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**August 2, 2012**

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**Survey: Americans Ready for Education Belt-tightening, Wary of Some Cuts**

*Americans support dramatic changes in how schools do business, including ending “Last In, First Out,” but oppose laying off aides and librarians and expanding digital learning*

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The results of a new survey indicate that Americans recognize the long-term financial stress that public education must accommodate and are open to dramatic changes in school-district budgets—within limits. *How Americans Would Slim Down Public Education*, a report released today by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, presents the findings of the nationally representative survey that asked respondents to grapple with various cost-cutting measures and budgetary trade-offs that education leaders face in today’s economy.

From cutting central-office staff to reforming retirement benefits, the report outlines how voters think spending should be reduced when budgets require cuts—and what programs must be protected. Changes championed by many education reformers met with mixed reviews, with the public opposing cuts in non-teaching staff and deeply divided on the value of on-line education. A sample of the findings:

- By a 74 to 18 percent margin, respondents believe that teachers with poor performance should be “laid off first and those with excellent performance protected” rather than have “newcomers laid off first and veteran teachers protected.”
- By a 51 to 39 percent margin, the public would lay off a veteran teacher with *average* performance before a new teacher with *excellent* performance.
- Almost half (48 percent) say that, if their own district were facing a serious budget deficit, the best approach would be “to cut costs by dramatically changing how it does business”; 26 percent would “change as little as possible and wait for times to get better”; only 11 percent would raise taxes.
- 32 percent view virtual schools as a bad idea while 40 percent see them as a good option, but *only* for students who have difficulty in traditional schools.

- 69 percent support “reducing the number of district-level administrators to the bare minimum” as a good way to save money.
- 63 percent favor closing or combining schools that have declining enrollments; 63 percent says it’s a good idea to merge small districts so they share things like the superintendent’s office, bus services, and clerical help.
- 76 percent believe that “too many students are being mislabeled as having special needs when they just have behavior problems or weren’t taught well in the first place.”

“States and districts can’t afford to dance around their broken budgets any longer,” said Fordham Institute President Chester E. Finn, Jr., “and Americans understand this. The public is open to making dramatic changes in traditional education practices. It’s a mixed bag, however. Some of the changes the public favors won’t necessarily save enough—and some of the changes beloved by education reformers and policy wonks don’t find huge support with the broader public.”

Results are based on 1009 interviews conducted by The Farkas Duffett Group in March 2012 with a randomly selected, nationally representative sample of adults eighteen and older. (The statistical margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.) The survey was supplemented by responses from four focus groups conducted around the country.

Find *How Americans Would Slim Down Public Education* online at:

<http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/how-americans-would-slim-down-public-education.html>

**The Thomas B. Fordham Institute** is committed to the renewal and reform of primary and secondary education in the United States. Generous support for this report was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as by our sister organization, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. For further information on this report, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, please visit us online at [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net).

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