

PRESS RELEASE

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New Survey: Parents Mostly Uninformed On New School Funding Law, But Willing to Participate in Decisions about School Budgets

Survey Finds Distinct Differences Among High Income and Low Income Parents When it Comes to Evaluation of Schools and Levels of Engagement

Oakland, California – Most parents say they don't know about the new funding system in California schools, but want to get involved in guiding how the funds are spent, according to a new survey by EdSource.

The statewide survey is the first to look at how connected and involved parents are with their child's schools. It comes at a time when parents have been given a role by the State Legislature to provide input into how state education funds are spent through the Local Control Funding Formula now being implemented in schools across the state. Signed in July by Governor Brown, the law also names parent involvement as one of several "priority areas" that schools must focus on.

The survey of 1003 parents was conducted via telephone by the polling firm Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) between November 5-12 and was underwritten by The California Endowment.

Fifty seven percent of parents reported knowing "nothing at all" about the new funding formula, compared to 9 percent who said they knew "a great deal" about it, underscoring the challenge school districts and parent organizations face in educating parents about the new reforms.

Once parents are given a brief summary, three-quarters express support for the reforms, and only 1 in 10 say they oppose them. Three quarters (76 percent) say they are "very" or "somewhat" involved in their child's school, with close to one-third (30 percent) saying they are very involved. Most also give favorable ratings -- an A or B grade -- to their children's schools, and most report high levels of communication with them.

"Contrary to popular perceptions of many parents being disengaged from their child's schools, the fact that parents are already involved in their child's school, and feel welcome there presents a good foundation for them to become involved in California's new funding law," said EdSource executive director Louis Freedberg.

The survey also reveals distinct differences among high-income and low-income parents including:

- Nearly four in ten parents (39 percent) of parents who report incomes of \$100,000 or more describe themselves as "very involved," compared to only 24 percent of those reporting incomes of \$30,000 or less.
- Forty three percent of parents with incomes higher than \$100,000 give their child's school an A, compared to only 25 percent of parents with incomes of under \$30,000.
- Thirty nine percent of low-income parents feel that only a small group of parents have the opportunity to engage in decision-making at their child's school, compared to only 19 percent of high-income parents who feel that way.

Freedberg said these differences suggest schools will have to work harder to engage low-income parents -- whose children are one of the targets of the new funding legislation -- in their schools.

"Because of what we know about the strong link between parent involvement and academic outcomes, it is reassuring that parents from all income levels want to be involved," Freedberg said. "The challenge facing California's education leaders is how to ensure that all of them have the opportunity to do so."

Parents cited lack of time and conflicting work schedules as the major obstacles in getting more involved in giving input on how funds will be spent.

They also say there are several steps schools could take to increase their involvement, including giving plenty of advance notice, and assuring them that they will have a meaningful voice in the process. Nearly half said child-care at meetings would also make a difference, and a smaller number said transportation and translations from English would also help.

Most parents say they do participate in a wide range of activities in their schools, with activities related to their child's education topping the list. A much smaller proportion say they attend school board meetings (30 percent) or participate in school site councils and other school or district committees (24 percent).

Parents also said they get much of their information about their child's school in a distinctly old-fashioned way -- through their children. Other less dominant information sources include conversations with their child's teacher and school newsletters. As schools develop communication strategies around the school funding law, the importance of children as a major conduit of information cannot be underestimated.

For more information, see: <http://edsources.org/today/parent-engagement>

Survey Methodology

From November 5-12, 2013, FM3 completed 1,003 telephone interviews (on landlines and cell phones) with California parents of children under the age of 18 attending public schools in all major geographic regions. Parents were from different income levels, and had children in elementary, middle and high schools. The margin of sampling error is +/-4.4% at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups within each sample will be higher. The sample included interviews with a random sample of 601 parents, paired with oversamples of 202 parents with household incomes under \$30,000 and 200 parents of children in ESL (English as a second language) classes. All data have been weighted to reflect the true distribution of California public school parents by household income and ESL status.

About EdSource

Founded in 1977, EdSource is a nonprofit, non partisan organization whose goal is to engage Californians on key education challenges and to highlight strategies that promote student success. Subscribe [here](#) to EdSource Today, EdSource's daily online service.