



PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES



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TO: INTERESTED PARTIES

FROM: LORI WEIGEL / PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES
BOB DRAKE / DRAKE RESEARCH & STRATEGY INC.

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RE: COLORADO VOTERS' VIEWS OF IMPROVING K-12 EDUCATION IN COLORADO

The bipartisan research team of Public Opinion Strategies (R) and Drake Research & Strategy (D) recently completed a statewide survey of Colorado voters. The survey was sponsored and funded by Colorado Succeeds, Common Sense Policy Roundtable, and several other partnering organizations. Responses to the survey show that education is a top-tier issue of concern for voters, who express strong support for a number of policy proposals to improve education. Voters statewide increasingly embrace vocational and technical training, and reforms that relate to preparing students better for the workplace are on par with school safety and teacher quality as an area they would like to see addressed.

Key Highlights:

- Education is second only to economic issues such as jobs and the cost of living in the state.
- Voters grade the quality of schools in the state as fairly mediocre. A plurality of voters offer up a grade of “C,” with only two-in-five grading schools as an “A” or a “B.” As is often the case, voters do view K-12 schools in their community more positively than those statewide.
- Three of the four policy initiatives tested in the survey receive strong majority support from the electorate: giving schools greater flexibility and discretion; increasing early childhood education opportunities; and allowing teachers in hard-to-fill positions to be paid more.
- Reforms that relate to students being able to fare well in the workplace are nearly on par with long-time areas of focus such as attracting and retaining quality teachers and school safety.
- Three-quarters (78 percent) agree that “for most young people who want more education after high school, vocational or technical training makes more sense than a four-year college or university.” This is twelve points higher than last tested in 2005.



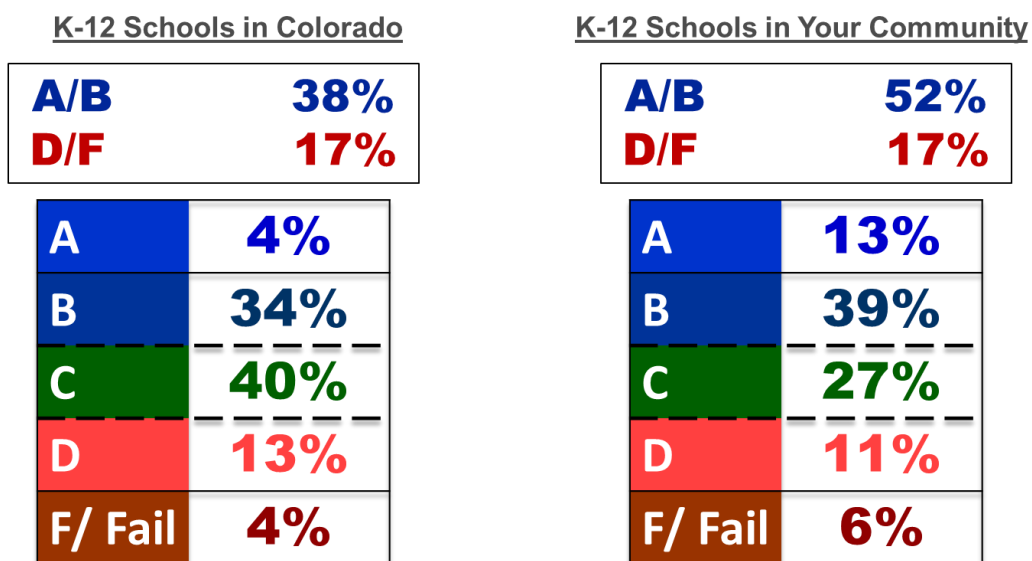
Detailed Findings:

1. Education is a top-tier issue for Colorado voters, eclipsing other “hot topics.”

- Nearly one-in-five Colorado voters (19 percent) volunteer education as the most important issue or challenge facing Colorado, greater than the number who point to traffic and growth (15 percent), crime and drugs (15 percent) or drought and environmental issues (11 percent).
- Education is only eclipsed by economic concerns, which range from jobs to affordable housing issues (26 percent).

2. More Colorado voters grade K-12 public schools in Colorado as a “C,” but offer better grades (“B” average) for schools in their local community.

- As the following graph depicts, voters judge their local schools more positively than they do if asked about schools statewide.



- Notably, voters’ marks for Colorado schools dipped during the economic downturn, but have rebounded since then.

	2005	2011	2012	2018
A/B	42%	30%	34%	38%
D/F	11%	21%	18%	17%

- Parents, especially college-educated parents, are the most apt to judge their local schools as deserving an “A” or “B” grade (58 percent and 66 percent, respectively). Voters in suburban areas and small towns are also far more positive (60 percent and 57 percent) than those who say they live in a city (43 percent) or rural area (41 percent).



3. A number of potential reforms intended to improve K-12 public education in Colorado were tested, and most are widely embraced by 2018 voters.

- Respondents were asked whether they would support or oppose a randomized list of four different proposals “which might be considered by the next Governor of Colorado.” A majority express overwhelming support for three of the four policy reforms detailed below. Support for the fourth reform falls well below the others.

<i>Ranked by % Strongly Support</i>	Strongly Support	Total Support
Give local schools greater flexibility over teacher and staff hiring and firing, types of courses offered, course materials and approaches to learning	44%	86%
Increase affordable opportunities for parents to send their children to quality early childhood education programs if they choose	44%	85%
Allow teachers in hard to fill positions like science and math or in rural areas to be paid more	43%	84%
Make it easier to create more charter schools	24%	51%

* “Total Support” in the above column includes those saying both “Strongly” and “Somewhat” support

- The three proposals with the strongest support levels garner support throughout the state and will all key demographic and partisan sub-groups. Support for creating more charter schools does tend to elicit a more ideological response, with fully 69 percent of Republicans supporting creation of more charter schools, but fewer than half of independent voters and just 36 percent of Democrats offering up support.

4. Reforms that relate to students being able to fare well in the workplace are nearly on par with long-time areas of focus such as attracting and retaining quality teachers and school safety.

- Respondents rated 19 potential areas which some people think should be the focus of improving public schools in Colorado. For each one in the randomized series, respondents indicated how much focus should be placed on that particular item – a great deal, a fair amount, not very much or none at all. While main-stays like teachers and school safety are rated as being areas for the greatest focus, a host of areas related to gaining skills and expertise that is valued in the workplace rate nearly as high among Colorado voters, as seen in the following graph:



<i>Ranked by % A Great Deal</i>	A Great Deal	Total Great Deal/ Fair Amount
Attracting and retaining quality teachers	77%	98%
Maintaining a safe environment where students can learn without worrying about being harmed	73%	95%
Developing skills useful in the workplace, such as communication, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity	67%	93%
Providing career and technical training in areas like health care, coding and web development, automotive, carpentry, and culinary arts to help prepare students for the workforce	66%	95%
Providing students with access to work-based learning experiences, such as internships, apprenticeships and job shadowing	59%	92%
Ensuring lower income students are able to achieve at the same or close to the same levels as higher income students do	58%	86%
Providing more students the opportunity to further their education beyond high school, such as technical training, community college or other higher education	57%	91%
Developing computer and digital literacy skills	54%	89%
Having one of the highest high school graduation rates in the country	51%	88%

- This emphasis on having tangible skills for after school appears to be on the rise. This survey repeated a few questions asked thirteen years ago regarding education. What is relatively unchanged is the view that “Colorado’s high schools are not providing the education that today’s students need to succeed in college or enter the workforce.” A solid majority of 62 percent agree with this statement, while 25 percent disagree—a feeling shared equally across the political spectrum and with most key demographic sub-groups. This is comparable to responses in 2005 (60 percent agree, 31 percent disagree).
- However, there has been a significant 11 point increase in the proportion of Colorado voters who indicate agreement with the view that “for most young people who want more education after high school, vocational or technical training makes more sense than a four-year college or university.” More than three-quarters (78 percent) now agree with this view, while only 15 percent disagree. In 2005, 67 percent expressed agreement.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the survey clearly demonstrates that education is on the minds of Colorado voters, and could be an issue at the forefront of voters’ minds as this year’s election season unfolds. While most Coloradans view their local schools positively, they take a dimmer view of K-12 public schools statewide. They embrace a range of reforms, particularly those that enable students to gain skills that will help them in the workplace. There has been a consistent sense that high schools are not meeting this need currently, and greater acceptance of vocational and technical training in the last decade.



Methodology:

This survey was sponsored and funded by Colorado Succeeds, Common Sense Policy Roundtable, and several other partnering organizations. It was conducted by the bipartisan research team of Public Opinion Strategies (R) and Drake Research & Strategy (D) from March 17-21, 2018.

The analysis in this memorandum is based on N=500 telephone interviews among a statewide sample of Colorado voters who have participated in elections similar to the 2018 general election, or have recently registered to vote in the state. The margin of sampling error for weighted estimates based on the full sample is ± 4.38 percentage points at a confidence interval of 95 percent, not including the design effect. Sampling error is larger for demographic, partisan and geographic population subgroups. Calls were completed on both cell-phone and landline telephone.

Comparisons in the memo are made to a similarly conducted statewide survey of 693 voters that was conducted July 21 to July 28, 2005.

