



# **Quality, Affordability & Access:**

*Americans Speak on Higher Education*

Public opinion research conducted by  
Peter D. Hart and Robert M. Teeter

*Listening.  
Learning.  
Leading.*

[www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org)





Kurt Landgraf  
CEO and President

Dear Colleague,

ETS has a long and distinguished research tradition, reflecting our strong commitment not only to advance the field of measurement but, moreover, to advance learning for all students—across the country and around the world.

We have come to realize in recent years that we must not only inform the debate on education but also engage the public on the critical education issues. As we seek to reach more learners, we must listen more closely to the public we serve.

In the past three years, ETS has undertaken a vast amount of public opinion research. The centerpiece of that research has been the annual survey conducted for us by the bipartisan team of Peter Hart and Robert Teeter. This research has gauged the sentiments of the general public, educators, and education policy-makers on issues such as standards-based reform, standardized testing, and teacher quality.

This year's survey—*Quality, Affordability, and Access: Americans Speak on Higher Education*—reveals Americans' attitudes about education and education reform, both in K-12 and higher education. Before we present this year's findings, however, I would like to share some of the lessons we've learned from listening to Americans—to teachers and students, parents and policy-makers, and to taxpayers—over the past three years.

As the global economy continues to twist and turn and as we witness an unstable and often dangerous international political environment, one thing remains constant: the need to prepare our citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in today's world and, ultimately, to shape tomorrow's world. And so we find in survey after survey that Americans place education at the top of their agenda. Education, they agree, is a fundamental American value.

Parents and taxpayers express strong support for reforms that raise standards and accountability in education, but they also consistently tell us that they need much more information about what's happening in their schools and districts.

All too often parents hear about tests and test scores, but rarely do they hear the full story about how reforms are improving teaching and learning in their schools. There is a continuing need to connect the dots in communicating about the reforms in policy and practice that are occurring. We need to be diligent and continue the public conversation long after the policy debate ends.

Today, there are increased pressures and demands on national, state, and local leaders to improve our schools—and as we learned in this year's survey, to expand access to higher education. All of us in the education enterprise must do a better job of communicating with the public. Parents and taxpayers are hungry for information about what's happening in their communities. We must be more proactive and persistent in our outreach efforts, and we must work together to advance learning for all our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kurt M. Landgraf". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Kurt M. Landgraf  
CEO and President  
Educational Testing Service

# Quality and Affordability: An Overview

## Summary of Key Findings

During these uncertain times, education remains at the top of the American public's agenda. A national survey conducted in May 2003 among American adults, with additional, more targeted surveys of college students, college faculty, and business leaders, finds that education ranks above every issue except for the economy. The survey's findings, in fact, show that education outranks terrorism, moral decline, taxes, and health care.

One major reason why Americans place such a high priority on education is their belief that the K-12 system is not making the grade. Evaluations of the K-12 system are up slightly from 2002, but it still receives a mediocre "C" average, and majorities of the public say that our nation's education system is in need of significant reform. The public expects more from the nation's K-12 education system. Pushing students through the system is not enough; students must graduate equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in higher education and the work force.

Teacher quality is a fundamental element of this discussion because Americans equate quality education with quality teaching. Concern about the quality of K-12 teachers leads the public to support a broad range of proposals for improving teaching quality in America. Americans endorse any measures that promise to improve it. In response to one question, they place greater emphasis on attracting and retaining good teachers than on other options, but in response to other questions they also strongly support more and better teacher training. Moreover, as the skills that are most important to quality teaching are thought to be the least measurable, the public does not converge on any particular strategy to evaluate teachers' abilities.

By contrast, colleges and universities receive high marks for the quality of their academic programs, and the public does not see a need for them to undertake major reforms. Instead, Americans want more people to have access to college; majorities of them say that our nation's education system is coming up short in terms of offering young people from all backgrounds a chance to go to college and of providing financial help to college-bound students, especially students who are prepared to succeed in college. The consensus is that we must find ways to help more people receive a higher education.

While most of the concern about education quality focuses on K-12, Americans support the concept of increased accountability in higher education. In terms of colleges and universities, however, the public's greatest concern is the rising cost of a higher education. The public believes that rising tuition at colleges and universities across the country is an obstacle that warrants redress through government assistance. Americans say that they are willing to pay more in taxes to make higher education affordable. They strongly support proposals that provide more financial assistance to students and their families. The appetite for increasing access to the higher education system is so great that even those who typically vote against big government are strongly in favor of the federal government's playing a significant role, including Republicans, conservatives, and seniors.

# Quality, Affordability, and Access: Americans Speak On Higher Education

*From May 8 to 21, 2003, Peter D. Hart Research Associates and Robert M. Teeter's Coldwater Corporation conducted a national survey among 1,003 adults. Additional interviews were conducted among 408 higher education faculty (107 deans and department heads and 301 professors), 321 higher education students, and 302 business leaders (152 CEOs/CFOs/senior vice presidents and 150 senior human resources staff). The statistical margin of error is  $\pm 3.1\%$  for the base sample of adults and is larger for the subsamples of faculty ( $\pm 4.9\%$ ), students ( $\pm 5.5\%$ ), and business leaders ( $\pm 5.8\%$ ). The statistical margin of sampling error is just one form of error or bias that can affect survey results.*

*Prior to conducting the surveys, Hart Research convened six focus group discussions, one each among parents, business leaders, higher education students, professors, higher education administrators, and school of education professors and administration. Groups were conducted in Los Angeles, Boston, and nationwide by telephone.*

## **High Marks for Higher Education, Mediocre Ones for K-12**

The public praises higher education in America and expresses confidence in its ability to prepare graduates to succeed in the work force. Seventy-two percent of adults say that higher education in America works pretty well or needs only minor changes; just 37% say that our education system is coming up short or falling behind in preparing students to succeed in the work force. This lack of a call for reform in higher education is consistent across all subgroups, including political party, age, income, and education.

Members of the higher education system see even less of a need for reform—90% of college faculty and 89% of college students say that higher education works pretty well or needs only minor changes. Business leaders match this praise, with 88% seeing no need for major changes.

"I think, as a nation, we've probably got one of the best systems of colleges and universities in the world."

– Business leader, Los Angeles

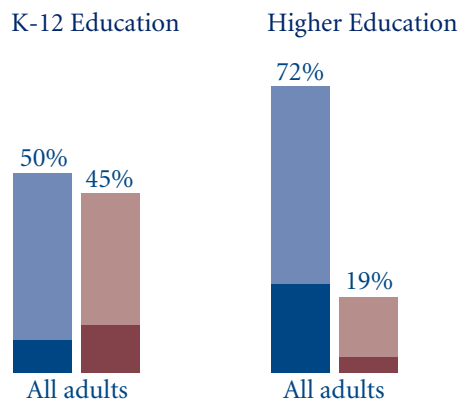
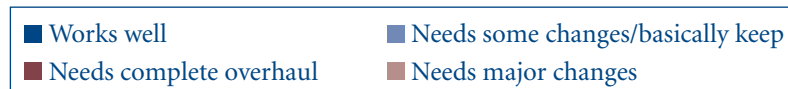
In addition to seeing no need for major reform, 56% of the general public awards higher education an A or a B for how well these institutions are doing as a whole, and only 5% gives it a D or an F. These scores equate to the public's giving colleges and universities a 2.6 GPA. Majorities of most groups grade colleges and universities an A or B, particularly 18- to 34-year-olds (70%), college graduates (62%), blue-collar workers (62%), and adults with incomes of \$50,000 to \$75,000 (60%). Other populations overwhelmingly give colleges and universities high grades, including 80% of college students, 79% of college faculty, and 72% of business leaders giving a grade of A or B.

A significant reason for this praise is that the public looks at the results of a college education and it likes what it sees. A 57% majority of adults say that the nation's education system is doing very well or well enough at graduating from college students who are prepared to succeed in the work force. Business executives, who are in a position to hire recent graduates, offer a more upbeat assessment, with 73% reporting that higher education is doing a good job of preparing students for the work force.

## K-12 System Still Needs Reform

Praise for the higher education system contrasts with the public’s critical assessment of the K-12 system. Most Americans continue to see a serious problem—if not a crisis—in our K-12 schools, and they want reform. Just 12% say that the nation’s schools currently are working very well or fairly well. At the other end of the spectrum, only 16% say that a complete overhaul is needed. The largest groups among those sampled want change but differ on how much change is needed, with 38% saying only some changes are needed and 29% saying that changes must be major. The push for reform is particularly strong among Westerners, Republicans, and upper-income adults.

## Assessments of K-12 and Higher Ed



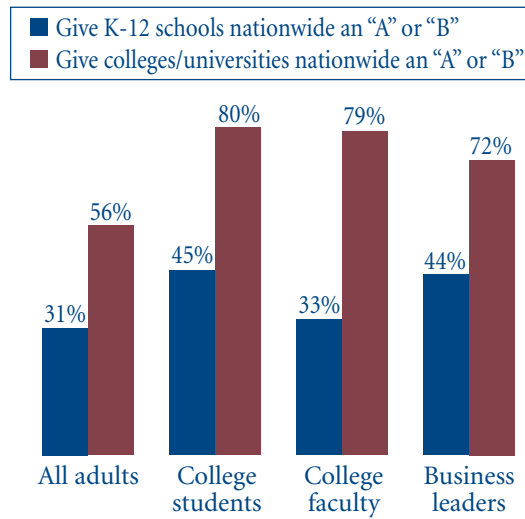
	Works well/some changes	
	K-12	Higher Ed
College students	58%	89%
College faculty	61%	90%
Business leaders	75%	88%

While colleges and universities receive ratings that place them comfortably on the dean’s list, K-12 schools receive grades that are not quite failing, but also do not merit a place on the honor roll. Only 31% of the public gives K-12 an A or B, resulting in a 2.2 GPA. Assessments of K-12 quality remain largely unchanged from the previous two surveys. The current rating, while just a fraction of a point higher than the previous year, is nonetheless the highest GPA given to K-12 schools since the first survey was conducted in 2001.

“Something needs to happen to help that system, to help everybody, and not just you have to go to a private school or the most expensive high school to excel in life.”  
*– College student, Boston*

“I would say that, in the K-12 area, we’re at a crisis in America. And I think that’s the case, because we have not figured out how to assure a quality education, which goes beyond simple literacy. [We need] a quality education for all of our citizens.”  
*– College faculty*

## Grading the Education System



Parents of K-12 students give the system similar grades. Just 4% of them award an A, while nearly half (47%) give it a C (2.3 GPA). College students, majorities of whom recently graduated from the K-12 system and offer a more personal assessment, are more positive, with 43% giving schools a B and an overall GPA of 2.4.

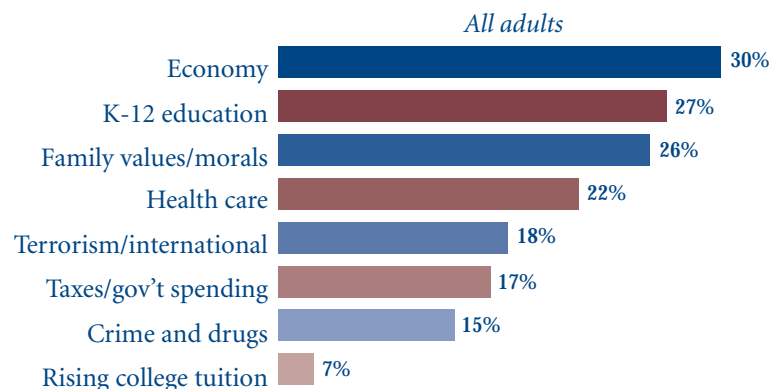
### Education Is A Top Priority

The demand for reform at the K-12 level pushes the issue to the top of the nation's list of concerns. Improving K-12 education remains one of the most important issues for 27% of Americans. Only the economy (30%) ranks higher among the public. K-12 education is cited by more Americans than are family values and moral decline (26%), health care (22%), and terrorism and international issues (18%).

Education is the first or second issue among most basic public subgroups, and is the top concern of parents of K-12 students (35%), minorities (34%), and recent graduates of the K-12 system (30% of 18- to 34-year olds). K-12 education is also college students' most important concern (32%).

## Education Is A Priority For the National Agenda

*Which one or two are the most important issues or problems facing the nation today?*

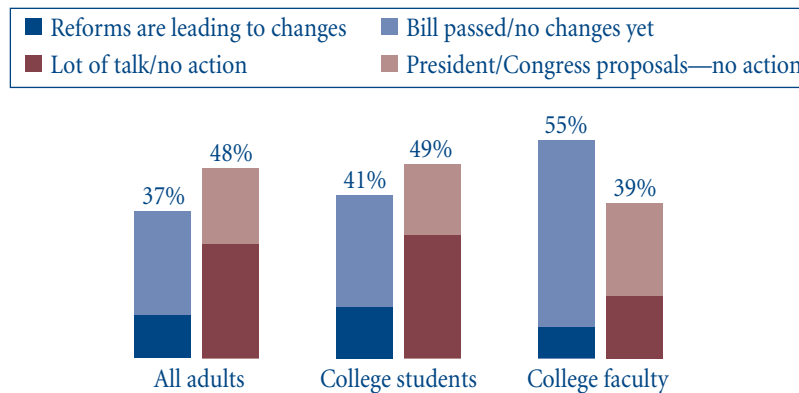


## National Reform Efforts Are Still Largely Unknown

Although K-12 education has been at the top of the American agenda for many years, few Americans know about national reform efforts. When asked how they would best describe “where things stand today in terms of education reform at the national level in Washington,” only 37% of adults are aware that a major K-12 education bill has been signed into law and only 12% believe that reforms have led to changes in the schools. Nearly a third (30%) believe that there has been a lot of talk but no action, and 18% say “the President and Congress have put together proposals, but so far no compromises have been reached,” while 15% say that they are not sure about where things stand in education reform.

### Low Awareness of National K-12 Education Reform

*Where do things stand with education reform at the national level?*

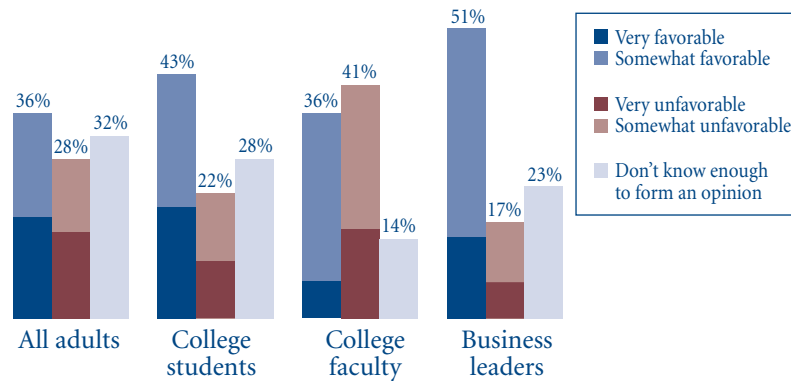


Awareness of the law has increased in the past two years but is still low among the major demographic groups. College faculty members are the only group that generally seems aware of the state of K-12 education affairs in Washington, as 55% of them recognize that the bill was passed by Congress and signed into law.

Opinions of the federal education legislation are mixed. After hearing a brief description of the No Child Left Behind Act, 36% of adults feel favorable toward the reform measure, whereas 28% express unfavorable views. Even when a description of the legislation is read to them, nearly a third (32%) of adults say that they do not know enough about the legislation to form an opinion. Among the general public, support for No Child Left Behind is highest among Republicans (48%), blue-collar workers (45%), adults with an income above \$75,000 (43%), and K-12 parents (41%).

## Evaluation of No Child Left Behind

Two years ago, Congress passed and President Bush signed into law an education reform bill called the No Child Left Behind Act. The new law provides federal funds for school districts in poor areas, and requires states to set standards for education and to test students each year to determine whether the standards are being met.

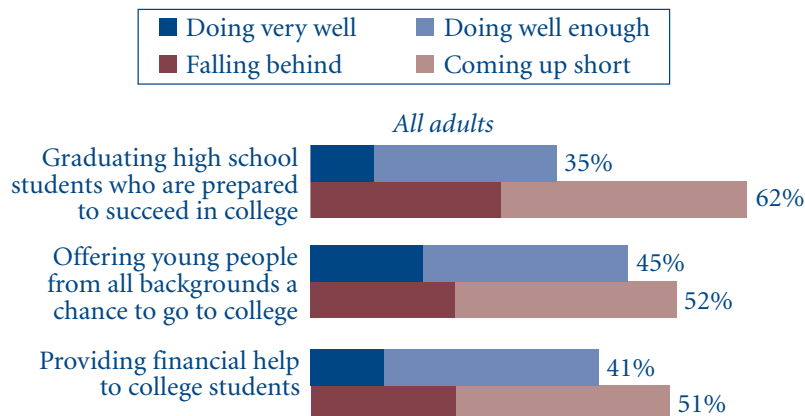


### Challenges to Higher Education: Student Preparation, Access, and Funding

The American public believes that a college education is a very valuable asset and wants as many people as possible to have access to a higher education. The public's criticisms are not aimed at the quality of higher education institutions, but rather at areas that it believes are a barrier to reaching that goal. Majorities think that our nation's education system is falling short when it comes to giving people the tools they need to succeed in college—access, financial assistance, and a strong K-12 background.

## Challenges to Higher Education: Student Preparedness, Access, Affordability

*How is the nation's education system doing in selected areas?*



The strongest criticism of higher education is actually directed at the K-12 education system—62% of the public believes that our nation’s K-12 system is falling short or behind in terms of graduating high school students who are prepared to succeed in college. Seventy-one percent of 50- to 64-year-olds and 69% of minorities say that K-12 schools are falling behind in preparing students for college. College faculty, who see firsthand how well prepared students are, express less criticism of the K-12 system, with 42% saying that it is doing well or well enough in preparing high school students to succeed in college; still, a solid majority (56%) believes that the system is falling short or behind.

While preparing students for college is more of a concern for the nation’s K-12 system, the biggest complaint about America’s higher education system is that it costs families too much, and just over half (51%) of the public believes that the nation’s education system is falling short or behind in terms of providing financial help to college-bound students. This belief that the nation’s education system is not doing enough to help students pay for college is consistent across all income brackets and education levels.

The American public also expresses a desire to see that more people have access to higher education. Slightly more than half (52%) of adults say that our nation’s education system is falling short or behind in terms of offering young people from all backgrounds a chance to go to a college or university. More than three in five minorities (63%) and Democrats (60%) see access to higher education as an area needing serious improvements.

While most Americans agree that access to college should be widened, they are divided on whether a college education is a right or a privilege. Forty-five percent of adults say that a college education is a right that should be available and affordable to all Americans, and 41% say that a college education is a privilege that must be earned.

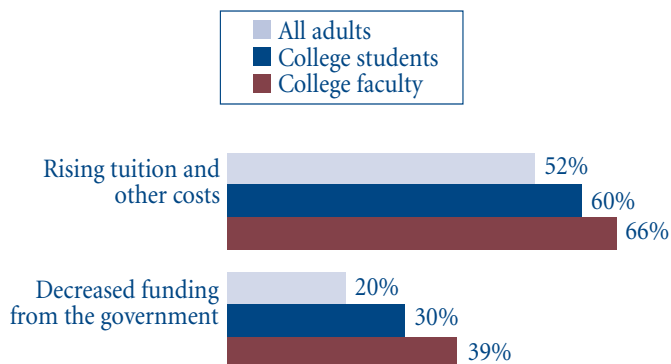
There is a generation gap on this issue—younger adults see a college education as a right (53% of 18- to 34-year-olds), while older adults see it as a privilege (52% of adults age 65 and over). Party identification also creates a division on this issue, with more than half of Democrats (54%) believing that it is a right, and about half (52%) of Republicans seeing it as a privilege.

### **Rising Tuition Is the Biggest Problem Facing Higher Education**

The public points to rising tuition and other costs as the biggest problem facing colleges and universities, yet it believes that a college education is still an excellent investment. When asked to identify the biggest problem in higher education today, concerns about education quality fall to the bottom of the list, and rising tuition and other costs are ranked as the most significant problem. Slightly more than half (52%) of adults name rising tuition and other costs as the biggest problem facing colleges and universities; additional concerns are student behavior and values (30%), decreased funding from the government (20%), and the quality of faculty and academic programs (16%).

# Rising Tuition Is Biggest Problem Facing Higher Education

*What are the biggest problems facing colleges/universities?*



College faculty and students put even more emphasis on rising costs—66% of faculty and 60% of students say that rising tuition is the biggest problem facing colleges and universities today. Thirty-nine percent of educators and 30% of students also point to decreased funding from the government as the biggest problem.

When asked to identify the root cause of rising costs, the public points to several culprits, including wasteful spending by college and university management (33%), too much spending on construction (26%), and decreasing aid from state and local governments (21%). Faculty and students answer somewhat differently, however, putting less of the blame on colleges and more on decreasing government aid—it is the most mentioned reason among faculty (38%) and second among students (32%).

"I must have paid \$140,000 for these four years, but I really can't put a price tag on that."

– College student, Boston

Despite concerns about rising costs, nearly all adults (96%) believe that receiving a college degree is a good investment, including 72% who say it is a very good investment.

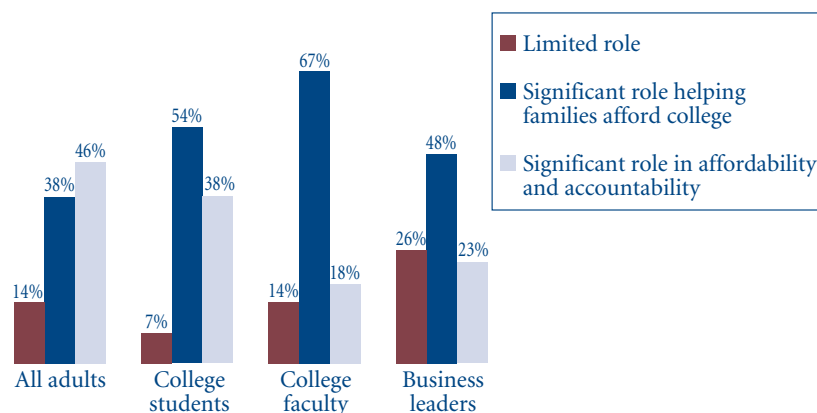
## Significant Role for Federal Government in Higher Education

The public's desire to increase college access to as many Americans as possible results in strong support for the federal government playing a significant role in higher education. The public particularly supports proposals to help students and families pay for a college education, and people maintain that they are willing to pay more in taxes to contribute to this effort.

An overwhelming 84% of adults say that the federal government should play a significant role in higher education. Even groups who typically vote against big government strongly favor the federal government being involved in this arena, including Republicans (76%), seniors (71%), and Southerners (83%). This widespread support is indicative of the high value the American public places on higher education.

# Significant Role in Higher Ed For Federal Government

*What should be the federal government's role in higher education?*



With nearly everyone in favor of the federal government playing a significant role in higher education, the real question is what *type* of role government should play. The public is somewhat divided on this question, with 38% believing that the federal government's role should be limited to helping students and families afford college, while 46% think that the government's role also should include establishing means by which colleges and universities can be held accountable for how well they educate their students. Subgroups that favor a significant role in affordability and accountability include minorities (62%), blue-collar workers (55%), and parents of K-12 students (52%).

## Government's Most Important Role Is Affordability

Affordability is at the heart of the consensus over the federal government's role in higher education. The survey findings reveal broad public support for all proposals to give students financial help in attending college. Attaching a price tag to such proposals does not deter Americans' desire for the government to help more people afford a college education. They are willing to pay more taxes to increase financial support for college

students (66%) and colleges and universities (61%), and to increase tax credits for families sending their children to college (72%). Support for these proposals is widespread among respondents who identify themselves as Democrats or Republicans, although Republicans support paying more taxes in order to help more people afford a college education to a lesser extent than do Democrats.

In addition to giving financial aid to students and schools, the public also supports measures that would limit tuition increases. Seventy-seven percent of adults favor placing federal limits on college tuition to keep increases in line with inflation, including 47% who strongly favor such a measure.

"I think the role of the federal government is an important one in ensuring accessibility and affordability."

– *Business leader, Los Angeles*

"... I would echo what most people have said, with respect to what they ought to be doing—that is, focusing on finding ways to make access to higher education not only more affordable, but a little easier in terms for those who really have the need, in terms of the Pell Grants and other loans, as well as work study."

– *College faculty member*

## Financial Assistance Should Go to Students

In terms of who should receive government aid, by a wide margin (73% to 18%) the public prefers direct assistance to students over aid to educational institutions. Even faculty members prefer assisting students (70%) instead of institutions (21%).

The public wants government to help students who are struggling to pay tuition and other costs. By 58% to 28% Americans support need-based over achievement-based assistance. This preference is consistent across all income brackets. Women favor need by a wide margin (63% to 22%). However, men are more divided and support need by a narrower margin (52% to 34%).

While the public largely agrees that government aid should be directed to students and should be need-based, it does not agree on the form of aid students should receive. After hearing three statements supporting greater use of grants and loans and maintaining the current mix of grants and loans, a 37% plurality says that the government should shift toward greater loan use. Twenty-eight percent of adults say that there should be a greater use of grants, while 26% believe that the current mix is about right and no adjustments are necessary. Nearly half (48%) of Republicans prefer a shift toward more loan use, while Democrats are divided more evenly between grants (35%) and loans (32%).

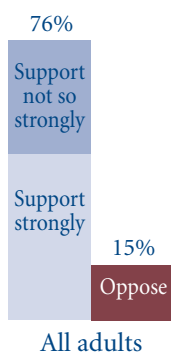
## Strong Support for Higher Education Act Reauthorization

The public expresses strong support for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act and wants funding to continue at current levels or to increase. After hearing a brief description of the federal law, three in four (76%) Americans support the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, including 46% who strongly support it; only 15% oppose reauthorization.

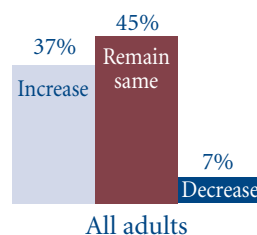
### Strong Support For Higher Education Act

#### Higher Education Act Reauthorization

One of the major ways the federal government supports college-level education is through the Higher Education Act. . . . the government provides funds for student aid programs . . . aid to colleges and universities and support services for disadvantaged students. A major objective of the law is to increase access to college and university for all students. Do you support or oppose continuation of the Higher Education Act when Congress reviews the Act later this year?



#### Higher Education Act Funding Levels



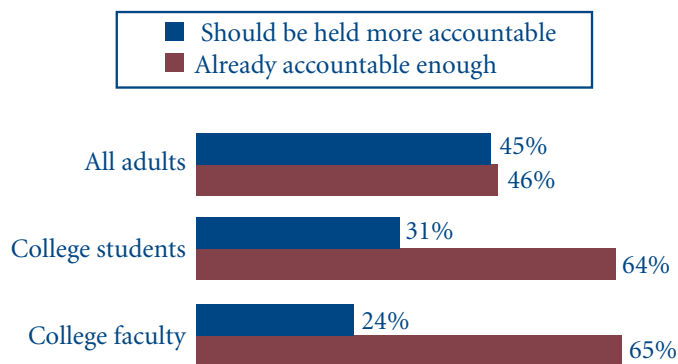
In times of increasing budget deficits, the American public does not want budget cuts to affect higher education. Forty-five percent (45%) wants the funding level for the Higher Education Act to remain the same, 37% wants funding to increase, and only 7% wants less funding. Support for increasing funding for HEA is strongest among 18- to 34-year-olds (43%), Democrats (50%), and adults who think that a college education is a right (50%). Conversely, support for keeping funding levels the same is strongest among seniors (52%), Republicans (52%), and adults who see college education as a privilege (53%).

## Higher Education Accountability: Public Focuses on Quality

The American public sees little to fix in terms of the quality of higher education institutions, but many people still want to hold schools accountable for student learning. The public is divided over questions of accountability in higher education: 45% says that colleges and universities should be held more accountable, and 46% says that they already are accountable enough. Respondents who are directly involved in higher education are not concerned that colleges are not being held accountable enough—64% of college students and 65% of college faculty say that colleges are already accountable enough.

### Higher Education Accountability: *Public Is Divided*

Should colleges/universities be held more accountable?



Among the general public, two interesting divisions emerge. The first is based on ideology: Conservatives favor more accountability (53% vs. 40%), while moderates and liberals say that colleges already are accountable enough (49% vs. 43% and 57% vs. 36%, respectively). This ideological divide persists independent of political party, with conservative Democrats, independents, and Republicans all calling for more accountability, and liberal Democrats and independents saying that there already is enough accountability. Under-scoring the unusual partisan distribution is the fact that moderates swing toward enough accountability mostly because of moderate Republicans.

A second watershed is level of education achieved. Most college graduates say that universities are accountable enough already (61% to 34%), while those with a high school diploma or less would like to see more accountability (57% to 32%). People with some college education are divided evenly (46% more accountability, 45% already enough).

Taken together, people's ideology and level of education are fairly strongly related to their point of view of accountability in higher education. These results suggest that the impulse toward more accountability may lie partly in the respondent's psychological distance from higher education. Conservatives famously rail against the "liberal citadels" of academia, while people with no more than a high school diploma lack firsthand experience with a university classroom.

## Focus of Accountability Should Be on Quality

Even in a climate of fiscal restraint, the public cares more about the quality of education than financial prudence. When asked what is more important—holding colleges and universities accountable for how they spend the federal dollars they receive, or holding colleges responsible for the quality of education they provide—the public prefers quality of education by 52% to 24%. Support for holding schools accountable for the quality of education is even stronger among college students (62%) and college faculty (56%).

## Higher Education Accountability:

### *Public Focus On Quality, Not Spending*

More important to hold colleges/universities accountable for:

	<u>All adults</u>	<u>College students</u>	<u>College faculty</u>
Quality of education	52%	62%	56%
How they spend federal aid	24%	25%	23%
Some of both	22%	13%	17%

## Teacher Quality Is Critical to Improving K-12 System

Americans consider improving the nation's K-12 schools and improving teacher quality to be synonymous. Indeed, improving teaching quality in American schools is ranked as above all other issues and is unmistakably the public's top priority in education reform. Teacher quality also registers as the federal government's biggest challenge in reforming education, with 41% of Americans choosing improving teacher quality as the government's biggest education challenge in the 2002 survey, over other significant challenges such as providing more funding (33%) and measuring progress (22%).<sup>1</sup>

In the 2003 survey, one-third or more of the public cites having the skills to design inspiring learning experiences and having a caring attitude toward students as the two most important qualities for a good K-12 teacher to have. Thoroughly understanding the subjects they teach and being enthusiastic about the job also are rated as important characteristics of high-quality teachers. By comparison, barely one in 10 adults considers a teaching degree from a good school of education to be a significant measure of quality.

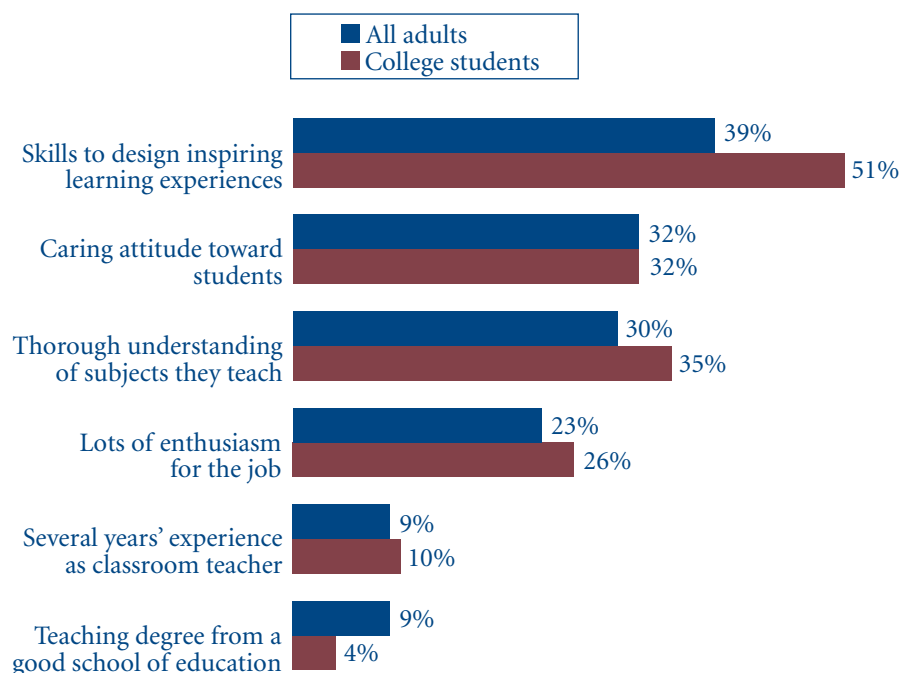
"The crisis, K-12, in my mind also, is teacher preparation. You know, we talk with a lot of high-ability students coming out of high school, and I can't think of five that I've talked to the whole year that are thinking about a teaching career, and that really worries me. I think we're really in for a crisis when a lot of teachers retire.

"There just are not good people going into the profession. It doesn't hold a high esteem, in terms of salary, and benefits, and so forth. So, I think that has to be factored in as well, that we really have to figure out a better reward system for teaching and a way to get more people involved in that."

– College faculty member

<sup>1</sup>In 2002, the survey focused on teacher quality, and the current poll asks several follow-up questions related to this subject. The strong similarities in answers to questions common to the two surveys give us confidence that the American public has stable views on issues of teacher quality, and thus this report incorporates data from both surveys. This memorandum updates public views on the topic of K-12 teacher quality. The complete findings of both surveys are reported in separate memos.

## What Is Quality Teaching?



College students, most of whom have completed their secondary schooling in recent years and thus have recent experience with the K-12 system, place even greater emphasis on teaching style: Fully 51% say that having the skills to design inspiring learning experiences is one of the most important qualities of a good K-12 teacher.

In addition, when asked to identify the greatest problem in training teachers, 66% of adults say that teachers' not developing the proper skills to make information interesting and understandable is a greater problem for the education system than is teachers' not developing adequate knowledge about the subjects they teach (18%).

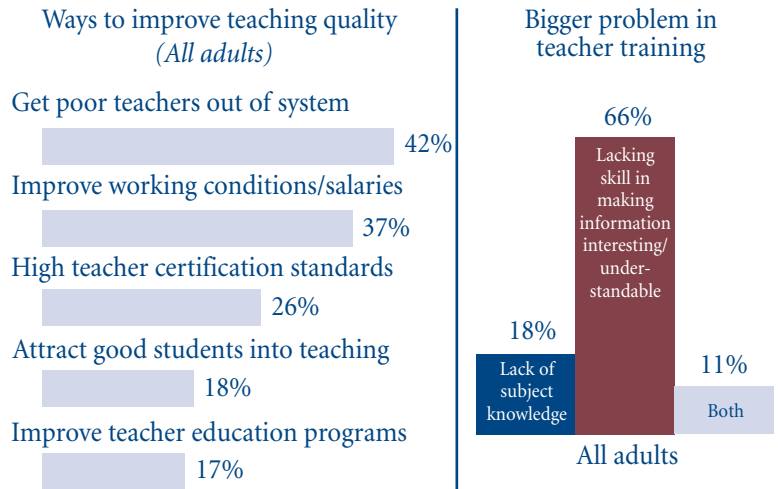
### Training Is Only Part of the Problem

When asked specifically about teacher training, Americans say that they want more of it and they want it to be better, but when the questions are put in the context of other proposals to improve teacher quality, improving schools of education does not rank as high as do other initiatives. In terms of professional development, in 2002 an overwhelming 91% of adults favored (70% strongly) offering more training programs so teachers could continue to learn more and become better teachers during their careers.

Improving teacher education programs for people entering the teaching profession, however, is not ranked as high as are other ways to improve teacher quality. When asked in 2003 to identify the most important steps to improve teacher quality, only 17% of the public cited improving the quality of teacher education programs.

The lack of emphasis on teacher training leads the public to put greater emphasis on measures to attract and retain gifted teachers, such as increasing salaries and improving working conditions as well as making it easier to remove ineffective teachers. In the eyes of most Americans, the steps involved in improving teacher quality relate more to retention than to recruitment. Creating a quality teaching corps requires quality working conditions for teachers. In 2003, when asked to identify the biggest challenges in creating a better teaching work force, the results showed that retaining high-quality teachers remains the public's priority. Getting unmotivated or poor-quality teachers out of the system (42%), improving the working conditions and salaries for teachers (37%), and having high standards for teacher certification (26%) are seen as the most important ways to improve the quality of K-12 schools.

# Keys To Improving Teacher Quality



In 2003 as well, 77% of adults favored increasing teachers’ salaries to hire and retain more well-qualified teachers even if it meant increasing taxes, and 84% said that they supported holding colleges and universities accountable for the skills of teachers they train by testing recent education graduates.

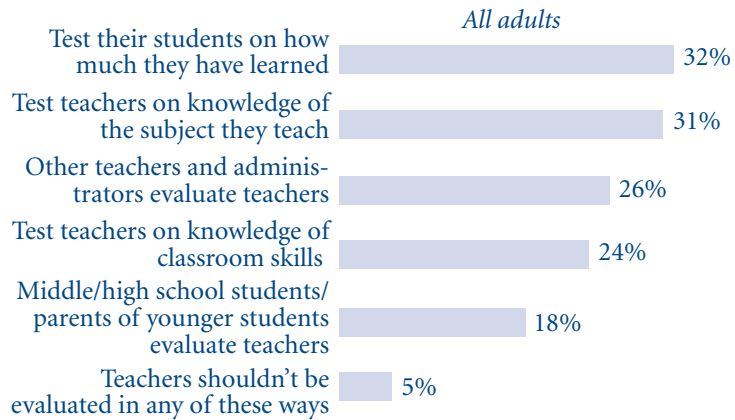
## No Consensus on Evaluating Teachers

“You can see a passion in a good teacher’s eyes when they’re talking to you. They’ve just got you until that bell rings.  
 “And how are you going to test for that? How are you going to make sure? How are you going to screen for that?”  
 – College faculty member

The public recognizes that *how* to evaluate teachers is a complicated question without a clear answer. When it comes to quality teaching, Americans think that having the skills to motivate students is more important than being knowledgeable about the subject taught. They also recognize, however, that teaching is a skill that is difficult to measure. As a result they do not have a clear or overriding opinion on how teachers might be best evaluated. In 2003, when asked to select from a list of five the best one or two ways to evaluate teachers, Americans’ answers are divided nearly evenly across all the choices. Only 5% of the public says that teachers should not be evaluated in any of the ways presented.

## Best Ways To Evaluate Teachers:

*No Clear Answers*



## Conclusion

The results of this third annual survey of public attitudes and opinions on education clearly show that ensuring American students receive a high-quality education is a national priority. Teacher quality is a critical component of this discussion because Americans equate quality education with quality teaching. In fact, Americans rank improving teaching quality above all other education issues—teacher quality is the public’s top priority in education reform.

On the issue of education, Americans speak with a clear and consistent voice. Ultimately, in this year’s survey, the American people are sending the same message to their elected leaders as they did in 2001 when the *No Child Left Behind* legislation was being written: The key to education reform is balance. While Americans have far greater concerns about the K-12 system than about higher education, they endorse greater spending and greater accountability as the formula for improving schools at all levels. Americans give colleges and universities high marks for the quality of their education programs, but the American people want greater access to higher education for young people from all backgrounds and they support more financial assistance for students and their families.

