
2022

Across the Aisle

Across the Aisle: Bridging the Education Divide

What Voters and Parents Want in Education

THE HONORABLE BOB WISE

Governor of West Virginia | 2001 - 2005

Member of the U.S. House of Representatives | 1983 - 2001

JAVAID SIDDIQI, PH.D.

President & CEO | The Hunt Institute



SPECIAL THANKS

The Hunt Institute and Governor Bob Wise sincerely thank the Carnegie Corporation of New York for their ongoing support of the Across the Aisle initiative.



Dear Colleagues,

When we published our first report last year, we presented a scenario for state and district policymakers and education leaders to answer to:

■ After several years when the threat of the pandemic is no longer a concern and states and districts have utilized their remaining federal relief funding, a reporter thrusts a microphone and camera in your face and asks:

“ How have you made this education system better than it was?”

One year later, our question remains – and it is still unclear whether we have an answer.

When the first report was released, schools had just begun to reopen, and parents and the general public were uncertain and anxious about how we would begin to return to a form of normalcy. With massive amounts of federal relief funding to support recovery efforts, states and districts had been in a period of triage, preparing educators and students to return to schools, while at the same time putting together the pieces to better understand the degree of academic and social and emotional learning loss that students have experienced.

As we move into a transition phase, much has changed, yet much has also remained the same. Our schools continue to be tested by seemingly irreversible [learning loss](#), declining [public school enrollment](#) and [college enrollment](#) rates, an [educator workforce crisis](#), and overall declining [confidence in public schools](#). Hot button issues like critical race theory and book banning have also dominated media headlines. At the same time, the past year has



also seen a sobering number of [school shootings](#), raising concerns from parents that our own institutions of learning cannot keep our students safe.

How will we move forward from here? When we conceived the initiative in spring 2021, the premise was that a growing constituency of education stakeholders, including parents, educators, school leaders, students, and organizations, do not want to go back to an education system that was not working before the pandemic hit.

From our work over the past year and a half surveying voters and parents, researching key education issues, and collaborating with state education leaders and organizational partners in the field, we provided clear evidence that the public desires bold changes in education, including greater workforce training, mental health supports, and individualized learning. Parents in particular have seen firsthand the setbacks and learning challenges that their children have experienced, and rather than focus on looking back at the impacts of COVID, they want policymakers to provide forward-looking solutions.

With public support for big changes and now two years left of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to carry them out, we have the resources and public will to redesign education systems to serve all students. What we need now are policymakers and education leaders that are willing to listen to their constituents and bring them to the decision-making table.

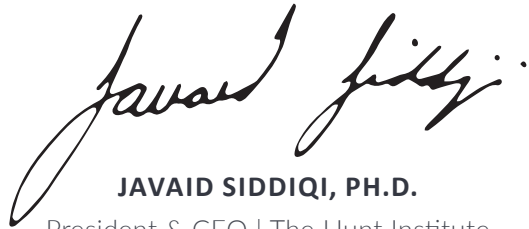
Growing our Across the Aisle initiative, our imperative and resolve remains the same: we will continue to cut through the headlines to elevate public priorities in education and translate them into actionable policies for state and local leaders. As we transition into education transformation, our work at The Hunt Institute will continue to evolve to fill changing state and public educational needs and priorities. We will continue to work with key organizational partners and stakeholders to bring to you and the policymakers we work with updated information on emerging issues in education.

From our careers working directly with students and schools, and in state and district offices, we know that our country and its communities are nothing if not resilient. It is time for us to listen and respond to what the public wants – we owe it to our students and communities to do so.



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Introduction

We have learned much over the past year about the state of our education systems and where students are. From our research on key education issues and our most recent survey results, we also have a better understanding of how public perceptions in education have evolved. Partnering with Lake Research Partners, The Hunt Institute conducted a [nationwide education survey](#) of voters and parents, finding that nearly 5 in 10 voters say their confidence in the public school system has decreased since the start of the pandemic (48 percent) and over the past year (47 percent). The results reflect those of other reputable polls: one annual [Gallup](#)

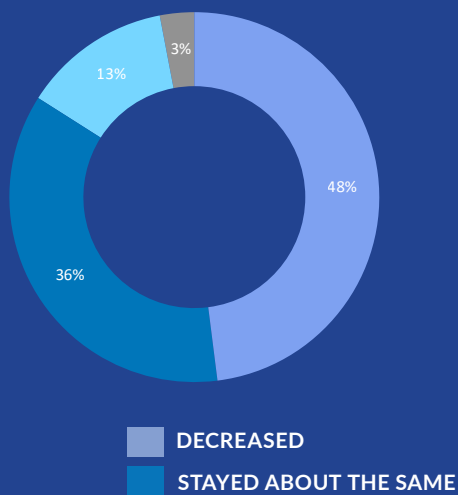
[poll](#) likewise found declining confidence in U.S. public schools in 2022 compared to 2020, with the strongest drop among Republicans and Independents.

The Hunt Institute's survey results also show how parents think education leaders have handled the impacts of the pandemic. Only a quarter of parents believe school district officials (26 percent), state education leaders (26 percent), and school board members (24 percent) handled the impacts of COVID-19 very well.

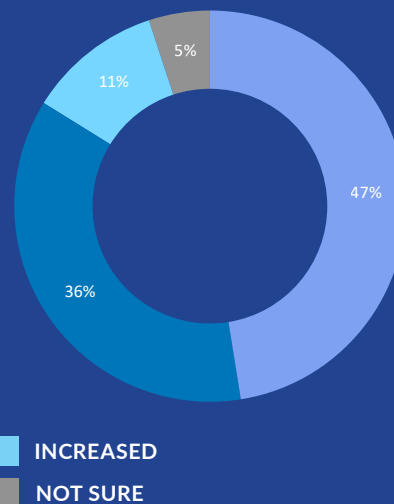
Declining perceptions of the public school system has coincided with a [growth in school choice options](#) and

Pluralities of voters nationwide say their confidence in the public school system has decreased since the start of the pandemic and over the last year.

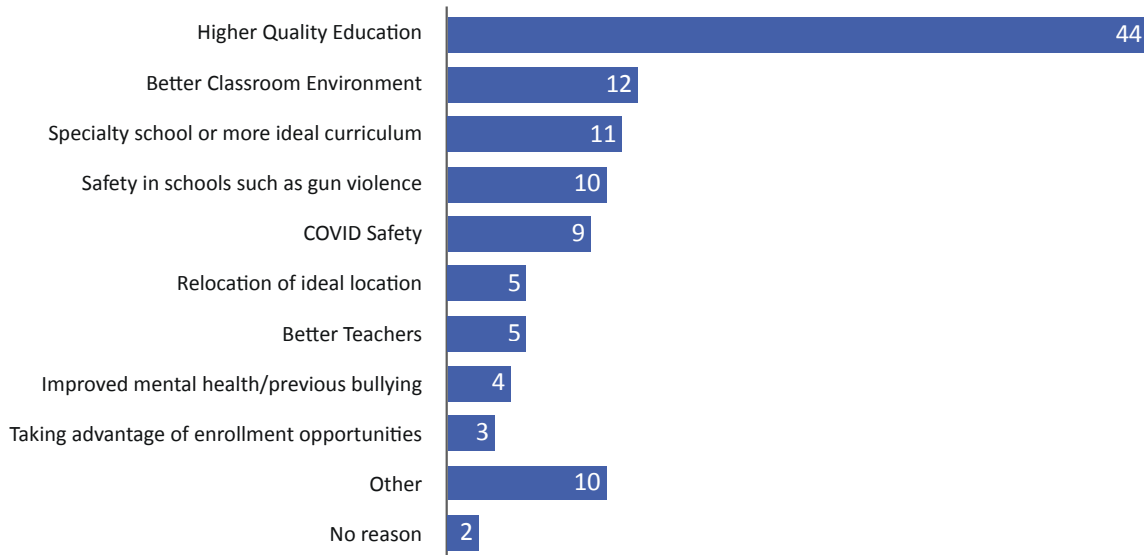
Has your confidence in the public school system increased, decreased, or stayed about the same **since the start of the pandemic?**



Has your confidence in the public school system increased, decreased, or stayed about the same **over the last year?**



In a few words, please explain why you and your family decided to enroll your child in a charter, magnet, private, parochial/religious, or another type of school environment.



Note: Total percentage over 100 percent is due to parents citing multiple reasons for changing school environments.

preferences during the pandemic. According to the National Parents Union's [August 2022 survey](#), a large majority of parents of K-12 students (76 percent) support allocating traditional per pupil funding to parents so they can send their child to whatever school best meets their needs, whether it is a public, charter, or private school. From our survey, among parent participants who decided to move from a traditional public school to an alternative school environment (charter, magnet, parochial/religious, private, or other type), a plurality of respondents noted through open-ended responses that "higher quality education" was the primary reason for changing schools, indicating overall dissatisfaction with student learning in traditional public schools.

Amid this climate, a silver lining comes in the form of historic federal investments that we will likely not see again. While the deadline to spend the \$13.2 billion in ESSER I funding has passed, states and districts still have what remains of their [\\$54.3 billion](#) in ESSER II and \$122 billion in ESSER III dollars to invest in major educational improvements. According to Georgetown

University's [Edunomics Lab](#), as of August 2022, states have spent about 16.7 percent of their ESSER III funds. This is a significant portion of ESSER funding left unused, and time is shrinking to spend it thoughtfully.

Moreover, these ESSER dollars are not the only funding streams states and districts have available at their disposal. In addition to ESSER funding, there are also [\\$350 billion](#) in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) and \$1 trillion from the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#), portions of which can be used to [target educational needs](#).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these untapped dollars reflect how the public feels about the current level of school funding and how federal relief dollars are being spent. Despite current efforts, according to The Hunt Institute's survey, over half of voters nationwide (52 percent) still say their state spends too little on public school funding – a seven-point increase from our survey in fall 2021 – while only a quarter (26 percent) say funding levels in their state is about the right amount. National Parents Union found in their [August](#)

[2022 survey](#) that almost 6 in 10 parents (57 percent) have not seen or heard anything about additional resources in their children's schools or classrooms being used to address challenges related to the pandemic. In addition, more than half of parents (52 percent) also have not heard much or anything at all about ESSER III funding for schools and how it can be used.

To garner buy-in and regain public trust in our education systems, state and district leaders must do more to understand stakeholder challenges with existing school systems and bring communities together to find evidence-driven solutions. Last year, we found that public priorities centered around issues like whole child education, closing the digital divide, and workforce training. Now, despite buzzwords like critical race theory, curriculum censorship, and book banning overshadowing media headlines over the past year, we found that while some priorities from our last report have shifted, others continue to be top of mind for the public. Among these issues include:

- Implementing workforce training and developing real-world skills in the classroom.
- Improving school safety, including addressing gun violence and other physical violence.
- Supporting student mental health and wellness.
- Addressing learning loss challenges.

A majority of voters (58 percent) and parents (59 percent) strongly agree that states and school districts should be taking advantage of the large, once-in-a-generation amount of federal relief dollars to support schools and students and implement positive, long-term changes to our education system.

-The Hunt Institute Nationwide Voter and Parent Survey, 2022

Since the pandemic began, parents have been less satisfied with our existing school systems, and they want to see greater transparency and education customization that meets students where they are. Nearing the final deadline to obligate remaining ESSER funding, our state and local policymakers can take additional steps over the next two years to maximize their return on investment. Practical steps include:

- Integrating sustainable and meaningful stakeholder engagement into decision-making.
- Pulling funding from multiple sources to maximize dollars.
- Collaborating and sharing learnings with other states and districts for evidence-driven solutions.
- Leveraging partnerships with organizations and institutions to build capacity.

This report serves as an update to our 2021 report, [The COVID Constituency: Emerging Priorities for Education Leaders](#). The following information synthesizes public survey results – including the release of our own [nationwide survey results](#) conducted in partnership with Lake Research Partners – as well as practical steps for moving forward. With a looming deadline, it is more important now than ever that we move quickly and thoughtfully to improve our education systems for all students.

Across the Aisle:

Bridging the Education Divide

PUBLIC PRIORITIES

Leveraging remaining ESSER dollars, states and districts have an opportunity to elevate public voices to drive innovative educational change. In that spirit, The Hunt Institute and Governor Bob Wise, in partnership with national public opinion and political strategy firm Lake Research Partners, conducted a nationwide survey of voters and parents to gain public perceptions and priorities in education.

Rather than recent hot-button issues such as book banning and curriculum censorship, the results indicate a strong desire for policymakers and education leaders to take action on areas such as:

- Teaching real-world skills for the future work force.
- Ensuring schools are safe.
- Providing mental health supports for students.
- Addressing learning loss and literacy.

In fact, The Hunt Institute's survey found that banning books and censoring curriculum is largely unpopular, with 7 in 10 voters (68 percent) and 6 in 10 parents (60 percent) believing it is a problem. In addition, compared to other issues provided in the survey, it is among the lowest ranked priorities for policymakers to address.

Furthermore, survey findings from other reputable sources, and from partner organizations like [Learning Heroes](#) and the [National Parents Union](#), which have been polling, researching, and prioritizing the voices of parents and families for years, back up what we are hearing. These priorities show that the public desires a holistic path forward to recovery – one that supports a safe and healthy school environment and prepares students for college and career.

61%

OF VOTERS AND 62% OF PARENTS STRONGLY AGREE THAT TO REALLY SUCCEED, SCHOOLS NEED TO GO BEYOND JUST TEACHING THE BASICS TO STUDENTS.

The Hunt Institute Nationwide Voter and Parent Survey, 2022

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REAL WORLD TRAINING

With the [rise of automation](#) and remote work threatening the low-wage labor market, there is a growing need to skill, reskill, and upskill in a changing economy. Even prior to the pandemic, the disparity between the jobs available and the skillsets of job seekers, also known as the skills gap, was a concern among hiring personnel. In a [2019 survey](#), 75 percent of human resource professionals stated they had difficulties recruiting candidates for a job because the candidate pool lacked the requisite skills.

Addressing workforce challenges must start in schools, as education systems are viewed as “pipelines” for our future workforce. For the last decade, states have implemented numerous education reforms designed to improve student college and career readiness. While much has been accomplished within K-12 education to better align education and the workforce, the U.S. is still not where it needs to be.

The Department of Education’s [fall 2021 release](#) of student enrollment data in career and technical education (CTE) programs showed evidence of racial disparities in participation, finding that Black and Hispanic students are less likely to benefit from CTE classes related to higher-paying careers and college degrees – such as STEM, information technology, and manufacturing coursework – than their white peers. On the other hand, Black and Hispanic students are more likely to enroll in coursework related to lower-paying fields like hospitality and tourism.

Amid economic uncertainty during the pandemic, the public is deeply conscious of the importance of developing real-world skills in schools, and they are eager for schools and districts to strengthen their workforce pipelines. The Hunt Institute’s survey found that while voters believe that a strong foundation in core subjects is as important as ever, students

need real-world skills like critical thinking and career training, to be better prepared for further education, work, and civic life. In fact, nearly half of voters (48 percent) believe that not teaching real-world skills for the future workforce is a very big problem in public education today. Voters also strongly favored proposals that call for teaching critical skills for the workplace in schools (65 percent) and increasing job skills and workforce training opportunities in high school, such as apprenticeships and internship opportunities (64 percent).

SCHOOL SAFETY

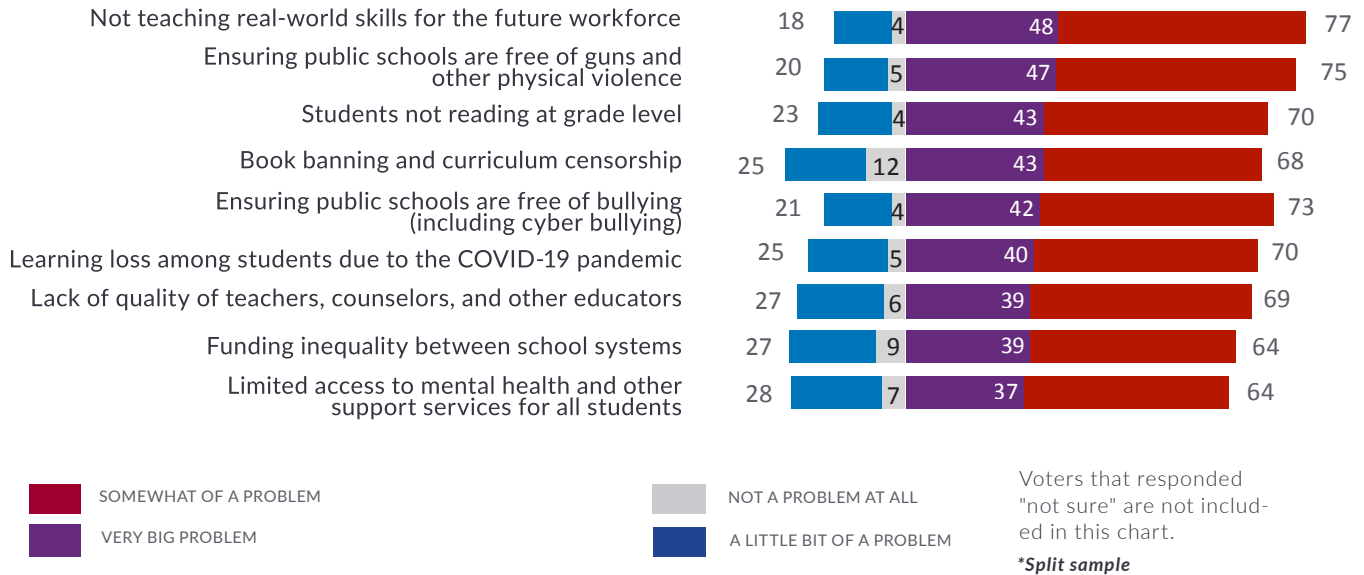
Since the 1999 Columbine attack, more than 300,000 students have experienced gun violence in their schools. The past year alone has seen a record number of school shootings, with 93 shootings that occurred on elementary or secondary school campuses – a twenty-year high. Furthermore, 43 of those shootings resulted in at least one death. With high-profile attacks in Uvalde, Parkland, and Sandy Hook within the last decade, and countless smaller or unreported incidents in communities across the nation, school safety has undoubtedly become a top priority for the public.

The Hunt Institute’s survey results reveal just how passionate voters and parents are about school safety, and especially in regards to addressing gun violence in our schools – even more so than issues around school choice, digital access, or standardized testing. Three in four voters (75 percent) believe that guns and other physical violence in schools is a problem, and a similar number (73 percent) believe bullying, including cyber bullying, in schools is a problem. Black voters in particular are more likely to believe these are a problem.

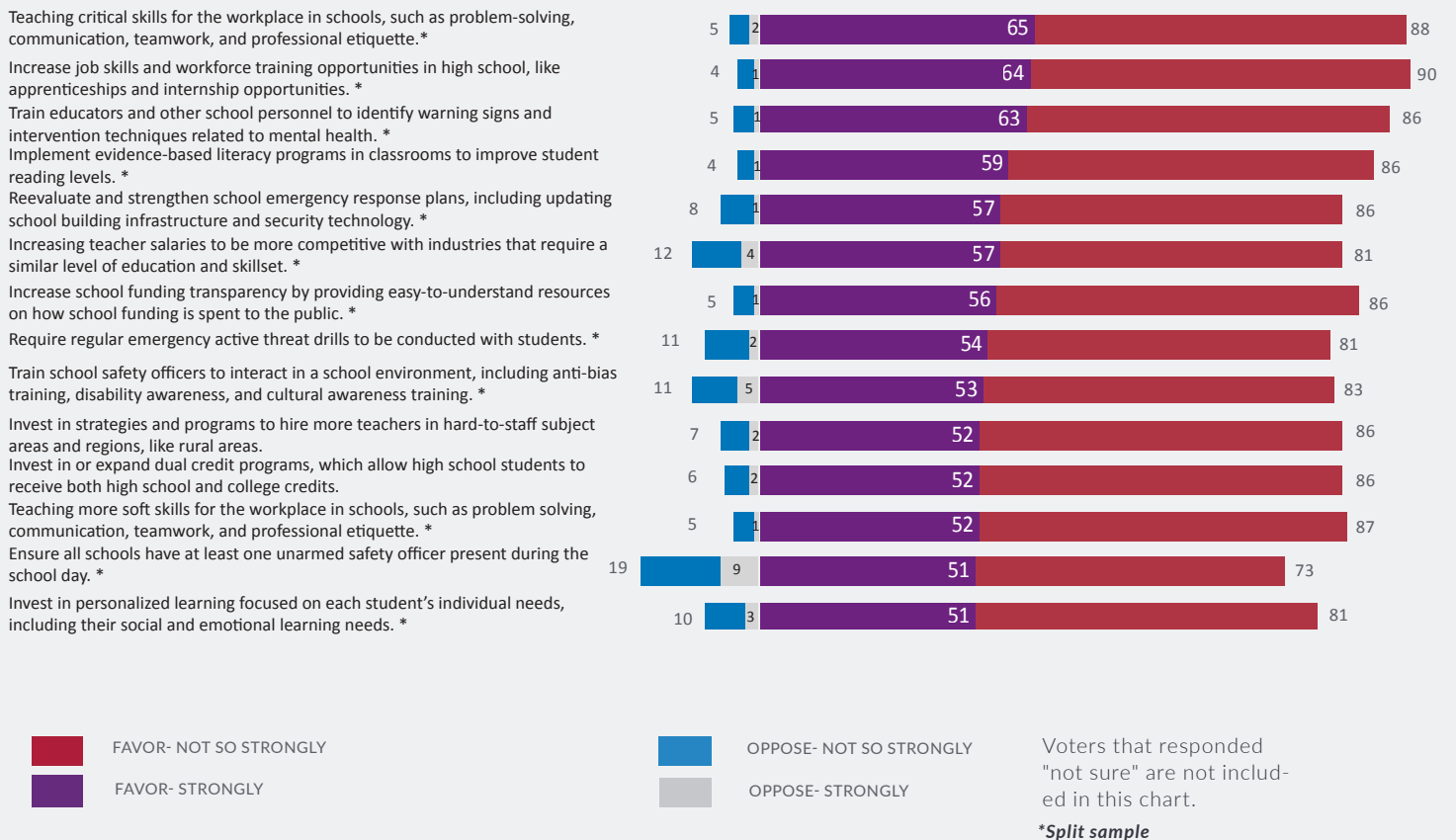
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Voters are most likely to say that not teaching real-world skills for the future workforce and ensuring public schools are free of guns and other physical violence are very big problems in public education today. Students not reading at grade level, book banning and curriculum censorship, and ensuring public schools are free of bullying round out the top tier of problems.



Now you will see a list of different proposals people say could improve public schools if our public officials and education leaders prioritized them. For each, indicate whether you would favor or oppose the proposal.

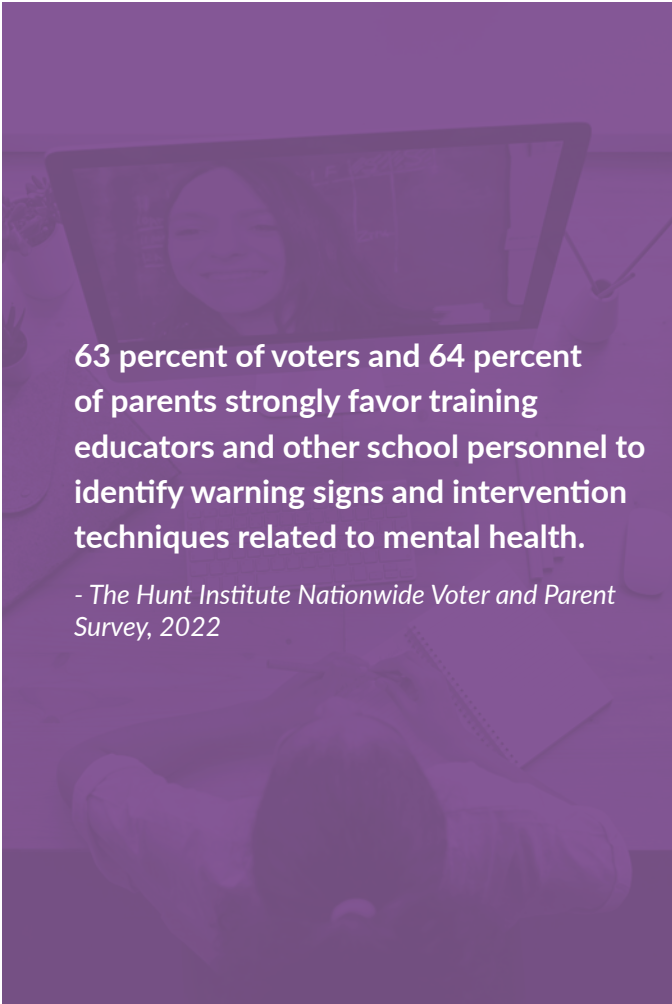


When asked how personally important it is that policy-makers address these issues, more than three in four voters (77 percent) agreed that ensuring our public schools are free of guns and other forms of physical violence is very important. Parents felt similarly about this issue at 73 percent believing it is very important. In addition, when testing favorable messaging among voters, The Hunt Institute's survey found that more than half (55 percent) indicated they were likely to support public officials who acknowledged the need to address gun violence and other physical violence and promote gun-free spaces.

Parent concerns about school safety are reflected in other surveys as well. According to an August 2022 [Gallup poll](#), 44 percent of U.S. parents with a child in grades K-12 at school fear for their oldest child's personal safety at school – a 10-point increase since 2019. Likewise, Learning Heroes' [2022 parent survey](#) found that among their top four parent concerns, 60 percent of parents worry about their child being exposed to violence at school.

These worries are further bolstered by a shortage of trust among the education community about school safety preparedness. A [2022 nationwide survey](#) of students, educators, parents, school staff, and public safety officials, by Safe and Sound Schools, found that there is a general lack of confidence and knowledge of safety preparedness efforts among some groups. Only 64 percent of public safety respondents believe school community members are adequately informed and trained, and across all stakeholder groups in the survey, the top school safety concern is an active shooter attack.

With schools back in person, school systems and those closely linked with them will continue to deal with the ongoing trauma of school shootings over the past year, making school safety a major issue for 2022 and beyond.



63 percent of voters and 64 percent of parents strongly favor training educators and other school personnel to identify warning signs and intervention techniques related to mental health.

- The Hunt Institute Nationwide Voter and Parent Survey, 2022

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STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

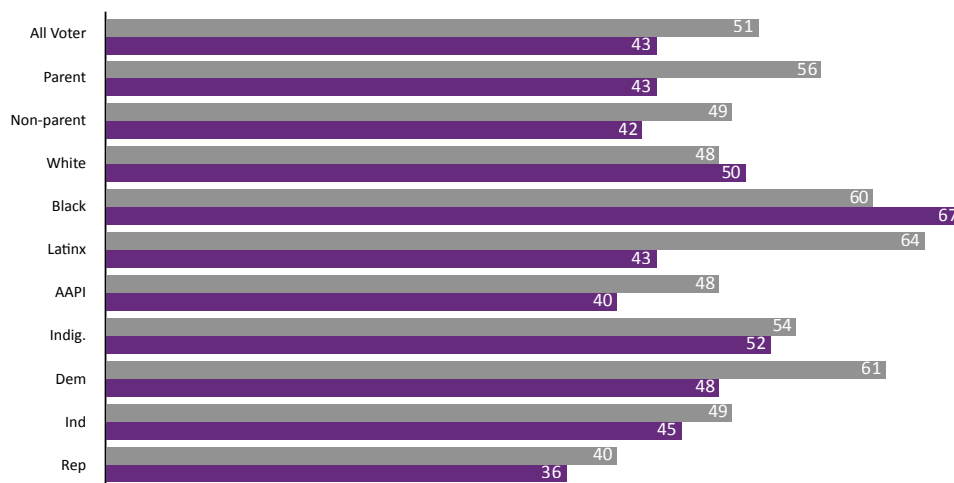
The past two and a half years have resulted in major mental health challenges for students. Youth suicide has been on the rise over the last decade and is the [second leading cause of death](#) among children ages 10-14 and the [third leading cause of death](#) among individuals ages 15-24. [Survey results](#) from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey (ABES) released in April 2022 found that more than one in three high school students (37 percent) experienced poor mental health during the pandemic, and over two in five (44 percent) experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth and female youth reported greater levels of poor mental health; emotional abuse by a parent or caregiver; and having attempted suicide than their counterparts.

Moreover, almost one in five high school students (20 percent) seriously considered suicide, and nearly 1 in 10 (9 percent) attempted suicide during the 12 months before the survey.

This data reflects the growing demand in mental health supports that students have been seeking in schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) [April 2022 School Pulse Panel](#) results, over two-thirds of public schools reported having an increase in the percentage of students seeking mental health services in school since the beginning of the pandemic. Yet, these supports remain limited. The same survey found that only roughly half (56 percent) of public schools moderately or strongly agreed that they could effectively provide mental health services to all students in need, citing an insufficient number of mental health professionals to manage their caseload, inadequate

When asked whether voters would favor or oppose personalized learning focused on individual needs, strong favorability increased for nearly all parent, political party, and racial subgroups when social and emotional needs were included.

- Invest in personalized learning focused on each student's individual needs, including their **social and emotional learning** needs.
- Invest in personalized learning focused on each student's individual learning needs.



access to licensed mental health professionals, and inadequate funding as the top reasons that limit schools' ability to serve their students' social and emotional needs.

Parents and voters are sensitive to this ongoing student issue and have shown strong concern and support of student mental health as a priority for policymakers.

Unsurprisingly, 65 percent of parents overall worry about their child's happiness and emotional wellbeing, according to Learning Heroes [2022 parent survey](#). From The Hunt Institute's survey, half of all voters (51 percent) are also most likely to think additional counseling or social, emotional, and mental health support would be very helpful for students moving forward. Likewise, an [NPR/Ipsos parent poll](#) from spring 2022 found that 73 percent of parents believe that making mental health counseling available to students would benefit their own child.

When considering political messaging, The Hunt Institute's survey found that despite [recent media portrayal](#) of social and emotional learning as a controversial term associated with critical race theory, the term may not be the dog whistle issue the media portrays it to be. Across political parties, most racial groups, and both parents and non-parents, the survey results showed stronger favorability when social and emotional learning needs were included in the question than without.

Given the growing student mental health crisis and the residual and ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that students are provided the necessary mental health supports that meet their social and emotional learning needs for real learning to happen.

LEARNING LOSS & LITERACY

With schools largely reopened starting in fall 2021, learning loss resulting from over a year of school

closures and differences in student learning opportunities continues to be an ongoing challenge across the country. Drawing on online assessment data, [some sources](#) estimate between five to nine months of learning loss from the pandemic, with greater disparities for students of color.

Recently released [2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\) scores](#) showed alarming results, revealing steep declines in reading and math scores among 4th and 8th graders nationwide, in some cases widening or maintaining disparities for low-income students and students of color. Between 2019 to 2022, the average reading score in fourth and eighth grade declined by three points; average math scores saw even greater declines, with five and eight point reductions for fourth and eighth grade, respectively. Additionally, [recent results](#) from NAEP's long-term trend (LTT) reading and mathematics assessments for nine-year-old students showed a five-point decline in reading and seven-point decline in math in 2022 compared to 2020. The reading results were the largest average decline in reading since 1990, while the math results were the first ever score decline in the 50-year history of the assessment.

Recent assessment results are particularly concerning because research shows that reading proficiency – and in particular early literacy – is [critical](#) to later success, both in academics and in life: children reaching grade-level reading proficiency by the third grade are [four times more likely](#) to graduate and succeed in their careers. The public agrees, as more than 7 in 10 voters (73 percent) say ensuring students are reading at their grade level is very important, according to our survey.

Both educators and parents have also expressed concerns with their students' and children's academic recovery.

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According to the Institute of Education Sciences [2022 School Pulse Panel](#), school administrators in nearly 90 percent of public schools reported that teachers have expressed concerns about getting their students to meet academic standards during the 2021-22 school year, and administrators in 82 percent of public schools reported parents having the same concern.

As reflected in The Hunt Institute’s last survey, learning loss remains one of the top issues for voters and parents, with 70 percent of voters believing it is currently a problem and 40 percent believing it is a very big problem. When asked how important it is for public leaders to address the issue, 6 in 10 voters (60 percent) and parents (61 percent) believe it is very important to address. Across race, region, political party, and geographic area, all subgroups saw a majority of voters believing learning loss is very important to address.

Furthermore, across party lines, voters acknowledge the socioeconomic inequities exacerbated by the pandemic, with 82 percent of Democrats, 72 percent of Independents, and 61 percent of Republicans agreeing that COVID-19 widened the learning gap between students from low-income and high-income families.

To accelerate learning, parents want more tailored learning experiences for their children. Ninety-three percent of parents believe it is important for public officials and education leaders to promote personalized learning focused on individual needs, and 58 percent of parents believe it is very important. Voters as a whole agree across party lines, with 90 percent of Democrats, 90 percent of Independents, and 79 percent of Republicans believing that personalized learning is important for public officials and leaders to support.

Across all races, regions, political parties, and geographic areas tested, a majority of voters believe learning loss is very important for public officials and education leaders to address.

W	B	L	AAPI	NA	NE	MW	S	W	D	I	R	URBAN	SUBUR.	RURAL
56	77	75	53	69	63	55	58	64	62	61	58	58	63	58

**% VERY IMPORTANT
ADDRESSING LEARNING LOSS
ALL VOTERS = 60%**

Practical Steps for Moving Forward: How States and Districts Should Approach the Next Two Years

As the country continues to navigate educational challenges and rebuild schools and systems over the next several years, we are at a pivotal moment for deciding whether we can accelerate true education transformation or be satisfied with returning to our pre-COVID status quo. We know that the public does not want to return to the “normal” that existed prior to the pandemic. Rather, they want a “new normal,” and we owe it to our students, their families, educators and school leaders, and communities to do what we can to improve our school systems with evidence-driven, innovative solutions.

With less than two years on the ESSER countdown clock, states and districts have limited time to take advantage of their federal relief funding to implement the bold changes they want to see in schools. Yet, when school systems are already overwhelmed with issues such as reengaging missing and disengaged students, supporting educators, and ensuring schools are healthy and safe, what more can state and local leaders do to

maximize federal relief dollars and student outcomes? There are several opportunities for policymakers to support thoughtful planning and implementation:

Integrate sustainable and meaningful stakeholder engagement into decision-making. As part of utilizing ESSER funding, states and districts are required to “engage in meaningful consultation with stakeholders” as part of their [state and district plans](#). While there is flexibility with what this engagement can look like, it is critical that education leaders are thoughtful in creating lasting and accessible platforms to elevate key stakeholder voices, including parents and families, educators and school leaders, and students. Bringing stakeholders to the table should be an ongoing strategy for policymakers as it can support public buy-in and rebuild trust for bold and sustainable action.

Part of stakeholder engagement should include listening to their concerns and priorities, being transparent about existing challenges and proposed solutions, and providing space for feedback and thought partnership

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for continuous program iteration. While some states have formed parent advisory committees and student cabinets, others have organized virtual town halls and listening sessions to engage a wider audience. Providing multiple platforms for communication and engagement is one strategy to opening up conversations with diverse families and voices.

📖 **Connecticut:** Upon taking office, State Education Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker has reenergized to a higher level the [Commissioner's Roundtable for Family and Community Engagement in Education](#), which was established in 2016, prior to the the pandemic.

📖 **North Carolina:** State Superintendent Catherine Truitt recently announced the inaugural members of her [Parent Advisory Commission](#). Comprised of 48 parents and or guardians representing the state's eight educational regions, the commission has already met and [discussed topics](#) like educator workload, learning loss, and school finance transparency.

📖 **North Dakota:** State Superintendent Kirsten Baesler has organized a [student cabinet](#) comprised of 3rd through 12th graders from both public and non-public schools across the state, in addition to the state's [Family Engagement Cabinet](#). The student cabinet offers students an opportunity to provide Superintendent Baesler with feedback and advice to help guide North Dakota's state education policy.

Pull funding from various sources to maximize dollars.

While states were allocated [\\$122 billion](#) in American Rescue Plan (ARP) ESSER dollars earmarked for pandemic recovery efforts, they can also tap into an additional [\\$350 billion](#) in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal

Recovery Funds (SLFRF) that can go toward programs and initiatives to support student mental health, community wraparound services, and workforce training. Moreover, the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act delivered an additional [\\$65 billion](#) towards expanding high-speed internet access in our communities and [\\$500 million](#) in grants to update school infrastructure and transportation, both of which states and districts draw on.

With [record-high inflation](#) in recent years, and real average weekly earnings declining by [3.4 percent](#) over the past year, the public is naturally tax-sensitive at this time. Therefore, strategically directing available funds and "braiding" funding from multiple sources where needed will be key to supporting sustainable programs.

📖 **California:** California is committing [\\$45 million](#) of its ESSER funding to jumpstart a statewide competitive grant program to expand community schools as part of a larger seven year, [\\$3 billion initiative](#), which will provide a variety of critically-needed social and emotional supports for students.

📖 **Iowa:** Utilizing SLFRF funds, [Iowa](#) is on track to expand a brand-new, \$45.6 million [Teacher and Paraeducator Registered Apprenticeship](#) program to more than 130 schools, training over 500 new paraeducators and 500 new teachers.

Collaborate and share learnings with other states and districts for evidence-driven solutions.

Over the past two years, states have undertaken numerous pilot programs, initiatives, and research as part of their efforts to address challenges from the pandemic. States do not have to start from scratch or reinvent the wheel to develop evidence-driven strategies. Rather,

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communicating with and learning from other states about what is or is not working for them can save states time and funding, and support cross-state collaboration. From our experience, state superintendents, their leadership teams, and noted district leaders through our [State Chiefs Retreats](#) – which provide state teams an opportunity to discuss concerns and challenges regarding the pandemic and its impact on education – attendees have shared that it was valuable to have uninterrupted time together to share their work and develop an action plan for their work ahead. Other organizations like the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#) (CCSSO) and [Next Generation Learning Challenges](#) (NGLC) also offer similar learning and sharing opportunities at the state and local levels.

Leverage partnerships with organizations, and postsecondary institutions to build capacity. Most likely, state and district agencies are at capacity managing existing work. A major challenge we have heard from partners is not having enough staff to plan and implement programs and initiatives. Fortunately, there are many national and regional organizations that can support states with technical assistance to conduct evaluative research, convene stakeholders, develop resources, and facilitate implementation of strategies.

For instance, organizations and thought leaders in the parent engagement space, like [Learning Heroes](#) and the [National Parents Union](#), have been dedicated to prioritizing the voices of families through polling and research. They have the expertise and knowledge to provide guidance on family engagement strategies. Organizations like [Jobs for the Future](#) (JFF) can also support states to expand work-based learning opportunities and streamline career pathways for

students. Joining the work of many other organizations leading cross-sector and cross-departmental initiatives, The Hunt Institute has also supported several state education departments through the convening and facilitation of [advisory committees](#) and work groups, with membership from diverse stakeholders.

Partnerships with local postsecondary institutions can also support program evaluation research while at the same time providing original research opportunities for state higher education institutions and their faculty and students.

Missouri: The Missouri State Board of Education and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has partnered with The Hunt Institute to support the planning and facilitation of the state’s [Teacher Recruitment and Retention Blue Ribbon Commission](#).

North Carolina: The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has partnered with the [NC Collaboratory](#), a policy research center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, to lead a joint [\\$6 million project](#) to support research on the impact of COVID-19 on student learning and the existing policies and programs to address those challenges.

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Bridging the Education Divide

Conclusion

What role will state and local policymakers and education leaders have in propelling our country to the next phase? Are we willing to adopt bold and evidence-driven strategies, programs, and practices, or will we stumble across the final two-year finish line right where we started?

Our students and educators have suffered great academic and social and emotional losses since the pandemic began. We have spent the past two years learning about and understanding just how much we have lost. Now, we must look ahead and set a roadmap toward major educational progress through forward-looking solutions. Our current and newly elected officials have inherited an education mandate and are better equipped than ever to meet it – it's time to take up the baton and move forward at full force.

ABOUT THE ACROSS THE AISLE INITIATIVE

Across the Aisle: Bridging the Education Divide is a project developed in spring 2021 by The Hunt Institute in collaboration with Governor Bob Wise, former West Virginia governor and member of the U.S. House of Representatives. The project seeks to connect public needs to policymakers by collecting firsthand experiences, perceptions, and priorities from the public and translating them into actionable, nonpartisan policies that will fundamentally change education for the better.

As part of this work, The Hunt Institute has produced several resources and convenings, including:


- An annual public opinion survey further capturing the challenges, perceptions, and priorities of voters and parents.
- Policy briefs, blog posts, and op-ed publications that highlight key education issues and solutions for recovery.
- Webinars highlighting public priority topics, stakeholder engagement, and our survey findings.
- Convenings with state education leaders to create actionable solutions to state-specific issues.

The Hunt Institute looks forward to continuing its work to lift up public voices and provide guidance and support for policymakers to transform education to serve all students.



The Honorable Bob Wise

Former Governor (2001-2005) and Member of the U.S. House of Representatives (1983-2001), West Virginia

 [@BobWise48](#)

Governor Bob Wise has spent his career advancing education opportunities for our nation's students. In 2019, he completed 14 years as president of the nonprofit Alliance for Excellent Education (All4Ed), a national leader in advocating for the policies and practices necessary for secondary school students to be ready for postsecondary education and careers. He was named one of the ten most influential people in education technology by Tech & Learning and one of NonProfit Times's "Power & Influence Top 50." He currently coordinates the Global Science of Learning Education Network. Governor Wise served 24 years as governor, member of the U.S. House of Representatives, and state legislator, and has become a prominent speaker and advisor on education issues and trends.



Javaid Siddiqi, Ph.D.

President and CEO, The Hunt Institute

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Dr. Javaid Siddiqi is the President and CEO of The Hunt Institute. Dr. Siddiqi works with senior-level elected officials across the political aisle to help design strategy, shape policy, and drive educational improvements on the national and state levels. He began his professional career as a high school teacher, assistant principal, and principal in Chesterfield, Virginia. Dr. Siddiqi also served as the Virginia Secretary of Education in Governor Bob McDonnell's cabinet, in which he assisted in the development and implementation of the Commonwealth's education policy and provided guidance to 16 public universities, the Virginia Community College System, five higher education and research centers, the Department of Education, and state-supported museums. He is an Aspen Institute Fellow, former Vice-Rector of the Radford University Board of Visitors, and a former member of the Chesterfield County School Board. He currently serves on the Elevate Early Education Board and the National Center for Teacher Residencies Board.

Comprehensive survey results can be found here: [LINK](#)

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