%	2.5%	1.6%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=901)	61.6%	20.2%	11.7%	4.2%	2.3%

Participant Commentary

"If charter schools are going to exist and be subsidized, they need to be held to the same standards public schools are required to have."

"If state funds are going to private and charter schools, then they should be held accountable as public schools are held accountable. The private and charter schools should also be required to hire highly qualified teachers."

"Hold private/charter/home/public schools to the same high standards."

"Charter schools should have to meet the same teacher standards and test scores as regular public schools. Charter schools may have more flexible methods, attendance policies, and daily schedules, but not different standards."

AWARENESS OF LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

In August of 2013, the North Carolina Legislature passed and Governor McCrory signed legislation that made sweeping rule changes to the state's education system. These changes removed extra pay for teachers earning advanced degrees and dramatically modified educator pay, evaluations, and tenure. In addition, the changes lifted class size caps, expanded Teach for America in NC, eased charter school requirements, and introduced a voucher system. Local, state, and national media outlets have spent considerable print space and airtime covering these changes. Residents were asked about their level of awareness of these changes.

Findings

- Almost 80% of respondents indicated that they were aware of most to all of the changes made by the state Legislature.
- For those who have never been employed by a public school, 59% indicated that they were aware of most to all of the changes made by the state Legislature.

Table 13. To what extent were you aware of these legislative changes?

	Not aware of any of the changes	Aware of a few of the changes	Aware of most of the changes	Fully aware of all of the changes
All Respondents (N=2,484)	4.2%	16.3%	36.0%	43.5%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=900)	9.7%	30.6%	40.0%	19.8%

Participant Commentary

"The public needs to be aware of the real situations and reality of public education in order to make informed voting decisions."

"I am not aware of a single change that North Carolina has made in education over the past eight years that is positive."

"I'm scared, particularly for lower-income and less aware children/parents/families."

PRIVATE OR CHARTER SCHOOL

Participants were asked if the legislative changes related to public K-12 education have impacted their intentions to send their own children to public charter or private schools.

Findings

- Almost 30% of respondents indicated that the recent changes have made them consider sending their child to a private or charter school.
- For those who have never been employed by a public school, 36% indicated that the recent changes have made them consider sending their child to a private or charter school.

Table 14. Have these changes led you to consider sending your child to a private or charter school?

	Yes	No	My child already attends a private or charter school
All Respondents (N=1,966)	29.6%	65.4%	5.0%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=767)	36.2%	56.7%	7.0%

Participant Commentary

"I send both of my children to private school because of the quality of public education in NC."

"We are actively searching for private school options to escape the ridiculousness that has become the NC school system!"

"Even though I don't have a child in school at this time, I will within the next few years. It is heartbreaking that I am seriously considering a private school for her."

"Just because a child attends a private school does not mean they are getting a better education, it just means they have a more expensive education."

"If I could afford private school then my child would go to private school."

DIRECTION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NORTH CAROLINA

A frequently used research question to gauge public opinion regarding politics and the economy is known as “right track, wrong track.” Residents of North Carolina were asked if they believe the state’s system of public education is headed in the right direction or the wrong direction.

Findings

- Over 94% of respondents said that they felt public education in North Carolina is headed in the wrong direction.
- Over 90% of those who have never been employed by a public school said that they felt public education in North Carolina is headed in the wrong direction.

Table 15. In which direction do you believe public education in North Carolina is heading?

	The right direction	The wrong direction	Not sure
All Respondents (N=2,276)	2.0%	94.3%	3.6%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=835)	3.1%	90.1%	6.8%

Participant Commentary

“These laws will not improve NC public education, but destroy it!”

“I am just very disappointed in the direction NC is headed. I hope to find work in another state that values children and education. NC is no longer that state.”

“I am shocked, angered, and saddened by the direction of education in this state, all at the hands of the current legislature and governor. Because of these devastating changes, and in spite of a strong desire to teach again, I will not likely re-enter the profession.”

“My family is very concerned about the direction in which the 2013 NC State Legislature seems to be taking our public education system. We have two children enrolled in public schools now, and have witnessed firsthand the exodus of quality teachers and the swelling of class sizes. At all levels, we will be paying attention to candidates’ attitudes, statements, and actions regarding this issue and will vote accordingly.”

TRUST

In making or changing policies, a main consideration is whether those making the decision are knowledgeable of the issues, have experience dealing with these issues, and have sound integrity. All three components come together in the level of trust people have in policy makers. Respondents were asked to rate their trust in three groups: classroom teachers and administrators; the local school board; and the NC Legislature and Governor.

Findings

- Respondents indicated that they most trusted classroom teachers and administrators to make educational decisions for public schools, with 96% stating that they had moderate to a great deal of trust in those groups.
- Almost 60% stated that they trusted the local school board a moderate to a great amount, while only 3.3% stated that they trusted the NC governor and legislature more than a little.
- Those parents never employed by a public school had similar overall responses to all respondents. Responses to trust for classroom teachers and administrators showed a higher percentage of moderate trust (29.7% vs 19%) and lower percentage reporting a great deal of trust (62.6% vs. 76.8%).

Table 16. How much trust do you have in the following groups to make educational decisions for our public schools?

All Respondents (N=2,284)	No trust	Little trust	Moderate trust	A great deal of trust
Classroom teachers and administrators	1.1%	2.8%	19.2%	76.8%
Local School Board	0.0%	29.2%	49.8%	11.1%
NC Legislature & Governor	80.6%	16.1%	2.6%	0.7%

Participant Commentary

"Most of our current legislature do not know enough about education to make the changes they have enacted."

"We don't trust NC Board of Education. We don't trust NC legislation. We don't trust those who put money above our children."

"I do not trust my school district to identify teachers based on performance. The NC Dept of Public Instruction seems to me very much like our district- a politically motivated and convoluted mess."

"It would be nice if we could put trust back into the teachers that they know what is right and appropriate for young children."

GRADE OF SCHOOL

Asking residents to grade their local public school is a question included in the Annual PDK/Gallup survey of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. Respondents were similarly asked to give a grade of A, B, C, D, or Fail to the public school attended by their oldest child.

Findings

- Over 77% of respondents indicated that they would grade their oldest child's school with either an A or a B.
- Almost 73% of those who have never been employed by a public school indicated that they would grade their oldest child's school with either an A or a B.

Table 17. Students are often given grades of A, B, C, D, or Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public school your oldest child attends was graded in the same way.

What grade would you give the school?	A	B	C	D	Fail
All Respondents (N=2,302)	35.2%	42.1%	15.6%	3.5%	3.4%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=842)	28.9%	43.4%	18.3%	5.3%	3.9%

TEACHER EVALUATIONS

One change to how we pay teachers involves tying teacher's pay to how well a teacher's students perform on standardized tests. Respondents were asked whether they favor or oppose requiring teacher evaluations to include how well a teacher's students perform on standardized tests.

Findings

- Almost 73% of respondents said that they oppose the inclusion of students' standardized test scores on teacher evaluations.
- For those never employed by a public school, 59% of respondents said that they oppose the inclusion of students' standardized test scores on teacher evaluations. 17% of these respondents indicated that they don't know.

Table 18.

Do you favor or oppose requiring teacher evaluations to include how well a teacher's students perform on standardized tests?	Favor	Oppose	Don't know
All Respondents (N=2,427)	15.8%	72.5%	11.7%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=881)	23.5%	58.8%	17.7%

Participant Commentary

"Some teachers have the advantage of teaching students who are academically talented. Other teachers may have students who are apathetic, have lower IQs, and cannot succeed with the very best conditions."

"I don't want teachers teaching to a test, I want them teaching my child."

"Value added measures are unreliable, the tests are constantly changing."

"Teachers should not be evaluated from test scores. Not all students test well nor perform their best on these tests. Farmers can't control the weather no matter how good of a farmer they are...just as teachers cannot control what the students do on that ONE day out of a year!!!"

"Teachers teach but if the students' test scores aren't up to standard (with no student accountability) teachers get the blame and will get low evaluations leading to job loss once tenure is gone. I believe that if a teacher is teaching the curriculum, attending professional development workshops, and following directions that should be all that is evaluated."

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR TALENTED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Two years ago, the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program, a program enacted by the General Assembly in 1986 with a mission to recruit talented high school graduates into the teaching profession, was cut. Funding has not been restored. Residents were asked whether the NC Legislature should provide scholarships to talented high school students who are interested in teaching in NC to help pay the costs of going to college.

Findings

- Over 81% of respondents agreed that talented high school students interested in teaching in North Carolina should be awarded college scholarships by the state legislature.
- Over 80% of those who have never been employed by a public school agreed that talented high school students interested in teaching in North Carolina should be awarded college scholarships by the state legislature.

Table 19. The NC Legislature should provide scholarships to talented high school students who are interested in teaching in NC to help pay the costs of going to college.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Respondents (N=2,427)	3.0%	5.6%	9.6%	34.1%	47.7%
Those Never Employed by PS (N=884)	2.9%	6.1%	10.3%	38.8%	41.9%

Participant Commentary

"A vicious circle is being created... don't give teachers a reason to want to be a teacher but give scholarships to get teachers."

"The NC Legislators need to provide a legitimate raise to existing teachers before they start awarding high school students scholarships."

"It would be great to provide scholarships for high school students but right now the current teachers and our schools need the money."

"We should only provide a teaching scholarship once a student has spent measurable time in the classroom at various grade levels, been evaluated by classroom teachers, and agrees to teach in the state for a minimum amount of years in order to receive it."

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, ASSESSMENT

While we did not ask respondents to comment about the type and quality of education being delivered in their children's schools, a significant number of respondents did so in the survey's "Additional Comments" section. Two related themes in these comments are: 1. Schools no longer foster a joy of learning, and 2. Serious concerns about the amount of standardized testing. What follows are representative quotes.

Theme One: Schools no longer foster a joy of learning.

"I WANT [my son] to receive engaging teaching time each and every day that he is in school in each and every subject area. I WANT him to be excited about reading and math. I WANT him to learn about history and about science. I WANT him to be excited about school and progressing and bettering himself for the future. I DO NOT WANT him to be given a seat on a back burner while the state creates crazy laws and tests in the hopes of improving statewide test scores. The longer the state takes to make changes or end this insanity altogether is just more learning time lost and greater frustration for our children."

"They can only sit and do worksheets for so long before they lose interest."

"I am in the process of applying for scholarships to local private schools because I feel like I have no idea what else to do. My child is in first grade and is absolutely miserable. I feel like she is a totally different kid these days. Her teachers/principal seem like they couldn't care less that she is reading on a third grade level... yet then my child is reprimanded for talking and "acting out" in class because she is bored out of her mind."

"I am tired of watching my daughters be used as an experiment for a curriculum that has never even be field tested. I am fed up & so are the majority of parent around here."

"For the first time I am considering homeschool for my children. I am watching the joy of learning being tested out of my child...My 3rd grader is very smart and reads on a high school level and does math on a middle school level and I worry about him being bored."

Theme Two: Serious concerns about the amount of standardized testing.

"The amount of standardized testing my daughter did in elementary school was ridiculous. They probably lost a month of instruction time as they reviewed and sat for tests. At many schools, the last weeks of school were severely under utilized because everything had been crammed in preparation of the test and the last few weeks were just for review or maybe preview for the next grade."

"As a parent of a "gifted" child, I have grown extremely frustrated this year as I have watched his education be neglected at the expense of "training" his poor classmates to take the EOG test. I feel sorry for his teacher."

"These 3 weekly tests that my 3rd grader has to take to add to his portfolio each week is ridiculous! He's already a year behind and the added stress/tests are not fair."

"Soon, the students will dread going to class knowing that their time will be filled with test after test."

"The amount of testing is out of control."

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to gather opinion data from North Carolina citizens on recent education policies passed by the NC Legislature. This document offers findings from a quantitative survey of residents of North Carolina. Participants completed the survey online. A link to this survey was shared with multiple PTA organizations across North Carolina and it was posted on multiple websites, including personal Facebook and Twitter pages and the Charlotte Observer Facebook page. In addition, individual respondents also forwarded and/or posted the survey link. The survey was opened on January 23, 2014 and closed on February 10, 2014.

Participants

- 2,678 citizens from 70 school systems in North Carolina participated in the survey. A total of 2,352 (87.8%) participants responded to every question on the survey. For each question reported, the number of respondents is also listed.
- 85.1% of respondents were female and 14.9% were male.
- As far as participant age, 6.6% of respondents were between 18-29, 31.7% were 30-39, 35.3% were 40-49, 17.9% were 50-59 and 8.6% were over 60.
- In terms of income level, 14.8% of respondents had family incomes below \$40,000, 40.4% had incomes between \$40,000 - \$80,000 and nearly 45% had incomes above \$80,000.
- 62.4% of participants indicated they have been employed by a public school (currently or previously) and 37.6% indicated they have never been employed by a public school. NOTE: For most tables, we also report findings for this latter group.
- While 81% of respondents indicated they have had a child attend public schools in North Carolina, just 62% indicated they currently have a child enrolled in public schools in the state.

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