

# How Program Officers at Education Philanthropies View Education

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# Methodological Notes

- Used survey items from Public Agenda surveys given to education professors, K-12 teachers, parents and the general public.
- Surveyed 240 education program officers at philanthropies.
- Received responses from 128 program officers, a response rate of 53%.
- Statistical note for the tables:
  - \*  $p < 0.05$ ,
  - \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ,
  - \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (test for equal proportions).
- Sources:
  - Data for foundation officers were collected by author for this study.
  - Data for education professors, K-12 teachers, parents, and the general public are from Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, *Different Drummers* (Public Agenda, 1997) and Jean Johnson and John Immerwahr, *First Things First: What Americans Expect from Public Schools* (Public Agenda, 1994).

**TABLE 1      Background of Program Officers**

	<b>Mean</b>
Years at Foundation	6.6
Education Degree	22.8%
No teaching or administrative experience	40.4%
Administrative Experience	26.9%
Teaching experience	56.0%
- Taught in a public school	80.4%
- Taught in a private school	34.8%
- Number of years teaching	6.0

Note: Public/private school break down are not mutually exclusive categories.

## TABLE 2 Teachers

Teacher education programs can impart different qualities to their students. Which qualities do you think are most essential and which are least essential?

### Percentage responding “absolutely essential”

	Program Officers	Education Professors
Teachers who will have high expectations of all their students.	78	72
Teachers committed to teaching kids to be active learners who know how to learn.	72**	82
Teachers who are themselves life-long learners and constantly updating their skills.	66***	84
Teachers who are deeply knowledgeable about the content of the specific subjects they will be teaching.	47*	57
Teachers trained in pragmatic issues of running a classroom such as managing time and preparing lesson plans.	27**	41
Teachers who maintain discipline and order in the classroom.	18***	37
Teachers who expect students to be neat, on time, and polite.	14	12
Teachers who stress correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.	12	19

## TABLE 3 Classroom Activities

Thinking about the typical K-12 classroom, would you like to see more, less, or about the same of the following learning tools?

	Percentage responding “more”	
	Program Officers	Education Professors
Portfolios and other authentic assessments	68*	78
Mixed ability grouping	49	50
Computer programs that enable kids to practice skills on their own	45***	69
Homework assignments	21***	41
Penalties for students who break the rules	19**	37
Homogeneous grouping	16	15
Memorization	11	14
Prizes to reward good behavior in the classroom	11	13
Multiple-choice exams	4	2

## TABLE 4 Perceptions of the Nation's Schools

Here are some perceptions about the nation's public schools. How close does each come to your own view – very close, somewhat close, not too close, or not close at all?

### Percentage responding “very close” or “somewhat close”

	Program Officers	Education Professors
The general public has outmoded and mistaken beliefs about what good teaching means.	74	79
More often than not, teacher tenure is an obstacle to improving schools.	65**	52
The schools are expected to deal with too many social problems.	64***	85
Academic standards in today's schools are too low and kids are not expected to learn enough.	63***	78
Considering the differences in the children they teach, private schools don't do a better job than the public ones.	48***	67
Too many kids get passed on to the next grade when they should be held back.	46**	61
Many of the criticisms of the public schools come from right-wing groups who want to undermine public education.	46	54
Much of the decline in public confidence in public schools is a result of negative press coverage.	37***	65
One of the most effective ways to improve schools is to give them a lot more money.	30***	54

## TABLE 5 School Reform

Here are some ideas for changing the way public schools teach. For each, please indicate if you think it would improve kids' academic achievement. 1 to 5 scale.

	Percentage responding "4" or "5"			
	Program Officers	Education Professors	K-12 Teachers	General Public
Not allowing kids to graduate from high school unless they clearly demonstrate they can write and speak English well.	62**	76	83	88
Emphasizing such work habits as being on time, dependable and disciplined.	49***	78	93	88
Raising the standards of promotion from grade school to junior high and only letting kids move ahead when they pass a test showing they have reached those standards.	34**	49	62	70
Mixing fast learners and slow learners in the same class so that slower kids learn from faster kids.	33***	54	40	34
Permanently removing from school grounds kids who are caught with drugs or with weapons.	32***	66	84	76
Taking persistent troublemakers out of class so that teachers can concentrate on the kids who want to learn.	30***	66	88	73

**TABLE 6****Please tell me how serious a problem each is in your own community's public schools.****Percentage responding "very serious" or "somewhat serious"**

	Program Officers	General Public	White Parents	Black Parents	Trad. Christian Parents
Schools are not getting enough money to do a good job	75***	58	67	77	69
Kids are not taught enough math, science, and computers	71***	52	46	66	56
Academic standards are too low and kids are not expected to learn enough	71*	61	49	70	57
There are too much drugs and violence in schools	61**	72	58	80	66
There is not enough emphasis on the basics such as reading, writing, and math	42***	60	52	61	56
Schools don't teach kids good work habits such as being on time to class and completing assignments	41*	52	36	47	37
Too many teachers are more interested in being popular than in requiring respect and discipline	17***	41	35	43	38
Schools fail to teach religious values	6***	47	51	65	70
Schools are too graphic and explicit when teaching sex education	5***	24	19	27	30

## **TABLE 7      Topic Clusters**

**Survey items clustered by topic area, responses of program officers with and without teaching experience.**

	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>No Experience</b>	
<b>Cluster (no. of items)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>P-value (t-test, between group means)</b>
<b>Discipline (5)</b>	14.5	12.4	0.0005
<b>Basic Skills and Work Habits (5)</b>	13.6	12.0	0.0094
<b>Student Accountability (3)</b>	9.3	8.3	0.0642

**TABLE 8      Discipline**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>No Experience</b>	<b>P-value</b>
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
Permanently removing from school grounds kids who are caught with drugs or with weapons.	3.23	2.57	0.0052
Taking persistent troublemakers out of class so that teachers can concentrate on the kids who want to learn.	3.20	2.60	0.0077
Too many teachers are more interested in being popular than in requiring respect and discipline.	2.07	1.72	0.0118
Teachers who maintain discipline and order in the classroom.	3.95	3.58	0.0148
Penalties for students who break the rules.	2.09	1.96	0.2634

**TABLE 9      Basic Skills and Work Habits**

	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>No Experience</b>	
<b>Question</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>P-value</b>
Emphasizing such work habits as being on time, dependable and disciplined.	3.85	3.25	0.008
There is not enough emphasis on the basics such as reading, writing, and math	2.57	2.11	0.0117
Homework assignments	2.14	1.98	0.1827
Memorization	1.59	1.43	0.2311
Teachers who stress correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.	3.50	3.29	0.2679

# Summary and Recommendations

- Program officers diverge from mainstream opinion on three issues--discipline, basic skills, and student accountability.
- Recommendations for foundations seeking compatibility with mainstream opinion:
  - Hire program officers with teaching experience
  - Hire a staff with balanced views
  - Appoint outside review committee to evaluate grant portfolio