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## **Parents Want Tests to Work for Kids, Not Just for 'System'**

*Ed Post Poll of Public School Parents Also Shows That They See Themselves as Most Responsible for Student Learning*

Parents of public school students generally support the use of standardized tests but also feel they are being overused and not targeted to help their child improve, according to a new Education Post poll.

The poll explored familiar issues like testing, standards, choice and accountability but also probed on issues of poverty and parental responsibility and found overwhelming recognition on the part of parents that they and their children are primarily responsible for their success in school.

In survey questions, 44 percent of parents said that standardized tests are fair, compared with 38 percent who said they are not and 18 percent who are unsure. And 44 percent of parents believe standardized tests have a positive impact on schools overall; 30 percent of parents said they feel the impact is negative, and 25 percent are not sure.

"We're hearing from parents that they generally see value and promise in testing, but their experiences with testing do not come close to matching what they want for their kids," Education Post Executive Director Peter Cunningham said. "Parents told us that they see standardized tests as a tool for the system. They want them to be

used more as a tool to help their kids learn.”

Through in-person focus groups, and an interactive online research method where we asked parents to respond to a series of questions using imagery and visuals, Education Post spoke with parents to better understand their views of the public education system today. We then conducted an online survey of 1,011 public school parents nationwide. (A full breakdown of poll results and demographic is available at [educationpost.org/parentpoll](http://educationpost.org/parentpoll)).

“Testing, accountability, standards—these are all issues that are being hotly debated and that affect parents and students every day,” Cunningham added. “We wanted to hear directly from them about what’s working for their child and what’s not.”

### **Public School Parents on Testing**

On testing, parents have concerns about how standardized tests are being used: 29 percent said that tests "put too much stress on my child," and another 43 percent say tests are stressful but that the stress is manageable. In addition, 49 percent of parents say there are too many tests (compared with 48 percent who say there is the right amount of tests or too few tests). The majority of African American parents (54 percent) say there is the right amount or too few tests.

The areas of dissatisfaction become clearer when parents are asked how they see tests being used and how they want them to be used. Parents mostly want tests to have a student-centered use:

- to identify students who need help (65 percent),
- to help parents identify areas where their child needs extra help (54 percent), and
- to help teachers and schools create individualized plans for students based on their personal needs (48 percent).

But when parents were asked how they see tests being used, they mostly identified system-centered uses:

- to measure basic learning basic skills (49 percent),
- to create school rankings (41 percent), and
- to identify schools that need help (37 percent).

### **Public School Parents on Responsibility for Learning**

Parents clearly hold themselves (39 percent) and students (37 percent) most responsible for academic success. Fourteen percent of parents said teachers are most responsible, and 7 percent said their

school.

But while most parents see the ultimate accountability being at home, they also place a high priority on supporting teachers and making sure ineffective teachers are replaced and underperforming schools are expected to improve. When given a list of "education priorities" and asked to assign a priority to each one:

- 87 percent of parents said "giving teachers the respect, support, and resources they need to be effective" should be a "top" or "high" priority,
- 84 percent put "removing ineffective teachers from the classroom" in those top two categories,
- 79 percent had "requiring states and districts to take action in chronically low-performing schools,"
- 76 percent said "creating higher standards and a more challenging curriculum," and
- 75 percent said "holding teachers and principals more accountable for student achievement."

"Parents clearly feel a personal sense of responsibility for the success of their child," Cunningham said. "But they also know they're not in it alone, and they want action taken to support teachers, to raise standards and rigor, and to address underperformance."

### **Public School Parents on the Effects of Poverty**

The Education Post poll also asked parents for their views on how to close the gaps that exist in opportunities and achievement between students from low-income and middle-class families.

Here's how the issue was presented to parents in the survey:

"Students from lower-income communities are not performing as well academically as students from middle-class communities. Factors outside of our school system like poverty and crime contribute to this gap in performance. Below are two statements about how we should address this issue. Please indicate which statement comes closest to your view:

- Schools and teachers can't overcome the obstacles faced by our nation's most vulnerable children, so we should fix the problems of poverty first.
- Schools and teachers can overcome the obstacles faced by our nation's most vulnerable children, so we should focus on improving schools serving students in poverty."

A strong majority of parents (68 percent) believe schools and teachers

can overcome the effects of poverty. In addition, 85 percent of parents agree that schools should apply the same standards to all students and not expect less of students due to their background, race, or income.

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“Parents told us they feel a deep personal responsibility for their child’s success at school,” Cunningham added. “They want fewer tests and want them to be used to empower parents and teachers instead of just measuring results.

“They also believe our schools have a responsibility to help all kids succeed, regardless of the challenges they face. This is what they want from their schools, and this is where we should focus the conversation and resources.”

The Education Post poll results come from a 20-minute online survey conducted in early August of parents/guardians with children/grandchildren attending grades K-12 in public schools. The national sample includes 1,011 parents with oversamples of 412 Hispanic and 429 African American parents, including those in the national sample. With this national sample, we can say with 95 percent certainty that the results are accurate to +/-3.6 percent and larger for subgroups.

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*Education Post is a non-partisan, non-profit communications organization dedicated to building support for student-focused improvements in public education.*