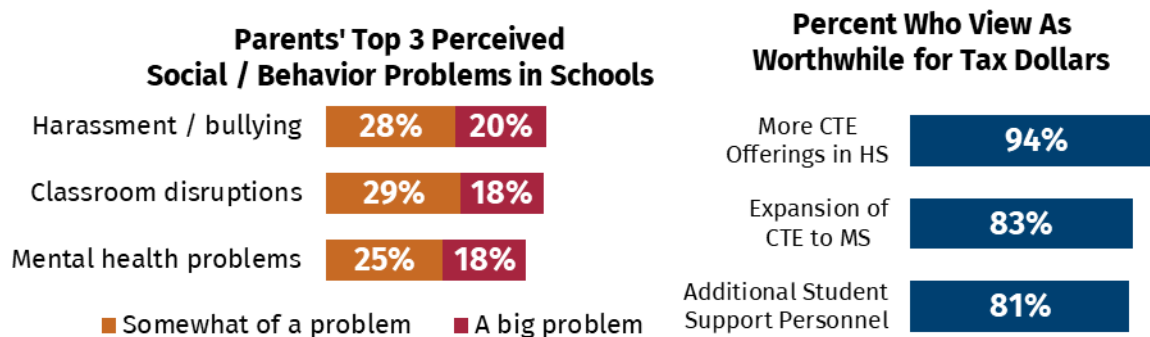


## Executive Summary

The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) launched the *Education Survey for Family and Community* to coincide with the West Virginia’s Voice Education Forums. The results suggest general satisfaction with public schools in West Virginia. However, responses from more than 4,000 West Virginians highlight a number of areas for improvement, including **dedicating more resources to ensure students have the necessary social emotional supports**.

Between March 18 and April 3, 2019, the WVDE collected responses from a range of parents—including those with children enrolled in public school (1,974), those not enrolled (306), and those who are not school-age (231)—as well as other family and community members (1,563).<sup>1</sup> Despite responses from a range of stakeholders, it is important to note that **respondents were not demographically representative of West Virginia**. Respondents were more likely to be female and have higher levels of education than the general population. For this reason, results should not be interpreted to represent the views of all West Virginians.



That said, the survey results provide valuable insights from a range of stakeholders about how public schools can improve. Schools communicate regularly with parents and caregivers, but parents and caregivers are struggling to foster deeper engagement. Though a minority, a substantial portion of parents and caregivers do not believe their children are comfortable discussing problems with adults at their schools. Finally, respondents across the board see the need to expand Career Technical Education (CTE) opportunities.

While the survey results provide just one source of information from one set of stakeholders, the findings contained in the survey report support a few promising avenues for action by state policymakers—including the West Virginia Legislature, the West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE), and the WVDE—in cooperation with local county districts and schools.

- Commit additional funding to initiatives that enable schools to provide the **richer social emotional supports that students need to thrive**;
- Increase Facebook outreach to parents and the public, who already receive education information on the platform, in an effort to **foster deeper, two-way communication**;
- Provide funding, support, and flexibility for county districts and schools to **tailor and expand CTE to meet local needs**, including expanding into middle school.

<sup>1</sup> Nineteen respondents did not indicate their relationship to public schools in West Virginia.

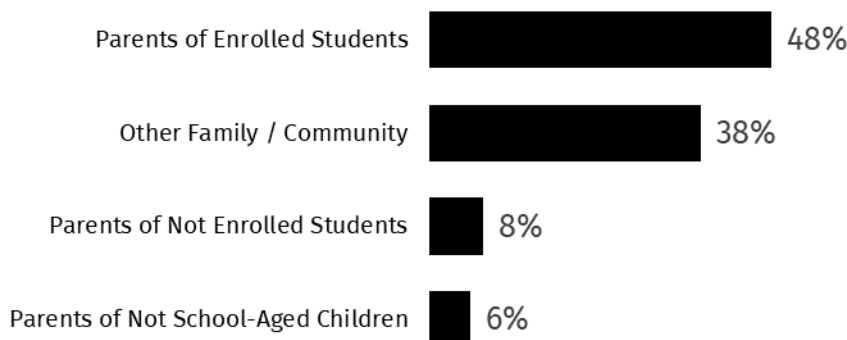
## Background

The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) launched the *Education Survey for Family and Community* to coincide with the West Virginia’s Voice Education Forums held at eight locations around West Virginia. Forums began on March 18, 2019 and ended on April 3, 2019. The purpose of the forums was to obtain feedback from a range of individuals on what strategies the state should use to improve student outcomes. The forums allowed participants to discuss ideas in four primary policy topics (“School Choice and Innovation”, “Funding Opportunities”, “Social Emotional Supports for Students”, and “Instructional Quality”). Participants also had the opportunity to raise other education reform ideas that had yet to be included in the discussions that began during the 2019 West Virginia Legislative Session.

The WVDE conducted the *Education Survey for Family and Community* to provide an additional input opportunity for those not able to attend the forums and to gather public perception about the current state of public education in West Virginia. The following summarizes key findings from the 4,093 responses received from March 18 through April 3.<sup>2</sup>

The vast majority of respondents represent two primary stakeholder groups: nearly half (48%) self-identify as a parent or primary caregiver of a school-aged child enrolled in a West Virginia public school. Almost four in ten (38%) identify as a community or other family member. The remainder are parents or primary caregivers of a school-aged child not enrolled in a West Virginia public school (8%) or of a child that is not school-aged (6%).<sup>3</sup>

### Distribution of Respondent Types



Questions varied based on respondents’ relationships to public education in West Virginia. Results are largely reported in aggregate, noting when only certain groups answered a question and/or when key differences between groups are observed.

## Respondent Demographics

In interpreting the results of this survey, it is crucial to note that the self-reported **demographics of respondents are not representative of West Virginia’s adult population**. For instance, respondents

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<sup>2</sup> Survey responses were collected online using SurveyMonkey.

<sup>3</sup> Three respondents did not select a stakeholder group. As with all questions, percentages are calculated based on those who answered the question.

disproportionately indicated they are female (73%). Respondents have a higher level of education than the general adult population of the state. While two in ten (19.9%) adults in West Virginia age 25 and older have completed a bachelor's degree or higher,<sup>4</sup> about seven in ten respondents (72%) report having completed a four-year degree or graduate school. Although we do not know the ages of respondents, the large difference in college completion is unlikely to be due to age composition.

More than one-third of respondents did not report racial/ethnic identity. Of those that did, 97% indicated they are white, 1% are African-American, 1% are multi-racial/multi-ethnic. Less than 1% are each of the other options respectively.<sup>5</sup>

About eight in ten (82%) respondents to the *Education Survey for Family and Community* attended high school in West Virginia. The exception is parents with school-aged children not enrolled in public school. Only seven in ten (73%) of such parents attended high school in West Virginia.

Respondents with school-aged children<sup>6</sup> indicated the ages of their children by selecting all applicable school programmatic levels. Slightly more respondents have high school students, but parents with children of all ages are well represented. Note that percentages do not sum to 100% because individual respondents may have children in different programmatic levels. Additionally, 11% of parents with school-aged children also have children below school age.

- Pre-Kindergarten - 2nd Grade (36%)
- 3rd Grade - 5th Grade (35%)
- 6th Grade - 8th Grade (38%)
- 9th Grade - 12th Grade (44%)

## Questions for Parents/Primary Caregivers of WV Public School Students

Respondents with children enrolled in a West Virginia public school received a set of questions specific to their, and their children's, experiences with public schools. This set of questions addressed several topics, including parental engagement and involvement, academic expectations and learning conditions, and school climate and safety.

### Parental Engagement and Involvement

Being able to engage parents meaningfully in the public education is an often-cited challenge among educators. Based on the recent *Educator Voice Survey*, about four in ten (43%) West Virginia teachers do not believe that parents/guardians are influential decision makers in their schools. Survey respondents appear generally involved, but **parents and schools are struggling to foster deeper engagement** in support of student learning. Nearly all respondents (93%) try to help their children with schoolwork, demonstrating a fundamental desire to be involved. Slightly fewer believe they have the knowledge to do so effectively (89%), but the difference is only by four percentage points.

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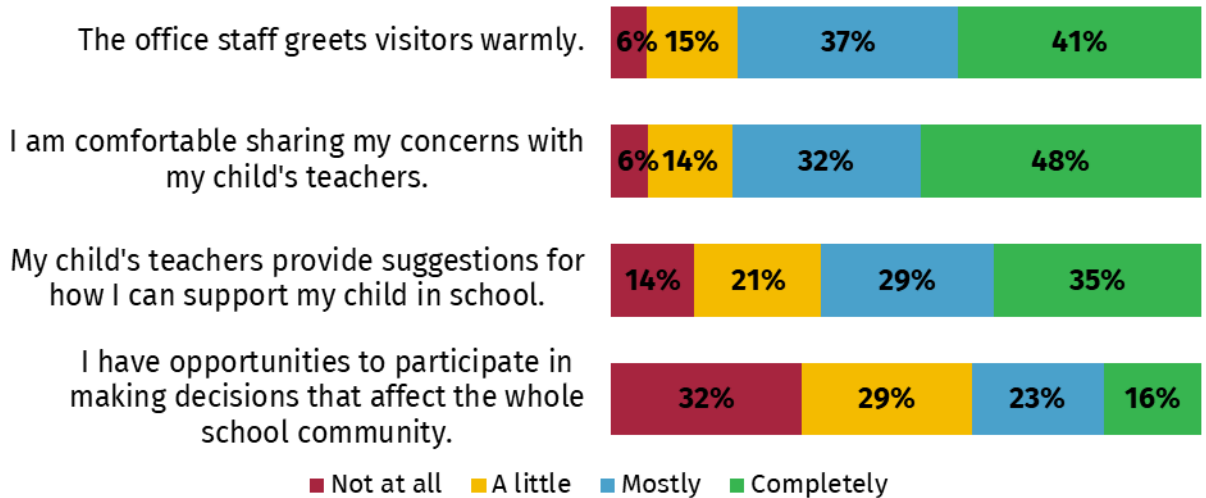
<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 2019. American Community Survey (ACS) and Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS), 5-Year Estimates 2013-2017. Retrieved 04/15/2019 from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/wv,US/EDU685217>.

<sup>5</sup> American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Hispanic or Latino, and Pacific Islander.

<sup>6</sup> Including those whose children are enrolled in a WV public school and those who are not.

While about eight in ten parent/caregiver respondents are greeted warmly by school staff (79%) and feel comfortable sharing concerns with their children’s teachers (79%), only about four in ten (39%) mostly or completely agree that they have opportunities to participate in meaningful decisions that affect the whole school community. Parents appear involved in their children’s education and schools generally make them feel comfortable. Too often these conditions do not translate into meaningful interaction between parents and schools.

**How much do you agree with the following statements about your child's school?**



Effectively engaging parents in the public education system depends on building strong channels of two-way communication.<sup>7</sup> In West Virginia, parents’ responses about communication with educators suggest this communication is **more frequently one-way than two-way**. The most common form of communication that parents receive is generally school information. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of parent/caregiver respondents receive such information at least monthly and a majority (58%) receiving it weekly or more. Respondents receive information specific to their children that could spark a two-way conversation far less often. More than six in ten reported discussing with school staff a child’s academic progress or a child’s accomplishments less than monthly (61% and 66%, respectively). Caregivers report similarly infrequent (less than monthly) communications about their children’s behaviors, whether that behavior was positive (66%) or negative (74%).

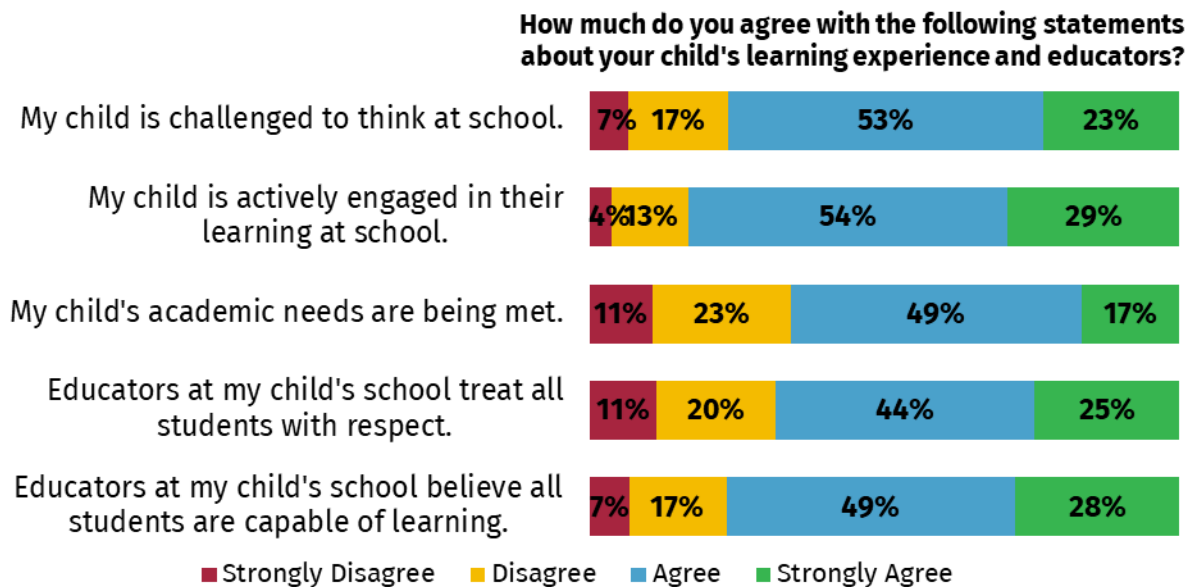
**Academic Expectations and Learning Conditions**

Parent/caregiver respondents report **general satisfaction with the academic experiences** of their children, but **substantial room for improvement remains, especially around equity**. Three-quarters (75%) believe their children’s classes are worthwhile.<sup>8</sup> Most parent/caregiver respondents indicated

<sup>7</sup> Deslandes, R., Barma, S., & Morin, L. 2015. Understanding Complex Relationships between Teachers and Parents. *International Journal about Parents in Education*, 9(1), 131-144.

<sup>8</sup> Based on a modified version of the *Worth* instrument from TNTP. 2018. “Student Engagement Survey” from *The Student Experience Toolkit* (2018) by TNTP, Inc., available at <https://tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit>. An anchored item response theory calibration was performed to verify model-data fit between our survey responses and the item parameters used to construct the original scoring process. This analysis yielded sufficient model-data fit and supports the application of the same scoring process despite adaptation of questions for this survey.

their children are challenged to think at school (77%) and are actively engaged in learning (83%). However, these aggregate results mask the fact that less than three in ten respondents strongly agree with the two previous statements (23% and 29% respectively), implying ample room for improvement around student engagement.



Results for other questions are more mixed. When it comes to student assignments, about six in ten respondents (60%) think their children’s assignments are neither too easy nor too difficult. About one quarter (27%) think assignments are too easy while about one in ten believe they are too difficult (11%). A small fraction (2%) indicated assignments are too easy and too difficult, though interpretation of those responses is difficult.

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents agree their children’s academic needs are being met, but only one-fifth (17%) strongly agree and a full third (34%) do not agree. Finally, one-quarter (23%) of parents do not agree that educators at their children’s schools believe all students are capable of learning. It should be a bare minimum that educators come to school with the belief that *all students can learn*, but only 28% of parents strongly agree that this is the case. While the overall results are positive, it is critical to understand what leads significant portions of respondents to report such troubling concerns.

### School Climate and Safety

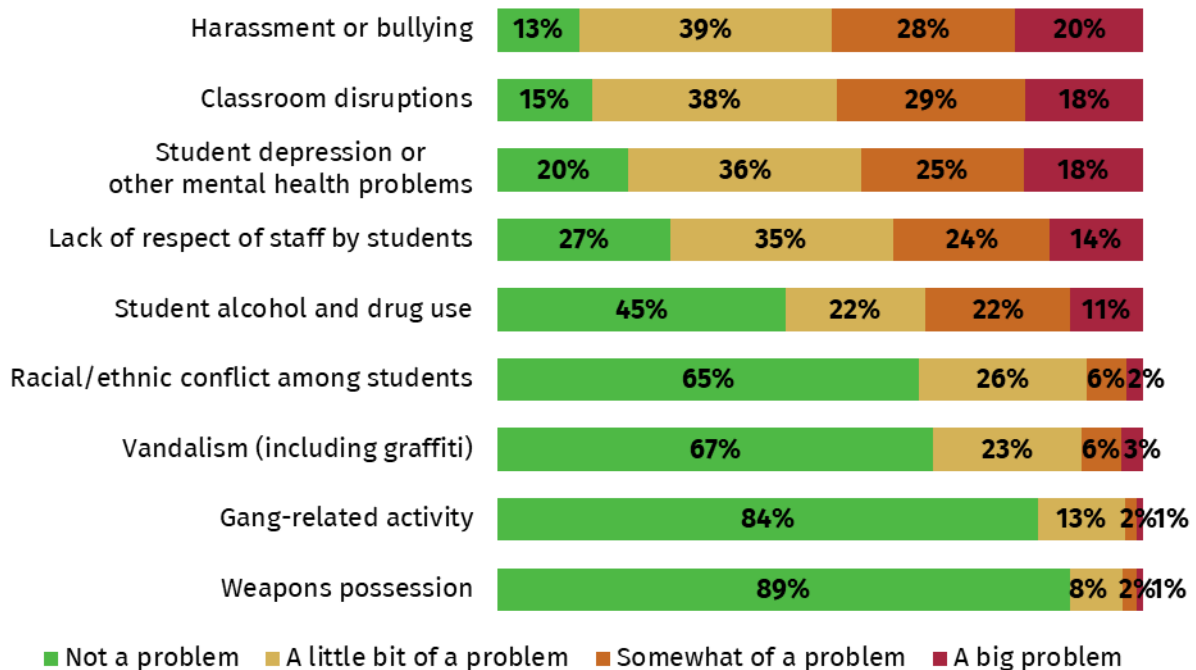
Parents/caregivers have **generally positive perceptions about the climate** at their children’s schools. Nearly nine in ten parent/caregiver respondents agree or strongly agree that school staff are friendly to children (88%). Similarly, three-quarters (76%) report that their child likes going to school. On the other hand, more than one third (35%) do not believe discipline at their children’s school is fair.

When asked about a range of unsettling and illegal behaviors, parents/caregivers generally do not report them to be a significant problem at their children’s schools, but exceptions exist. Nearly half of respondents believe the following are somewhat of a problem or a big problem at their children’s schools:

- Harassment or bullying (48%)
- Classroom disruptions (47%)

- Student depression or other mental health problems (44%)

### How much of a problem at your child's school is each of the following?



Around one-fifth of respondents believe these behaviors are big problems at their children’s schools. It is not uncommon for these issues to co-occur. For example, almost half (47%) of the respondents to the *Education Survey for Students* reported harassment or bullying and classroom disruptions both occurring daily and/or weekly. This reinforces the need to **ensure students have the social emotional supports** they need at school. More than one-third of parents/caregivers do not believe their children are comfortable discussing problems with school staff (37%) and three in ten (31%) do not believe educators treat all students with respect. These perceptions speak to the need to ensure *all* students feel supported at school.

## Questions for All Respondents

The questions posed to all respondents to the *Education Survey for Family and Community* address the perceptions of respondents about a number of topics on school operations and education reform. These ranged from respondents’ ability to engage with public schools, where they get information about these schools, their satisfaction with public education, and the extent to which they support various public school reform strategies. The following sections describe key findings drawn from participants’ responses.

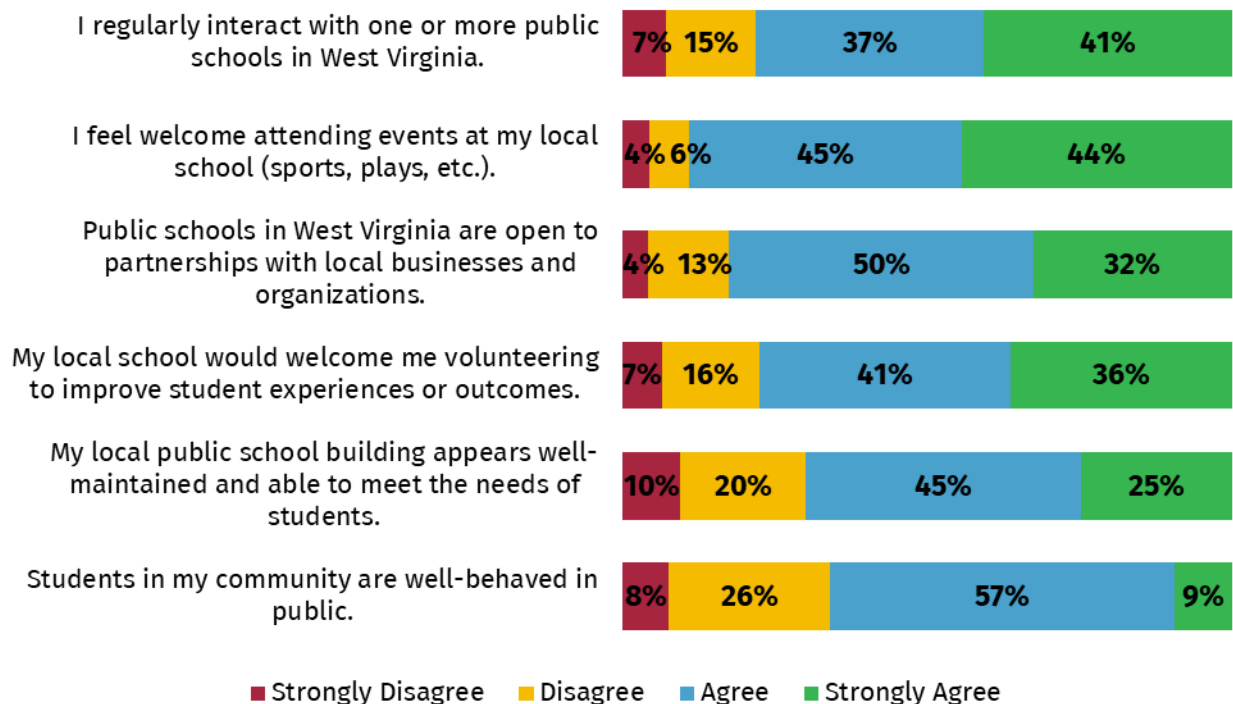
### Public School Engagement

When asked about their ability to engage with public schools, parents/caregivers of enrolled students reported **schools to be open and inviting**. For example, more than eight in ten (85%) report regularly interacting with one or more public schools. They also overwhelmingly feel welcome at public school events (91%) and that public schools are open to partnerships with local businesses and organizations (83%). Almost as many agree or strongly agree that local schools would welcome them volunteering to

improve student educational experiences (78%), that school facilities appear well maintained to meet student needs (72%), and that students are well-behaved in public (71%).

Respondents who identified as other family or community members and parents/caregivers to non-school-aged children respond in ways that are similar to those with enrolled students. Differences between these groups and parents of enrolled students are only a few percentage points.

**All Respondents: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your ability to engage with public schools?**



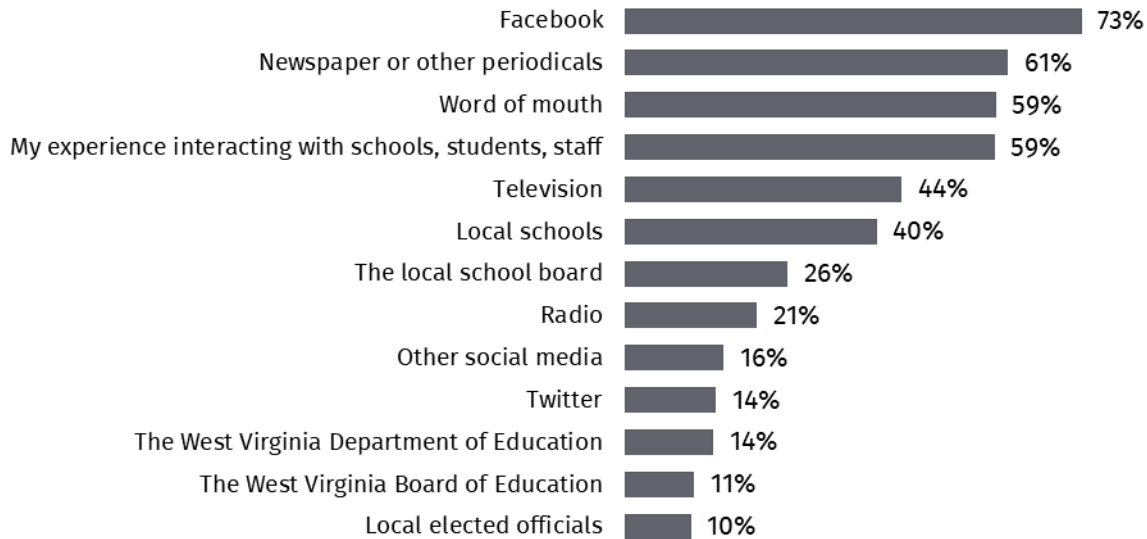
Parents/caregivers of school-aged children not enrolled in public schools responded very differently from the other three respondent groups. While it is not surprising they interact less with public schools and feel less welcome there, it is interesting to note that six of ten (62%) of respondents in this group do not believe students are well-behaved in public.

**Information Sources about Public Schools**

**Facebook is a key source of information about public schools in West Virginia.** Nearly eight in ten (77%) parents/caregivers of students enrolled in public schools get information about public schools from Facebook. Facebook is a similarly popular source of information for parents/caregivers of students not enrolled (73%) and parents/caregivers of children not of school-age (77%). Other family or community members most frequently cite newspaper or other periodicals as a source of information about public education (72%), though two-thirds (66%) also get information from Facebook.



**All Respondents: I frequently get information about public schools in WV from...**



Social media of other types (i.e., Twitter, etc.) are used much less frequently. More traditional sources are also cited as frequently used sources of information. Among parents/caregivers of students enrolled in public schools, in descending order, key sources include interaction with schools, students, and staff (61%), word of mouth (59%), newspaper or other periodicals (52%), local schools (46%), and television (37%). With exception of the difference noted above, this pattern was similar across all groups.

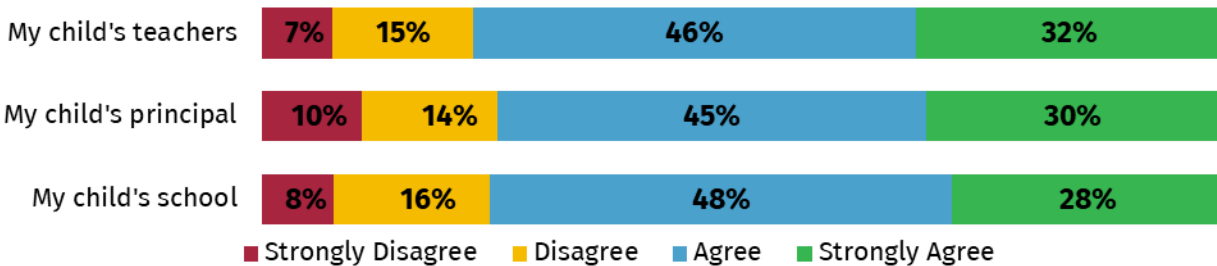
**Satisfaction with Public Schools**

Respondents with children enrolled in a WV public school **express satisfaction with public education**. Other groups report similar levels with the notable exception of parents/caregivers of school-aged children not enrolled in public school, who are generally dissatisfied with public schools.

About three-quarters of public-school parents agree or strongly agree they are satisfied with their child’s teachers (78%), principal (75%), and with their child’s school overall (76%). When asked about West Virginia generally, other family or community members and parents/caregivers to non-school-aged children report similar levels of satisfaction when it comes to teachers (74%/75% for each group). Satisfaction levels are lower for principals (63%/65%) and schools (59%/51%).

**Parents/Caregivers of Public School Students: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your child's education?**

*I am satisfied with...*





The reverse was true for parents/caregivers of children not enrolled in a WV public school. About three in ten are satisfied with teachers (31%) and principals (29%), and only one in ten (10%) with schools overall.

About six in ten parents/caregivers of children enrolled in a WV public school who responded report satisfaction with their local district's superintendent (60%) and with the central office staff (61%). Although still a majority, a slightly lower percentage (55%) agree or strongly agree they are satisfied with the local district board of education. Other community and family members and parents/caregivers of non-school-aged children showed similar levels of satisfaction for all three entities to parents/caregivers of enrolled students. Again, parents/caregivers of children not enrolled in a WV public school generally are of the opposite opinion for all three entities.

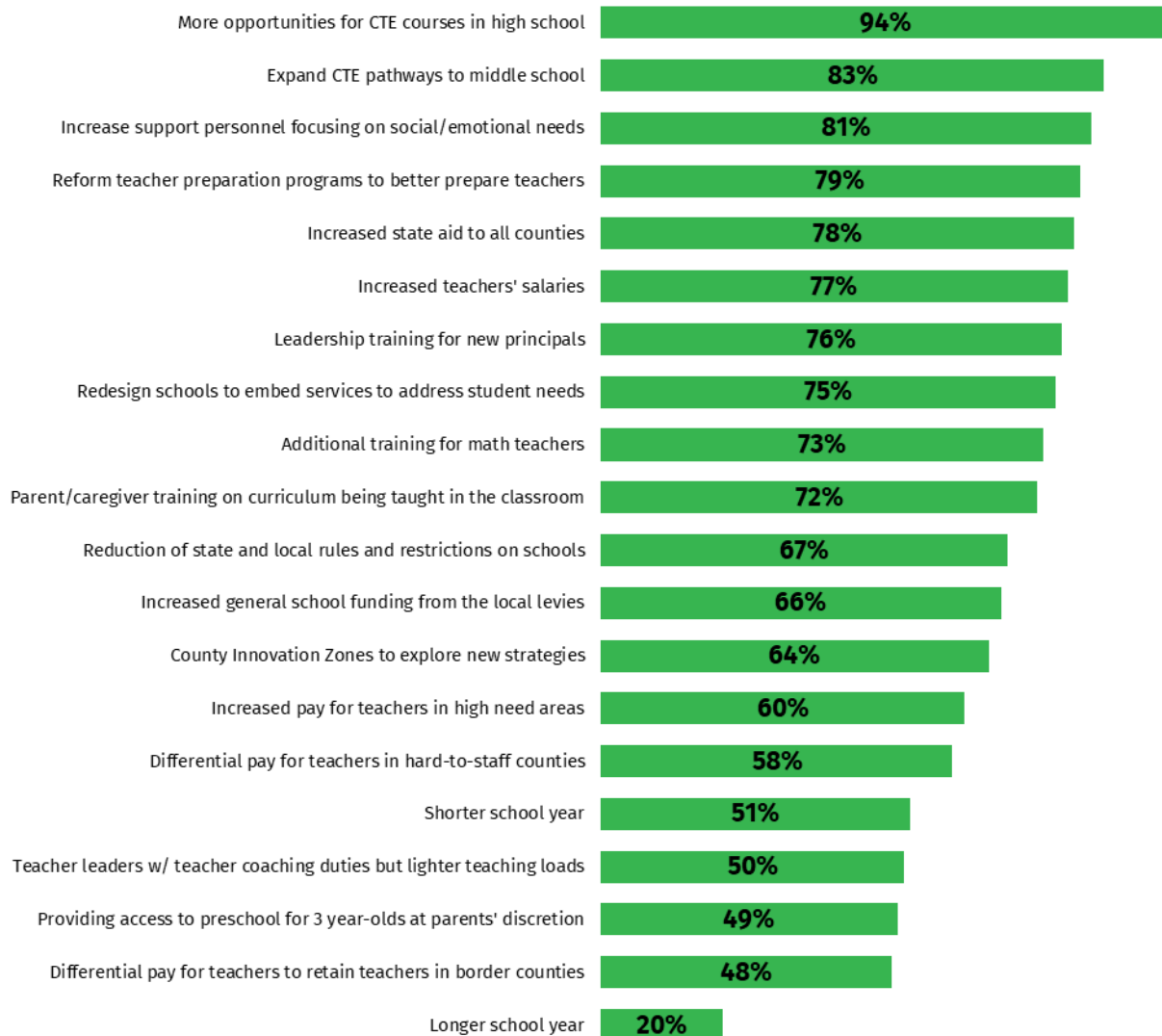
### Support for Public School Reform Strategies

Respondents are **generally willing to pay higher taxes to fund education** at the local (58%) and state levels (54%). Of parents/caregivers of students enrolled in public schools, majorities report a willingness-to-pay to fund public education. At the local level, 61% agree or strongly agree that they would be willing to pay additional local levy taxes to fund education for their county school district. Nearly as many are willing to pay additional state taxes to increase general state funding to public education (55%).

There are comparable levels of agreement among other family or community members (local - 58%/state - 57%) and parents/caregivers to non-school-aged children (65%/54%). Willingness-to-pay rates are much lower among parents/caregivers of students not enrolled in public schools with about a quarter agreeing with the two funding questions (26%/23%).

Implementing new education initiatives may require raising additional tax revenue or reducing funding for other programs. Respondents were presented with twenty education initiatives and asked to indicate if they believe them to be worthwhile investments of state and local tax dollars.

## Overall percentage of respondents indicating various education reform initiatives are worthwhile investments of tax dollars



Strong majorities are noted in favor of most initiatives. Those for which 80% or more of respondents thought are worthwhile include:

- *More opportunities for Career Technical Education (CTE) courses in high school;*
- *Expansion of Career Technical Education (CTE) pathways to middle school; and*
- *Increased number of professional student support personnel focusing on social/emotional needs.*

Those for which 60% up to 80% thought of as worthwhile include:

- *Reforming teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities to better prepare teachers to enter the classroom;*
- *Increased teachers' salaries;*
- *Increased state aid to all counties;*

- *Leadership training for new principals;*
- *Redesigning schools to embed social services to address student needs (for example: Communities in Schools);*
- *Parent/caregiver training on current curriculum being taught in the classroom;*
- *Additional training for math teachers;*
- *Reduction of state and local rules and restrictions on schools;*
- *Increased general school funding from the local levies;*
- *County Innovation Zones to explore new strategies;*
- *Differential pay for teachers in hard-to-staff counties; and*
- *Increased pay for teachers in high need areas (math, special education, etc.).*

To some extent, there was a notable level of agreement among the four respondent groups on what they considered to be worthwhile education initiative investments. In the table below, initiatives are sorted from highest to lowest in terms of the overall percentage of respondents indicating them to be worthwhile. Out of the top ten initiatives, the four respondent groups share seven in common (in **bold** font on chart on next page). Among them there is a strong endorsement for increased opportunities for Career Technical Education in both high and middle school. There also is a strong support for professional development of new principals and math teachers, for training parents on current school curricula, and for reforming teacher preparation programs to better prepare teachers to enter the classroom.

## Open-Ended Feedback

Of the 4,093 family and community members who responded to the *Educator Voice Survey*, 2,371 (58%) responded to the open-ended question (“*If you could change one thing about how schools work to improve student outcomes in West Virginia, what would it be?*”). The key findings are summarized below:

- Many respondents note a need for increased educator compensation, increased social emotional support, increased student and parent accountability, reduced class sizes, and less standardized testing.
- Some respondents express concerns surrounding a need to eliminate ineffective teachers as well as a need to do more to recruit and retain high quality teachers. A similar number of respondents express concerns surrounding the length of school days/school year and a need for teaching more basic life skills.
- A number of family and community members express concerns that current funding for education is not being spent effectively and efficiently.
- While responses surrounding charter schools and ESAs were varied, there appears to be a large number of unfavorable opinions. However, many agree that more flexibility is desirable.

**Percentage from each respondent group indicating varying education reform initiatives as worthwhile investments**

<b>Education Reform Initiative</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Parent/ primary caregiver of a school-aged child enrolled in a WV public school</b>	<b>Parent / primary caregiver of a school-aged child not enrolled in a WV public school</b>	<b>Parent / primary caregiver of a child who is not school-aged</b>	<b>Other family or community member</b>
<b>More opportunities for Career Technical Education (CTE) courses in high school</b>	94%	94%	90%	97%	95%
<b>Expansion of Career Technical Education (CTE) pathways to middle school</b>	83%	83%	70%	84%	84%
<b>Increased number of professional student support personnel focusing on social/emotional needs</b>	81%	84%	61%	82%	82%
<b>Reforming teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities to better prepare teachers to enter the classroom</b>	79%	78%	74%	76%	82%
Increased state aid to all counties	78%	82%	51%	73%	79%
Increased teachers' salaries	77%	79%	43%	84%	81%
<b>Leadership training for new principals</b>	76%	77%	63%	74%	78%
Redesigning schools to embed social services to address student needs (for example: Communities in Schools)	75%	77%	53%	75%	76%
<b>Additional training for math teachers</b>	73%	74%	67%	72%	72%
<b>Parent/caregiver training on current curriculum being taught in the classroom</b>	72%	72%	60%	76%	73%
Reduction of state and local rules and restrictions on schools	67%	65%	74%	67%	68%
Increased general school funding from the local levies	66%	72%	35%	68%	64%
County Innovation Zones to explore new strategies	64%	65%	56%	67%	63%
Increased pay for teachers in high need areas (math, special education, etc.)	60%	65%	59%	60%	54%
Differential pay for teachers in hard-to-staff counties	58%	59%	61%	62%	55%
Shorter school year	51%	59%	44%	48%	40%
Creating teacher leader positions that have increased teacher coaching responsibilities and higher pay, but lighter teaching loads	50%	52%	36%	50%	51%
Providing access to preschool for three-year-old children at parents' discretion	49%	50%	33%	56%	51%
Differential pay for teachers to retain teachers in border counties	48%	50%	46%	51%	45%
Longer school year	20%	18%	23%	23%	23%