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NASHVILLE VOTERS SAY CITY IS NOT PRIORITIZING CHILDREN AND YOUTH; DISATISFACTION WITH SCHOOLS INCREASING

Despite growing discontent, majority of citywide survey participants believe Nashville schools aren't resourced enough

Educational experiences and quality teachers determine thriving schools more than student scores according to annual poll of Nashville residents

NASHVILLE, TENN. – October 14, 2021 – A recent poll of registered voters in Davidson County by the [Nashville Public Education Foundation \(NPEF\)](#) reveals that across all demographics, strong majorities do not believe Nashville prioritizes children or opportunities for youth. Additionally, NPEF's annual citywide survey shows an overall decline in satisfaction ratings for schools. Yet, Nashvillians recognize the role that adequate funding plays in improving public schools as most residents acknowledge schools are not resourced enough.

"It was no surprise we'd uncover a great deal of challenging news in this year's survey. But just as with other urban school districts across the country, we're seeing increased frustration with Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) that we believe is due in large part to extended pandemic hurdles," said **Katie Cour, President and CEO of the Nashville Public Education Foundation**. "Now more than ever, schools face real and lingering challenges to educate students. We are encouraged to see that Nashville residents continue to believe in the potential for public schools, and they agree that improving our schools is the best way to prioritize kids."

In new questions regarding the needs of children and youth, the poll found that only 1 in 5 residents believe the city is placing its next generation at the forefront of decision making. While 7 in 10 respondents identify better public schools as the best way to prioritize children and youth, they also recognize the importance of non-school factors on student success including less crime, more economic opportunities, more accessible childcare, and more parks and recreation options.

Regarding overall satisfaction with schools, 45% of respondents say MNPS has gotten worse over the past 5 years while only 10% say it's gotten better. This growing pessimism is prevalent throughout NPEF's citywide survey and reflected in most every issue, including overall school performance, handling of COVID, and serving disadvantaged communities.

Despite worsening views on key measures about school performance, the basic beliefs of voters on school funding are constant. Two-thirds (66%) of Nashville residents say education funding is somewhat or much too low. Further, respondents acknowledge the hard work of teachers and school leaders with a strong majority (66%) believing schools are underfunded and a significant majority (72%) believing teachers are underpaid. Compared to last



year, the number of those polled who say teachers are underpaid has dropped slightly (~8%) – possibly a result of Nashville’s news earlier this year of a new salary structure that improves MNPS teacher pay.

“NPEF continues its work every day because, like the majority of Nashville voters, we believe it’s possible for all kids to thrive in our schools,” **Cour** said. “Removing the most significant barriers to student success will require changes in the way we prioritize the needs of our children and youth in Nashville.”

Illustrating Nashvillians support a ‘kids first’ approach, respondents say student growth and learning is most important in determining a successful school with factors such as quality teachers and engaging learning experiences also important. Accordingly, respondents place more of an emphasis on improving student learning each year (46%) than academic scores (19%).

Other findings in the citywide survey indicate Nashvillians strongly support (69%) mask mandates in schools; support for school choice has stayed flat (61%); job training programs, more tutors/learning opportunities, and updated WIFI and technology are the top three preferred uses of federal COVID Recovery Act funds; and a majority (57%) of Nashvillians wants public schools to teach students how race and class affect society even though they are split on whether or not Critical Race Theory (CRT) is actually currently being taught (36% don’t know).

The goal of NPEF’s citywide survey is to benchmark public education perceptions and better understand voter attitudes toward education priorities and support for potential education policy changes. The poll was conducted by [ALG Research](#) on behalf of NPEF in 2018, 2020 and again this year. ALG Research conducted a multi-modal telephone survey of 500 randomly sampled registered voters in Nashville between September 21 – September 27, 2021. 26% of interviews were done over landlines, 36% over cell phones, and 38% via text-to-web. The margin of error for the sample is +/- 4.4 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence.

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About the Nashville Public Education Foundation

The Nashville Public Education Foundation is a nonprofit organization that works to remove barriers for students by promoting excellence, serving as a critical friend to Metro Nashville Public Schools, convening stakeholders, and advocating for change so all students can thrive in school. 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.

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