

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY REPORT

Executive Summary

Northwest/Central Ohio Public School Advocacy Network

May 5, 2016

Background

Out of their growing concern for a loss of local control of Ohio’s public schools, superintendents from 40 school districts, career centers and educational service centers spanning 10 counties in northwest and west central Ohio formed a grass roots network on March 3, 2016, to advocate for positive changes in public education. The first initiative of the Northwest/West Central Ohio Public School Advocacy Network was to survey citizens about public education.

Methodology

In March and April, the citizens residing in this grass roots network of school districts were invited through web sites, social media and other communication venues to participate in an online opinion survey utilizing Survey Monkey. These districts include Ada Exempted Village, Archbold City, Bath Local Schools, Bellevue City, Celina City, Columbus Grove Local, Coldwater Exempted Village, Cory-Rawson Local, Delphos City, Elida Local, Fairlawn Local, Gibsonburg Local, Hardin Northern Local, Hopewell-Loudon Local, Indian Lake Local, Jennings Local, Kenton Local, Liberty-Benton Local, Lima City, Lincolnview Local, Marion Local, McComb Local, Miller City-New Cleveland Local, Minster Local, New Riegel Local, Ottawa-Glandorf Local, Ottoville Local, Pandora-Gilboa Local, Parkway Local, Ridgemont Local, Riverdale Local, Russia Local, Seneca East Local, Shawnee Local, Spencerville Local, St. Henry Local, St. Marys City, Van Wert City, Wapakoneta City and Waynesville-Goshen Local. The geographic reach of these 40 school districts covers portions of 12 Ohio counties with a combined population 618,564 people based upon the Census Bureau’s estimate in 2013.

Response

This online survey was completed by 4,679 citizens and, as a result, provides a high level of statistical reliability. Its margin of error is low, plus or minus 1.43%, which means that the figures included in the survey report could be 1.43 percentage points higher or lower. The study’s confidence level is 95% which means that in 95 cases out of 100 the survey results would represent the opinions of all residents who reside within the 40 school districts participating in this Northwest/West Central Ohio Public School Advocacy Network survey.

I don’t have school age children in my home.....	21%
I have children enrolled in public school.....	71%
My children attend a private or charter school.....	1%
I open enroll my child outside of the district in which I live.....	6%
My children are home schooled.....	1%

Findings

(Note: Some of the totals may not add up to 100% due to mathematical rounding. In addition, the percentages in parentheses are the responses from citizens who don't have school age children in their homes.)

- Thinking about our local public school district, how do you think it is doing preparing children for their future?

Excellent.....33% (37%)
Good..... 47% (45%)
Fair..... 15% (14%)
Poor..... 4% (3%)

- In your opinion, is K through 12 public education getting better, worse, or has it stayed the same over the last 5 years?

Getting better.....27% (31%)
Getting worse.....44% (39%)
Stayed the same..... 29% (29%)

- Which issue is the biggest problem facing our schools?

Regulation from the state and federal government.....59% (61%)
Lack of parental involvement..... 12% (15%)
Finances..... 11% (12%)
Quality of teachers..... 8% (4%)
Discipline and safety..... 7% (6%)
Overcrowded schools and classroom size..... 3% (2%)

- Which issue is the second biggest problem facing our schools?

Finances..... 29% (30%)
Regulation from the state and federal government.....22% (23%)
Lack of parental involvement..... 21% (25%)
Discipline and safety..... 13% (14%)
Quality of teachers..... 9% (5%)
Overcrowded schools and classroom size..... 5% (3%)

• What letter grade would you give your local school district?

- A..... 34% (37%)
- B..... 41% (40%)
- C..... 18% (18%)
- D..... 5% (4%)
- F..... 2% (1%)

• Do you believe that regulations and mandates for public schools from the state have increased or decreased over the past 5 years?

- Increased.....88% (91%)
- Decreased..... 3% (2%)
- Unsure/don't know.....10% (7%)

• Should scores from standardized tests be a part of the teacher evaluation process?

- Yes.....19% (14%)
- No.....68% (74%)
- Unsure/don't know..... 13% (12%)

• When thinking about how you evaluate the quality of a school, please place the following in ranking order, with one (1) being the most important and four (4) being the least important.

Most important

- Quality of teachers..... 85% (87%)
- Number of high level course offerings (many course offerings)..... 13% (13%)
- High marks on a state report card..... 5% (3%)
- Providing many sports and other extracurricular activities..... 3% (2%)

• I believe my property tax dollars should support for-profit charter schools.

- Strongly agree..... 3% (1%)
- Agree..... 12% (7%)
- Disagree..... 39% (34%)
- Strongly disagree..... 46% (58%)

• Should parents and students who choose private schools be able to use publicly supported vouchers/tax dollars to pay for that choice?

- Yes.....16% (12%)
- No.....69% (73%)
- Unsure/don't know..... 16% (15%)

- Should any school receiving public tax dollars be held to the same standards of transparency and accountability as your local public school?

Yes.....95% (98%)
 No..... 5% (2%)

- Policy decisions at the state level are in the best interest of our local schools.

Strongly agree..... 2% (2%)
 Agree..... 14% (12%)
 Disagree..... 41% (42%)
 Strongly disagree..... 29% (34%)
 Unsure/don't know.....14% (9%)

- Who should control your local school district?

Federal government..... 1% (1%)
 State government..... 12% (10%)
 Local board of education..... 79% (81%)
 Unsure/don't know..... 9% (8%)

- I feel connected to my local school.

Strongly agree..... 29% (32%)
 Agree..... 55% (54%)
 Disagree..... 13% (13%)
 Strongly disagree..... 3% (2%)

Insights and conclusions

There is a wide gap between what the majority of citizens in 40 school districts in northwest and west central Ohio want on several key issues impacting their local public schools and the statewide education policies that are currently in place. The overwhelming message from a large and statistically reliable sample of 4,679 citizens from these school districts is clear: We want our local boards of education to be in control of our schools which are doing a good job of preparing our children for their future. We want less government regulation and fewer government mandates. We are opposed to using our tax dollars to support private schools and for-profit charter schools. And we believe that student test scores should not be used to evaluate our teachers who are the key to providing our students with a high quality education.

Below is a detailed look at how the citizens in this part of the state feel about public education, their local public schools and some of Ohio's education policies. It is significant to report that the views of those citizens who don't have school age children in their home and the views of

those who have children enrolled in public school track within a few percentage points of one another on nearly every question. This is important to note since the total number of survey responses are weighted heavily toward families with children currently attending the public schools.

- While citizens are divided over whether K-12 public education is getting better or getting worse (56% say getting better or staying the same and 44% say getting worse), 84% say they feel connected to their local public schools and 80% believe their local schools are doing an excellent or good job of preparing children for their future. When asked what letter grade they would give their local school district, 75% say an A or B.
- Regulation from the state and federal government is viewed by 59% of the citizens in this part of the state as clearly the biggest problem facing their local public schools. Nearly nine out of 10 (88%) think state regulations and mandates for public schools have increased over the past five years and 79% believe local boards of education should control their schools. Only 16% think that policy decisions at the state level are in the best interest of their local schools.
- When evaluating the quality of a school, 85% feel that having high quality teachers is most important. The vast majority (68%) also believe scores from standardized tests should not be used to evaluate their teachers.
- Most of the citizens (85%) in these 40 northwest and west central Ohio school districts think that their property tax dollars should not be used to support for-profit charter schools and 69% are opposed to using their tax dollars to pay for vouchers to support private schools. When asked if any school receiving public tax dollars should be held to the same standards of transparency and accountability as their local public school, 95% said yes.