

Growing Opposition to the Common Core (Figure 1)

Although nearly two-thirds of Americans support the Common Core, the percentage opposed has nearly doubled over the past year.



ILLUSTRATION / BRUCE SANDERS DESIGN AND ILLUSTRATION

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have the potential to ensure that every child in the United States is prepared for college and career—a worthy goal and one that we should work together to achieve. However, information, policies, and products to implement the Common Core State Standards are sometimes confusing or challenging to implement. This implementation guidance from IRA represents the consensus of a group of literacy leaders in the field who support the implementation of the Standards for student literacy achievement. The intent is to support state and local education agencies, university faculty, publishers, and planners and facilitators of professional development as they implement the ELA Common Core State Standards.

Use of Challenging Texts
 CCSS require that students read more challenging texts for instruction than has been general practice in the past. This shift could help students

key aspect of reading instruction in these early years involves explicit instruction in the alphabetic code—being able to decode words effectively and to develop solid word recognition skills. The most suitable texts for these purposes include features like decodable words, common sight words, and predictable language, rather than the presentation of highly complex ideas and language. Kindergarten and Grade 1 children should have opportunities to engage with complex texts, but this best takes place in the context of having those texts read to them, a practice that supports their language development and emerging comprehension skills. For their own reading, texts written at traditional levels are most appropriate, and unlike the texts for Grades 2–12, should not be raised at this time.

The Common Core State Standards specify the levels of text that students need to be able to read effectively by the end of school years. However, this does not mean that all reading should be at these levels. In order to help students to attain the necessary end-of-year levels, teachers need to establish an ambitious itinerary of rich and varied narrative and informational texts, including some texts that are easier than the Standards specify. Athletes vary their routes to build strength, flexibility, and stamina; likewise, readers need reading experiences with a range of text difficulties and lengths if they are to develop these characteristics as readers.

Finally, beyond the beginning reading levels, the CCSS guidelines on text complexity encourage teachers to expect students in reading at least some texts they are likely to struggle with in terms of fluency and reading comprehension. This represents a major shift in instructional approach. To ensure that the interactions with such texts lead to maximum student learning, teachers must provide significant support

SOURCE: The Education Next Survey, 2012 and 2013

The **2013** *Education Next* Survey

Although opposition to Common Core education standards is growing, an overwhelming majority of Americans remain supportive of these standards. A majority also back government funding of preschool education for disadvantaged children.

At the same time, Americans are becoming increasingly resistant to demands for greater education spending and higher teacher pay. They give a higher evaluation to private schools than to public ones in their local community, but opposition to market-oriented school-reform proposals, such as performance pay for teachers and school vouchers, seems to be on the rise. Those are just a few of the findings from the seventh annual *Education Next (EdNext)* poll administered under the auspices of the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance

(PEPG) to a representative sample of the U.S. adult population. Teachers, parents, African Americans, and Hispanic respondents were also surveyed in large enough numbers to provide reliable estimates of their opinions. Detailed results are available on the EdFacts page of the *EdNext* web site (educationnext.org/EdFacts).

Please note that in this survey we place the neutral option on an issue—neither support for nor opposition to the policy—as the last response option rather than placing it in the middle position. As a result, the number of respondents who

Americans React to Common Core and Other Education Policies

by MICHAEL B. HENDERSON and PAUL E. PETERSON

took the neutral position dropped on almost every issue from what had been observed in prior years. (See the Methodology sidebar on page 13 for survey specifics.)

Major Findings

Other than the reduction in the percentage of respondents taking a neutral position, we find little change in public opinion on most of the education policy questions about which we inquired in this survey. Our discussion focuses on questions not posed in prior years and on items for which we observe significant changes in public opinion from prior years. (Responses to all items are available on the EdFacts page at educationnext.org.)

High support for Common Core, but growing opposition

Support for the Common Core remains very high despite recent political controversy. Nearly two-thirds of Americans favor adopting these standards in their state, roughly

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the same share as last year (see Figure 1). Adoption of the Common Core is in fact one of the most popular reform proposals about which we inquired. Yet opposition to Common Core may be strengthening, as the policy has come under increasing criticism from groups at both ends of the political spectrum. Although the share of the public expressing opposition remains small, at just 13 percent, that percentage has nearly doubled since one year ago.

The growth in opposition coincides with a decline among those taking a neutral position, which may be due to changes in the survey design discussed above. It's notable, however, that the shift was almost entirely toward the opposition.

Higher evaluations of local private schools

Members of the public hold the schools in their local community in higher regard than they hold the nation's schools. Nearly half say that local public schools deserve a grade of either "A" or "B," but only about one-fifth say the same for the nation's public schools. But if members of the public think better of local public schools than they do of those in the nation as a whole, they are definitely more satisfied with local private schools than with public ones. Nearly three-fourths of Americans give private schools an "A" or "B" (see Figure 2). Just 5 percent give private schools a "D" or an "F," as compared to 16 percent giving one of those low grades to local public schools and 23 percent assigning those grades to the nation's schools.

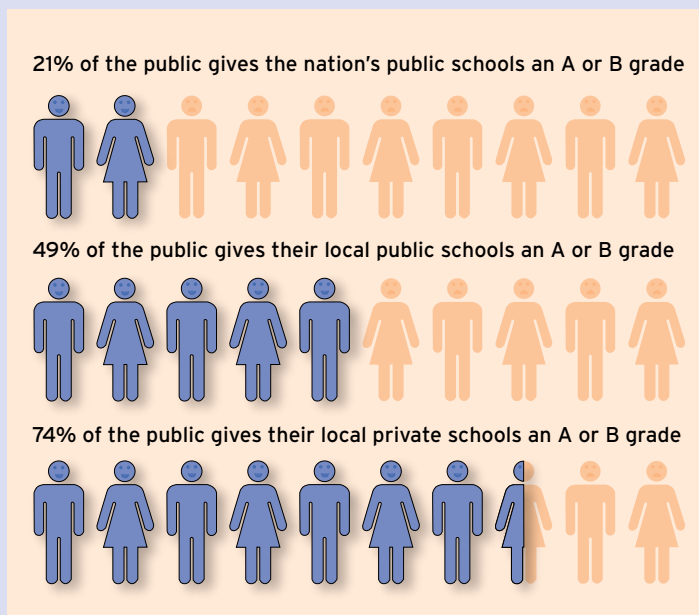
Schools better at serving the more-talented than the less-talented students

Much of the discussion concerning American education policy focuses on the achievement gap between high- and low-performing students. Americans agree with many critics who say the public schools do a better job of educating more-capable students than educationally disadvantaged ones. Close to three-fourths of Americans say their local schools are doing well at attending to the needs of more-talented students, but that percentage plummets to just 45 percent when they are asked about the effectiveness of local schools at meeting the needs of the less-talented (see Figure 3).

Teachers see less disparity in the treatment of high- and low-performing students. While 77 percent of the teachers think the highly talented are well served, 66 percent say the needs of the less-talented are also well attended to.

In the Public Mind, Local Private Schools Outperform Public Schools (Figure 2)

The public believes the public schools in their community are better than the public schools in the nation as a whole but thinks more highly still of their local private schools.



SOURCE: The 2013 Education Next Survey

Support for pre-kindergarten spending

President Obama has called for federal funding of preschool programs, and the issue has received strong support in Congress despite concerns about government debt and partisan gridlock. Widespread support for pre-kindergarten funding proposals may be inspired by the popularity of the idea among the public at large. When asked about support for a proposal “that would allow low- and moderate-income four-year-old children to be given the opportunity to attend a preschool program, with the government paying the tuition,” 60 percent of the public responded favorably, with just 27 percent voicing opposition. Among teachers the response was even more enthusiastic: 73 percent in favor and just 22 percent in opposition.

Declining support for school spending and teacher pay

We inquired about local school expenditures in two different ways. We asked half of our sample whether they would like to see funding for schools in their district increase, decrease, or remain the same, while we told the other half the current per-pupil spending in their district before we asked that question.

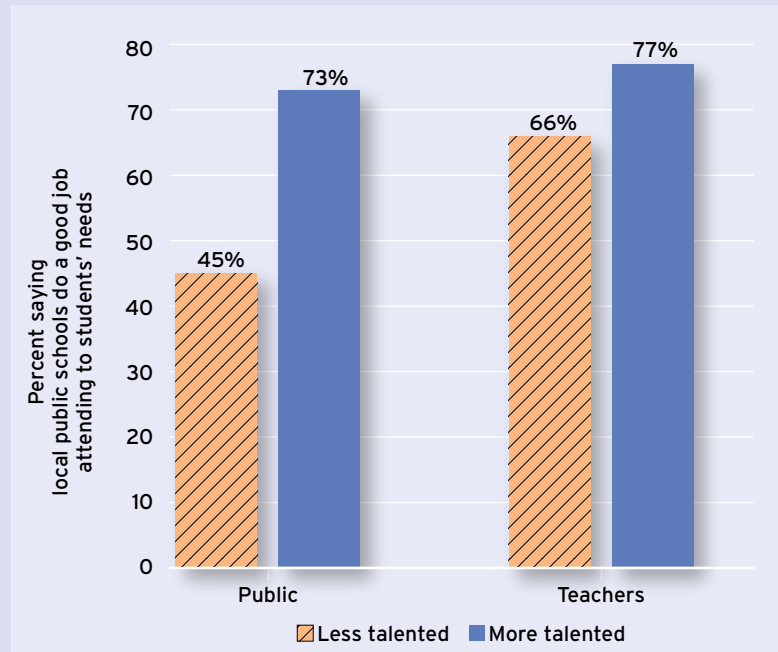
Among respondents not told actual spending levels, only 53 percent support higher funding, down 10 percentage points from the 63 percent who were supportive a year ago. Providing information about current spending decreases support for higher levels of spending. Among those told how much local schools currently spend, support for spending increases was 43 percent, the same as a year ago.

We are uncertain as to why the decline in support occurs only among those who were not told about actual expenditure levels. We do know that members of the public are no better at estimating actual expenditure levels than they were previously. They estimate that expenditures average \$6,680 per pupil, hardly more than 50 percent of the average actual expenditure level of \$12,637 per pupil in the districts where respondents live.

A similar pattern holds for attitudes toward teacher pay. In 2013, 55 percent of respondents not informed of current pay levels favor increases in teacher pay, down from 64 percent taking that position a year ago. Meanwhile, only 37 percent of those

More Talented vs. Less Talented (Figure 3)

Teachers are more likely than the public to believe that local public schools attend to the needs of less-talented students.



SOURCE: The 2013 Education Next Survey

informed of salary levels favor an increase, virtually the same as the 36 percent taking that position in 2012. Once again, we cannot attribute the change to better knowledge of actual salary levels, as average estimates of salary levels remain essentially unchanged at \$36,428, about \$20,000 below actual average salaries in the states where respondents live.

The public is becoming more resistant to rising school expenditures and to raising teacher salaries.

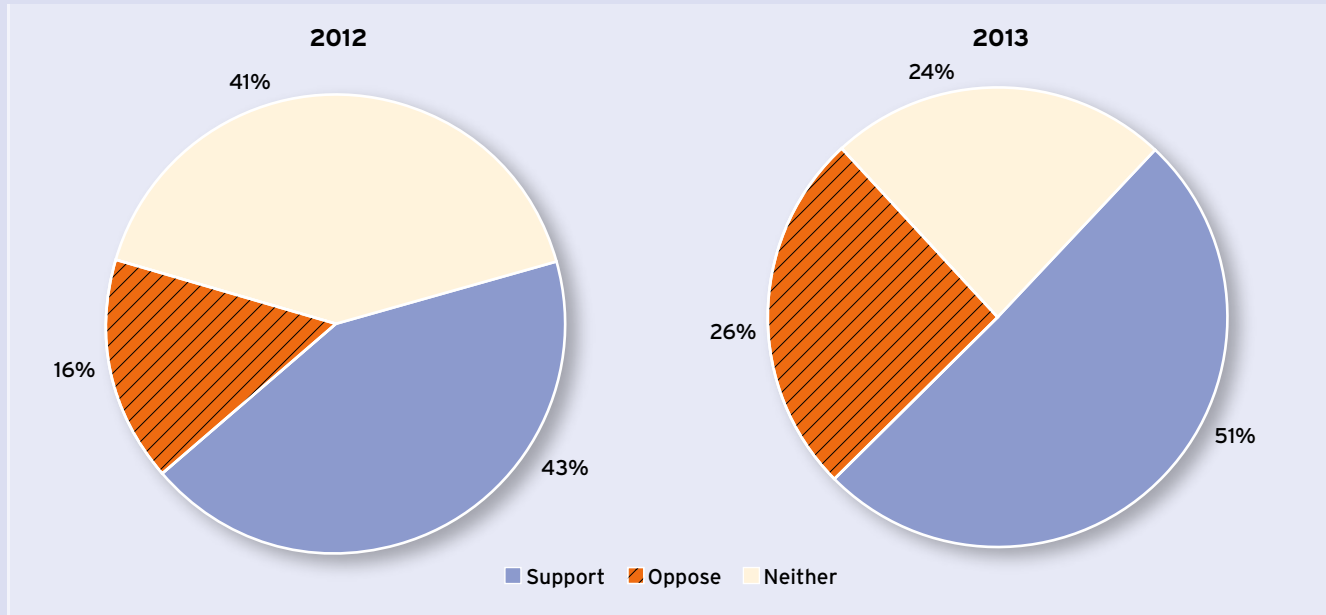
Merit-based teacher tenure

Those respondents supporting such performance-pay policies remain at 49 percent, virtually unchanged from the last time we asked this question in 2011. However, resistance to the use of student performance information to evaluate teachers seems to have intensified. Opposition to basing teacher salaries in part on student progress has grown from 27 percent to 39 percent over the past two years.

Similarly, 27 percent of respondents oppose basing decisions about teacher tenure on how well students progress on standardized tests, nearly double the 14 percent opposed to the idea one year ago. To be sure,

Gains for Both Supporters and Opponents of Charter Schools (Figure 4)

From 2012 to 2013, supporters and opponents gain roughly equal percentages, as the number of respondents without a definite opinion with respect to charter schools drops.



SOURCE: The Education Next Survey, 2012 and 2013

this is less than half of the share of members of the public who support tying tenure to student performance, which remains at 58 percent. The growth in opposition comes at the expense of those taking the neutral position. But that drop in those who have no definite opinion does not change the level of support for merit-based teacher policy. The entire shift is toward greater opposition.

School vouchers

Growing resistance to reform extends to school voucher programs as well. Opposition to expanding school choice through a universal voucher initiative that “gives all students an opportunity to go to private schools with government funding” is higher in this year’s survey than it was a year ago. Whereas 29 percent of Americans expressed opposition to universal vouchers in the 2012 survey, 37 percent do so in this year’s survey. Those in favor of a universal voucher plan make up 44 percent, hardly different from 43 percent one year ago, a shift well within the

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margin of error. The fact that most of the shifts away from the neutral position on the merit pay, merit tenure, and universal vouchers questions result in greater opposition—while levels of support remain unchanged—suggests that something more is happening than mere changes in survey design. At the very least, opposition appears to be stronger than previously reported.

Those without a definite opinion with respect to charter schools dropped to 24 percent in 2013 from 41 percent in 2012 (see Figure 4). That is one of the largest shifts away from neutrality that has taken place as a result of placement of the neutral position as the last of five options. Both supporters and opponents show gains. Support for charters shifts upward from 43 percent to 51 percent, while the level of opposition increases from 16 percent to 26 percent. Since both supporters and opponents gain roughly equal percentages, we interpret this result as indicating no underlying change in the balance of public opinion.

Conclusions

On most issues, public opinion does not change much over time, and so it has been this past year. Even though the past 12 months have been marked by teacher strikes, debt crises at all levels of government, and intense partisan debate, public opinion remains quite stable.

For that reason, it is all the more interesting to observe that in some cases a shift in public opinion seems to be occurring. The public is becoming more resistant to rising school expenditures and to raising teacher salaries. But the

public is also becoming increasingly skeptical of such reform proposals as performance pay and school vouchers. Neither the defenders of the status quo nor those proposing major changes in education policy have achieved a public-opinion breakthrough in 2013.

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Methodology

The results presented here are based upon a nationally representative, stratified sample of 1,138 adults (age 18 years and older) and representative oversamples of the following subgroups: public school teachers, parents of school-age children, African Americans, and Hispanics. Respondents could elect to complete the survey in English or Spanish. The nationally representative sample discussed here represents a subset of a larger sample used to analyze a broader experiment about how individuals respond to information about school quality. The sample consists of those who responded to the question as presented in the tables available on the EdFacts page at educationnext.org.

Survey weights were employed to account for nonresponse and the oversampling of specific groups. In general, survey responses based on larger numbers of observations are more precise, that is, less prone to sampling variance, than those made across groups with fewer numbers of observations. As a consequence, answers attributed to the national population are more precisely estimated than are those attributed to groups. The margin of error for responses given by the full sample in

the EdNext-PEPG survey is roughly 3 percentage points for questions on which opinion is evenly split. The specific number of respondents varies from question to question due to survey nonresponse and to the fact that, in the cases of school spending, teacher salary, and voucher questions, we randomly divided the sample into multiple groups in order to examine the effect of variations in the way questions were posed. In these cases, the online tables present the results separately for the different experimental conditions.

Percentages reported in the figures and online tables do not always add precisely to 100 as a result of rounding to the nearest percentage point.

William G. Howell served as director of the 2013 *Education Next*-PEPG Survey of Public Opinion. The survey was conducted in June 2013 by the polling firm Knowledge Networks (KN), a GfK company. KN maintains a nationally representative panel of adults, obtained via list-assisted random digit-dialing sampling techniques, who agree to participate in a limited number of online surveys. Detailed information about the maintenance of the KN panel, the protocols used to administer surveys, and the comparability of online and

telephone surveys is available online at knowledgenetworks.com/quality/.

The presentation of response options for our support/oppose questions differs from the format used in prior years. Previously, respondents selected from five options appearing in the following order: "Completely favor," "Somewhat favor," "Neither favor nor oppose," "Somewhat oppose," and "Completely oppose." In this survey, respondents selected from the same set of response options, but the "Neither favor nor oppose" choice appears at the end of the list rather than in the middle. Placing this choice at the center of the response options may imply that it represents a moderate or balanced position, which respondents may select for reasons of social desirability rather than because of true neutrality. Placement at the end of the response set may suggest that this is a residual category to be chosen only if the respondent is uncertain or indifferent. Of the items discussed in the essay, responses to those concerning the Common Core, preschool, merit tenure, merit pay, vouchers, and charter schools were affected by the change in survey design. The exact wording of each question is displayed online at educationnext.org/EdFacts.