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NASHVILLE VOTERS UNDERScore POTENTIAL FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND ARTICULATE NEEDS FOR DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Late August Poll Data Also Supports MNPS' Handling of Coronavirus as Majority of Parents Agreed Virtual School to be Best Option for Safety of All

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – September 17, 2020 – Encouraging the work of Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS), its teachers and all attending families, a recent poll of registered voters by the [Nashville Public Education Foundation \(NPEF\)](https://www.nashvillepef.org) confirms a majority (54%) of Nashvillians believe local public schools have the potential to serve as the center of the community with the right resources and increased focus on underserved populations. Further, the data suggests that, while improvements are needed, public school parents are generally positive in rating the district's performance and school quality, including its handling of the COVID-19 crisis.

“The loudest voices don't always represent the majority and it's imperative that everyone from across Nashville's exceptionally diverse district of public schools can be heard,” said **Katie Cour, President and CEO of the Nashville Public Education Foundation**. “Debate is healthy, but at a time when there seems to be unproductive division on almost every other topic, we hope to bring some constructive balance to the conversation of how our public schools are performing – and how they can better serve all Nashvillians.”

Specifically, survey respondents indicate that increasing teacher pay (61% very effective / 26% somewhat effective), investing in early education (63% very effective / 23% somewhat effective), and spreading out high quality teachers (62% very effective / 23% somewhat effective) are all ways to improve public education. And while voters attribute education quality ultimately to teachers, the survey indicates the perception that the MNPS school board (60% responded 1st or 2nd choice), and district principals and administrators (44% responded 1st or 2nd choice) are most responsible for ensuring that schools perform well.

Notably amidst the most difficult academic year for schools worldwide, in late August, a majority of Nashvillians in general (56%) and public school parents specifically (64%) gave the district a positive rating of excellent or good for its handling of the coronavirus outbreak. In an unsurprising correlation, 63% of respondents indicated MNPS should continue virtual school to safeguard teachers, students, and families from the coronavirus, while only 30% said they place more importance on getting students back to school as soon as possible to learn in-person.

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“Make no mistake, we believe kids belong in the classroom and we are aggressively monitoring for the conditions that will allow us to safely welcome all MNPS families back into our buildings,” said **Christiane Buggs, Metro Nashville Public Schools Board of Education Chair**. “Though not ideal for many families, virtual learning has allowed us to keep students and staff safe while our country navigates this deadly pandemic. The MNPS school board continues to work with district leadership and staff, community groups and families to make safe decisions that support student growth across for all Nashvillians.”

Regarding equity and education, Nashville residents say that schools can do a better job in serving students in disadvantaged communities (30% responded not so good / 12% responded poor). There is a feeling that limited access to good-paying jobs (24% of respondents) and higher crime rates (23% of respondents) impact available resources and hurt the quality of some of neighborhood schools. Respondents indicate that students in disadvantaged schools need better access to more effective teachers (25% of respondents), as well as adequate supplies and facilities (22% of respondents).

“As part of our mission to improve public education and eliminate inequities for students in Nashville, we must remain vigilant in knowing the issues and perceptions prevalent in our community,” said **Cour**. “There is a clear appetite for improvement, and these insights will help us to adjust goals and develop new collaborations that advance positive outcomes for more schools and students.”

Other findings in the Citywide Survey indicate respondents are split on views on school performance ratings. Whereas comparable to the 2018 survey, there was measurable erosion among all voters with children in the household (44% responded negatively, -16% net change since 2018), public school parents in particular give schools a solid rating (60% responded positively, -7% net change since 2018). Given competing opinions, Nashvillians remain supportive of school choice programs (23% somewhat favor/36% strongly favor).

MNPS is the second largest district in the state of Tennessee and the 41st largest district in the United States. The goal of the polling is to benchmark public education perceptions and better understand voter attitudes toward education leadership, priorities, and support for potential education policy changes. It is a follow-up to NPEF’s first Citywide Survey focused on education issues in 2018. The 2020 poll was again conducted by [ALG Research](#) on behalf of NPEF. ALG Research conducted a telephone survey of 501 randomly sampled registered voters in Nashville, using live professional telephone interviewers. Interviews were conducted August 19-23, 2020. The margin of error for the sample is +/- 4.4 percentage points at the ninety-five percent level of confidence.

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About the Nashville Public Education Foundation

The Nashville Public Education Foundation is a nonprofit organization that raises private funds to support teachers and leaders, champion successes, and dismantle inequities in Metro Nashville Public Schools. More information is available at nashvillepef.org.

About ALG Research

ALG Research is a nationally recognized public opinion research firm specializing in message development and strategic consulting.