

Education is an Investment for the Next Generation of Arizonans, Poll Indicates



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The road to increased economic growth for the state of Arizona is dependent on our commitment to education, according to a new survey out of Arizona State University’s Morrison Institute for Public Policy. In fact, more than 77% of respondents ranked public education as “very important” continuing a trend found in other statewide surveys highlighting education as Arizona’s most pressing issue. Yet, respondents also indicated concern about the preparedness of high school graduates, 42% indicating that Arizona’s graduates were “not as well prepared” as high school graduates from other states.

To gauge the importance of education in the state, Morrison Institute focused the survey questions on two main categories: 1) identifying specific areas to improve Arizona’s K-12 education system; and 2) ranking an array of other important educational issues. This document highlights the results from the survey.

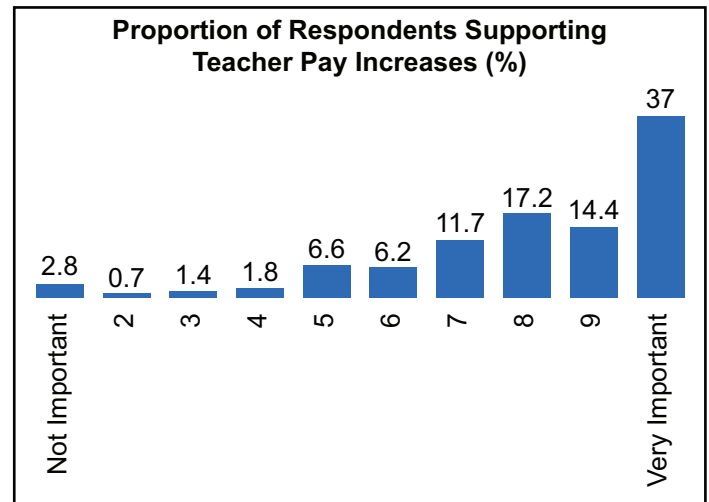
Identifying specific ways to improve the K-12 Education System

The two main areas that emerged as the most important ways to improve K-12 education in Arizona were: increases in teacher pay and more school counselors to support students. In addition, respondents also indicated school safety and class size as being important. Less important for respondents was increasing charter school options or increasing state dollars for private tuition.

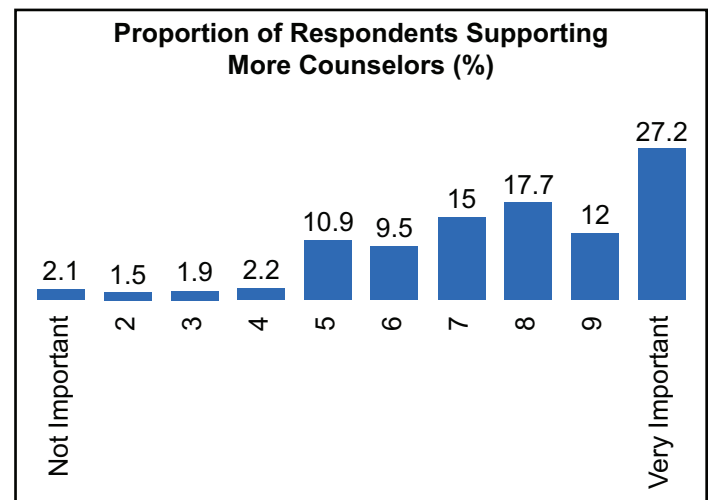
Respondents highly supported increases for teacher pay

When it comes to investing in education, respondents highly supported increases in teacher pay. On a 10-point continuum nearly 70% of respondents indicated that it was “very important” that the state increase teacher pay. In contrast, less than 5%

reported that teacher pay was “not important.” These trends continued and held true when the data were disaggregated by race/ethnicity, urban or rural living, and gender. The data were clear. Respondents across all categories reported that increasing teacher pay was very important.



Arizonans believe more counselors are needed to improve K-12 education



In addition, the survey found that Arizonans believe having more counselors for students is important to improving K-12 education. More than 56% of respondents indicated the importance of having more school counselors as very important. Interestingly, when disaggregating the data, we found that Hispanic support for more counselors was especially strong. More than 73% of Hispanics surveyed chose the highest three categories of importance. Other subgroups, including both males and females, and those living in both urban and more rural areas, also found the need for more counselors to be very important.

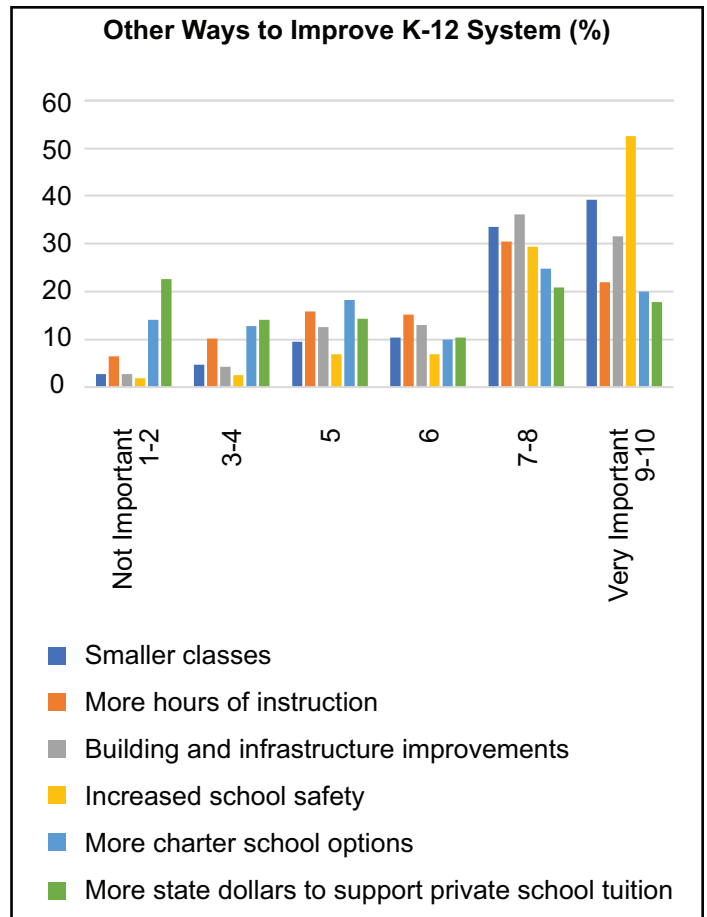
Arizonans identified multiple opportunities for K-12 improvement; less likely to support state support for private tuition

School safety topped the list of issues that respondents found important to improving K-12 education. 81% of respondents highlighted its importance. At the same time, Arizonans also indicated that smaller class sizes were important. For example, 73% of participants identified it as important when collapsing the top four rating categories. Less important for respondents was increasing charter school options or increasing state dollars for private tuition. Less than half of respondents indicated that increasing state dollars to support private school tuition was important.

Other Important Educational Issues to Consider

When it comes to vocational education, Arizonans seem to want more training options during and after high school. More than 80% of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the state should have more options during high school. Moreover, 78.9% of respondents also indicated that there should be more vocational training options after high school.

While charter schools tend to be a highly publicized topic, nearly half (46.8%) of respondents were “unsure” if they were well-regulated. Additionally, 30.4% of respondents indicated



that they “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” that Arizona’s charter schools were well regulated compared with 22.8% that “agreed” or “strongly agreed.”

On the topic of a tax credit to offset the costs of private education, Arizonans were split. 21.4% were unsure; 36.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 42.2% agreed or strongly agreed.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Arizona should have more vocational training options for students after high school	2.2%	3.0%	16.5%	46.2%	32.1%
Arizona should have more vocational training options for students during high school	1.8%	3.2%	14.1%	44.8%	36.1%
Arizona’s charter schools are well-regulated	10.8%	19.5%	46.8%	18.5%	4.3%
Arizona is doing enough to ensure that students who speak English as a second language receive a high-quality education	7.4%	22.4%	38.4%	23.2%	8.6%
Arizona’s community colleges are preparing students for the workforce	4.9%	14.4%	33.4%	38.6%	8.8%
Parents should receive a tax credit to help offset the costs of private education for their children	16.0%	20.4%	21.4%	27.1%	15.1%

Conclusion

Overall, the survey indicated positive support for improving public schools and providing more opportunities for students to be successful. In the K-12 realm, respondents heavily supported: (1) teacher pay increases, (2) increasing the number of counselors, (3) smaller class sizes, and (4) building and infrastructure improvements. While all of these issues are important separately, they all relate back to the larger issue of education funding. Unfortunately, the strategy of attacking these issues on a piece-meal basis has been met with only limited success. For Arizona to reap larger benefits, the state will have to identify a more aligned funding strategy that can help improve the issues identified in this polling but also others that were not addressed.

This work has also highlighted other important educational

issues for state educational leaders to consider. Specifically, respondents supported more vocational training options during and after high school. Yet, at the same time, workforce projections indicate that 68% of all jobs in Arizona will require at least some postsecondary training after high school by 2020. Balancing these sometimes-competing demands will be important for state educational leaders. To improve the system so that it is more equitable for Arizonans will require leaders to take a two-step approach. First, the state must provide all students with an education that allows them to choose their own college and career pathway. Secondly, for those graduates choosing a more vocational pathway, there has to be opportunities for those working in those positions to advance and build on their educational skills. This means a system of stackable credentials where students with a certificate can continue their education towards an associate's degree or even a bachelor's degree.