

# Education Reform

## Insight into the Business Community's Views About the U.S. Education System

Public schools educate 90% of America's students. Efforts to improve our public education system directly impacts communities and organizations across the nation. To gain a better understanding of how the business community today views the education system in the United States, the Education and Workforce Development initiative at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce conducted an *Education Reform Survey*. This report reflects survey respondents' views about the nation's education system and reforms implemented by state and local school systems today.

This nationwide online survey was conducted in September 2006 by the Chamber's Statistics and Research Center. Please see "About the Survey Sample" at the end of this report for additional details. Please note that percentages may not total to 100%, due to rounding.

### Key Demographics of Respondents

- A total of 571 business organizations responded to the survey. U.S. Chamber members are strongly weighted in the results and reflect 436 or 76% of the respondent base.
- Respondents represent several business categories: Chamber, Association, Education, Small Business, Organization, Nonprofit, and Other.
- The top two business categories that replied to the survey include small businesses and chambers of commerce. Small businesses represent more than half (52%) of the respondents, chambers represent 20%, and associations/nonprofits represent 11%.
- The majority of respondents hold executive titles—67% represent upper management or higher in their company; and 39% hold a position of president.
- A majority of respondents (78%) are from small businesses with fewer than 100 employees. In addition, a significant portion of respondents (67%) are from businesses with fewer than 50 employees.
- More than a quarter of respondents (27%) are located in the Southeastern<sup>1</sup> region of the United States. The Southwest and South Central<sup>2</sup> regions represent 16%, the Western region represents 15%, and the Great Lakes<sup>3</sup> region represents 14% of the country.

### Highlights and Results

- Almost all respondents (96%) agree that it is very important to have a rigorous curriculum in K–12 classrooms in order to prepare students for college and the workplace.

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<sup>1</sup> Southeastern region includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

<sup>2</sup> Southwest and S. Central region includes Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas

<sup>3</sup> Great Lakes region includes Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania

- More than half of the respondents (53%) feel that the current curriculum does not adequately prepare students for college and the workforce.
- A significant level of respondents (90%) agree there is a need to continue to raise the bar on achievement expectations to ensure that the United States remains competitive with other high-achieving countries.
- More than half (56%) of total respondents indicate that the school systems need a *great degree* of input from the business community when setting the state standards for college and workforce readiness.
- Respondents are in favor of reforming testing methods of school systems with four-fifths (81%) agreeing that a yearly state-developed assessment should be implemented to identify a student's potential learning problems before they escalate.
- For schools that *do not* prepare students for college and the workplace, respondents favor the implementation of several programs and concepts to aid students:
  - 84% agree that school systems should be required to offer professional development sessions to teachers, 77% agree with the requirement of the school systems to restructure schools, 76% agree with the requirement of the school systems to offer tutoring to students, and 74% agree school systems should be required to offer students the ability to attend a higher performing school outside their assigned school boundaries.
- Support for voucher programs vary – over half (53%) support voucher programs, with 38% favoring a state-by-state plan and 15% supporting a national plan. An additional 15% of respondents support a voucher program as a last resort, 29% do not support voucher programs, and 4% have no opinion.
- Almost all (98%) respondents place a priority on improving math and science in upper elementary, middle, and high schools.
- A majority (87%) of all respondents believe that the current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements should be extended to high school.
- Four-fifths (81%) of respondents state that additional reform is needed to improve the U.S. education system. More than one-third (35%) of respondents state that *just* additional reforms are necessary, while 46% call for additional reforms and funding.
- Respondents do not believe the current teacher workforce is doing an adequate job with our students. Only one fourth of the respondents feel that teachers use the best research available to design instruction methods and that institutions of higher education are preparing teachers to be effective, 26% and 27% respectively. Additionally 19% agreeing that professional development of the current teacher workforce is based on proven, effective practices.
- Nine-tenths of respondents (91%) agree that better compensation should be given to effective math and science teachers.
- As an incentive and reward, three-fourths of respondents (73%) are in favor of raising the pay scale for teachers whose students improve in their academic achievement.
- Respondents (57%) do not believe that parents have access to the resources needed to improve their child's quality of education. Additionally, three out of five (61%) respondents do not believe money is being well spent to improve low-performing schools.

## Key Findings

### Business Respondents Indicate a Need for Rigorous Learning Programs

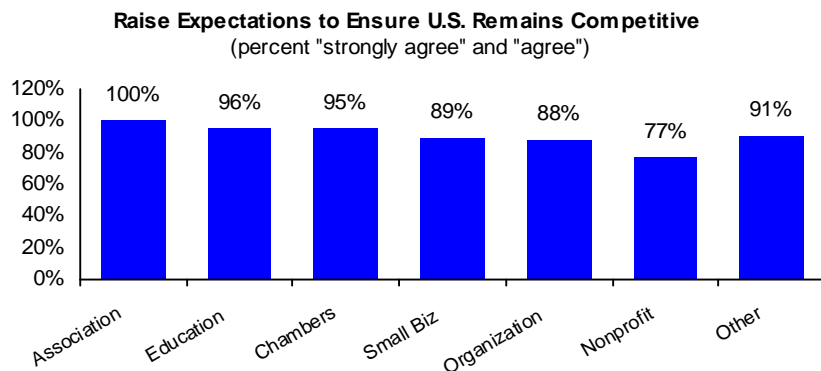
Almost all (96%) of the respondents agree that it is very important to have a rigorous curriculum in K–12 classrooms to help prepare students for college and the workplace. In fact, less than one-third of respondents believe the current curriculum offered in school systems adequately prepares students for their future professional careers, while more than half (53%) state that the current curriculum *does not* prepare students.

These opinions hold true regardless of company size, type, and position held; approximately 40% of respondents disagree that curriculum prepares students for college or the workforce. There are variances by region of the country. More than half (57%) of respondents in the Midwest<sup>4</sup> agree that K–12 curriculum is adequately preparing students, compared with only 15% of respondents in the Northwest.<sup>5</sup>

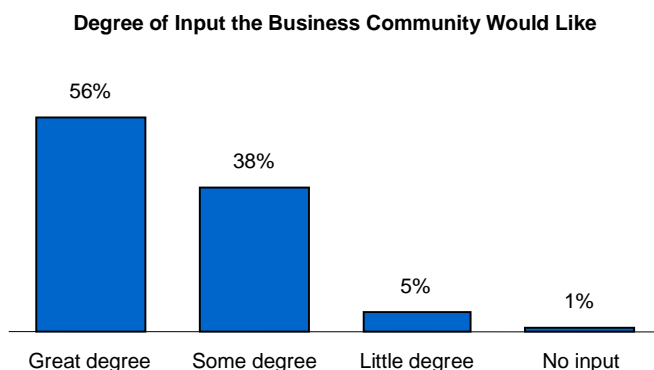
### Ensuring U.S. Competitiveness

Nine out of 10 respondents (90%) agree there is a need to continue to raise the bar on achievement expectations to ensure that the United States remains competitive with other high-achieving

countries. This is true across all business segments, especially with associations and education categories, where 100% and 96%, respectively, agree or strongly agree that there is a need to continue to raise the bar on our expectations.



More than half (56%) of total respondents (and 52% of small businesses) indicate that the school systems need a *great degree* of input from the business community when setting the state standards for college and workforce readiness.



When looking at the chamber of commerce business category, almost three-fourths (71%) believe that businesses should have a *great degree* of input. Additionally, more than half of the U.S. Chamber *member* respondents (58%) would like a great deal of input into the U.S. education system.

<sup>4</sup> Midwest region includes Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

<sup>5</sup> Northwest region includes Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming.

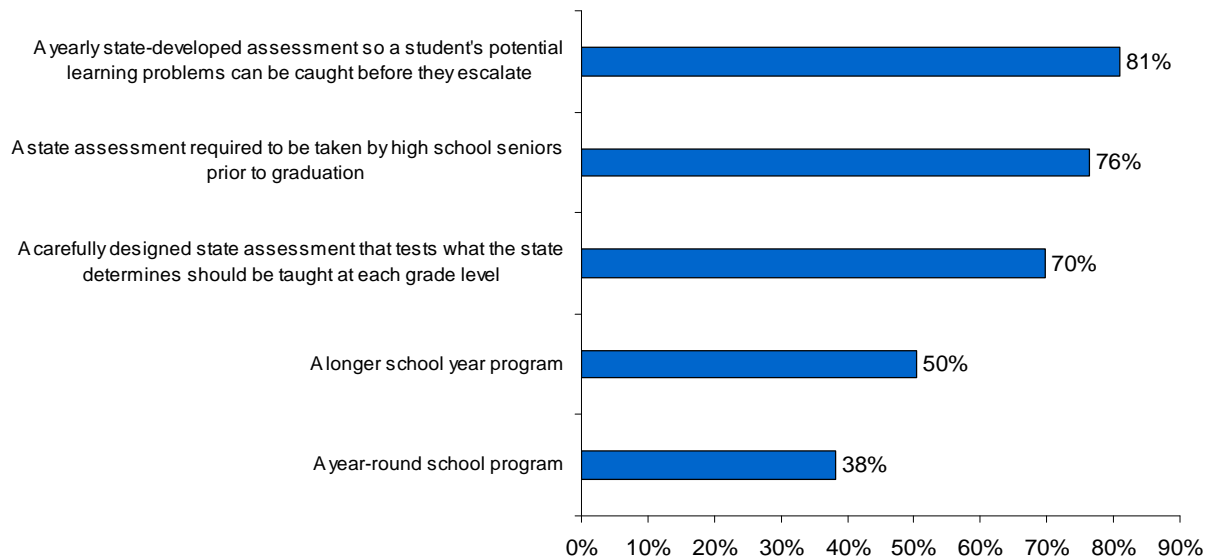
## State Assessment Standards and Techniques

Many respondents believe that a redesign is in order for state academic standards. Three-fourths (76%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that high school seniors should be required to take a state assessment before graduation to show college and workforce readiness, but nearly as many (70%) report that a carefully designed state assessment should be given at each grade level. Between 60% and 80% of respondents from each region of the United States “agree” or “strongly agree” that a carefully designed state assessment of student knowledge and skills administered by the state should be taught at each grade level and would be beneficial to prepare students for post-high school careers.

Significant portions (81%) of respondents agree that a yearly state-developed assessment should be implemented to identify a student’s potential learning problems before they escalate. Although just three-fourths of nonprofit organizations agree with this statement, almost all companies (92%) from the education business category agree.

From a national perspective, close to one-third of respondents are in favor of year-round school systems. In comparison, more than half (52%) of respondents in the Western region<sup>6</sup> are in favor of offering a 12-month school year. A longer school-year program is favored by approximately two-thirds of respondents. The chamber of commerce business category supports a longer school-year at 64% and the nonprofit company segment at 67%. Less than half of small businesses (43%) are in favor of longer school-year programs.

**New Programs or School Planning Concepts**  
(percent “strongly agree” or “agree”)



The business community respondents vary in awareness about the programs and concepts in place in their state or local school systems. About a quarter (28%) report that programs or assessments are already in place within their communities, and another 29% report that these programs have been proposed. The remaining respondents (43%) indicate that they are not aware of any reforms.

Regionally, slightly more than one-third of respondents who reside in the Southeastern region of the United States report that these new programs are already in place, compared with only 16% of respondents who live in the Midwest.

<sup>6</sup> Western region includes Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, and Utah.

## Consequences

For schools that *do not* prepare students for college and the workplace, respondents favor the implementation of several programs to aid students. A large majority of respondents (84%) either “agree” or “strongly agree” that school systems should be required to offer professional development sessions to teachers. Requiring school systems to restructure schools (77%) and to offer tutoring to students (76%) ranks behind professional development. 74% of respondents want to require school systems to offer students the ability to attend a higher performing school outside their assigned school boundaries.

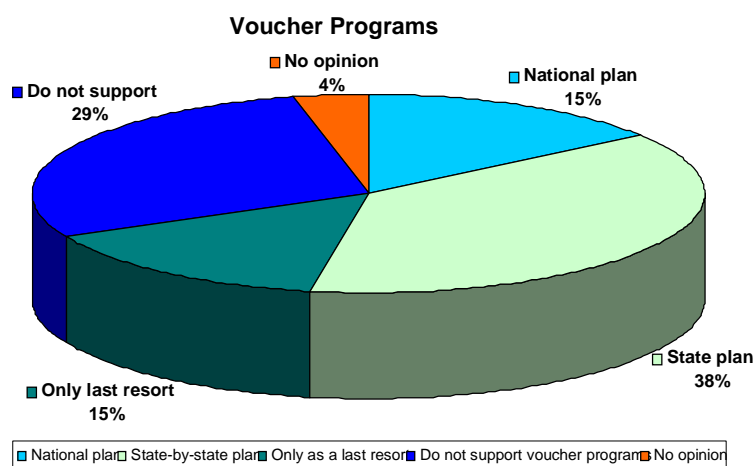
About three-fourths of all respondents agree that school systems should offer tutoring to students. Of those representing the Eastern and Western regions of the United States, their selections indicate a high level of support, with 86% and 83%, respectively, either “strongly agreeing” or “agreeing” that tutoring will help underperforming schools.

## Current Reform Efforts—No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

A majority of respondents (87%) indicate the current requirements for state-established standards that support annual assessments and accountability for student learning (that is, the NCLB Act) in elementary and middle schools *should be extended to high schools*.

## Voucher Programs

Voucher programs are reform efforts offered to low-income students as an alternative to attending schools that consistently under perform. Support for these programs varies. Over half of the respondents (53%) support voucher programs, with 38% favoring a *state-by-state plan* and 15% supporting a *national plan*. An additional 15% support a voucher program only as a last resort choice. More than a quarter (29%) of respondents do not support voucher programs, and 4% have no opinion.



On average, approximately 15% of all respondents support a national plan that would provide funding through competitive grants to states, school districts, and nonprofit organizations that provide scholarships. This percentage increases to nearly one-fourth (24%) of respondents for those who reside in the Eastern<sup>7</sup> region of the United States.

Survey participants classified as representing the education business category oppose voucher programs, with 52% indicating that they do not support school voucher programs. Large companies (more than 500 employees) and nonprofit companies also do not support school voucher programs (44% indicator level).

<sup>7</sup> Eastern region includes Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia

### New State Standards

Currently, states may establish academic standards for what students should know in the academic subject areas of their choice, but the standards should be developed for math, reading and language arts, and science. More than half of the respondents (57%) believe that states should be required to include other academic subject areas in the list of state standards. The majority of respondents from all regions (from 50% to 70%) feel that states should be required to include other academic subjects, with the exception of Midwest residents (34%) and nonprofit companies (40%). A significant portion of association respondents, three-fourths, indicate that other areas should be included in the list of state standards. The most common examples of new subject areas include history and “real-world issues,” such as team building, budgeting and finance classes.

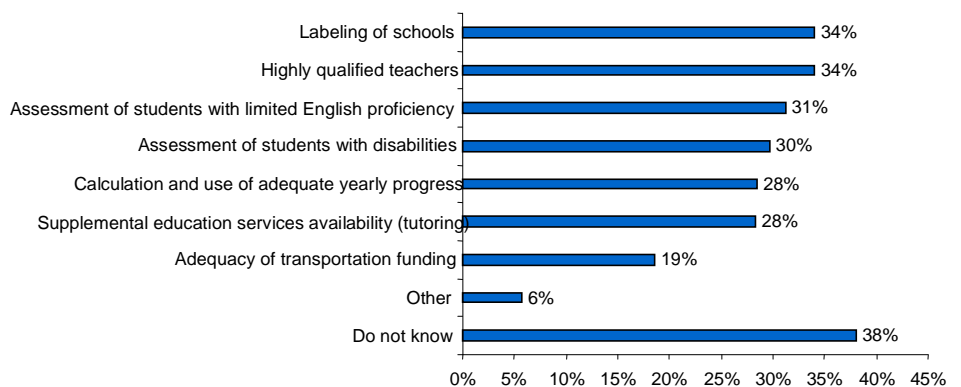
The survey results point out that almost all business organizations (98%) place a priority on improving math and science in upper elementary, middle, and high schools, with more than three-fourths (76%) placing a very high level of priority on improving math and science.

### Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

When asked whether their state has experienced significant problems with implementing the NCLB Act,

responses are mixed. One-third (34%) of business respondents highlighted the labeling schools issue (such as those that are lower performing or are in need of improvement) and the lack of highly qualified teachers issue as problematic affects of the NCLB Act.

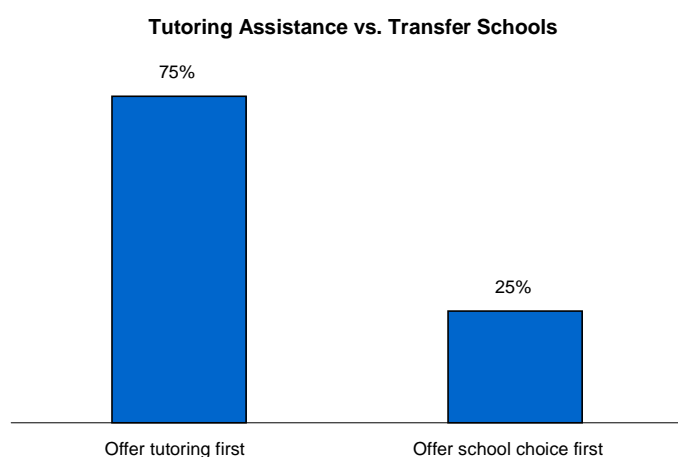
Problems with Implementation of No Child Left Behind Act



Nearly half (49%) of the companies with 1,000 or more employees report that their state is experiencing problems with the calculation and use of adequate yearly progress, compared with only 23% of respondents from organizations with 16 to 50 employees.

## Additional Reforms

The survey respondents believe that additional K–12 reforms are necessary to improve the education system in the United States. More than one-third (35%) of respondents state that *just* additional reforms are necessary, while 46% call for additional reforms *and* funding.



When probed with the question of what to offer students in schools that do not show sufficient progress in raising student achievement, business respondents overwhelmingly indicate (75%) that they would rather school systems first offer tutoring services to students.

Respondents show a mixed confidence level about the issue of whether lower-performing schools in their state have the ability to become acceptable and effective schools; one-third (34%) are either very confident or confident, and 34% are not confident.

## Qualified Teachers

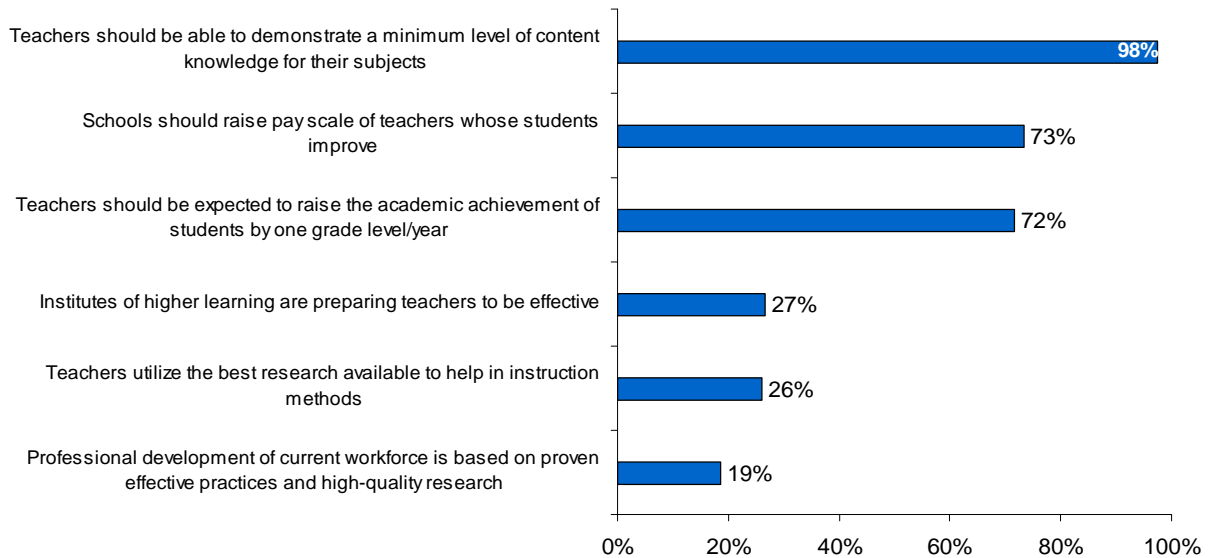
Respondents consistently agree that teacher quality is a key factor for students' academic development. Three out of four (75%) respond that high-quality instruction tends to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their peers. In addition, 72% agree that teachers should be expected to raise the academic achievement of the students they teach by at least *one grade level* per school year. Almost all (98%) agree that teachers should be able to demonstrate a *minimum level of content knowledge* in the subjects they teach.

One-quarter (26%) of business community leaders indicate that teachers use the best research available to design instruction that helps students improve their academic achievement. Slightly more (27%) feel that institutions of higher education are preparing teachers to be effective, and only 19% believe that professional development of teachers is based on proven, effective practices that are based on high-quality research. Across the board, all industry categories imply that colleges and universities are not preparing teachers to be effective. The exceptions are respondents in the education business category at 44% – this segment reflects that schools of higher learning are effective.

There is little consensus surrounding the professional development of teachers. Approximately half of all respondents neither agree nor disagree with the methods as to how teachers stay up-to-date. Categorically within the association segment, *no* respondents feel that professional development of teachers is based on proven, effective methods, compared with almost half (46%) of the respondents in the education field.

Most of the respondents (approximately 80%) agree that schools should be held accountable for students meeting grade-level proficiency each year.

**Teacher Workforce Today - Expectations and Presumptions**  
(percent "strongly agree" or "agree")

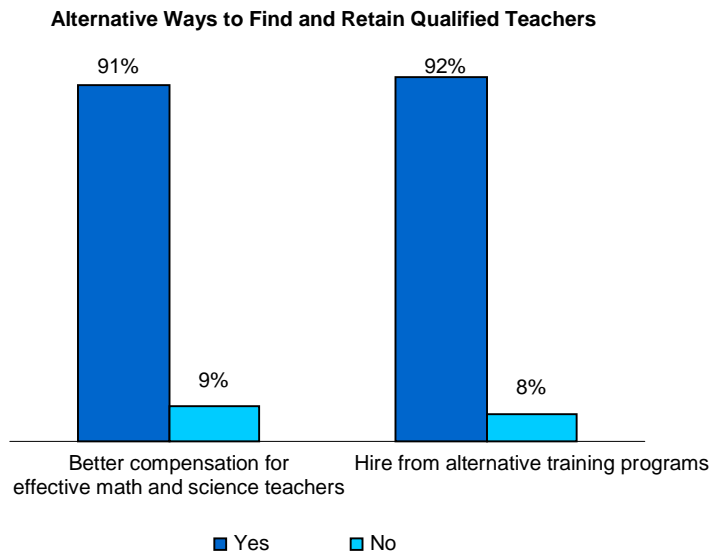


**Alternative Ways to Find and Retain Qualified Teachers**

As a method to retain and reward highly qualified teachers, three-fourths of respondents (73%) agree that schools should raise the pay scale of those teachers whose students improve in their academic achievement as an incentive program, and nine-tenths (91%) believe school districts should provide better compensation to attract more effective math and science teachers.

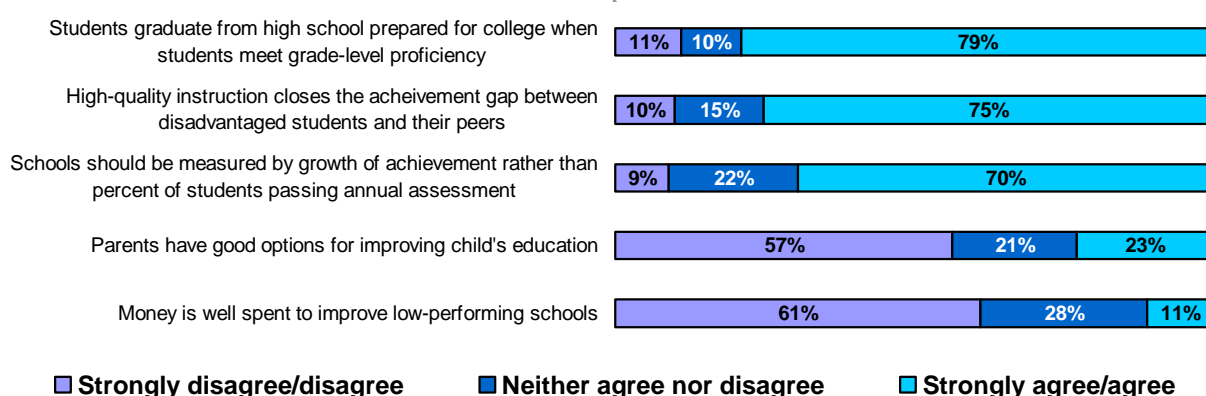
A high level of respondents (92%) feel that school districts should recruit teachers to enter the classroom from alternative training and certification programs, including programs that bring retired military personnel and professionals with relevant content knowledge into the classroom.

All industry segment respondents want to attract competent teachers. In fact, at least 86% agree that offering more compensation or hiring from alternative programs would help school systems to find more qualified teachers.



Nearly 8 out of 10 respondents (79%) feel that students graduate from high school adequately prepared for college when they meet grade-level proficiency. Additionally, three-fourths of respondents either “strongly agree” or “agree” high quality instruction closes the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their peers, and over two-thirds (70%) believe that schools should be measured on the growth of student academic achievement rather than on the number of students who pass an annual assessment.

### Other Thoughts on Education Reform



More than half (57%) of the respondents agree that parents *do not* have access to the resources needed to improve their child's quality of education. Additionally, three out of five respondents (61%) do not believe money is being well spent to improve low-performing schools.

## About the Survey Sample

### Professional Status and Education

PROFESSIONAL STATUS	
President	39%
CEO	15%
Vice President	11%
Senior Partner	3%
Management	18%
Other	15%

This survey includes 571 diverse business organizations with a variety of executive level job titles and descriptions, from manager to company owner or CEO.

## Size of Business and Industry

The small business segment represents more than half on the survey participants. Chambers of commerce and nonprofit organizations together represent close to one-third (28%) of the respondent group.

Seventy-nine percent of the businesses responding have fewer than 100 employees, including 35% with fewer than 15 employees and 33% with 16 to 50 employees.

Companies with less than 100 employees make up a total of 75% of total respondents.

### TOP FOUR INDUSTRIES

Small Business	52%
Chambers of Commerce	20%
Nonprofit Organization	8%
Other	9%

### EMPLOYEE SIZE

Fewer than 15 employees	35%
16–50 employees	33%
51–100 employees	11%
101–1,000 employees	15%
More than 1,000 employees	7%

## Geographic Distribution of Survey Respondents

The majority of survey respondents (27%) are from the Southeastern region of the United States. Responses are geographically represented from throughout the United States, as shown in the chart below.

### GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS

Southeastern (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia)	27%
Southwest and South Central (Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas)	16%
Western (Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, and Utah)	15%
Great Lakes (Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania)	14%
Midwest (Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin)	11%
Eastern (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia)	9%
Northwest (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming)	7%

## About the U.S. Chamber's Education and Workforce Initiative

### Chamber Focuses on Education

The U.S. Chamber is stepping up its efforts on education and workforce preparedness to ensure that students have a strong academic foundation to meet the workforce needs of employers today and in the future. For more information about the Education and Workforce Development initiative, contact Jacque Johnson, Executive Director at 202-463-5518.

Visit [www.uschamber.com/issues/index/education](http://www.uschamber.com/issues/index/education) for more information.

## About the U.S. Chamber of Commerce

**Representing your ideas—and interests—in Washington, DC, for nearly a century.**

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world's largest business federation representing more than 3 million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions. It includes hundreds of associations, thousands of local chambers, and more than 100 American Chambers of Commerce in 91 countries.

Whether you own a business, represent one, lead a corporate office, or manage an association, the U.S. Chamber provides you with a voice of experience and influence in Washington, DC, and around the globe. The Chamber's core mission is to fight for business and free enterprise before Congress, the White House, regulatory agencies, the courts, the court of public opinion, and governments around the world.

From its headquarters near the White House, the Chamber maintains a professional staff of more than 300 of the nation's top policy experts, lobbyists, lawyers, and communicators. The Washington staff is supported by seven regional offices around the country, offices in Brussels, an on-the-ground presence in China, and a network of grassroots business activists.

Visit [www.uschamber.com](http://www.uschamber.com) for more information.

**Special appreciation goes to the business community for taking the time to participate in the survey.**

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**U.S. Chamber of Commerce**  
Statistics and Research Center  
1615 H Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20062-2000  
202-463-5381  
[www.uschamber.com/research/services](http://www.uschamber.com/research/services)

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Education and Workforce Initiative  
1615 H Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20062-2000  
202-463-5518  
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