

**2016**

The People's  
Review of  
Education  
in Idaho.

# IDAHO // READY FOR CHANGE

WHAT IDAHOANS  
REALLY THINK  
ABOUT EDUCATION  
IN IDAHO.

J.A. and KATHRYN

**ALBERTSON FAMILY  
FOUNDATION**

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**Idaho Ready for Change:  
What Idahoans Really Think  
About Education in Idaho**

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**FDR Group**

The Farkas Duffett Research Group (FDR Group) is an opinion research company with expertise in conducting focus groups, surveys, and program evaluations. FDR Group projects are nonpartisan, in-depth examinations of how people think about policy issues: the fears, values, and hopes that drive their views; their policy preferences; and the areas where their attitudes are still evolving.

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In my experience as a district superintendent, the state's deputy superintendent, a parent, and now the executive director of the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation, I have always embraced the crucial ingredient that drives lasting change in our education system in Idaho: the voice and energy of the public and parents. That's why we commissioned a survey, The People's Review of Education in Idaho, which asks 1,000 randomly chosen Idahoans from every corner of the state about what they value in their K-12 public education system.

The Albertson Family Foundation is a data-driven organization. We have spent the past three years collecting data about student achievement in Idaho and have found some disturbing results. When compared to other states, Idaho ranks in the bottom 10 on key educational measures: 41st for high school graduation and 50th for the percentage of teens who further their education or training after high school. Only one-third of our third graders are reading at grade level, and 60 percent of our 4th and 8th graders are not proficient in math.

Data is a measuring stick by which we can compare our performance against others. But we felt there was more to the story. What do regular Idahoans - citizens, taxpayers - value most in their public education system? Do they have confidence in their local schools? What are the essential subjects students should be learning? And most importantly, are the children of Idaho getting what they need to succeed in life and work?

To help us find out, we enlisted the services of the nonpartisan New York-based FDR Group, led by expert analysts Steve Farkas and Ann Duffett, who have a combined 45 years of experience in opinion research and social policy.

We are grateful to the many Idahoans who participated in a series of in-person conversations in the Spring of 2015 to help Farkas and Duffett develop the survey and learn about recent education developments in Idaho.

A majority of Idahoans believe that education is the single most important issue facing the state. And they also express wide-ranging dissatisfaction with their education system. Most alarming, only 48 percent of Idahoans would recommend their local schools to a family looking for a top-notch school and 7 in 10 parents would choose a school other than their traditional public school for their own children if they had the choice. Only 6 percent of Idahoans would give their local schools an A grade, and 79 percent say Idaho would attract more companies and its economy would be stronger if it had better schools.

But the results also shine a light on what Idahoans value most and a pathway toward improvement. Idahoans want more vocational education classes, internships, and real-world experiences for students. They believe that teaching critical thinking, technology, and how to work hard and be responsible is essential. Idahoans believe in the power of great teachers to reach the most difficult kids. That young people must continue their education past high school. And they overwhelmingly support more learning options for their children.

We intend to conduct the survey annually to provide a year-after-year measurement of how we are doing in working toward the things we value as a state.

Everyone in Idaho who wants public education to succeed should pay attention. The data show we can do better. We believe we must do better, not just for the sake of Idaho's children but also for the prosperity of this beloved state.

Idaho is indeed ready for change.

- Roger Quarles, **Executive Director,**  
**J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Idaho Ready for Change is based on 1,000 interviews conducted by telephone with a randomly selected representative sample of Idaho adults in September 2015. The survey was preceded by six focus groups with education leaders and members of the general public. What follows are the highlights of the findings. See page 35 for a full description of the methods and page 29 for the complete survey findings.

## 1. Idahoans say their public schools fall short.

Idahoans are disappointed in their public schools and give them lackluster grades across a variety of key measures. Many findings reflect a loss of confidence: Less than half would recommend their local schools to families seeking a top-notch education; less than half would give their local schools grades of A or B. In head-to-head comparisons, Idaho residents with charter schools in their area believe charters outperform regular public schools. Finally, a majority of parents would send their own children to alternatives other than the regular public schools if they had the chance.

- > **Just 42% of Idahoans give their own community's public schools a grade of A or B.**
- > **Just 48% of Idahoans would advise a family looking for top-notch schools to move to their district.**
- > **Among respondents with a charter school in their area, 58% think charters outperform the regular public schools - only 23% give the nod to the regular public schools.**
- > **If money were not an issue, 73% of Idaho's parents would prefer that their child attend a private or charter school, while only 26% would opt for the regular public schools.**

## 2. Idahoans believe education is key to economic success.

Idahoans believe that education is the key to the economic success of individuals and of their state and communities. They think that young people must continue their education beyond high school in order to succeed in the real world, and they reserve special praise for schooling that prepares youngsters for work, such as vocational classes and trade schools. Still, many believe that education is valuable for its own sake. Most parents would pick a 4-year college for their own children over trade school or community college.

- > **80% say Idaho should expand “high school internships and work experience,” and 75% “vocational education classes.”**
- > **92% agree that “some people may look down at trade or technical schools, but they are excellent options for high school grads.”**
- > **89% believe that “young people need to continue their education past high school - it’s hard to get a good job with just a high school diploma.”**
- > **Asked what would be best for their own child after high school, 65% of parents say they would want their own child to go to a four-year college, 14% community college, 13% to a trade school, 3% get a job.**
- > **79% of Idaho residents believe that “if Idaho had better public schools, it would attract more companies and professionals and its economy would be stronger.”**
- > **78% also believe that “Idaho ends up losing many of its best and brightest young people because there aren’t enough good jobs for them.”**

## 3. Idahoans set academic priorities for the public schools.

This study checks in with Idahoans to ask what is absolutely essential for Idaho’s schools to teach and what is less of a priority. Survey respondents were read a list of 10 subject areas and asked to rate whether each was absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important for the schools in their area to teach. The “absolutely essential” results provide a sense of the public’s academic priorities:

- > **94%, Basic reading, writing, and math**
- > **77%, Computers and technology**
- > **75%, Critical thinking**
- > **60%, Basic science like biology**
- > **56%, U.S. history and civics**
- > **54%, Practical job skills for office or industry**
- > **42%, Advanced science, and math like physics and calculus**
- > **41%, Literature, music, and art**
- > **31%, Sports and physical education**
- > **29%, Farming, agriculture, and forestry**

## 4. Idahoans insist that student effort and grit are decisive factors in student success but also believe that good teachers matter.

Idahoans believe that hard work and persistence are key determinants of student success in school—and crucial for schools to teach. They also believe that good teachers can transcend social problems and get even difficult students from tough homes to learn.

- > **Asked to pick the most important of three factors that determine student achievement, a plurality of 49% picks “the student’s own effort and motivation”; 34% say it is “teacher quality and commitment”; and 15% that it is “the school’s standards and expectations.”**
- > **81% of Idahoans believe it’s just as important for their schools to teach the value of such things as hard work, persistence, and responsibility as it is to teach academics. (16% would prefer that the schools mostly focus on teaching academic subjects.)**
- > **Asked to pick the main factor out of four that would most help young people succeed in the work world, a plurality of 49% points to “having persistence and a strong work ethic”; 31% say “getting a good education”; 10% who you know; and 8% “knowing how to deal with people well.”**
- > **By a vast 80% to 17% margin, Idahoans believe that good teachers can successfully teach difficult students from neglectful homes, rejecting the view that it’s unrealistic to expect this.**

## 5. Charter schools are prized by Idahoans.

Idahoans believe charters are outperforming regular public schools and are especially attracted to the promise that charters can specialize in the content areas they teach students. Idahoans who know more about charter schools are more likely to favor them.

- > **80% of Idahoans favor charter schools described as “public schools that have a lot more control over their own budget, staff, and curriculum, and are free from many existing regulations.”**
- > **Idahoans with charter schools in their area are far more likely to think that the charter schools offer a better education than the regular public schools - by a 58% to 23% margin.**
- > **Asked which of three charter school features is most appealing, 62% pick that charters “can specialize in teaching students who have specific interests and talents.” In contrast, only 19% pick charters’ greater control over budgets, and only 15% that they can hire and fire staff more easily.**
- > **Among Idahoans, greater knowledge correlates with stronger support for charter schools: 17% of Idahoans who know little or nothing about charter schools strongly favor them, compared with 55% of those who have a great deal or quite a lot of knowledge.**

## 6. Idahoans support academic standards and the Idaho Standards Achievement Tests.

Idahoans express broad support for standards and the Idaho Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT) and think Idaho’s schools should teach to the same academic standards as the rest of the nation. Still, many believe that too much is made of tests and that they are often not used to help students.

- > **74% of Idaho residents say the state’s public schools should teach to the same academic standards as the rest of the country because “students need the same basic knowledge wherever they are”; only 23% want Idaho to teach to its own academic standards because “what Idaho’s students need to learn is different from the rest of the U.S.”**

- > **Idahoans favor the ISAT by a 67% to 30% margin.**
- > **Idahoans oppose letting parents decide whether to have their children take the ISAT for math and reading by a 56% to 42% margin.**
- > **54% of Idahoans believe that “too much is made of” comparisons of school districts by test scores, graduation rates, and college attendance rates, compared with 44% who say these comparisons are valuable.**

# INTRODUCTION

**Idaho Ready for Change** is a comprehensive effort to capture the voice of Idahoans regarding one of the most important issues facing their state: public education. In fact, so important is public education to the state's citizens that 50% point to it as the most important issue facing Idaho today – more than the 40% who say it's the economy.

That simple, powerful survey finding signals that Idahoans are highly alert to what education means for their state's future and the future of their families. The telephone survey, conducted September 2-21, 2015, with 1,000 randomly selected Idaho residents, covers a myriad of issues – from the purposes of education, to how the local public schools are performing, to the top educational priorities, to teacher quality, to charter schools, and standards and accountability. But before we fielded the survey, we conducted four focus groups across the state, interviewing a wide spectrum of ordinary citizens to hear their concerns in their own words. No matter who they were – parents or retirees, young adults or business owners, college grads or high school dropouts, farmers or web designers – they were so engaged by the conversations that they invariably wanted to stay past the two hours we had asked them for. They cared, they had important things to say, they listened to each other, and they talked freely enough to occasionally disagree when that was the case. We are grateful to them for sharing their views with civility and thoughtfulness.

The focus groups we moderated took us to Boise-Meridian, Pocatello, Coeur d'Alene, and Salmon. They were invaluable to the crafting of the questionnaire, both in informing the topics to cover and in choosing the language and phrasing we used to formulate the questions. Most of the questionnaire, in fact, was specially tailored to capture the Idaho story – only a few of the questions have been repeated elsewhere. We use quotes from the focus groups to add texture and nuance to the quantitative findings. In an

initial phase, we conducted two focus groups with leaders in higher education, business, K-12 education, and other civic groups. The leaders were promised confidentiality, but we want to express our thanks here for the grounding they gave us in the issues facing Idaho.

Throughout the conduct of the project, the J. A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation gave the FDR Group complete freedom to conduct the research independently and objectively. It was evident that the Foundation cares deeply about the state and its education system and truly wanted to understand what Idahoans think about the issues at hand. We are especially grateful to the trust and support of our colleagues and friends at the Foundation – Jennie Sue Weltner, Blossom Johnston, and Roger Quarles.

As Idaho's policymakers tackle complicated new legislative initiatives and fine tune old ones, listening to what Idahoans want for their public schools becomes critically important. Not because the public can give good advice on such specifics as the proper design of a literacy program – that is the realm of professional educators. The public's true aptitude is in being the most reliable repository of the core values that can give meaning and direction to public education – and speak to whether or not it needs to change. As we will see in the pages that follow, Idahoans believe that their public schools need to change, and they demonstrate clear preferences about what that change should look like.

## IDAHOANS SAY THEIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS FALL SHORT.

Idahoans are disappointed in their public schools and give them lackluster grades across a variety of key measures. Many findings reflect a loss of confidence: Less than half would recommend their local schools to families seeking a top notch education; less than half would give their local schools grades of A or B. In head-to-head comparisons, Idaho residents with charter schools in their area believe charters outperform regular public schools. Finally, a majority of parents would send their own children to alternatives other than the regular public schools if they had the chance.

“We didn’t expect too much.”

Idahoans are broadly dissatisfied with their local public schools and believe they need to improve. **More than half (53%) would give their own community’s public schools a grade of C or lower; only 42% give them grades of A or B.** [Q14] These are lackluster marks, especially when compared to the national average. When a recent Gallup poll posed the identical question, 44% of Americans gave their local schools a C grade or lower.<sup>1</sup>

Disappointment was the common sentiment expressed in the focus group discussions.

There’s a disconnect when people don’t know what they’re paying for. When people pay taxes, it goes to education, but you generally just pay taxes ... And when you have a disconnect, you’re not going to have a good product. –Boise

And because we are so low on our graduation levels, are we paying for failure? The teachers all want a raise, so are we paying for failure? –Boise

**Only 48% of Idahoans would advise a family looking for top-notch schools to move to their school district, while 42% would tell the family they might be better off looking elsewhere.** [Q15]

<sup>1</sup>The 47th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes toward the Public Schools. September 2015.



In the Pocatello focus group, for example, a recent college graduate said she and her husband were leaving Idaho. Her college experience made her realize she hadn't been adequately prepared by the public schools, and she didn't want her children to go through the same system. In Salmon, a recent transplant recounted how Idaho's public schools figured into his and his wife's calculations to move:

The school system in Idaho does not have a good reputation and definitely does not in Salmon... but we didn't expect too much. When we moved here with our little guys, very, very seriously we said.... It's a big deal to move somewhere with no options and a bad school system and so it's my responsibility as a parent. We have to do everything we possibly can, meaning create opportunities, put them in camps, read to them at home. Whatever we can do super actively. –Salmon

## “But she can't count.”

Many Idahoans believe their public schools fail to successfully teach youngsters the basics. **Only a slim majority (53%) would say that a high school diploma from their community's schools guarantees that the typical graduate has learned the basics; 45% say it is no guarantee.** [Q16]

Focus group participants spoke of their surprised disillusionment with the lack of basic skills they see in young adults. Their comments often recalled direct experience.

So when I hire now, I am shocked ... I've got people coming in with maybe two years in college or maybe four years, and they can't do a spreadsheet ... They don't understand algebra. –Boise

I hired a girl [for a cashier position] who was going back to school to get her GED ... But she can't count. I'm checking her, and we come up short or too much, and it's just nickels and dimes, but she can't do it without a calculator. I took it away, and I'm making her do it, but she's not happy. Well,

the bill was \$24.26, and the guy gave her \$25.50, and she could not give the change back. –Coeur d'Alene

I am working on my third degree, and I can tell you there are people in my classes who don't even know how to write. Or do algebra. They don't know how to spell, and they don't know what's grammatically correct. And they don't know how to do even pre-algebra, which is what you do in junior high. –Pocatello

## Charter schools stand out

The regular public schools fall short when Idahoans compare them to local charter schools. **Two in three Idahoans (67%) report having a charter school in their area. Among those respondents, 58% think charters outperform the regular public schools – only 23% give the nod to the regular public schools.** [Q42A]

In Pocatello, a mom had no choice but to move her children back to a traditional public high school because their charter school ended at middle school. The contrast could not have been starker:

There was a huge difference. They were accelerated learning at the charter school, and then they moved to a place where they're not doing homework, not doing stuff in school, and they're bored. That's been a huge change. They're not pushed. In the charter school, they had expectations. They had to do their homework and turn it in every morning or there was a consequence for it. –Pocatello

# Parents half-way out the door?

The survey shows that if money were not an issue, the vast majority of parents would opt out of the regular public schools and send their children to alternatives. **Fully 73% would send their children to private school or to a charter school, while only 26% of parents would opt to send them to the regular public schools.** [Q53]

Moreover, Idaho parents' assessment of the public schools is essentially no different from the views of non-parents.

- > **43% of parents – compared with 42% of non-parents – would advise a new family moving to their school district that they would be better off looking elsewhere if they wanted top-notch public schools.**
- > **51% of parents – compared with 54% of non-parents – give their local schools a C grade or lower.**
- > **42% of parents – compared with 46% of non-parents – say a high school diploma is no guarantee the typical student has learned the basics.**
- > **55% of parents – compared with 60% of non-parents – say charters generally offer a better education than public schools in their area.**

In the focus groups, alert parents talked about working around the weaknesses in their schools, lobbying to move their kids out of classrooms with particularly bad teachers, augmenting the system's instructional weaknesses with work at home, or moving their kids to charter schools when that was an option.

# Money, trust, and the public schools

There was a strong refrain in the focus groups that any extra money given to the schools would get lost along the way rather than actually get into the classroom to increase teacher pay or lower

class size. And this sentiment was corroborated in the survey findings: **While 44% of the Idaho residents surveyed believe that if Idaho spent more on education, the money would get to the classroom and improve education, 51% believe the money would get lost along the way.** [Q4]

Several focus group participants did not trust the efficacy of increased spending.

You're making the assumption that there's a strict correlation between spending and the higher the quality of the education, and I don't think there is. I think educational spending and our math and science scores are about the same. We've never been great. –Boise

You'd have to know where the extra money was going. I don't know that you could believe it ... Before they deemed the building unsafe, they sunk over a million dollars in the heating system. To be honest with you, I know that the junior high is bad, but I think they [were] not making repairs to try to make it as bad to force the county, city, citizens of Salmon in voting for the bond ... And I voted for it, but it's suspicious. –Salmon

I don't think it matters how much you spend if you're not going to be efficient with it. If we just throw money at the problem without an efficient way to use that money, it's not going to do that much for us. –Pocatello

But in each of the four focus groups, at least one person spontaneously pointed out that Idaho ranked among the last in the states for spending. They connected low evaluations of Idaho's public schools with the state's low per pupil spending, arguing that their performance is held back by a lack of resources. With more money, they said, the schools could hire more teachers to reduce class size, or improve pay to improve teacher quality, or put more technology in classrooms.

Since Idaho doesn't pay that much, all the good teachers leave. –Boise

I know that Idaho is ranked 48th with the amount of money that we spend per child ... I don't think our schools are doing well. I think the classrooms are overcrowded. If there's a student in the classroom that has any type of special needs, then that teacher having to give them extra attention and that takes away from the rest of the class. That's really hard to have 30 kids in a classroom with one teacher. –Pocatello

- > North Idaho respondents are least likely (43%) to say they would encourage a family seeking top-notch schools to move to their district; those in South-Central Idaho are most likely to do so (58%). Respondents in the East (48%) and Southwest (47%) fall in between.
- > Things are a bit different in comparing the performance of charter schools to regular public schools. Southwest residents (65%) are most likely to say charter schools outperform regular public schools; South-Central residents (44%) are the least likely to give charter schools the nod. Respondents in East Idaho (58%) and North Idaho (53%) fall in between.

## Regional differences

North Idaho residents appear more dissatisfied with the quality of their public schools, while residents of South-Central Idaho appear more confident.

- > North Idaho respondents (59%) are most likely to give their local public schools a grade of C or lower; South-Central respondents (46%) are least likely to do so. Respondents in the east (52%) and Southwest (54%) fall in between.

## "It could be a lot better."

Idaho's citizens do not think their public school system is beyond repair – but they do believe that it needs to change before it can improve. Only 26% say there's so much wrong with Idaho's public school system that "a complete overhaul is necessary." But almost 2 out of 3 (65%) say that Idaho's public school system "could be a lot better with some changes." Meanwhile, just 7% believe the system is "in very good shape and needs little change." [Q2]



## IDAHOANS BELIEVE EDUCATION IS KEY TO ECONOMIC SUCCESS.

Idahoans believe that education is the key to the economic success of individuals and of their state and communities. They think that young people must continue their education beyond high school in order to succeed in the real world, and they reserve special praise for schooling that prepares youngsters for work, such as vocational classes and trade schools. Still, many believe that education is valuable for its own sake. Most parents would pick a 4-year college for their own children over trade school or community college.

“Do something that interests them and will get them a good job.”

Idahoans prize education, and they do so mostly—but not solely—because it prepares youngsters for employment and economic success. They believe that the K-12 system should be doing more to teach youngsters trade skills and give them exposure to the world of work.

**Fully 80% would expand “high school internships and work experience” while only 14% would leave things as they are. [Q37] Another 75% would expand “vocational education classes” – only 18% would leave things as they are. [Q41] More than 3 in 4 (77%) say it is absolutely essential for the schools to teach students computers and technology, and more than half (54%) say the same for teaching “practical job skills for office or industry.” [Q21 & Q25]**

High school just doesn’t prepare you to be a working part of society as a whole. I feel like it should. –Coeur d’Alene

I see a big shift in education right now. This 5-school conglomeration has put together a tech school rather than a high school. ... They put all media at this one location, and they’re technically training them to do something that interests them and will get them a good job. –Boise

# Higher education— the new normal

There is virtual consensus among Idahoans that getting a high school diploma is not enough for today's youngsters. **Fully 89% believe that "Young people need to continue their education past high school – it's hard to get a good job with just a high school diploma."** [Q7]

I really didn't have a choice not to go to school. It was something that was expected of me because in this day and age, Idaho – and I bet in other places it's worse – you don't get a very good job. You have to have a competitive edge with the rest of people, so college is like high school to me. It was just expected of me. –Boise

It's not necessarily you need a 4-year degree, but you need to be specialized in something. I don't think when you graduate from high school you're really ready for life, so you need to do something beyond – whether it's on the job training or go to a 2-year school or a vocational school. –Coeur d'Alene

Most Idahoans prize technical postsecondary training while simultaneously believing that such training has been undervalued and too quickly dismissed. **More than 9 in 10 (92%) say that "Some people may look down at trade or technical schools, but they are excellent options for high school grads."** [Q8]

I think one of the mistakes we are making in education today is that we put so much focus on that 4-year degree that we've neglected the economics of that. As an example, we don't do hardly anything for Vo-Tech, vocational, technical stuff. We seem to really frown on high paid, skilled jobs – machinists, diesel mechanics, nurses. –Boise

I think we need to rethink our thinking ... We need to learn the trades. What would we do without dental assistants? Plumbers? We should give pride to trades. –Coeur d'Alene

I think we need to push more trade schools ... I talked to these guys who come in to bring their supplies in. And they say, "If we could find a body man, there's jobs all over for painters and auto body men, but there's nobody going into those trades anymore." Same with mechanics. They're not seeing nearly as many people going into mechanical trade. –Salmon

## "But I still don't want that for my son."

Parents are just as likely to value trade or technical skills as other Idahoans (92% of both parents and non-parents feel these are excellent options) – but not necessarily for their own children. When asked what would be best for their own child after high school, approximately 2 in 3 parents (65%) would want their own child to go to a 4-year college.

**Parents see other options as far less desirable: trade schools (13%), community college (14%), or getting a job (3%).** [Q13]

This indicates that 4-year colleges have a strong hold on the parental imagination as the optimal track for high school graduates. One mom revealed the conflicting values and calculations she is confronting in guiding her son's post-high school decision-making.

I struggle. I have a son who is very bright, and he's a straight A student, and right now he just thinks welding is really, really fun. I'm like, "I don't care if you're a welder, but I don't want you to make that your career and then wish you had gone to college." ... Several community colleges have now approached, and they have these AA degrees. They will pay kids, and they're training them specifically to work for Boeing. They're saying if you will

choose right now, then we'll give you a laptop computer, and you'll take these classes in high school. We'll pay for your credits, and you will walk into a job after a 2-year degree. So, it's very technical and job oriented, and I like that. I do find that attractive, but I still don't want that for my son. –Boise

working. I worked with a lot of teachers at the spud plant because they said they made more money doing that than teaching. –Pocatello

## “A lot of people get degrees, and it doesn't do them any good.”

Experts are often quick to point to the lifelong payoff of getting a college degree, but many Idahoans participating in the focus groups questioned whether the trade-offs for getting a 4-year college degree are always worth it. They talked about the costs and the burden of student loans, and they doubted the supply of high-paying jobs.

More than a few Idahoans were alert to the reality of “credentialism,” noting that employers increasingly wanted to see a degree from job applicants.

There's so much competition now because so many people are getting at least a degree, even if they have a vocational education. There are so many people competing for all of those same jobs that it's getting to be harder. We are getting to that point where you're going to need to have that piece of paper. –Coeur d'Alene

You have to weigh its value versus the cost. The cost of going to school has gone so sky high that if you want to go to the best school in that field, it's crazy what it costs. And the student loans that these kids are ending up with when they're done – they have to get a job that will help them pay back those loans. So that's a huge part in deciding if it's really worth it in the long run. –Boise

## Better schools mean a better economy

Idahoans understand the impact education has on their state and on their communities. To be sure, when discussing education they instinctively focus on the good it can do for individuals. But Idahoans also recognize that their state's economic success depends upon the jobs that companies bring – jobs that will be won or lost based on the quality of local schools. Moreover, Idahoans know that their state's ability to attract and retain talented people depends upon the availability of quality jobs.

Kids go to school, and they get all these degrees, and yet they don't go anywhere. They went out, spent all this money getting different degrees, but in the end they aren't able to find the work. They can't pay their student loans. –Coeur d'Alene

**About 8 in 10 (79%) say, “If Idaho had better public schools, it would attract more companies and professionals, and its economy would be stronger.” [Q6] About 8 in 10 (78%) also believe that “Idaho ends up losing many of its best and brightest young people because there aren't enough good jobs for them.” [Q5]**

A lot of people get degrees, and it doesn't do them any good. I went through electronics and got the degree and couldn't get a job. There were no jobs in this area, so I ended up back in a spud plant

If I were to look up information and research about it, I would find that in areas where the education is higher, people are able to bring in businesses, create jobs. Even in agriculture – it's a business nowadays. –Pocatello

I came back right after college, and there were no jobs anywhere. I feel people are leaving because there isn't the level of jobs that are needed for people coming out of college. They come here, stick around for a year, can't find something good, and they move, go on and don't come back. We're missing that industry that would keep those young generations here. –Coeur d'Alene

There's a huge computer conglomerate here in Boise; Micron. The government bent over backwards to get them here ... They couldn't recruit people out of the Boise area or out of Idaho to go work there. Nobody had the technology skills that were required there, and even to this day, they're still importing these degreed people in to handle all of those jobs. –Boise

You lose people coming here – potentially [people] with good backgrounds – that could really add to the community. You hear it all the time. "Well, it's a beautiful spot, nice town, but the schools aren't what we need." –Salmon

Idahoans would pay careful attention to the perceptions employers and companies have of their K-12 education system, knowing that their decisions affect the state's economic wellbeing. When asked who they would be most interested in hearing from for an evaluation of Idaho's high school graduates, 50% point to the employers who hire them. **Far fewer would want to talk with the teachers who taught them (25%) or the colleges that enroll them (22%).** [Q32]

Aren't you looking at results? How the economic development of our state is going? If we have poorer education, it translates into poorer economic development. –Pocatello

## Hispanic support less intense

A closer look at the survey data shows that Hispanics are less enthusiastic in their support of the vocational track. Broad majorities of both Hispanics (89%) and whites (93%) say the view that trade or technical schools are excellent options for high school graduates comes "very close" or "somewhat close" to their own. But only 37% of Hispanics – compared with 70% of whites – say the view comes "very close" to their own, an indication that their support is less intense.

A Hispanic parent in the Boise focus group reacted to the conversation about the vocational track with some concern:

Sometimes they just stereotype people. Like they see Hispanic classmates, and they say, "Oh you won't make it to college. Go to this school." That's the stereotype for Hispanics. Instead of pushing them, they just say, "No, you won't make it." –Boise

## IDAHOANS SET ACADEMIC PRIORITIES FOR THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

When it comes to what students should learn, school systems face a litany of expectations and demands from their communities while operating within funding and time constraints. This study checks in with Idahoans to ask about their list of must-haves: What is absolutely essential for Idaho's schools to teach? What is less of a priority?

Survey respondents were read a list of 10 subject areas and asked to rate whether each was absolutely essential for the schools in their area to teach, important but not essential, or not too important. The results provide a sense of the public's academic priorities. What Idahoans think matters most - for example, computers and critical thinking - or what they believe matters less - for example, farming and sports - says something about their perceptions of what youngsters need to know in a changing world. Educators could quickly note that the mission of the public schools goes well beyond academic subjects to teaching social and cultural habits and values. The attitudes of Idahoans toward several of these social values are covered in the next section. The focus here is on academic priorities.

### What does it mean to be an educated person?

Idahoans want their public schools to prepare students for economic success, but getting job skills is hardly the end of their expectations. **Half of Idahoans (49%) do say the most important purpose of education is "to prepare students for the work world and give them job skills," while 50% also say that education is valuable for its own sake because "students need to become well-educated and well-rounded citizens."** [Q11]

*I'm a believer in liberal arts education, and that is something that is sort of falling out of favor these days, because people feel like they need to have skills for a given profession that are very specific and technical. A liberal education exposes you*



to many things that you maybe have never been exposed to before ... It makes you better able to deal with different people. If you're only centered on "my life, my things, what I do every day" it cuts you off from people who see differently, who have different perspectives. It just [gives you] a worldview, gives you a little bit of history.  
–Pocatello

## Non-negotiable: The basics, technology, and critical thinking

No subject is seen as unimportant, but Idahoans prioritize and identify the teaching of some subjects as non-negotiable. Basic reading, writing, and math (94%) lead the list of absolutely essential priorities Idahoans want their local public schools to teach. Teaching computers and technology (77%) is second on the list, as the public thinks these have become so integral to modern life that they are among the highest priorities for the schools to teach.

These skills are so obviously important to daily life that they hardly required elaboration in the focus groups – in Boise, for example, almost all participants ticked off "reading, writing, math" from the start. "Balance a checkbook," said one Boise participant. "Those kids can't balance a checkbook." They are exasperated when they run across someone who cannot make change or struggles with simple technology and conclude that the local public schools have failed to teach the simplest of essentials.

Spelling, punctuation, being able to write a resume. Be able to define specific words. Essay skills. –Coeur d'Alene

Critical thinking is also in the top tier of public expectations, with 75% of Idahoans believing it is absolutely essential for their schools to teach students. In this sense, Idahoans are in tune with the thinking of professional educators who

routinely insist that students must know how to ask questions, to evaluate information, and to rationally examine assumptions. The world has become more complicated and Idahoans recognize this.

But I think the education part is extremely valuable because it helps people learn critical thinking skills, problem solving, discipline as far as study habits, developing maturity ... I think people need to learn life skills, not just vocational skills.  
–Boise

High school did not make me think. And it did not make me consider things or ask questions. College did ... I learned things and asked questions and examined things in college. No one in high school ever had me do that. –Salmon

## The solid middle priorities

Three subject areas fall in the mid-tier of Idahoans' list of absolutely essential priorities: basic science, like biology (60%), U.S. history and civics (56%), and practical job skills for office or industry (54%).

I think history is very important, where you came from, and what happened in your past. –Coeur d'Alene

So where my kids go to school, they changed their name to STEM academy, which is science, technology, engineering, math. And they are trying to bring that back. Maybe instead of seeing science as boring, trying to make it more interesting for kids so they can apply more things in life. They are making the thinking in different ways. They are applying the things they are learning in the classroom.  
–Boise

# Less urgent subjects to teach

Idahoans also point to an interesting mix of subjects – from advanced science and math, like physics and calculus (42%), to literature, music, and art (41%), to sports and physical education (31%), to farming, agriculture, and forestry (29%) – that land at the lower-tier of their priorities.

The array of answers does not mean that a subject in the middle or lower tiers can or should be dropped altogether from the schools' offerings. What people typically mean is that some subjects should be left up to an individual student's choice, depending on one's interests, abilities, or passions. In essence, respondents took seriously the task of prioritizing the absolutely essential subjects.

I think students are more likely to succeed when they actually have an outlet for something, whether it be art or music or PE. They're more likely to succeed because they find something they like. –Pocatello

Each of the 10 subjects captures the loyalty of some segment of Idahoans while also triggering a countering refrain. For example, some perceived sports as a critical motivation to a portion of the student body, but others were baffled by what they see as the untoward emphasis sports teams receive in their community. Making it an option available for interested students without going overboard would be where most would end up.

I think we need to be thinking about the other students that actually look forward to that. That maybe that's something that they look forward to and drives their performance. So it's something that absolutely should be there, but it's not for everybody. It should be made available. –Salmon

The school decides they want to spend all that money hiring a better coach for their football team so they could get more championships. ... Sports are important, but

sometimes I think in our schools, sports take precedence over other things. It needs to be balanced. –Pocatello

Art, music, and literature faced the same sort of back and forth in the focus groups – those who could not see the relevance and importance of the arts would make these classes available but not mandatory, leaving it up to the students to choose. To others, these subjects are an integral part of what it means to be an educated person.

Boise is real [sic] committed to their music programs, so I felt my kids were fortunate, even though both of them ended up in IT, that they had access to the music programs. It was a huge development. It's lifelong ... learning music, learning the appreciation of having to study and master an instrument has helped them as they moved into their degrees of computer science and accounting. The music and art programs are always under pressure, but they are a critical part to the development of a good student and into their life as an adult. –Boise

I can't remember the last time I had to answer questions about Mozart. I think as you get older, you should have your choices. –Salmon

Some parents appreciated the fact that the schools could pick up the slack in areas in which they – as parents – are weak.

There's only so much time. I've got three kids in school, and there are only so many novels you can read in a year, but I appreciate the fact that my kids are constantly being pushed to read a classical novel. I don't have a list of the perfect classical novels, but I appreciate that my kids are being pushed to read them. –Boise

# CHAPTER 4

**IDAHOANS INSIST THAT STUDENT EFFORT AND GRIT ARE DECISIVE FACTORS IN STUDENT SUCCESS BUT ALSO BELIEVE THAT GOOD TEACHERS MATTER.**

Idahoans believe that hard work and persistence are key determinants of student success in school—and are crucial for schools to teach. They also believe that good teachers can transcend social problems and get even difficult students from tough homes to learn.

Student effort =  
Student achievement

Ordinary citizens may react positively or negatively to the litany of efforts to reform the K-12 system. But they virtually always start – and return – to a foremost conviction: that what matters most when it comes to learning is the attitude and effort that students bring to class. When asked to pick the most important of three factors that determine student achievement, a strong plurality of 49% says it is “the student’s own effort and motivation.”

**Fewer point to what reformers pay most attention to – only a third (34%) say it is “teacher quality and commitment,” and only 15% that it is “the school’s standards and expectations.” [Q30]**

It is clear from the comments of Idaho residents that they believe families and parents are closely connected to the attitudes and behavior students bring to class.

It’s based on motivation. What are they going to do with this high school diploma? Where are they going to go? If they don’t have it in their mindset...and being raised in a family where education is important no matter what you do. Like my dad always told me, I don’t care what you do as long as you do the best that you can. But we’re not instilling that in the kids today. –Boise

My sister is a teacher ... and there are so many parents that come in and say I don’t want my kids to have homework. You’re pushing my kids too hard. Back off on them. Then they come in and say You’re not helping them enough. She comes in before school, stays after, her lunch break. I don’t think we can blame the school. I think a lot of it is home and the parents. –Coeur d’Alene

# Teaching grit

Although Idahoans believe that the home is where students first learn such dispositions as grit, hard work, and responsibility, teaching these qualities is so important to them that they want the public schools to take on that mission as well. In fact, 81% say it's just as important for their schools to teach the value of such things as hard work, persistence, and responsibility as it is to teach academics. **Only 16% would prefer that the schools mostly focus on teaching academic subjects.** [Q28]

Success in life and in work, not just in school, rests in good part on having the right attitude toward work. Asked to pick the main factor out of four that would most help young people succeed in the work world, nearly half (49%) point to "having persistence and a strong work ethic." About 3 in 10 (31%) pick "getting a good education." **Far fewer say that success is determined by who you know (10%) or by "knowing how to deal with people well" (8%).** [Q10]

I own a body shop. I've had a hard time getting workers. Reliable help. I've had a couple of kids who graduated from high school who just don't work. They don't catch on. Work here two months, calling in sick three times. I think the work ethic starts at home, but I think learning it at high school to a point would help. –Salmon

A sense of professionalism. Can you handle not only the punctuality, can you handle the professionalism in the way you should handle yourself in a work environment? –Coeur d'Alene

## "They were great teachers."

Studies of teacher attitudes indicate that teachers agree with the public that how well students learn is strongly dependent upon how much they want

to learn.<sup>2</sup> In focus groups conducted for previous studies, classroom teachers often decry the pressure they face to deliver student achievement when students themselves are distracted, and their families are struggling with social and economic problems.

But Idahoans think that good teachers will make a difference, even when students are not ready to learn. **By a vast 80% to 17% margin, Idahoans believe that good teachers can successfully teach difficult students from neglectful homes, rejecting the view that it's unrealistic to expect this.** [Q31]

In the focus groups, people readily recalled personal experiences with teachers that demonstrated the power of teacher quality to bring students to success or failure. They believe that for better and for worse, teachers can make all the difference.

It's based on the teacher a lot. I noticed my son was accelerating really well in school, first, second grade. He got a bad teacher in third grade, and he hated school ... He had fallen below grade level, because that one teacher kept ragging on him. And then he got another teacher that really drove him, understood him. And now he's back up above grade level again. And he likes school again. –Pocatello

I grew up in a school that was rural, out in the middle of nowhere, but we had a phenomenal group of engineers and mathematicians come out of Buhl during a four or five year period. Well, the reason was a series of teachers. We were learning college level stuff. And those teachers were able to advance us well beyond what a Common Core or a standardized test could do. They were great teachers. And we all came back, and they saw how successful we were with our careers. They had an enormous pride in how many kids got into college, how many got into grad school. And then those teachers retired, and the program just went away. –Boise

<sup>2</sup>The MetLife Survey of The American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success, 2010. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED509650.pdf>

# CHARTERS

## CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE PRIZED BY IDAHOANS.

Idahoans prize charter schools and do so with greater conviction than citizens in other states. They support charters because they believe they are outperforming regular public schools, expecting parents and students to pull their weight, and specializing in promising content. Knowledge of charter schools varies greatly, but Idahoans who know more about them are more likely to favor them.

### Especially strong support in Idaho for charter schools

Idahoans broadly support charter schools, and the support in Idaho is consistently stronger compared with the views of people in other parts of the nation. **In this survey, 8 in 10 Idahoans (80%) favor charter schools described as “public schools that have a lot more control over their own budget, staff, and curriculum, and are free from many existing regulations.”** [Q44] Using the identically-worded survey question, a recent Colorado poll reports 67% favoring charter schools, a 2013 Maine poll reports 61% in favor, and a 2013 poll of Kansas City parents reports 63% in favor. Finally, a 2015 nationwide poll reports 53% of Americans in favor of charter schools.

### Idahoans like charters

Most Idahoans report that charter schools are operating in their local area, and most think that charters are outperforming the regular public schools.

**Two-thirds of Idahoans in the survey (67%) report that they know of a charter school operating in their area.** [Q42] **More importantly, these Idahoans believe that the charter schools offer a better education than the regular public schools - by a 58% to 23% margin.** [Q42A] For many Idahoans, the type of knowledge about charter schools that matters most comes from their own experiences and observations.

I think we have a rather limited view of what a charter school is. As far as I'm concerned, we have one in our community, and maybe just kind of a little peripheral info from other charter schools. So for me, there's no way that I could really speak to them in general. I just know that we have an excellent one here. –Salmon

In each focus group, one or two individuals would speak about charter schools from their direct experience, and their comments were almost invariably positive, even effusive.<sup>3</sup> They described schools that featured high expectations, engagement of children and parents, hands-on learning, and getting results. In the Boise focus group, a young college student talked about the comparative advantage of her old charter school over her friends' regular public school:

I read some of their books. ... Even their math books didn't explain when you're going to use it – just do it. [Our] school had different books where the problems were how you would actually use them. Even in science, we actually dissected things. –Boise

I have a lot of friends whose kids go to charter schools, and they love it, and their kids are thriving. They love learning. I teach Sunday school a lot, and I had the K-2 kids for a year, and kids from other schools, and I could see such a difference. Not just in reading level, but in the wanting to learn and engage in the learning. The kids in charter school were very much doing that, and the other kids were not doing it as much. It broke my heart. –Salmon

Several talked about their perceptions that charter schools have higher expectations and greater accountability.

<sup>3</sup> Recruiters in each of the site were asked to invite participants with an eye toward representative demographic characteristics such as age and education levels, not their experience or knowledge of charter schools.

My niece and nephew went to charter school, and their experience there has been amazing. They hold the parents more accountable for their homework. They get them involved. They have to do so

many hours of participating and field trips, chaperoning. ... My nephew is autistic, and my sister and brother-in-law are seeing improvement and seeing results. –Pocatello

I have personal experiences with friends and family that go to charter school here, and I think it is fantastic. ... They need to be put in an environment that can challenge them. There is a lot more homework. There is a lot more accountability on the actual child. ... I feel like it is a great way for parents to identify that special need in their children to make sure that when they go on to high school they can be as prepared as they need to be. You're not letting them slip through the cracks. –Coeur d'Alene

Different parts of the state have different perceptions of charter schools. The most notable difference is that the Southwestern Idaho residents have the most positive feelings toward charters and South-Central residents have the least. Residents of Southwest Idaho say that in their area the charter schools outperform the regular schools by a 65% to 19% margin. Those in South-Central Idaho split 44% to 45%. And while the difference between southwestern and south-central Idahoans in favoring charter schools is not dramatic (82% versus 73%, respectively), a look at those strongly favoring charter schools shows bigger differences (41% to 23%).

## Specialized content

Idahoans value the ability of charter schools to tailor their instruction to the interests of children more than they value the greater autonomy charters have over their budget and staff. When asked which of three features of charter schools most appeals to them, fully 62% pick the notion that charters "can specialize in teaching students

who have specific interests and talents.” **Only 19% say that what appeals to them most is their greater control over budgets, and only 15% say that it is the fact they can hire and fire staff more easily.** [Q46A]

One parent connected the conversation about charter schools’ autonomy in instruction to her children’s different learning styles.

I am raising three children with three different personalities and three very different learning styles. I, as a parent, would like to provide each one of my children the opportunity to learn in a system that they enjoy, that they want to learn in. If I have the arts-oriented child, then I would send him to the arts-oriented school. If I have the bookworm, I’m going to send him to the book school. –Salmon

I thought it was more for special needs. I thought it was for kids who couldn’t handle the public school.

But greater knowledge correlates with stronger support among Idahoans for charter schools - not weaker. While 70% of low-knowledge respondents favor charter schools, the percentage rises to 84% among high-knowledge Idahoans. Moreover, high-knowledge respondents are more likely to express intense advocacy for charter schools. While only 17% of low-knowledge Idahoans strongly favor charter schools, 55% of high-knowledge Idahoans do so, a difference of 38 percentage points.

## Higher knowledge corresponds with stronger support

Some might question the reliability of Idahoans’ support for charter schools, arguing that if people are relatively uninformed, their support may decay as they learn more about charters. As discussed above, Idahoans’ positive experiences with charters and their perceptions of strong performance seem to be the consequential drivers of charter school support. What’s more, this study also finds that the more Idahoans know about charter schools, the more they like them.

**Only 36% of Idahoans say they know a great deal or quite a bit about charter schools; 34% know only some; and 31% are low-knowledge, saying they know very little or nothing at all.** [Q43] A

short back-and-forth in the Coeur d’Alene focus group exemplifies how people’s guessing game about charter schools can sometimes be faulty:

It’s an elite school, right?

It’s when the parents pay for the student to go to school.

## IDAHOANS SUPPORT ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND THE IDAHO STANDARDS ACHIEVEMENT TESTS.

Idahoans express broad support for standards and the Idaho Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT) and think Idaho's schools should teach to the same academic standards as the rest of the nation. Still, many believe that too much is made of tests and that they are often not used to help students. In focus groups, the Common Core State Standards receive criticism and little praise.

National standards: "Why wouldn't that be a good thing?"

Idahoans believe their state's school system should be teaching to standards that are national and consistent from state to state. Almost 3 in 4 (74%) say the state's public schools should teach to the same academic standards as the rest of the country, because "students need the same basic knowledge wherever they are" - rather than teach to the state's own standards. **Only 23% want Idaho to teach to its own academic standards because "what Idaho's students need to learn is different from the rest of the U.S."** [Q34]

The focus group conversations showed support for the principles underlying national standards - especially when not tainted by enforcement from Washington, DC. It was intuitively appealing to people that young adults should be able to attend a different school system or a college in a different state and be academically prepared. They thought that while any given place may have unique interests and needs, in subjects like math, reading, and writing, the standards should be essentially the same wherever you are.

Why wouldn't that be a good thing?  
Because if you went from Idaho and you decided to go to college in Nebraska, at least making change would be the same way. You can have your specialty and this, that, or the other, but at least there would be common ground. -Coeur d'Alene



I like the idea that a lot of your basics are going to be the same. But in NYC, why in the world are they going to teach agriculture classes? Out here, those are very relevant. Your basics are probably going to be the same. There are certain math formulas and some of your science stuff—those are going to be the same no matter where you're at.  
—Salmon

## Do standardized tests serve the needs of children or adults?

Doubts about the virtues of testing are rooted in several beliefs. There is suspicion that standardized tests are driving instruction or crowding out real teaching; that the tests are unreliable because some youngsters do not test well; that the tests do not measure real learning. But what appears to be most damaging is the perception that standardized test results are seen to be serving the interests of adults who want to hold schools and teachers accountable, not to help children.

They're looking at just the test, and there's more to education than the tests that are taken. I sat through a lot of ISATs, and yeah, you can kind of see where knowledge is, but education is not just based on a test. You can't measure it by sitting everybody through a test every year 'cause you teach to the test. —Pocatello

And it was a whole different way of accounting, I think to make schools accountable for those scores. So that for me was the starting point of schools starting to educate for tests. —Boise

The only time I hear from the school is, "Hey, our state test is coming up tomorrow." The only time I got a phone call from them was to make sure your kid gets enough sleep for the test tomorrow. —Coeur d'Alene

The state's school system collects, disseminates, and compares test results, but there is little sense that the information is used to improve instruction or outcomes for Idaho's students.

Well, what are the schools doing with that information? When they say this is the statistic, there's a problem, do they address the problem? It's like watching your daughter ride a bike, and if she's not

## Support for ISAT

Support for academic standards goes beyond the conceptual level, as Idahoans appear to clearly support the state-level testing that goes along with it. **For example, Idahoans favor the state's ISAT exam by a 67% to 30% margin. [Q35] Moreover, a 56% majority opposes letting parents decide whether to have their children take the ISAT for math and reading – although 42% would let parents decide. [Q36]**

But alongside the seemingly strong support for the ISAT captured in the survey findings, the focus group discussions signaled that equivocation and resistance toward standardized testing is just beneath the surface – especially among Idahoans who feel its importance is exaggerated.

I believe in testing because I think you do need that information to find out if kids are comprehending that information. But the question is, are we testing too much and putting all that pressure on teachers to teach to the exam? —Pocatello

Some questioning of how useful standardized test results really are is picked up in the survey as well. **More than half of Idahoans (54%) believe that "too much is made of" comparisons of school districts by test scores, graduation rates, and college attendance rates, while 44% believe these comparisons are valuable. [Q33]**

getting that forward pedal, and you don't do anything about it, then she's not gonna get it. –Coeur d'Alene

Yes, they are doing the tests, and they are letting you know how your kids are doing. But at the same time, if your kids aren't learning at their level, they keep moving them to the next grade. So what's the point? They used to hold you back one more year if you didn't make it. And right now, they are just moving them forward. –Boise

I have a good feeling about the school – their communication with me as a parent is every day. You get emails every day. Great communication between the teachers, issues are addressed right away. I feel like for you to even know what's going on in the school or how your kid is doing, you need to have that communication. And I love that this school reaches out to me. I don't need to be the one to reach out. –Coeur d'Alene

I think testing, scores, and all this is a bunch of crap. I think if you go in the classroom and ask the teacher, has my child improved from the first of the year to the end of the year? That is how you're going to be able to score how your child is doing. –Salmon

## Different starting points

While leaders routinely marshal statewide test results to underscore the need for school reform, test scores are less compelling to ordinary citizens when they evaluate their public schools.

Two examples from the data in this study illustrate how the starting points of leaders and citizens can be surprisingly different. Survey respondents who are critics of their local schools are more likely to believe that too much is made of test scores and graduation rates. A 62% majority of those giving the public schools a D or F grade say too much is made of these comparisons, compared with only 49% of those grading the public schools an A or B. Idahoans who are critical of their public schools are also less likely to support the ISAT (55%) than those giving the schools an A or B grade (73%).

The heavy reliance on test scores among leaders stands in sharp contrast to the variety of indicators ordinary citizens use to evaluate whether students are learning and how well schools are teaching. As discussed earlier in this report, people are more likely to use real-life observations (e.g., Can youngsters make change? Can they succeed in the workplace?) or word-of-mouth reputation to build their impression of how well their schools are doing. To parents, for example, a key way to evaluate a school is the quality of communication they get about their child's progress, especially from teachers.

## Resistance to the Common Core

In the focus groups, some of the very people who supported national standards also expressed a strong dislike for the Common Core State Standards.

A number of participants who approved of the concept of national standards, for example, were convinced that the Common Core State Standards had been imposed on Idaho by the federal government.

I think having some sort of uniformity is good if we really are going to have an interconnected country. ... For example, in my business I regularly do work outside of state, and I think some uniformity would be OK. I don't think we need Common Core to enforce those standards. –Boise

There's nothing wrong with the principle. It's the application of it where it gets hung up. If we can keep that decision as local as possible, in a state like Idaho, that's gonna work fine. If folks from DC start telling us what our kids need to know, that's gonna be a problem. –Boise

But an even stronger source of antagonism is that many only see the Common Core as a standardized test – and one that has gone wrong. Given pre-existing suspicions that standardized tests are getting too much emphasis, identifying the Common Core as mostly about a test – and to some, a very lengthy and difficult to understand test – does not bode well. Here is a small sampling of focus group participant reactions to the question of what the Common Core means to them:

Really structured testing. –Boise

It's a universal test, and that's what Common Core is. I think that's what we're all afraid of. ... And that's where the schools really had to adjust their education to hit those scores. –Boise

If you're discussing Common Core. ... I'm against it. ... My kids just took the test last week. They won't tell the parents what's on the test. They won't tell the teachers what's on the test. Nobody else knows except kids taking the tests and evidently people grading the tests. I don't think that's right. –Salmon

to be able to apply it, not just figure out a formula and call it good. –Salmon

Moreover, people who might view multiple-choice exams with suspicion did not give the Common Core credit for having tests that require students to explain how they arrive at their answers. In fact, its testing regimen is perceived as pushing students toward rote learning and teachers into standardized teaching. One parent anticipated that the school's multiple-choice standardized exams would squash the love of learning she had worked so hard to instill in her kids.

It scares the crap out of me; I've got two little boys, and I can't guarantee they're going to do what I did. ... I loved school. They love to learn, but they are taught in a variety of ways [at home], in applicable situations by colorful examples and so far, with enthusiasm. But if I thought they were going to be funneled into standardized testing, they'll fail. –Salmon

## Common Core: Little credit, lots of blame

Recall that 75% of Idahoans believe “critical thinking” is absolutely essential for their public schools to teach. Yet not one of the nearly 50 people interviewed in the focus groups even mentioned that critical thinking might be a goal of the Common Core State Standards. Many people spoke about the need to teach students to solve real-world problems using hands-on learning and to be engaged in their own education. But in a stark irony, virtually no one in the focus groups thought that the Common Core's aim was to bring these things to classrooms.

If my kids graduate and all they are is book smart, to me that's no good. My kids need to be life smart; they need to understand how this applies to their world. They need

# CONCLUSION

Those who care about the success of Idaho's public schools should pay careful attention to the survey's reputational indicators – they signal serious trouble in the making. More than three in four parents would opt out of the traditional public school system and send their kids elsewhere if they could. Less than half of residents would recommend their local public schools to a family looking for a top-notch education. Idahoans do not believe the school system is completely off track, but they are dissatisfied with it and believe it needs to change.

The impetus for school reform, however, will probably not come from parents and ordinary citizens themselves. In the focus groups, active parents described how they worked around weaknesses in the schools, lobbying to move their kids out of classrooms with particularly bad teachers, augmenting instructional weaknesses with work at home, and moving their kids to charter schools when that's an option. The micro-adjustments that parents – and the traditional school system – make effectively function as relief valves, easing disaffection before it develops into a force of its own. Those expecting dissatisfied parents to coalesce into a political force that will agitate for change will probably be disappointed.

Leadership on improving the schools may be necessary. But it is essentially up for grabs since Idahoans cannot point to one single institution they see as responsible for improving the education system. In this study, when asked which level of government should take the most responsibility for improving Idaho's public school system, 34% point to the Department of Education, 31% to individual school districts, 20% to the Idaho legislature, and 11% to the Governor's office.

Those who would take the lead in improving Idaho's schools might keep a few things in mind about how the public approaches the public schools:

- Unlike policymakers and education leaders, citizens will not invest serious energy in understanding the intricacies of policy initiatives. By default, their judgment will rest on their intuition, their pragmatic sense of results, or the stories their friends and family tell them. For example, Idahoans prize charter schools because they seem to be working well and providing promising content to students. The principles of charter schools explain only a small measure of their appeal.
- Similarly, it may be useful for leaders to remember that while they focus on the operation of the education system, citizens focus on the education of kids. To improve outcomes, leaders might launch system-wide initiatives to evaluate the schools, mandate standards and accountability, or change instructional techniques. But citizens think in terms of the motives and responsibilities of individuals, believing that education works when students are willing to work hard in class, when families do their part at home, and when teachers love their work. It's risky to skip over their starting point, and start a conversation by jumping straight to expert-designed education proposals.

Common Core's struggle to gain traction with the public is instructive because it shows the hazard of leaving the public behind. On the one hand, advocates appear to have carefully prepared the education field for its arrival. They developed the standards, recruited political support, championed professional development, and promoted the design of new curriculum and tests. On the other hand, they appear to have invested very little care in describing to the public the good it might do for students. Strikingly, not one of the more than 40 focus group participants rallied in defense of the initiative when it came under fire. This despite the fact that some of the initiative's key components – for example, critical thinking or national standards – resonate well with the public.

A weakening of the lines of communication between the public schools and ordinary citizens means a growing disconnect. As one said:

**I was disenfranchised from public education ... it's so hard to make that connect between checking that box on a ballot that says, yes, I'm going to fund this, and what's actually coming out of the high schools. There's no connect between the two. Even today.... I have no idea what's going on at the schools. -Boise**

Even when leaders are absolutely convinced that their initiative will improve the schools, they would be wise to first listen carefully to the concerns of ordinary citizens, explain their intentions – and demonstrate the benefits for students. The effort they make can create a reservoir of public trust and support that will sustain the initiative over the long haul.

# IDAHO LANDMARK SURVEY

## for the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation

This study is based on a representative cross-section of 1,000 Idahoans 18 years of age or older. The margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points. Responses may not total 100% due to rounding. Combining answer categories may produce slight discrepancies between the numbers in these survey results and numbers in the report.

### SURVEY FIELDLED ON TELEPHONE SEPTEMBER 2 - 21, 2015

(Percent Responding)

#### GENDER

- 46** Male
- 54** Female

#### 1. Which of these is the MOST important issue facing Idaho today in your view? Is it:

- 40** The economy
- 9** The environment
- 50** Public education
- 2** DON'T KNOW

#### 2. Which comes closest to your view about Idaho's public school system?

- 7** It's in very good shape and needs little change
- 65** It's OK but it could be a lot better with some changes
- 26** There's so much wrong with it that a complete overhaul is necessary
- 3** DON'T KNOW

#### 3. In your view, which level of government should take the MOST responsibility for improving Idaho's public school system? Should it be:

- 31** Individual school districts
- 34** The Idaho's Department of Education
- 20** The Idaho Legislature
- 11** The Governor's office
- 5** DON'T KNOW

#### 4. Which comes closer to your view? If Idaho spent more money on its public schools:

- 44** The money would actually get to the classrooms and improve education
- 51** The money would actually get lost along the way
- 5** DON'T KNOW

Now I'm going to read you some statements and ask you how close each one comes to your view.

#### 5. Idaho ends up losing many of its best and brightest young people because there aren't enough good jobs for them – does this come very close, somewhat close, not too close, or not close at all to your view?

- 78** Very + Somewhat close
- 40** Very close
- 37** Somewhat close
- 11** Not too close
- 9** Not close at all
- 2** DON'T KNOW

#### 6. If Idaho had better public schools, it would attract more companies and professionals, and its economy would be stronger – does this come very close, somewhat close, not too close, or not close at all to your view?

- 79** Very + Somewhat close
- 43** Very close
- 36** Somewhat close
- 12** Not too close
- 8** Not close at all
- 1** DON'T KNOW

#### 7. Today's young people need to continue their education past high school – it's hard to get a good job with just a high school diploma – does this come very close, somewhat close, not too close, or not close at all to your view?

- 89** Very + Somewhat close
- 68** Very close
- 21** Somewhat close
- 5** Not too close
- 5** Not close at all
- 1** DON'T KNOW

8. Some people may look down at trade or technical schools, but they are excellent options for high school graduates – does this come very close, somewhat close, not too close, or not close at all to your view?

- 92 Very + Somewhat close
- 66 Very close
- 26 Somewhat close
- 4 Not too close
- 3 Not close at all
- 1 DON'T KNOW

[THERE IS NO Q9]

10. Here are four things that could help young people succeed in the work world. Which ONE do you think is generally MOST important?

- 31 Getting a good education
- 49 Having persistence and a strong work ethic
- 8 Knowing how to deal with people well
- 10 Knowing the right people and having the right connections
- 1 DON'T KNOW

11. Which comes closer to your view:

- 49 The most important purpose of education is to prepare students for the work world and give them job skills
- 50 Education is valuable for its own sake – students need to become well-educated and well-rounded citizens
- 2 DON'T KNOW

12. Are you the parent or guardian of any children under 18 years old, or not?

- 37 Yes, parent or guardian of children under 18
- 63 No

13. Thinking about your oldest child who is under 18, which of these do you think would be best for this child after he or she finishes high school?

- 65 To go to a four-year college
- 14 To go to a community college
- 13 To go to a trade school
- 3 To get a job
- 5 DON'T KNOW

Base: Parent of child under 18 N=359

[Q15 COMES BEFORE Q14]

15. If you were asked for advice by a family that wanted top-notch public schools for their children, would you encourage them to move to your school district, or would you tell them they might be better off looking elsewhere?

- 48 Encourage them to move to district
- 42 Tell them they might be better off looking elsewhere
- 10 DON'T KNOW

14. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools in your community?

- 42 A + B
- 6 A
- 36 B
- 35 C
- 13 D
- 5 Fail
- 5 DON'T KNOW

16. Which statement is more accurate for the students graduating from the public schools in your community? A high school diploma:

- 45 Is no guarantee that the typical student has learned the basics
- 53 Means that the typical student has at least learned the basics
- 3 DON'T KNOW

[THERE IS NO Q17]

Q18-27

Here are some things the public schools in your community could teach students. Please tell me if each is absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important in your view.

18. Advanced science and math, like physics and calculus – is this absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important for the public schools in your community to teach students?

- 42 Absolutely essential
- 49 Important but not essential
- 8 Not too important
- 1 DON'T KNOW

19. Basic reading, writing, and math – is this absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important for the public schools in your community to teach students?

- 94 Absolutely essential
- 5 Important but not essential
- Not too important
- DON'T KNOW

20. Basic science, like biology – is this absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important for the public schools in your community to teach students?

- 60 Absolutely essential
- 35 Important but not essential
- 5 Not too important
- 1 DON'T KNOW

21. Computers and technology – is this absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important for the public schools in your community to teach students?

- 77 Absolutely essential
- 21 Important but not essential
- 1 Not too important
- DON'T KNOW

22. Critical thinking – is this absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important for the public schools in your community to teach students?

- 75 Absolutely essential
- 20 Important but not essential
- 3 Not too important
- 2 DON'T KNOW

23. Farming, agriculture, and forestry – is this absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important for the public schools in your community to teach students?

- 29 Absolutely essential
- 58 Important but not essential
- 13 Not too important
- 1 DON'T KNOW

24. Literature, music, and art – is this absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important for the public schools in your community to teach students?

- 41 Absolutely essential
- 48 Important but not essential
- 10 Not too important
- DON'T KNOW

25. Practical job skills for office or industry – is this absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important for the public schools in your community to teach students?

- 54 Absolutely essential
- 40 Important but not essential
- 5 Not too important
- 1 DON'T KNOW

26. Sports and physical education – is this absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important for the public schools in your community to teach students?

- 31 Absolutely essential
- 55 Important but not essential
- 14 Not too important
- DON'T KNOW

27. U.S. history and civics – is this absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important for the public schools in your community to teach students?

- 56 Absolutely essential
- 39 Important but not essential
- 4 Not too important
- 1 DON'T KNOW

28. Do you think that the public schools in your community should mostly focus on teaching students academic subjects, or do you think it's just as important for them to teach the value of such things as hard work, persistence, and responsibility?

- 16 Mostly focus on academic subjects
- 81 Just as important to teach the value of such things
- 3 DON'T KNOW

[THERE IS NO Q29]



30. Which of these three factors would you say is MOST important in determining student achievement? Is it:

- 49 The student's own effort and motivation
- 15 The school's standards and expectations
- 34 Teacher quality and commitment
- 3 DON'T KNOW

31. Do you think that good teachers can successfully teach difficult students who come from neglectful homes, or do you think that it's unrealistic to expect even good teachers to overcome these challenges?

- 80 Good teachers can successfully teach difficult students...
- 17 It's unrealistic to expect even good teachers to overcome these challenges
- 3 DON'T KNOW

32. When it comes to evaluating Idaho's high school graduates, whose viewpoint would you be MOST interested in hearing?

- 22 The colleges that enroll high school graduates
- 50 The employers who hire high school graduates
- 25 The teachers who taught them
- 3 DON'T KNOW

33. School districts in Idaho are often compared on things such as standardized test scores, graduation rates, and percent going to college. Do you think these comparisons are valuable, or do you think too much is made of them?

- 44 These comparisons are valuable
- 54 Too much is made of them
- 2 DON'T KNOW

34. Do you think that Idaho public schools should:

- 74 Teach to the same academic standards as the rest of the country because students need the same basic knowledge wherever they are
- 23 Teach to the state's own academic standards because what Idaho's students need to learn is different from the rest of the U.S.
- 4 DON'T KNOW

35. As you may know, Idaho has adopted the I-SAT, the Idaho Standards Achievement Test. The test satisfies the federal government's requirement that all students be tested in math and reading each year in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school. How much do you support or oppose the Idaho Standards Achievement Test?

- 67 Strongly + Somewhat support
- 23 Strongly support
- 44 Somewhat support
- 18 Somewhat oppose
- 13 Strongly oppose
- 3 DON'T KNOW

36. Some people say that ALL students should take the I-SAT in math and reading. Others say that parents should decide whether their children take these tests. How much do you support or oppose letting parents decide whether to have their children take these tests?

- 42 Strongly + Somewhat support
- 19 Strongly support
- 23 Somewhat support
- 20 Somewhat oppose
- 36 Strongly oppose
- 2 DON'T KNOW

#### Q37-41

When it comes to each of the following, do you think Idaho should expand, reduce, or leave things as they are?

37. High school internships and work experience – should Idaho expand this, reduce it, or leave things as they are?

- 80 Expand
- 1 Reduce
- 14 Leave things as they are
- 5 DON'T KNOW

[THERE IS NO Q38]

39. Online learning – should Idaho expand this, reduce it, or leave things as they are?

- 48 Expand
- 12 Reduce
- 35 Leave things as they are
- 5 DON'T KNOW

40. Pre-kindergarten education – should Idaho expand this, reduce it, or leave things as they are?

- 49 Expand
- 8 Reduce
- 38 Leave things as they are
- 6 DON'T KNOW

41. Vocational education classes – should Idaho expand this, reduce it, or leave things as they are?

- 75 Expand
- 1 Reduce
- 18 Leave things as they are
- 6 DON'T KNOW

42. As far as you know, is there a charter school in your area, or not?

- 67 Yes, charter school in area
- 21 No
- 12 DON'T KNOW

Q42A. Which do you think generally offers a better education in your area? Is it:

- 58 The charter schools
- 23 The regular public schools
- 3 (Volunteered) No difference
- 4 (Volunteered) Depends
- 13 DON'T KNOW

Base: Charter School in Area/N=672

43. How much do you know about charter schools?

- 36 A great deal + Quite a bit
- 8 A great deal
- 27 Quite a bit
- 34 Only some
- 31 Very little + Nothing at all
- 22 Very little
- 9 Nothing at all
- DON'T KNOW

44. Charter schools are public schools that have a lot more control over their own budget, staff, and curriculum, and are free from many existing regulations. In general, how much do you favor or oppose charter schools?

- 80 Strongly + Somewhat favor
- 36 Strongly favor
- 44 Somewhat favor
- 12 Somewhat oppose
- 4 Strongly oppose
- 4 DON'T KNOW

[THERE IS NO Q45]

46A. Here are three ways charter schools are different from regular public schools. Please tell me which is the MOST appealing to you.

- 19 Charter schools have more control over their budgets
- 62 Charter schools can specialize in teaching students who have specific interests and talents
- 15 Charter schools can hire and fire staff more easily
- 2 (Volunteered) None are appealing
- 3 DON'T KNOW

[THERE IS NO Q47-51]

52. Have any of your children ever attended a:

- 11 Private non-religious school
- 15 Private religious school
- 16 Charter school
- 73 Regular public school
- 5 DON'T KNOW

Base: Parent of child under 18 N=359

(Does not total to 100 due to multiple answer categories.)

53. If money were not an issue and you could choose from all of the following options, would you prefer that your child attend a:

- 22 Private non-religious school
- 25 Private religious school
- 26 Charter school
- 26 Regular public school
- 2 DON'T KNOW

Base: Parent of child under 18 N=359

54. Where do you get the MOST useful information about what's happening in the public schools in your community?

- 24 From news you get from TV, radio, or newspapers
- 29 From conversations with people you know
- 31 From your own experiences and observations
- 16 From teachers
- 1 DON'T KNOW

[Q62 is out of order]

62. Would you say the area you live in is:

- 32 Rural
- 33 A small town
- 13 Suburban
- 22 Urban or city
- 1 DON'T KNOW

[THERE IS NO Q55]

56. What is the highest level of school you have completed?

- 3 Less than high school
- 21 High school graduate
- 29 Some college or trade school, no degree
- 12 Associate's degree/2-year degree
- 23 Bachelor's degree/4-year degree
- 12 Graduate degree
- DON'T KNOW

57. Please stop me when I read your age category.

- 13 18 to 24
- 18 25 to 34
- 17 35 to 44
- 19 45 to 54
- 16 55 to 64
- 10 65 to 74
- 7 75 or older

58. Do you consider yourself to be:

(Does not total to 100 due to multiple answer categories.)

- 90 White
- 10 Hispanic
- 3 Native American or Pacific Islander
- 1 Black or African American
- 1 Asian
- 2 Something else (specify)

59. I'm going to read some ranges of annual household income. Please stop me when I read the one that best describes your TOTAL household income in 2014.

- 16 Under \$25,000
- 23 \$25,000 to less than \$45,000
- 27 \$45,000 to less than \$75,000
- 16 \$75,000 to less than \$100,000
- 16 \$100,000 or more
- 2 DON'T KNOW

# METHODOLOGY

The findings in Idaho Ready for Change are based on 1,000 interviews conducted by telephone with a randomly selected representative sample of Idaho adults 18 years old and older in September 2015. The survey was preceded by six focus groups with education leaders and members of the general public.

## The Survey

Telephone interviews with a randomly selected cross-section of Idaho adults (n=1,000) took place between September 2 and September 21, 2015. The average length of an interview was 16.5 minutes. The survey's margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. The margin of error increases for sub-groups within the sample; for example, the statewide random sample generated 359 completed interviews with parents. When the study reports the views of parents - a sub-group of the total sample- the margin of error to take into account is plus or minus 5 percentage points.

To ensure a random sample of households, the study employed a dual-frame landline/cell phone telephone design. According to a recent issue of "National Health Statistics Reports", 52.7 percent of Idaho adults live in wireless-only households.<sup>4</sup> For the landline interviews, a standard random-digit-dialing technology was used. Every household in Idaho, theoretically, had an equal chance of being selected, including those with unlisted numbers. For the cell phone interviews, active numbers were dialed. A total of 600 interviews were completed on landlines, and 400 on cell phones.

To ensure that Idahoans of Hispanic heritage would be sufficiently represented in the sample, additional telephone interviews were conducted using listed sample with Hispanic surnames. Of the 71 interviews with Hispanics, 22 were garnered via the random sample and 49 from the listed sample. Overall survey data are weighted to population parameters for age to account for over-representation of older adults in the sampling frame.

To minimize non-response bias, interviews were conducted on each day of the week and at different times of the day. If a respondent indicated a better time for the interview, callbacks were made accordingly. Typically, between three and six attempts were made for each unique telephone number in the sample.

## The Questionnaire

As in all surveys, non-sampling sources of error could also have an impact on survey results. The survey instrument used in this study was extensively pre-tested to ensure that the language was accessible and appropriate to members of the general public, including those who may not be familiar with the topic of public schools. Questions were randomized, and answer categories rotated in an effort to minimize non-sampling sources of error. The questionnaire was designed by the FDR Group, and all interpretation of the data reflected in this report was done by the FDR Group.

The telephone interviews and data collection were provided by Opinion Access Corp. located in New York.

## The Focus Groups

In February 2015, two focus groups were conducted with leadership: one consisted of influentials from a cross-section of nonprofit organizations, including business, higher education,

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Released 12/2014

government, and parent groups; and one with current or former K-12 officials. The purpose of these focus groups with leadership was to gain an understanding of how influential people talk about the issues facing Idaho and its K-12 education system. The discussions were not recorded and participants were promised confidentiality. A total of 16 participated in the leadership focus groups.

In addition, four focus groups with members of the general public were conducted in May 2015, one each in Boise, Salmon, Pocatello, and Coeur d’Alene. The focus group participants were carefully recruited to represent the socioeconomic demographics of the respective communities, and they included both men and women, mothers and fathers, people of different races/ethnicities, older and younger, college educated and not. The purpose of these focus group discussions with the general public was to gauge understanding of the issues at hand and the energy these issues tap. The groups were also useful in testing and developing the survey instrument and especially for avoiding question wording that was too wonkish or heavy-handed. A total of 44 participated in the general public focus groups.

Focus groups allow for an in-depth, qualitative exploration of the dynamics underlying people’s attitudes towards complex issues. Quotes from the focus groups are used throughout the report to give voice to attitudes captured statistically through the survey interviews.

## Characteristics of the Sample

The following table compares demographics of the Idaho population with the weighted and unweighted survey samples.

	Population%	Weighted%	Unweighted%
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	50	46	44
Female	50	54	56

[U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey]

	Population%	Weighted%	Unweighted%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
Hispanic	12	10	7
White	94	90	92

[U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 State and County QuickFacts]

	Population%	Weighted%	Unweighted%
<b>Education</b>			
High school or less	39	24	23
Some college, 3-year degree	36	41	40
4-year or graduate degree	25	35	37

[U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey (for population 25 years or older)]

	Population%	Weighted%	Unweighted%
<b>Age</b>			
18-34	31	31	17
35-54	35	36	42
55-64	16	16	18
65+	17	17	23

[“Population Demographics for Idaho 2014 & 2015,” Suburban Stats (content provided by U.S. Census Bureau 2010-2015)]

	Population%	Weighted%	Unweighted%
<b>Urbanicity</b>			
Urban	66	66	66
Non-urban	34	34	34

[“Rural Idaho since the Recession,” Idaho at a Glance, August 2015, Vol. 6, No. 2]

	Population%	Weighted%	Unweighted%
<b>Region</b>			
North	20	25	27
East	23	22	22
Southwest	45	42	41
South-Central	12	12	11

[U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 State and County QuickFacts]

# HIGHLIGHTS

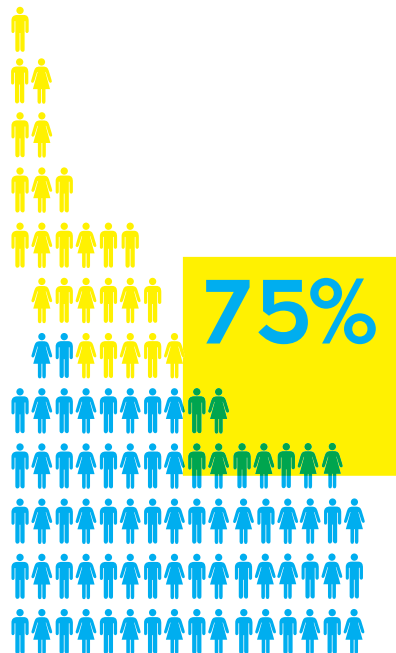
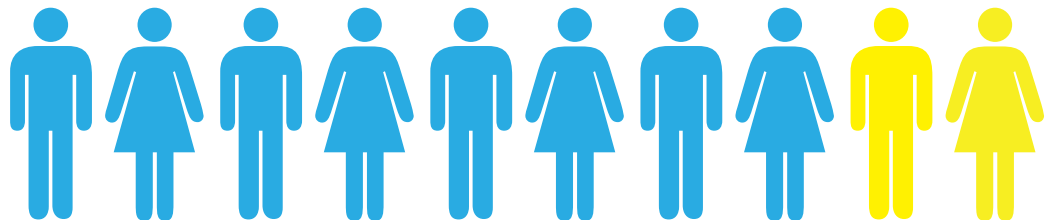
## RE//STUDENTS

**Q:**

When it comes to each of the following, do you think Idaho should expand, reduce, or leave things as they are...  
High school internships and work experience – should Idaho expand this, reduces it, or leave things as they are?

### REAL-WORLD LEARNING AND CRITICAL THINKING ARE ESSENTIAL:

**8 in 10 Idahoans** want to expand high school internships and work-experience opportunities.

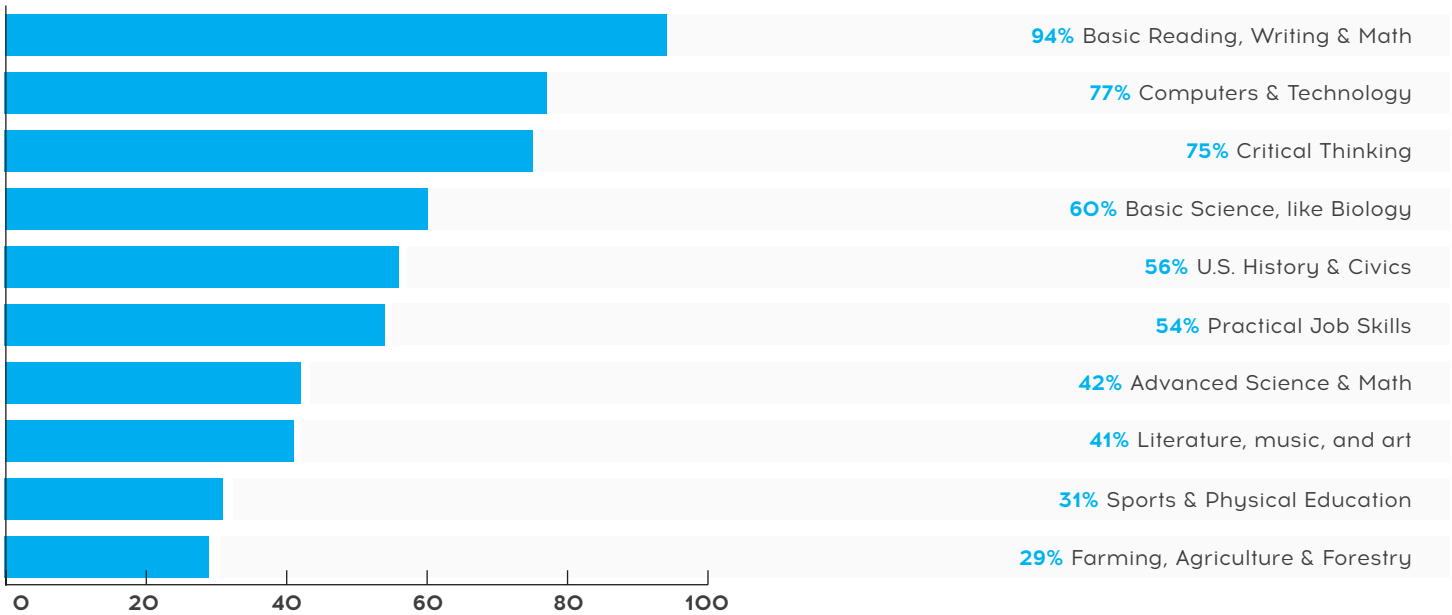


**75% of Idahoans** believe it is absolutely essential that students be taught critical thinking; only 29% believe that teaching farming, agriculture, and forestry is absolutely essential.

## ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL:

**Q:**

Here are some things the public schools in your community could teach students. Please tell me if each is absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important in your view.

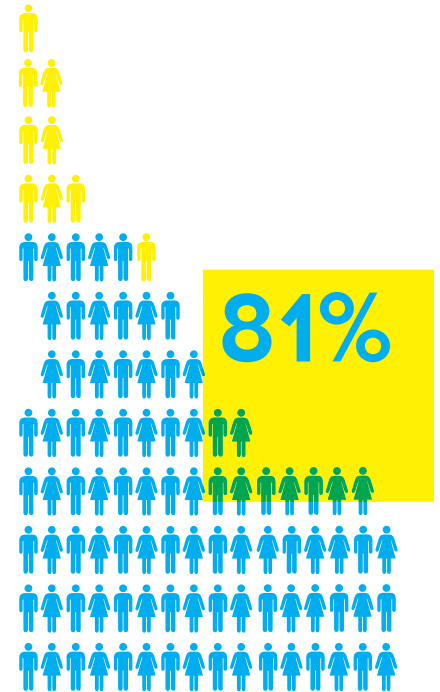


**Q:**

Do you think that the public schools in your community should mostly focus on teaching students academic subjects, or do you think it's just as important for them to teach the value of such things as hard work, persistence, and responsibility?

**GRIT & WORK ETHIC MATTER IN PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE:**

**81% of Idahoans** believe teaching students to work hard and be responsible is as important as teaching academic subjects.



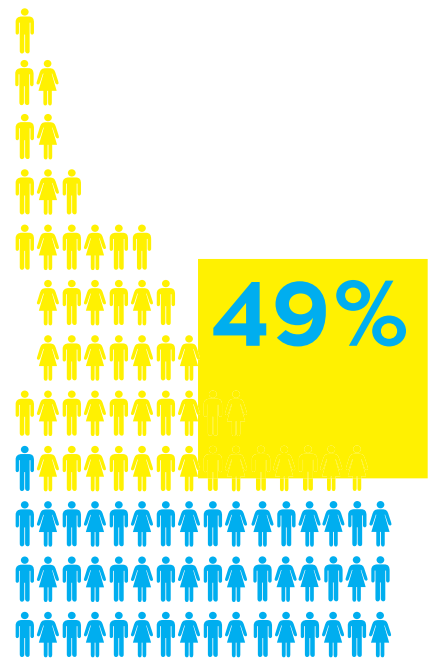
**Q:**

Which of these three factors would you say is MOST important in determining student achievement? Is it:

- The student's own effort and motivation
- The school's standards and expectations
- Teacher quality and commitment

**WHY FUTURE PREPARATION MATTERS:**

**49% of Idahoans** pick students' own effort and motivation as more important in determining achievement than teacher quality (34%) or school standards (15%).





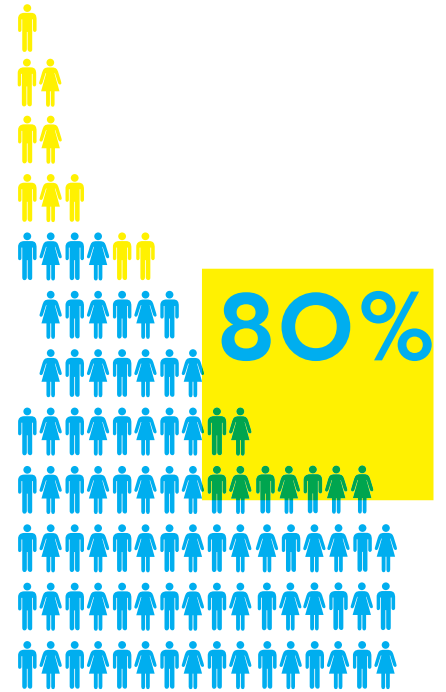
# RE//SCHOOLS

**Q:**

Do you think that good teachers can successfully teach difficult students who come from neglectful homes, or do you think that it's unrealistic to expect even good teachers to overcome these challenges?

## TEACHERS ARE VITAL FOR SUCCESS:

**80% of Idahoans** think even difficult students from neglectful homes can be successfully taught if they have good teachers.

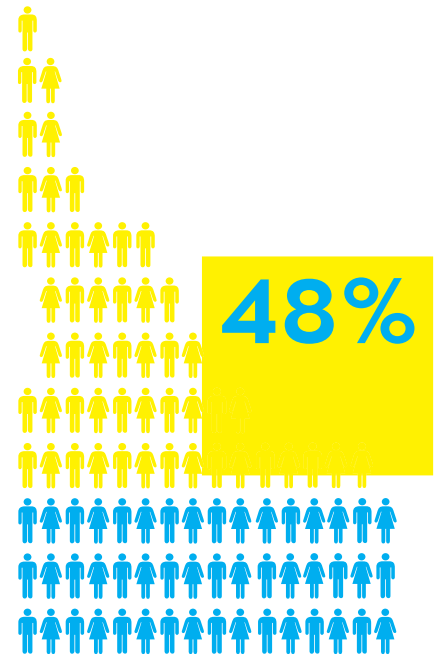


**Q:**

If you were asked for advice by a family that wanted top-notch public schools for their children, would you encourage them to move to your school district, or would you tell them they might be better off looking elsewhere?

## REGULAR PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE NOT MEASURING UP:

**Only 48% of Idahoans** would encourage a family looking for top-notch public schools to move to their school district.

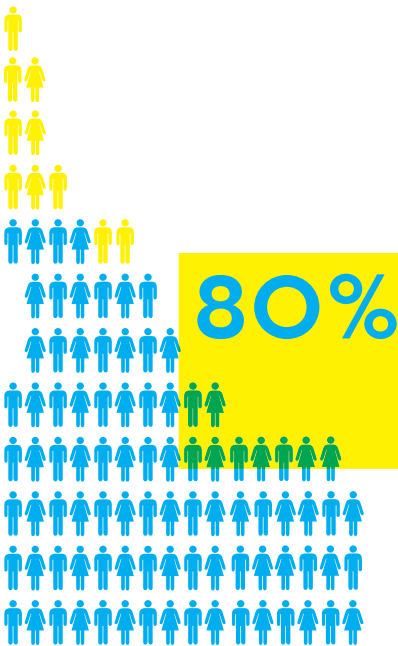


**Q:** Do you think that Idaho's public schools should:

Teach to the same academic standards as the rest of the country because students need the same basic knowledge wherever they are OR teach to the state's own academic standards because what Idaho's students need to learn is different from the rest of the U.S.?

**IDAHO STUDENTS MUST MEET NATIONAL STANDARDS:**

**3 in 4 Idahoans** believe their **public schools** should teach to the same academic standards as the rest of the nation.



**Q:**

Charter schools are public schools that have a lot more control over their own budget, staff, and curriculum, and are free from many existing regulations. In general, how much do you favor or oppose charter schools?

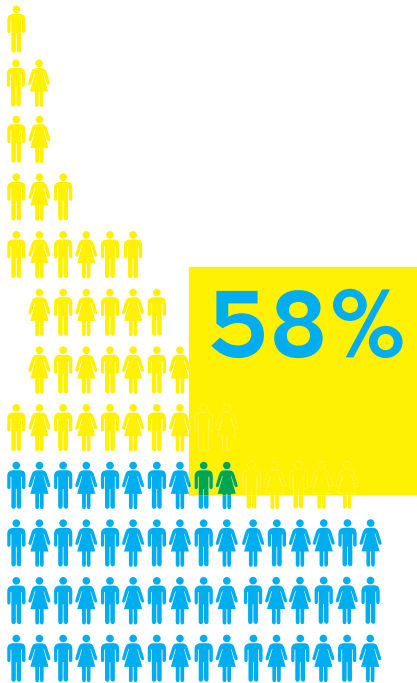
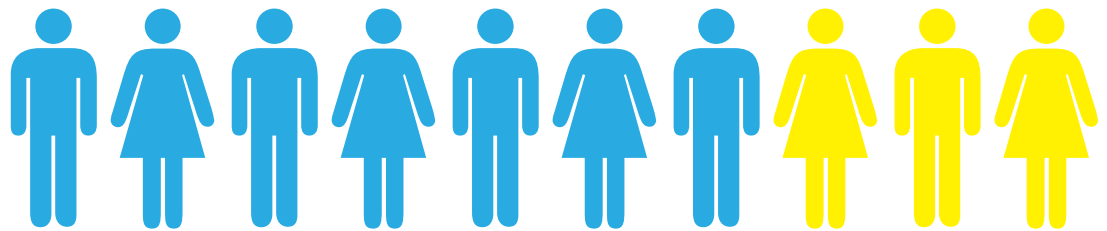
**80% of Idahoans** favor charter schools.

Q:

If money were not an issue and you could choose from all of the following options, would you prefer that your child attend a: private nonreligious school, private religious school, charter school, or regular public school?

**LEARNING OPTIONS ARE A MUST-HAVE:**

If they had the choice, more than **7 in 10 parents** would choose a school other than a regular public school for their kids.



Q:

Which do you think generally offers a better education in your area? Is it the charter schools or the regular public schools?

**58% of Idahoans** with charter schools in their area **believe charters offer a better education than regular public schools.**

