

Opinions on Various Policy Initiatives

Professors of education offer some support for a number of policy initiatives aimed at improving the teaching corps—e.g., holding educators more accountable, changing salary structures, and loosening tenure protections. They evince support for academic standards and even tepidly endorse *national* standards. Overall, however, professors oppose awarding financial incentives to teachers whose students score higher than similar students on standardized tests (see Figure 9).

TENURE REFORM

Professors are surprisingly open to limiting protections for teacher tenure. A wide majority (79 percent) supports “requiring a minimum of five years for tenure and strengthening formal teacher evaluation,” as opposed to a three-year norm in most states. An even broader majority (86 percent) favors “making it easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers—even if they are tenured,” with slightly more than half (51 percent) strongly favoring this proposal. Fewer, however, believe that teacher tenure deserves all the blame for what ails public schools: Forty-eight percent say that “more often than not, teacher tenure is an obstacle to improving the schools” while 47 percent reject that view (see Figure 10).

Though professors are generally sympathetic toward teachers, they can imagine—and sometimes see—classroom instructors who should not be teaching: individuals who graduated from their programs when they shouldn’t have, were granted tenure without a proper evaluation, or are still teaching despite losing passion for their craft. When this happens, they wonder, why should the K–12 students suffer? An adjunct professor who also teaches middle school in Los Angeles explained, “[In] the school where I work...tenure occurs after two years as a probationary teacher. [They should] make that five years. Make the tenure process harder to obtain, make tenure reviewable every five years...I am not saying get rid of due process.”

Figure 9 EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVES

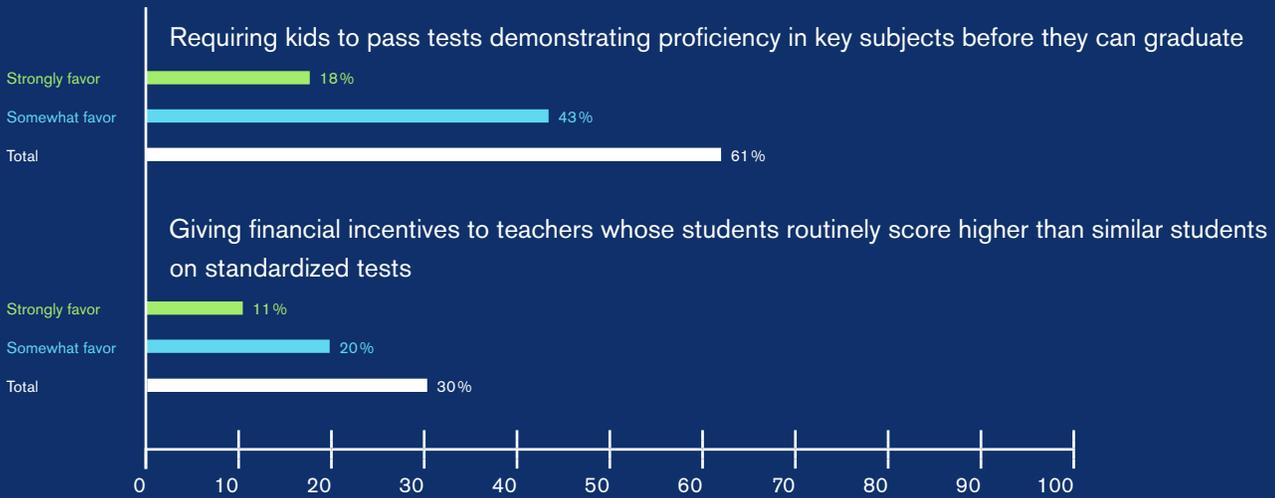
How much do you favor or oppose the following education reforms?
(Percent responding “strongly favor” or “somewhat favor”)



Percentages in figures may not equal 100 percent due to rounding or omission of answer categories. Question wording may be edited for space, but full question wording is available in Appendix B. Small discrepancies between percentages in the text and those in the appendix are due to rounding.

Figure 9 EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVES (continued)

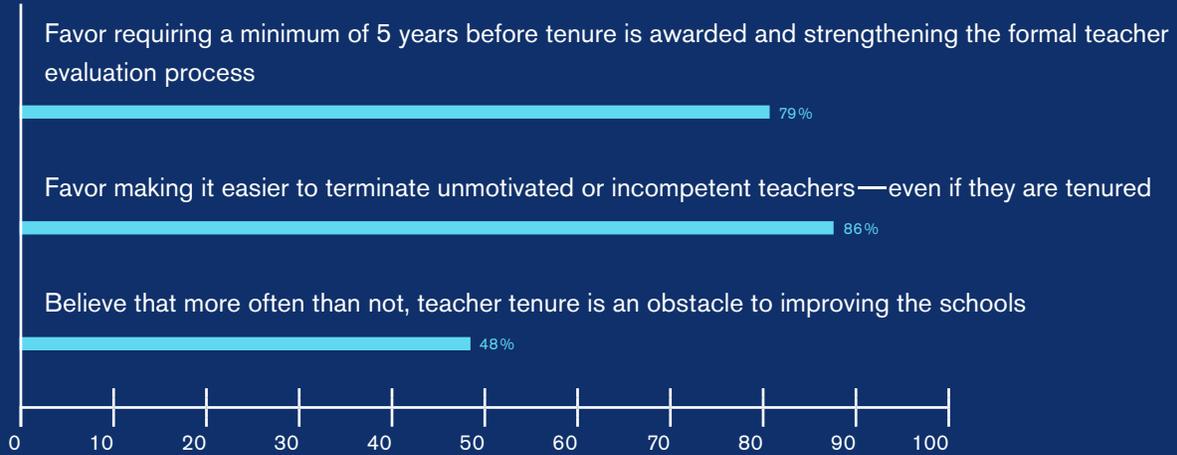
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Figure 10 TEACHER TENURE REFORM

(Percent saying they)



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5. Adjunct Professors More Practical?

Adjunct professors have a more accommodating posture toward teaching in the K–12 system than do tenured professors—plausibly because adjuncts are more likely to be former K–12 teachers now employed as clinical faculty. Based on several comments, many are simultaneously teaching in colleges and in district classrooms. Fully 26 percent of the sample consists of adjunct or non-tenure track faculty.

Adjunct professors are more likely than tenured professors to believe that education programs “often fail to prepare teachers for the challenges of teaching in the real world” (59 percent versus 44 percent). They are also more likely to report that it is absolutely essential for schools of education to impart the following to teacher education students:

- Training in pragmatic issues of running a classroom, managing time, and preparing lesson plans (50 percent versus 39 percent);
- Training in how to implement differentiated instruction in the classroom (62 percent versus 46 percent);
- How to maintain discipline and order in the classroom (44 percent versus 34 percent); and
- An understanding of how to work with the state’s standards, tests, and accountability systems (31 percent versus 20 percent).

TEACHING: CHANGE SOME RULES

Education professors embrace ideas that would help ensure quality among their graduates. An expansive majority (78 percent) favors requiring public school teachers to pass tests demonstrating their proficiency in key subjects before they are hired—a component of the original NCLB legislation. And more than six in ten (62 percent) believe that it is absolutely essential for teacher education programs to produce classroom instructors who are “deeply knowledgeable about the content of the specific subjects they will be teaching.” When focus group participants were asked for recommendations for improving education programs, one professor volunteered, “Someone *has* to say content....I want my teachers to go out and be very well grounded in what they know.” Another professor reiterated the importance of subject-specific methods courses: “If you are going to be a physics teacher, you take a physics methods course, not a generic science methods course.”

Because the stakes for children are so high, many professors see value in adding another quality-control bar besides graduation or passing the Praxis exams. “Fundamentally there are ethical, moral components to all of this,” an education professor told us. “We have to be ethical in terms of who we send out there.... There is no way to absolutely guarantee who is going to be a quality educator. We get as close as we can; we document as much as we can.”

Contemporary efforts to improve teaching sometimes link salaries to teacher quality or effort, and professors of education show some support for these initiatives. For example, they broadly favor (83 percent) financial incentives for teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools. But they resist tying teacher pay to student test scores, with just 30 percent in favor and 65 percent opposed. When not explicitly tied to salaries, the initiative sees slightly more support: Almost half (47 percent) say that measuring progress by assessing students’ skills and knowledge when they first come to a teacher and again when they leave—a “value-added” method of measuring teacher effectiveness—is an excellent or good idea. To be sure, virtually the same proportion (48 percent) describes that idea as only fair or poor.

STANDARDS FOR ALL—OR SHAKESPEARE RAP?

Professors of education are strong, consistent believers in some of the core tenets of the standards movement. They speak its language and approve of its assump-

6. Mirroring Public School Teachers

When it comes to ways of compensating and evaluating teachers, professors of education and classroom teachers have remarkably similar views. For example, most professors (83 percent) broadly favor financial incentives for teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools, as do 80 percent of public school teachers.¹⁷ Both groups oppose tying teacher pay to student test scores: Just 30 percent of teacher educators favor financial incentives for teachers whose students routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests, as do 34 percent of teachers.¹⁸ Finally, when it comes to the “value-added” method of measuring teacher effectiveness, education professors are divided between those who think it’s a positive versus negative approach (47 percent versus 48 percent). Classroom teachers are equally divided, at 49 percent versus 48 percent.¹⁹

tions. And they do not shy away from defining appropriate content or from testing to determine whether it has been learned. Almost four out of five (78 percent) support what many would consider to be a radical change in American education: a core curriculum with specific knowledge and skill standards spelled out for each grade level in the K–12 system. More than three out of five (61 percent) also favor requiring students to pass tests demonstrating proficiency in key subjects before they can graduate. One professor remarked, “We need accountability. Perhaps there was not enough accountability in the education system back prior to the whole standards-based movement.”

Although critics may charge education professors with cultural relativism, most education professors say that they welcome a healthy dose of traditional Western and American culture. Two out of three (67 percent) say “students must gain a shared understanding” of a “core body of knowledge such as Shakespeare, the Constitution and great books like *To Kill a Mockingbird*.” Only 18 percent say “this unfairly imposes one group’s cultural values on others and it’s irrelevant to many students.” Another 15 percent are not sure.

Still, some professors remain sensitive to cultural relativism through their pedagogical approaches. Here’s how one Ohio professor would harness the classics in inner-city schools: “It can be Shakespeare, but let’s think creatively about how we are going to write a rap and how we are going to use that Shakespeare in a rap kind of way and write our own story....So that you make sure your content and your style of teaching is relevant to your students and what interests and engages them.”

BUT WHAT ABOUT NCLB?

While some core elements of the standards movement resonate with professors—specifically testing teachers and students for content knowledge and having explicit grade-by-grade standards for K–12 students—they report little confidence in the nation’s most visible policy initiative on standards: NCLB (see Figure 11). Only 10 percent would renew the current version of NCLB “as is” or “with minimal changes.” By contrast, about half of the U.S. general public (49 percent)

17. Duffett, Ann, Steve Farkas, Andrew J. Rotherham and Elena Silva. 2008. *Waiting To Be Won Over: Teachers Speak on the Profession, Unions, and Reform*. Washington, D.C.: Education Sector. http://www.educationsector.org/usr_doc/WaitingToBeWonOver.pdf.

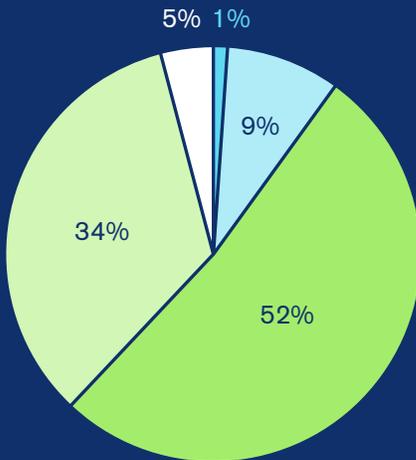
18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

Figure 11 NCLB REAUTHORIZATION

NCLB requires states to set standards in math and reading and to test students each year to determine whether schools are making adequate progress, and to intervene when they are not. This year, Congress is deciding whether to renew NCLB. What do you think Congress should do?

- Renew the legislation as is
- Renew with minimal changes
- Renew with major changes
- Not renew at all
- Not sure



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7. Perceptions of Charter Schools

Sizeable discrepancies set apart the attitudes of education professors and those of the public on a number of issues; their respective views about charter schools are no exception. Although the origins of charter schools are independent of NCLB, their trajectory was affected by the law's emphasis on alternative options to failing schools. Americans have demonstrated a lack of familiarity with the nuances of charter schools, but they consistently favor the general idea—most recently by a 64 percent to 33 percent margin.²⁰ By comparison, education professors are far less receptive to charter schools, favoring them only by a tepid 44 percent to 34 percent margin (23 percent are not sure).

would do so, a difference of 39 percentage points. And while a majority of professors (52 percent) think that the act should be renewed “with major changes” just 30 percent of Americans agree with that position.²⁰ It seems that education professors favor NCLB's focus on standards in principle, but reject “NCLB” as a brand. This may reflect an overall judgment that it has not lived up to expectations, or may mirror general dissatisfaction with the impact that the testing regimen and “adequate yearly progress” have had on the K–12 school system.

More than a few professors in the focus groups felt that good instruction has suffered because school districts are paying too much attention to improving test scores and preparing for assessments. Accountability is important, they believe, and assessments are useful. But as districts implement policies around standards, a single-minded focus on “hitting the numbers” may subvert good teaching. “I believe we need to know how our students are gaining knowledge, but...our administrators are so keyed in to scores being raised...they are even saying to [K]indergarten teachers, ‘We do not do developmentally appropriate teaching; we prepare them for what is coming up next, the assessment,’” said one focus group participant. “Forget about the instructional procedures, we've got to get ready for the test....When our student teachers go in [to the schools], all they are doing is test preparation.”

A few education professors even suspect that tests might be manipulated for political advantage. A teacher educator in Los Angeles, for instance, described questionable motives that influence the shifting of school populations. “When the lower-achieving students are...being diverted out, two things happen. One, the test scores in the district schools rise. That benefits the mayor. In addition, the Latino students are put into this charter school where they are getting all of this specialized support. Naturally, they are going to be improving as well.”

Still, education professors in the focus groups did point to what they deemed to be positive effects of NCLB, particularly the tracking of test scores by student subgroups. “[NCLB] has raised awareness of achievement levels among certain populations. It was definitely hidden and it wasn't important to a lot of people. I think sometimes those kids did get overlooked,” said one professor. Another was even more direct: “I'll say something good—it put a spotlight on demographic groups that previously administrators and districts would bury. You can't hide them [now].”

20. *Education Next*-PEPG. 2009. “Survey of Public Opinion.” Cambridge, MA: *Education Next* and the Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University. <http://educationnext.org/files/pepg2009.pdf>.

21. Bushaw, William J. and John A. McNee. 2009. “Americans Speak Out: Are Educators and Policy Makers Listening?: The 41st annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools,” 8-23. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91, no. 1 (September).

COMMON, NATIONWIDE STANDARDS

One source of tension surrounding NCLB is the state-by-state variability in content and testing standards that it left intact—and to some extent fostered. This, along with Race to the Top funds, likely helped convince states to adopt a common set of English language arts and mathematics standards put forth recently by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers; as of August 2010, more than three-quarters of the states had signed on. Still, professors are less enthusiastic about common standards than standards in general (see Figure 12). Although almost eight in ten of them favor “having a core curriculum with specific knowledge and skill standards spelled out for each grade level,” they indicate only moderate—yet significant—support for a national system of standards and tests in the core subject areas. Forty-nine percent believe that “all state governments [should] adopt the same set of educational standards and give the same tests in math, science and reading” while 36 percent would have “different standards and tests in different states”; 16 percent were not sure. While education professors are lukewarm in their support, the American public is comparatively enthusiastic. Seventy-two percent support the adoption of a national system of standards; only 19 percent prefer state-level benchmarks and assessments.²²

THE PROFESSORS AND EDUCATION REFORM

Given their position as teachers of teachers, it is critical to understand the views of our nation’s education school professors. When it comes to many proposed education reforms, they are far from naysayers—in fact, they are sometimes even forceful advocates. Some balk at using test scores to evaluate teacher quality and are far less optimistic than the public about NCLB and national standards, but are nonetheless strong believers in standards-based measures and in high-stakes testing of teachers and students to ensure content knowledge. They are unexpectedly vigorous supporters of tenure reform and efforts to facilitate the removal of inadequate teachers. In the end, though, it is difficult to characterize their perceptions with a broad brush since they often reveal schisms among the ranks (see “Reformers and Defenders,” Special Analysis, p. 46).

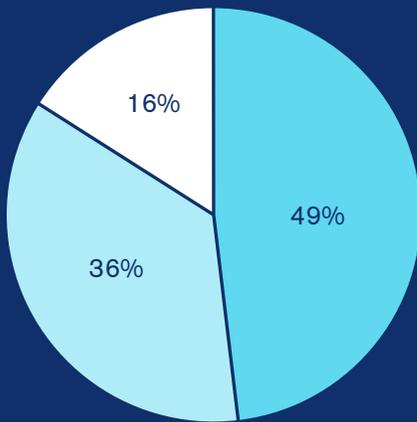
22. *Education Next*-PEPG. 2009. “Survey of Public Opinion.” Cambridge, MA: *Education Next* and the Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University. <http://educationnext.org/files/pepg2009.pdf>.

Figure 12

COMMON STANDARDS

Should all state governments adopt the same set of educational standards and give the same tests in math, science, and reading, or should there be different standards and tests in different states?

- Adopt the same set of educational standards and give same tests
- Should be different standards and tests
- Not sure



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