

## Analysis: EdNext Survey

### Survey shows broad support for teacher salaries and opposition to Common Core, but fault lines on school choice, union activities, and other issues.

EdNext, an education journal that seeks to shake up the status quo to encourage education improvement, released their 12<sup>th</sup> annual survey this month and it contains some interesting findings. Their poll utilizes a sample large enough that it can show valid results, not just for the public at large, but also for educators, and even breaks down educators by political party and whether they are members of unions, or not. This year they also checked to see how results differed between the 6 states that had teacher walkouts in the spring and other states. Detailed results of the poll can be found at the [EdNext Website](#). Summarized below some of the results below and thoughts on what these results could mean for upcoming education policy decisions.

**Education Quality** – The public has been consistent for the past few years in their assessment of the quality of their local public schools with approximately half (51% this year) giving their local schools a grade of A or B. While this sounds good, unfortunately the public feels even more favorably about other public services – 69% gave the local police department an A or B and 68% gave these same good grades to the local post office. So, when it comes to making decisions about education spending – verses spending public dollars elsewhere – policymakers may opt for supporting their local police department over the local schools.

**Teacher Salaries** – The public showed strong support (63%) for increasing teacher salaries in their own state, but if they were provided information on what teachers in their state are paid, this support dropped to just less than half (49%). This result seems to indicate that the public thinks teachers are paid at a lower rate than they are. However, the 49% was a 13% increase in support from previous years. This increased support coupled with the strong economy are likely to result in many states raising teacher salaries.

**Teacher Walkouts** – Respondents in the six states that had teacher walkouts in the spring (Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, North Carolina, Oklahoma and West Virginia) expressed even higher support for teacher salary increases with 63% supporting teacher salary increases compared to 47% in other states. However, the six states that engaged in the teacher walkouts had some of the lowest paid teachers in the nation. There is [some speculation in the media](#) that the apparent success of the teacher walkouts could lead to more teacher unrest this fall. However the walkouts last spring were largely teacher led, with little involvement from the unions, and the anticipated activism this fall [would be union led teacher strikes in the midst of contract negotiations](#). The public may be less sympathetic to strikes in these heavily unionized states. Already, in Washington state a local judge has [ordered striking teachers back to work](#).

**Compulsory Union Membership (Janus Court Decision)** – The public and teachers agreed by the same strong majority – 56%– that it is wrong to force teachers who do not wish to join the union to join or pay a fee to the union. This was affirmed by the Supreme Court in the Janus v AFSCME ruling in June – right

after this poll was taken. Ironically the Supreme Court Justices, with secure jobs for life, do not need to curry public favor. But this Court decision clearly resonated with the public and teachers.

**Racial Disparities in Discipline** – The US Departments of Education and Justice under the Obama administration issued a “Dear Colleague letter” to all school districts informing them that if data showed disparities in the way various demographic groups received disciplinary actions this could be deemed a civil rights violation subject to prosecution by the Office of Civil Rights. This policy rankled many and remains in disfavor with teachers and the public. The polling in May 2018 showed that only 27% of the public support such policies and only 29% of teachers feel the policies are a good idea. The Department of Education under Secretary Betsy DeVos has been reviewing these policies. While there is [pushback](#) against what supporters of the Obama regulations call “exclusionary discipline policies,” the lack of public support for the Obama administration guidance could lead to Secretary DeVos rescinding the guidance letter sometime in the next year.

**Charters and Vouchers** –The poll shows an increase in the public over the past two years from 45% to 54% in support of government funding that would give all families access to funding for private school choice. There is less support – 42%– for providing private school funding only for low income families. The polling on school choice is very sensitive to the specific words used in the question. If the word voucher replaces the word choice in the question, support for public support of private options decreases by 10 points, from 54% to 44%.

**Polarization Among Teachers** – The poll also makes clear that there are deep divides between union teachers and non-union teachers on some key issues. The areas where this divide was reflected by a greater than 20% difference in responses between union and nonunion teachers include:

- requiring non-members to pay agency fees to the union;
- the impact of collective bargaining on school quality;
- satisfaction with political activities of the local union;
- providing private school vouchers for all families;
- requirements for federal testing of students;
- increasing school spending;
- increasing teacher salaries;
- providing teacher tenure; and
- support for charter schools.

It is not surprising that the areas of disagreement between union and nonunion teachers are for the most part union related issues. **The bigger story may be that there is strong unity among teachers regardless of union affiliation on a few issues – opposition to merit pay, opposition to the Common Core standards and opposition to the federal guidelines regarding racial disparities in student discipline outcomes.**

As Christian teachers knowing how the public and our colleagues feel about the issues impacting the classroom can help us to serve the Lord and the public in more winsome ways. As Christian teachers in the public schools there may be some issues in which we are called to be salt and light to a culture that does not want to hear the truth.

Please share your thoughts on this column by entering them below. Personal comments can be sent to [JMitchell@ceai.org](mailto:JMitchell@ceai.org). John Mitchell is the Washington, DC Area Director for the Christian Educators Association.