

# Parents Want a Complete Overhaul of the Education System

In the wake of COVID-19, people now overwhelmingly believe that the education system's broader purpose needs to be rethought. This begins with a shift away from standardized testing, college prep and a one-size-fits-all model and toward personalized curricula, practical skills and subject mastery.

A new Purpose of Education Index survey released by the Massachusetts-based national think tank Populace found a radical shift in the way most of us view education and what our children should be getting out of it.

"The findings show the K-12 educational system is wildly unresponsive to what parents and children actually want," said Todd Rose, co-founder and CEO of Populace.

Rose added that people are not looking for something "better" – they are looking for something fundamentally different. "They want a way out of the one-size-fits-all approach driven by standardized testing models and elite institutions making us compete in a zero-sum game and instead an educational framework geared towards individualized learning, practical skills, and preparation for a meaningful life."

The study was conducted with over 1,000 participants conducted with cooperation from YouGov and data analytics firm Gradient. Respondents were given 57 priorities for K-12 education and ranked them using a conjoint analysis that forces them into trade-off scenarios and avoids the distorting effects of social influence.

The fissure between the public education system and parents began in 2020, when school districts across the country closed

at the beginning of the pandemic. Parents, often working in the same room where their children were being educated over Zoom, began to gain a more complete understanding of what and how their children were being taught – and they did not like what they saw.

Attitudes changed almost overnight as parents got a peek behind the curtain at what their children were being taught, what was emphasized and how out-of-step the system was in preparing their children for the workplace after graduation. An awakening took place as parents soon learned the power teachers unions had, not just over curriculum but also over whether schools would even open.

That disruption has been devastating. Test scores shared with the Associated Press showed that the average student lost over half a year of learning in math and a quarter of a school year in reading. But students in some public-school districts lost twice that in learning.

This has all prompted many parents to move their children out of public schools and into private or parochial schools, most of which are not controlled by teachers unions and stayed open during the pandemic. The overall rate of parents choosing to home-school grew from 5.4% to 11.1%, according to data from the Census Bureau.

For the study, respondents were given 57 priorities for K-12 education and ranked them using a conjoint analysis that forces them into trade-off scenarios and avoids the distorting effects of social influence. Pre-COVID-19, people ranked preparedness for college as one of the highest priorities for a K-12 education. In this recent survey, it was one of the lowest priorities.

The study also showed that 70% believe more things about the educational system should change than stay the same, including 21% who say nearly everything should change.

Respondents said they wanted to see students develop practical skills such as managing personal finances, preparing meals or making appointments as their top priority – functions that students a generation ago learned in home economics classes.

“Demonstrating basic reading, writing, and arithmetic,” “being prepared for a career,” and “hav(ing) the skills to be competitive in the local job market” are goals of education that went out of style in the last generation, but now people are more interested in bringing them back than they are in less practical and more short-term goals.

Overall, the report evinces widespread belief that education needs to be fundamentally changed. It needs to prepare students for the workforce, adulthood and success, not necessarily put students into the pipeline for college.

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