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| **Elon University Poll**

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- [Charts and data](#) (PDF)
- [Survey topline](#) (PDF)

Elon University Poll: North Carolinians give K-12 schools low grades as the federal government begins to move more control of education to the states

A new statewide survey by the Elon University Poll has found that many North Carolinians give low marks to the quality of public schools and largely attribute their impressions to factors beyond the control of classroom teachers.

A majority of survey respondents laid blame for school performance on elected leaders at both the state and local levels, and the poll found that North Carolinians believe schools are underfunded, even while many people express confusion about the way public education is structured.

The poll followed President Trump's [executive order](#) to "return authority over education to the State and local communities" and "enable parents, teachers and communities to best ensure student success." On Nov. 18, the U.S. Department of Education announced plans to transfer education programs to six other federal agencies, with K-12 programs moved to the Department of Labor.

To understand public attitudes and knowledge about K-12 education programs in North Carolina, the Elon University Poll partnered with Elon University's Dr. Jo Watts Williams School of Education to design a survey on a wide range of educational issues. The poll, conducted for the Elon Poll by YouGov from Nov. 19 to Dec. 1, included 800 adults in the state and has a margin of error of +/- 4.24%.

Views on school quality

When asked to assign letter grades to K-12 schools, North Carolinians tended to give mediocre marks, with the lowest grades for traditional public schools and a significant

share unsure what grades to assign to charter schools, home schools and private schools.

Percent giving schools grades of “C”, “D” or “F”

- Traditional public schools: 50%
- Charter schools: 28%
- Home schools: 27%
- Private schools: 20%

Percent giving schools grades of “A” or “B”

- Private schools: 51%
- Charter schools: 41%
- Home schools: 40%
- Traditional public schools: 36%

In assessing public schools in their local area, just under half (48%) of parents/guardians of children under age 18 gave their local schools an “A” or “B”, while 44% of those who are not parents/guardians gave an “A” or “B” grade.

About three-quarters of North Carolinians put the most blame for poor-performing public schools in their area on state government and the local school boards. School principals and parents get somewhat less blame and teachers get the least blame:

“A lot” or “some blame” for poor-performing schools:

- State government: 77%
- Local school boards: 77%
- Principals: 67%
- Parents: 64%
- Teachers: 57%

Poll respondents gave low marks to the state’s top education and political leaders, with 50% saying they do not work well together to improve schools, compared with 35% who said the leaders work well on behalf of schools.

“We found clear evidence that North Carolinians want to see more effective governance of K-12 schools,” said Jason Husser, director of the Elon University Poll. “A large majority thought state government bears some of the blame when schools underperform.”

Only 26% said public school funding in North Carolina is distributed fairly among counties, with 48% saying funding is distributed unfairly and 26% not sure.

An overwhelming 94% said factors such as poverty, neighborhood safety or family stability are major factors in school underperformance. Beyond those issues, insufficient funding and lack of parental involvement were also ranked as top factors in school underperformance:

Most common factors for school underperformance

- Insufficient funding and resources - 60%
- Lack of parental involvement - 52%
- Weak school management - 38%
- Student challenges outside of school - 30%
- Poorly prepared teachers - 26%
- Political conflict among leaders - 24%
- Technological distractions - 22%
- Broader community or crime problems - 18%

"Sixty percent identified the real problem: insufficient funding," said Ann Bullock, dean of the Dr. Jo Watts Williams School of Education at Elon University. "Schools need to be funded at a level to meet the needs of the students in each community. Education needs to be a priority for change to happen."

Considering concerns about school quality, survey respondents were fairly evenly split about the impact of education on the state's economy and business climate. Public education is seen as more of an asset by 29% of North Carolinians, with 26% saying it's more of a liability and 22% saying the schools don't make much difference.

School curriculum

North Carolinians have high expectations for student achievement across a wide range of skills. Skills deemed "very important" included writing and composition, and financial literacy and money management (both at 77%), along with human-centered skills (72%) and basic scientific concepts and reasoning (70%). U.S. history and civics was seen as "very important" by 61% of respondents, followed by household management and maintenance at 58% and technical skills like coding and data analysis at 57%.

Regarding artificial intelligence, 59% said high school graduates should understand how AI works as well as its benefits, risks and ethical issues. At the same time, 63% said schools should limit student use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT because of potential problems such as overreliance, bias, misinformation and privacy risks.

"While sixty-three percent want to limit AI tools in schools, 59% want students to understand AI deeply," Bullock said. "The public wants AI education, not AI immersion. Educators should control when and how AI is used and teach the risks before handing over the tools."

Despite recent news reports that people have less faith in the value of a college degree, 30% of respondents in this survey said a college degree is very valuable and 43% said a degree is somewhat valuable, with only 17% saying a college degree is not valuable.

Knowledge of the K-12 educational system

Many North Carolinians said they are not sure about the basic structures of the state's educational system. Only 40% correctly responded that charter schools are considered public schools in North Carolina, with 34% incorrectly saying charter schools are private and 26% saying they were unsure.

The largest share (36%) of poll respondents said they were unsure whether North Carolina's charter schools and private schools that receive public voucher funds are subject to the same testing and reporting requirements as public schools. Charter schools in North Carolina generally mirror traditional public schools in testing and reporting requirements, whereas private schools taking voucher funds face only partial testing rules and less accountability.

Similarly, 28% said they were unsure how public schools in the state are funded, and just over half (52%) knew that local school board members are elected by voters and not appointed positions. As for the North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction, only 41% knew this is an elected position and 31% said they were unsure about how that office is filled.

"Though North Carolinians, as a whole, were clear in wanting better schools, they expressed significant confusion about the mechanisms of decisions that influence school performance," Husser said. "I suspect some of that confusion is due to the relatively complicated K-12 educational bureaucracy in North Carolina."

North Carolinians tended to underestimate how much public K-12 teachers are paid. Compared with the national average teacher salary of \$72,030 (Source: National Education Association annual report), North Carolina teachers earn \$58,292. However, the average guess by respondents in this survey was that the average North Carolina teacher is paid \$42,257 (\$16,000 lower than the actual figure). The average entry-level teacher in the state earns \$42,542.

A large majority of survey respondents (71%) said public school teachers in North Carolina are paid too little. Just under half (48%) said teachers get a great amount or fair amount of public respect, with 41% saying teachers get not much or no respect. Considering the rewards of teaching, the level of teacher pay and the work environment, 45% said it is likely they would encourage their child or a close family member to become a K-12 teacher in North Carolina, while 40% said they would be unlikely to do so.

Poll respondents strongly endorsed requirements for state-issued teaching licenses and teacher-preparation programs, with 48% saying those standards are extremely important and 29% saying they are very important. A large majority (82%) said they would support a state-funded teacher education program that would allow students to earn a debt-free college degree with intensive teacher training in exchange for working as a K-12 teacher in the state for several years.

“North Carolinians value high quality teacher education and three-quarters want to see quality teacher preparation paired with scholarship programs,” Bullock said. “Currently, 51% of initially licensed (beginning) teachers are not fully licensed and are seeking alternative routes to licensure. Alternatively licensed teachers are more likely to leave the profession. High quality teacher education programs with scholarships could help fill this gap and put qualified teachers in classrooms.”

Poll Methodology

Access the poll topline and methodology at: www.elon.edu/elonpoll. The survey was developed by the Elon University Poll and fielded by the international marketing and polling firm [YouGov](#) as an online, web-based survey, self-administered with online panels. Between November 19 and December 1, YouGov interviewed 1,164 North Carolina adults aged 18 and older. These respondents were then matched down to a sample of 800 to produce the final dataset.

Throughout this report, the analysis of partisan differences compares the views of Republicans plus those who lean Republican in their voting preference with Democrats plus those who lean Democratic. The margin of error for this poll (adjusted for weights) is +/-4.24%.

About the Elon University Poll

Established in 2000, the Elon University Poll conducts national and North Carolina surveys on issues of importance to voters and residents. Information from these polls is shared with media, citizens and public officials to facilitate informed public policy making through the better understanding of citizens’ opinions and attitudes. The poll is fully funded by Elon University and operates as the neutral, non-biased information resource.

The Elon University Poll is a charter member of the [Transparency Initiative](#), a program created by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) in 2014 to educate polling firms on ways to better share how they collect and interpret their information. The Elon Poll’s voluntary participation in this initiative signifies a willingness to clearly state in its reports how questions were asked, in what order, who funded the poll and then conducted it, and a definition of the population under study, among other details.