

Assessing Soft Skills: Are We Preparing Students for Successful Futures?

A Perceptions Study of Parents,
Teachers, and School Administrators

Foreword

The NWEA® Assessment Perceptions Study, our ongoing investigation into public perceptions of K-12 assessment, shows a pressing need for more discussion, attention, and focus regarding how we measure student growth and success.

Previous studies commissioned by NWEA in 2012, 2014, and 2016 revealed the need for better assessment literacy among administrators, teachers, and parents — a better understanding of the purpose, value, and instructional use of different assessment types. While I believe there has been progress on this front under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there is still a long road ahead before we make truly significant progress to support learning for all students.

This year, we broadened the survey to address fundamentally important questions: How do we know if we are preparing students for their futures? What skills will students need, and how do we gather evidence of this learning?

The results presented in this report quickly reveal an opportunity and call to improve assessment. They show that we are not aligned in the value of assessments given today — especially when it comes to the time they take, their purpose, and how results are communicated. Interestingly, there is agreement on the importance of measuring what we call “soft skills” such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork.

This year, for the first time, our study also included personal interviews with educators and parents. These reinforced our findings and also added a new perspective. Educators agree that soft skills are critical to student success and need to be directly taught and reinforced. But it was also acknowledged that these skills start at home.

When I read this report, I see opportunity. Parent optimism about assessments and education is encouraging. But where I see the most opportunity is in truly measuring what matters and ensuring that every assessment that exists today or is being created for tomorrow is relevant to student learning.

We must continue our dialogue on this — and use the voices of educators and parents to create a future for assessment in which all students are able to fully realize their potential.

Chris Minnich
Chief Executive Officer, NWEA

Key Findings

1. Parents, teachers, principals, and superintendents agree: It is equally important to assess both academic and nonacademic skills.

However, important nonacademic skills are not being measured very well.

- Over eight in 10 teachers (83%), parents (82%), superintendents (82%), and principals (83%) say it is equally important to assess both academic skills and nonacademic skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity (see Section 1).
- Only about one in 10 teachers say that the formal and informal assessments used by their schools to gauge nonacademic skills measure them “very well” (see Section 1).

2. The specific nonacademic skills that are valued, and the ways they are fostered, vary widely.

Not all stakeholders agree on whether schools, families, or communities should play the primary role in developing these skills.

- When asked to describe what type of nonacademic skills schools should teach, interview respondents replied with a wide variety of life skills ranging from character development attributes to interpersonal soft skills to functional life skills (see Appendix A).
- Although a majority of stakeholders believe it is very important for schools to measure nonacademic skills, many maintain that it is not within a school's scope of responsibility or capacity to teach these skills. As one principal commented, “We don't have the time that we need to reach out to the kids that are struggling the most with the nonacademic skills” (see Section 1).
- Educators report using a variety of approaches to develop these skills in their students, including project-based learning and seeking opportunities to teach teamwork within group exercises (see Section 1).

3. Teachers, administrators, and parents all report using multiple measures to assess what their child or their students are learning, though different groups rely on somewhat different measures.

Most parents think that the amount of time spent on assessments is just right or too little, but teachers and administrators say too much time is spent on assessments.

- While a majority of teachers and administrators say that too much time is spent on assessments, a majority of parents (59%) say students spend just the right amount of time or too little time taking assessments. Additionally, majorities of parents say that teachers spend just the right amount or too little time preparing students for assessments (65%) and administering assessments (61%) (see Section 3).
- Pluralities of parents (46%) and superintendents (49%) and a majority of principals (52%) say that teachers spend too little time communicating assessment results to parents (see Section 4).

4. Parents are optimistic about the education that their children are receiving and say their children are learning the skills they need for future success.

However, they do not think the tests their children take measure long-term outcomes very well.

- When asked to compare the quality of their own K-12 education with their child's education, over half of parents (52%) say the education their child is receiving is better than the education they received (see Section 2).
- More than 60% of parents agree (27%) or strongly agree (34%) that their child is learning the necessary skills in school that will make their child successful in the future (see Section 2).
- One in five parents (20%) say that assessments their child takes in school measure “very well” whether their child will be successful in college — higher than whether their child will be successful in their career (16%) and on par with whether their child has the skills to succeed in life outside of school and work (19%) (see Section 2).

Introduction

Assessments are powerful tools that can provide valuable feedback to teachers and students, but they are also at the center of political debates as to whether they measure the appropriate skills to determine if students will succeed in college or in their career. A 2017 PDK poll found that Americans want schools to focus on areas other than academics alone — 82% say that it is highly important for schools to help students develop interpersonal skills such as being cooperative, respectful of others, and persistent at solving problems.¹ The poll also found that 82% support job or career skills classes even if that means students might spend less time in academic classes.

Many schools are aware of the need for teaching both academic and nonacademic skills, and many are looking to make soft skills a stronger component in their curriculum.² In particular, eight in 10 Americans say the extent to which schools help students develop interpersonal skills is very or extremely important in school quality.³ Yet, only four in 10 Americans are confident that standardized tests can measure these skills.⁴ Although many organizations, including The Brookings Institution⁵ and Mission: Graduate,⁶ have identified broad soft skills that should be measured, there is still a lack of consensus, even at the federal level, on how to define them or measure them.

Federal education policy under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has allowed states to be innovative by establishing college- and career-ready standards while developing tests to assess other skills such as critical thinking, effective communication, and problem-solving.⁷ States are able to include these nontraditional measures to supplement test scores in evaluating school effectiveness.

Prior Gallup studies commissioned by NWEA have examined national perceptions of K-12 assessments among a full range of education stakeholders by collecting data from administrators (principals and superintendents), teachers, and parents. This study shifts the focus to nonacademic skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity. Furthermore, we examine differing opinions among racial and socioeconomic subgroups. Members of the same key stakeholder groups were asked about their perceptions of these skills, including which skills are more important to measure, how effective current assessments are at measuring these skills, and what skills students need to succeed. In addition to quantitative surveys, Gallup conducted qualitative interviews with a subset of administrators, teachers, and parents to add more depth and specificity to quantitative responses. As policymakers across the nation are finalizing measures to meet ESSA guidelines and states begin to implement these plans, they can use these results to better inform and guide their discussions on how to define and measure nonacademic skill development.



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Americans say the extent to which schools help students develop interpersonal skills is **very or extremely important** in school quality.³



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Americans are **confident** that standardized tests can measure these skills.⁴

1 Retrieved from http://pdkpoll.org/assets/downloads/PDKnational_poll_2017.pdf

2 Retrieved from <https://mdreducation.com/2018/03/16/soft-skills-becoming-stronger-school-accountability/>

3 Retrieved from http://pdkpoll.org/assets/downloads/PDKnational_poll_2017.pdf

4 Ibid

5 Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/grading-soft-skills-the-brookings-soft-skills-report-card/>

6 Retrieved from <https://missiongraduatenm.org/graduate-profile-user-guide>

7 Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/k-12reforms/standards>

Section 1: The Importance of Assessing Nonacademic Skills

Standardized test scores are positively correlated with grades and are often viewed as a proxy for student success. However, they do not adequately assess all of the nonacademic skills or soft skills — personality traits, motivations, or goals that are valued in the job market and in school — that may be better predictors of success in life.⁸ Psychologists have found that capabilities such as self-discipline, rather than IQ or grades, are more powerful predictors of educational success.⁹

Employers highly value nonacademic skills. In a 2014 study, a majority of employers (60%) said that having both field-specific knowledge and skills and a broad range of skills and knowledge across a variety of fields is important for recent college graduates to achieve long-term career success.¹⁰ Specifically, employers place the highest value on skills that cut across majors, such as communication skills, critical thinking, teamwork, and the ability to apply knowledge in real-world settings.¹¹



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Teachers (83%), parents (82%), superintendents (82%), and principals (83%) say it is **equally important to assess both academic knowledge and nonacademic skills.**

Education Stakeholders Say It Is Equally Important to Assess Both Academic and Nonacademic Skills

Similar to employers, a majority of education stakeholders recognize the value of nonacademic skills. Over eight in 10 teachers (83%), parents (82%), superintendents (82%), and principals (83%) say it is equally important to assess both academic knowledge and nonacademic skills.

For the following question, when we say “nonacademic skills,” we mean skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity. When we say “academic knowledge,” we mean how well a student demonstrates reading, writing, math, and science knowledge.

In your opinion, is it more important for schools to:

	Teachers	Parents	Superintendents	Principals
Assess students' academic knowledge	13%	13%	15%	15%
Assess students' nonacademic skills	4%	4%	3%	1%
Equally important to assess both	83%	82%	82%	83%

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1%.

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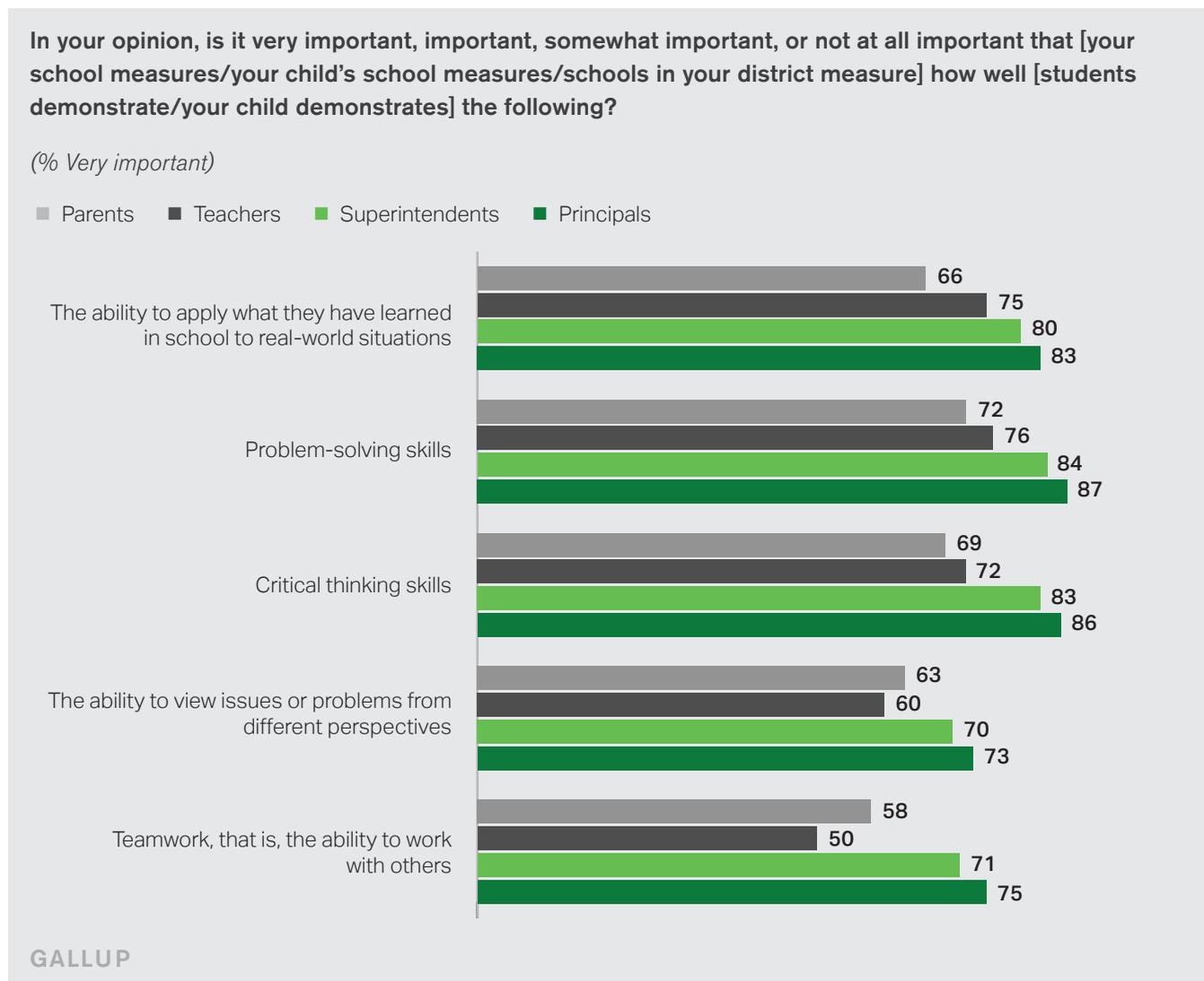
8 Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w18121.pdf>

9 Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.368.8509&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

10 Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2015employerstudentsurvey.pdf>

11 Ibid

Not only do a majority of these groups recognize the importance of academic knowledge and nonacademic skills, but they also believe it is important for their child's school or for their school to measure various nonacademic skills. Of the nonacademic skills included in this survey, parents (72%), teachers (76%), superintendents (84%), and principals (87%) most strongly agree that it is very important for schools to measure problem-solving skills. While all groups agree that other nonacademic skills are very important to measure, there are some differences among stakeholder groups on these items.



Principals' and superintendents' perceptions of the importance of measuring these skills are consistent with each other. But there are two areas where the perceptions of parents and teachers diverge. Parents (58%) are more likely than teachers (50%) to say it is very important that their child's school measures how well students demonstrate teamwork. Additionally, teachers (75%) are more likely than parents (66%) to say it is very important to measure how well students demonstrate the ability to apply what they have learned in school to real-world situations.

Where Should Students Develop Nonacademic Skills? Opinions Vary

Although a majority of stakeholders believe it is very important for schools to measure nonacademic skills, many interview respondents said that those skills should be developed at home. Several suggested that the current state of the family increases the need to teach nonacademic skills. An experienced principal stated, “Fifty to 60 years ago, the family structure was a little bit different. . . . I think more pressure is being put on schools to develop those social and emotional skills that they once had in the solid family structure.”

Furthermore, interview respondents who disagreed with the need to assess nonacademic skills maintained that it was simply not within a school's scope of responsibility to teach these skills. In their opinion, this responsibility falls on the family. One teacher stated, “I think a lot of [nonacademic skills] should probably be done at home. There's definitely a family aspect that needs to be tied into that, and parents being active in their students' lives is a huge part of that.”

Whether to Measure Nonacademic Skills: Differences by Race and Socioeconomic Status

Opinions on this issue vary across populations. When examining responses by race, teachers and parents of color (those denoted as “nonwhite” in the data) are more likely than their white peers to say it is very important to measure how well their child or student demonstrates nonacademic skills. In particular, teachers and parents of color are significantly more likely than white teachers and parents to say it is very important to measure teamwork (62% vs. 46% for teachers and 66% vs. 55% for parents, respectively) and students' ability to view issues or problems from different perspectives (70% vs. 58% for teachers and 68% vs. 62% for parents).

In your opinion, is it very important, important, somewhat important, or not at all important that [your school/your child's school] measures how well [students demonstrate/your child demonstrates] the following?

(% Very important)

	Parents		Teachers	
	White	Of Color	White	Of Color
The ability to apply what they have learned in school to real-world situations	65	73	73	81
Problem-solving skills	72	77	76	80
Critical thinking skills	69	71	71	75
The ability to view issues or problems from different perspectives	62	68	58	70
Teamwork, that is, the ability to work with others	55	66	46	62

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In addition to a teacher's race, there are also differences based on socioeconomic status and education. Teachers from high-income schools are significantly more likely than those from low-income schools to say it is very important to measure critical thinking skills (90% vs. 71%, respectively) and problem-solving skills (86% vs. 75%). In addition, teachers with a bachelor's degree or less are more likely than their peers with at least some postgraduate work to believe it is very important to measure these soft skills.

In your opinion, is it very important, important, somewhat important, or not at all important that your school measures how well students demonstrate the following?

(% Very important, among teachers)

	Income*			Education	
	Low-income	Middle-income	High-income	Bachelor's degree or less	Postgraduate work or degree
The ability to apply what they have learned in school to real-world situations	77	70	76	79	71
Problem-solving skills	75	74	86	81	73
Critical thinking skills	71	66	90	74	70
The ability to view issues or problems from different perspectives	60	59	66	62	60
Teamwork, that is, the ability to work with others	49	48	52	55	46

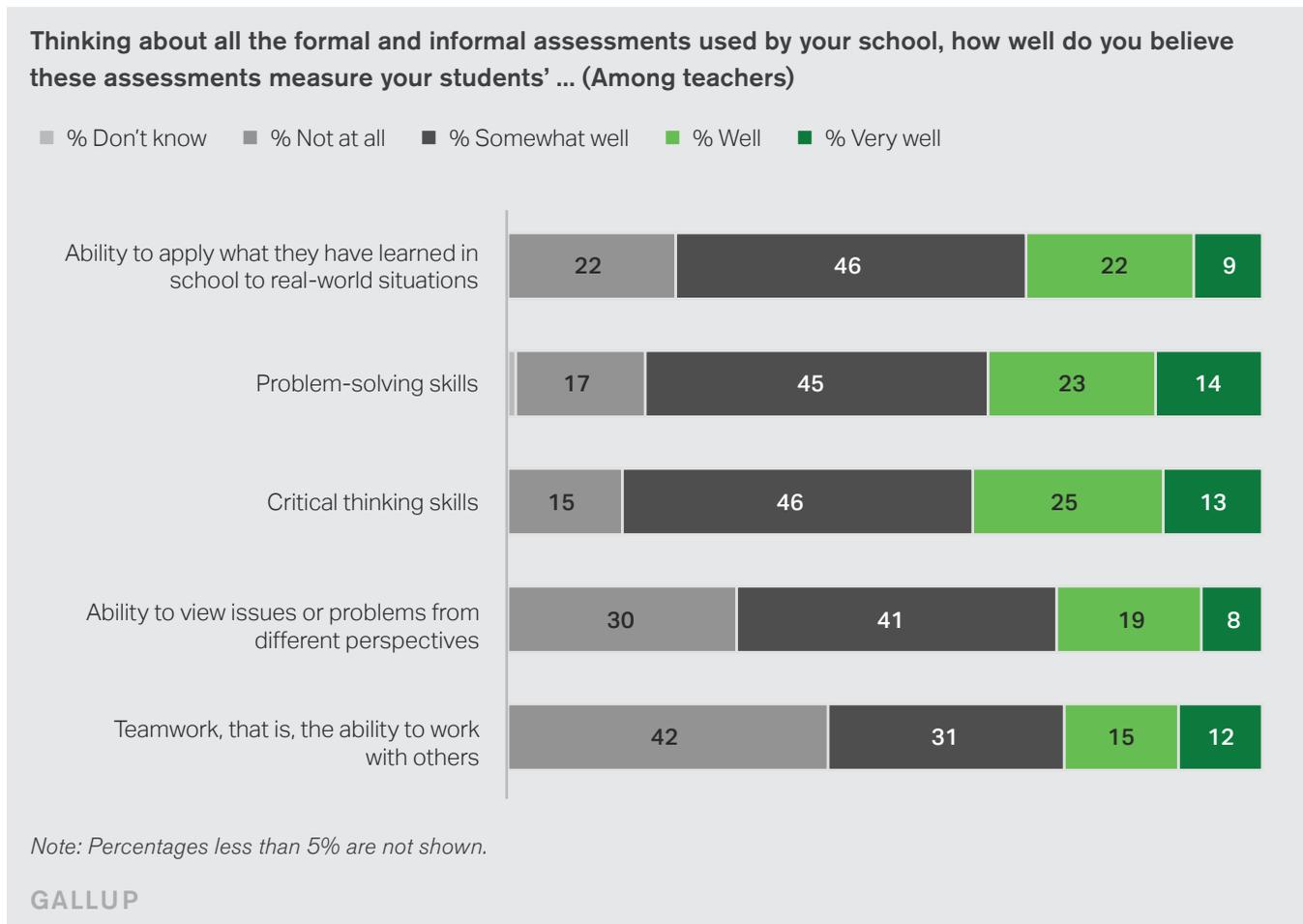
*Teachers were asked which category "best describes the type of students your school generally serves."

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Teachers: Important Skills Are Not Measured Very Well

Although a majority of parents, teachers, and administrators say that various nonacademic skills are important to measure, only about one in 10 teachers say they are measured “very well.” In fact, a majority of teachers say that the formal and informal assessments their school uses to gauge these skills measure them “not at all” or only “somewhat well.”



Although many interview respondents agreed with the need to teach nonacademic skills, few were able to provide examples of an assessment methodology for evaluating these abilities. Educators commented that measuring nonacademic skills is more subjective and more time intensive. Some wondered if teachers with large classrooms are able to get to know their students well enough to make these determinations. One principal commented, “We don’t have the time that we need to reach out to the kids that are struggling the most with the nonacademic skills.”

Several teachers recommended a shift to project-based learning as a way to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. One parent lamented the departure of logic courses in modern curriculums and insisted that they are necessary for developing critical thinking skills. Many respondents identified teamwork as an essential skill that students need to be successful in the real world. One superintendent encouraged teachers to think beyond their core subject and look for opportunities to teach teamwork within group exercises.



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Teachers say that the formal and informal assessments used by their schools to gauge nonacademic skills measure them “very well.”

Nonacademic Skills Have Different Meanings for Different People

“I think right now, across Texas, across the nation, the focus is on academics. But if you are connected to what’s going on around the world, we should have a sense of urgency that our role is critical in developing the skills for students. And I mean for everyone. ... Some of the kids, there’s so much need on the social, emotional learning [more] than ever before.”

— Superintendent

One possible reason why assessing nonacademic skills is proving to be difficult is that the concept means different things to different people. The interview question defined nonacademic skills as “skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity.” When given the opportunity to suggest other nonacademic skills, interview respondents listed a variety of items.

Several respondents noted that the world has fundamentally changed and that the education system needs to change with it. Application to real-world situations included calls for personal financial literacy, functional job skills training, and public speaking skills. Other respondents focused on character development such as instilling a strong work ethic, teaching resiliency to life changes, harnessing the ability to make decisions, managing the opportunities and pitfalls of taking risks in life, developing self-confidence, and how to accept not getting their way. See Appendix A for a full list of the nonacademic skills that respondents discussed in the qualitative interviews.



Section 2: Assessments as Indicators of Students' Future Success

There are many ways to define student success. For some, success means college readiness, while others may be more interested in career readiness or the acquisition of other specific life skills. Many parents are optimistic that their children are learning what they need to succeed, but they are less certain that assessments measure these long-term outcomes very well.

Parents: About One in Five Believe Assessments Measure Their Child's Future Success Very Well

The 2017 PDK poll found that 84% of Americans believe schools should assess students on their interpersonal skills, but only 39% are confident that standardized tests can measure these skills. Even if skills are imperfectly assessed, these results suggest that accountability is still in demand.¹²

One in five parents (20%) say that assessments their child takes in school measure “very well” whether their child will be successful in college — higher than whether their child will be successful in their career (16%) and on par with whether their child has the skills to succeed in life outside of school and work (19%). Yet, on the other end of the spectrum, similar percentages of parents believe that assessments measure these outcomes “not at all.” A majority of parents say that the assessments their child takes only measure these outcomes “somewhat well” or “well.”



¹² Retrieved from http://pdkpoll.org/assets/downloads/PDKnational_poll_2017.pdf

When examining results by different parent characteristics, a general pattern emerges. Lower-income parents and parents with a child in private school are more likely to believe assessments measure “very well” the ability for their child to succeed in their career, college, and life outside of school and work. Parents of color are more likely than white parents to say that assessments measure “very well” whether their child will be successful in college.

How well do you believe the assessments your child takes in school measure ...

(% Very well, among parents)

	Race		Income*			Type of school child attends	
	White	Of Color	Under \$60,000	\$60,000 to \$119,999	\$120,000+	Public	Private
Whether your child will be successful in their career	16	15	21	12	13	15	31
Whether your child will be successful in college	17	25	27	16	19	18	34
Whether your child has the skills to succeed in life outside of school and work	18	17	26	13	14	18	31

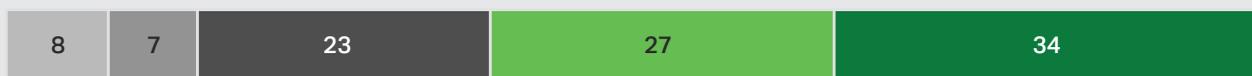
*Parents were asked for their annual household income before taxes.

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More than 60% of parents agree or strongly agree that their child is learning the necessary skills in school that will make their child successful in the future, with 34% strongly agreeing. Additionally, parents of color (40%) are more likely than white parents (32%) to strongly agree with the same statement.

Please rate your level of agreement with this item on a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree. Your child is learning the necessary skills in school that will make your child successful in the future.

■ %1 Strongly disagree ■ %2 ■ %3 ■ %4 ■ %5 Strongly agree

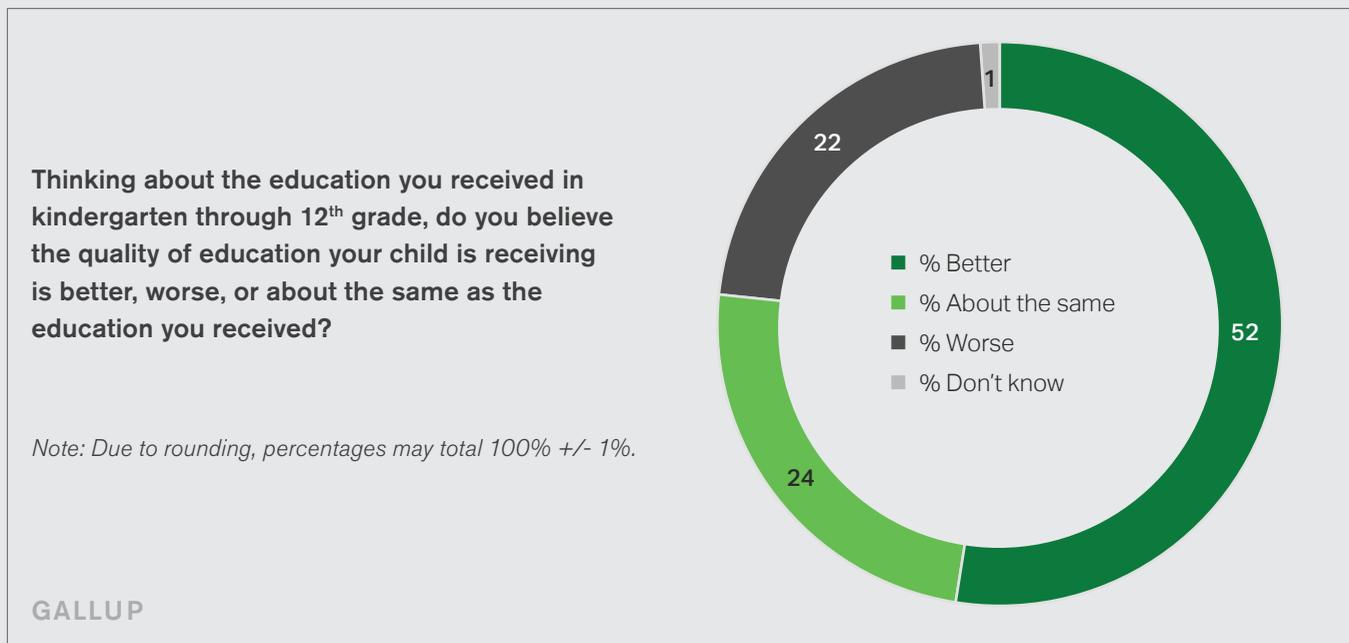


Note: Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/-1%.

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Parents Are Optimistic: Majority Believe Child's Quality of Education Is Better Than Their Own; Will Make Their Child Successful

When asked to compare the quality of their K-12 education with their children's schools, over half of parents (52%) say the education their child is receiving is better than the education they received. In particular, parents with a child in grades nine to 12 (56%) are more likely than parents with a child in grades five to eight (47%) to say the quality of their child's education is better.



In the interviews, parents credited their school with having more advanced curriculums at an earlier age, a focus on STEM topics, and a more structured approach to education in general. One parent specifically credited stronger assessments, stating, "They have better ways to measure and better metrics to better gauge a child's productivity and their progress [than we did]." Parents who rated the quality of education as worse cited the decline or disappearance of logic courses, which underpin critical thinking skills, and extracurricular activities such as music, which were once key components of education.



Similar to parents, educators in the interviews also say education is better. But of the educators who believe the quality of education is worse, several identified a surprising culprit: technology. One teacher detailed how distracting cellphones have become in the classroom and stated that it sets an unrealistic expectation among students that schoolwork should be just as entertaining as videos posted on social media. A superintendent made the connection between the rise of cellphones and the decline of nonacademic skills. He believes cellphone technology impedes students' nonacademic skill development by drawing them into an alternate world and disconnecting them from the real world. Another principal identified the same concern, noting a marked decline over the past few years in students' abilities to build effective personal relationships.

Section 3: Assessments: Types and Time

Critics of testing argue that students and teachers spend too much classroom time on mandated assessments. However, other groups see standardized tests as having an important role in supporting equity.¹³ This study shows that stakeholders use multiple measures to assess student learning and, consistent with a prior Gallup study commissioned by NWEA, finds that most parents don't believe students are over-tested.¹⁴

Teachers, Parents, and Superintendents Use Varied Measurements to Assess What Students Are Learning

Teachers, administrators, and parents all report using multiple measures to assess what their child or their students are learning, though different groups rely on somewhat different measures. When asked what they use to assess whether students in their school are learning what they need to, teachers (90%), superintendents (94%), and principals (96%) are most likely to say classroom test scores. In contrast, parents are most likely to say they use report cards (89%).

Teachers and parents do not value state accountability test scores as much as administrators do — only 64% of teachers and 51% of parents use those scores to measure if their child or their students are learning what they need to. Administrators place more emphasis on state accountability test scores, as 91% of superintendents and 89% of principals say they use them to assess learning.

Which of the following do you use to assess whether [students in your school are/students in your district are/your child is] learning what they need to?

(% Yes)

	Teachers	Parents	Superintendents	Principals
Parent-teacher conferences	—	79	83	81
Report cards	—	89	91	90
[Your child's/students'] projects or performances, such as science fair projects, art, or music presentations	71	75	86	77
Classroom test scores	90	80	94	96
State accountability test scores	64	51	91	89
One-on-one meetings with students	87	—	76	80
Formal meetings with other teachers about student performance, such as professional learning communities (PLCs)	83	—	85	91
Informal meetings with other teachers about student performance	89	—	88	93

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13 Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/07/23/anti-test-movement-slows-to-a-crawl.html>

14 Retrieved from https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2016/05/Make_Assessment_Work_for_All_Students_2016.pdf

In interviews, many educators stated that their student report cards or parent-teacher conferences are the main mechanisms of communicating progress in nonacademic skills. One principal described the nonacademic section of the report card at his school: “That’s part of a kid’s report card. ... We tell students that we expect that they seek excellence and you do that by being kind, working hard, and making no excuses.”

Few interview respondents gave examples of a formal methodology in place at their school for assessing nonacademic skills. A notable exception comes from a principal at a Montessori school, who stated, “We’re using an assessment tool called the Developmental Environmental Rating Scale. It’s specific and came from the Montessori and the public sector group. It’s a tablet-based app and measures a lot of nonacademic skills.”

Time Spent Taking, Preparing for, and Administering Assessments: Teachers and Administrators Say Too Much; Parents Say Just the Right Amount

A majority of teachers and administrators say that too much time is spent across the different aspects of testing, including the time students spend taking assessments, the time teachers spend preparing for assessments, and the time teachers spend administering assessments. In particular, teachers (70%) are more likely than administrators to say that teachers spend too much time preparing students for assessments — eight percentage points higher than superintendents and 20 points higher than principals.

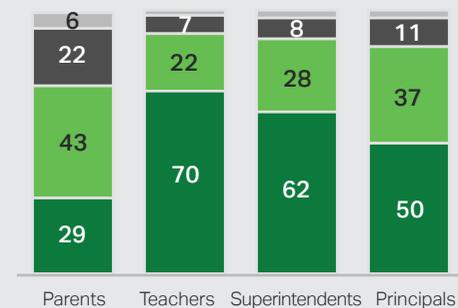
In contrast, parents are less likely to say too much time is spent on those same tasks. Rather, a majority of parents say that the time teachers spend preparing students for assessments (65%), the time students spend taking assessments (59%), and the time their child’s teachers spend administering assessments (61%) is just the right amount or too little.

When examining the differences among teachers by race, white teachers are more likely than teachers of color to say that teachers spend too much time preparing students for assessments (73% vs. 60%, respectively) and too much time administering assessments (80% vs. 63%).

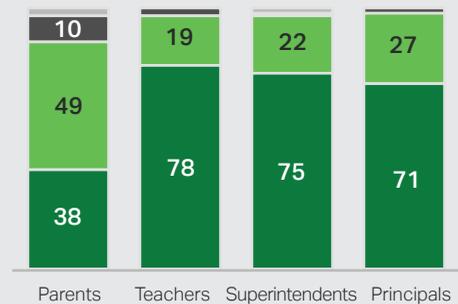
For each of the following, please indicate if you feel too much, just the right amount, or too little time is spent on these tasks.

- % Too much time
- % Just the right amount of time
- % Too little time
- % Don’t know

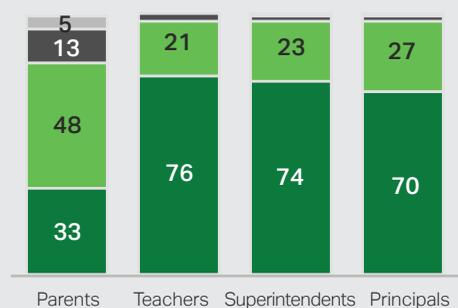
Time teachers spend preparing students for assessments



Time students spend taking assessments



Time [your child’s teachers/teachers] spend administering assessments



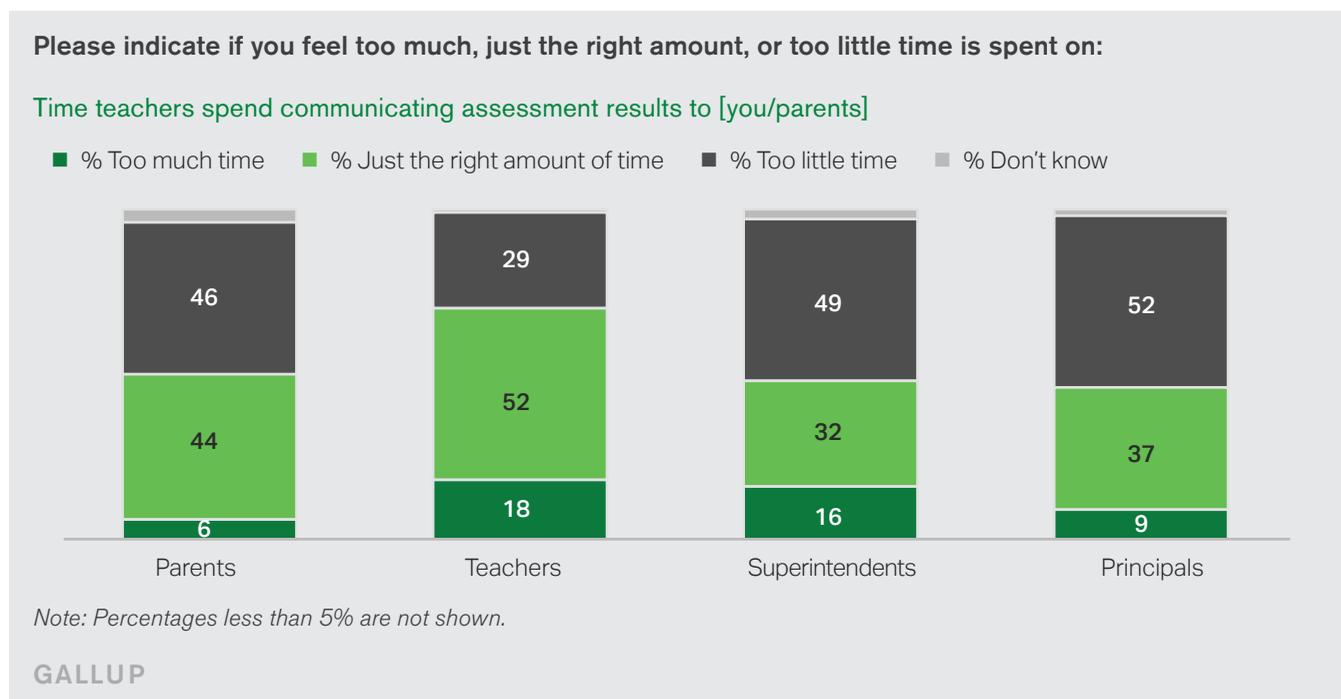
Note: Percentages less than 5% are not shown.

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Section 4: Communication Between Teachers and Parents

There Is a Disconnect Between Teachers' and Parents' Views on the Frequency of Giving Feedback on Assessment Results and Nonacademic Skill Development

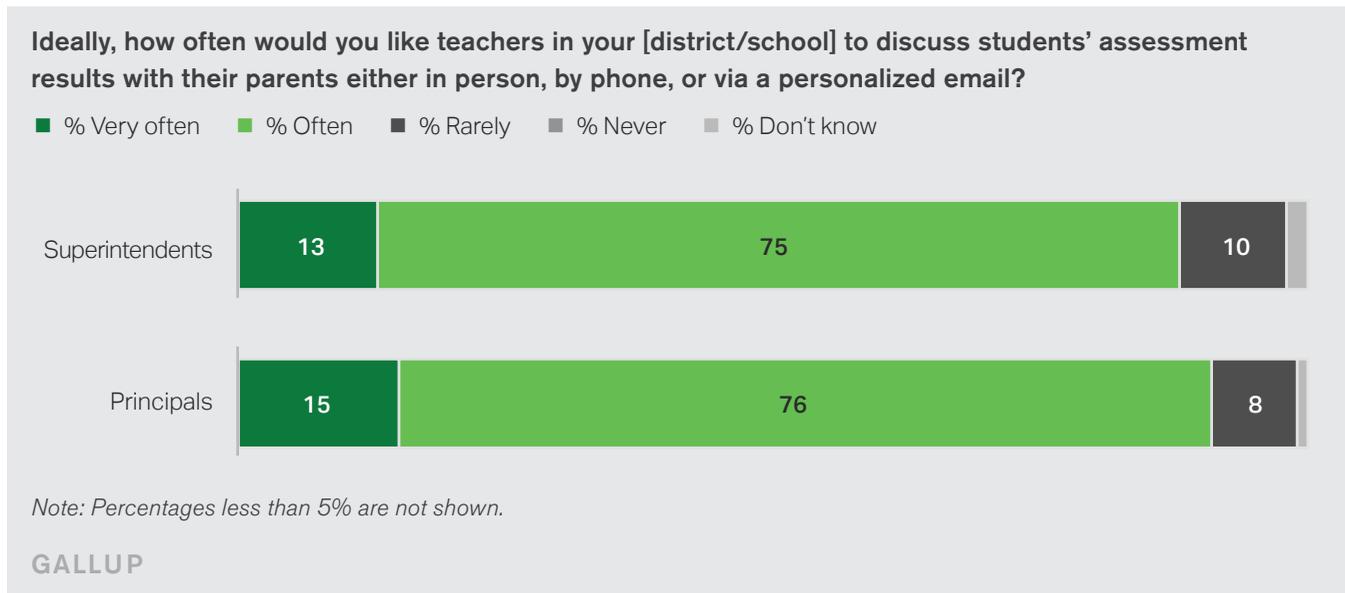
Most teachers say that just the right amount of time is spent communicating assessment results to parents (52%), while 29% say that too little time is spent on that task. Comparatively, pluralities of parents (46%) and superintendents (49%) and a majority of principals (52%) say that teachers spend too little time communicating results to parents. This is consistent with findings from a 2016 Gallup study commissioned by NWEA, in which over 60% of parents said their child's teachers rarely (39%) or never (22%) discuss their child's assessment results with them.¹⁵



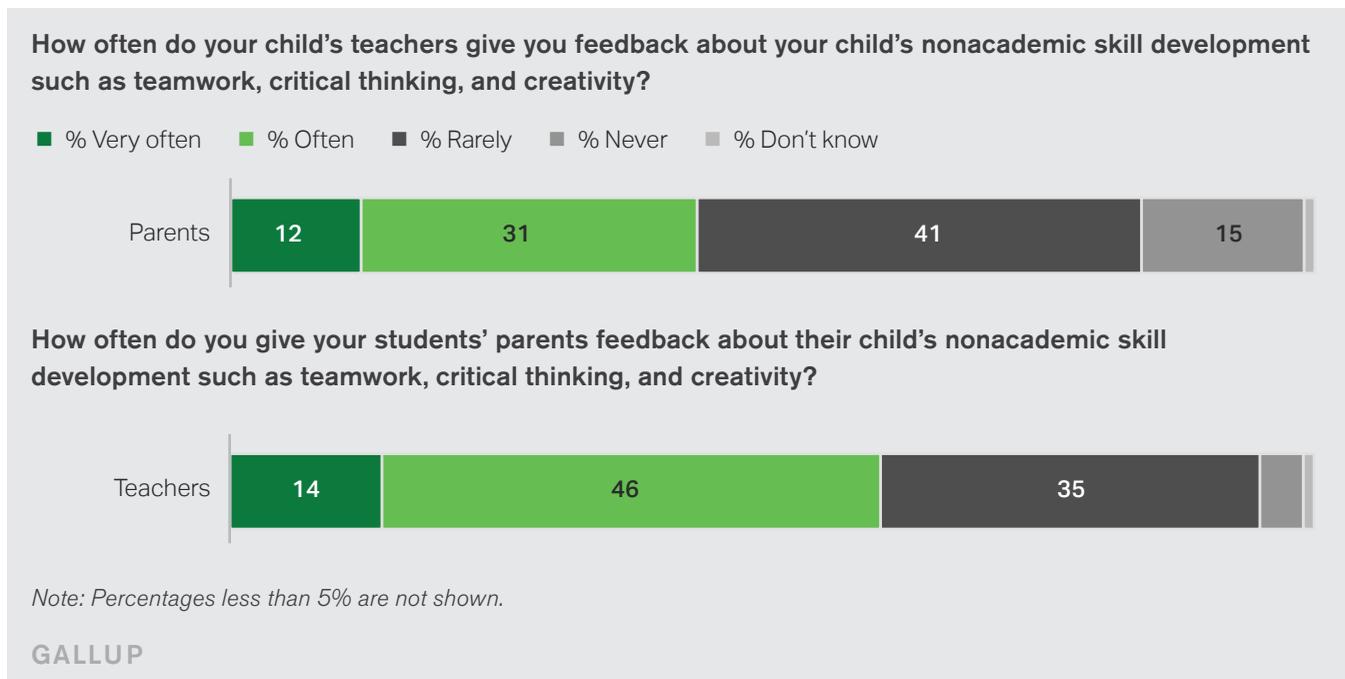
¹⁵ Retrieved from https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2016/05/Make_Assessment_Work_for_All_Students_2016.pdf

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A majority of administrators want frequent communication between parents and teachers on assessment results. When asked how often they would like teachers in their school or district to discuss students' assessment results, 88% of superintendents and 91% of principals say very often or often.



Consistent with communication about academic results, only 43% of parents say their child's teachers give them feedback about their child's nonacademic skill development very often or often. However, 60% of teachers say they give parents feedback about their child's nonacademic skill development very often or often — a 17-point gap.



NWEA Recommendations

1. Accelerate the evolution of state assessment systems to measure what matters for student success.

When ESSA was passed, there was a call for states to reconsider the design and purpose of their assessment systems, develop innovative approaches that reduce unnecessary testing efforts, and expand beyond traditional academic measures. However, while states are moving toward solutions, some have stalled, maintaining systems similar to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability model framed by compliance and reporting. Education leaders and researchers are beginning to recognize that transforming assessments will require capacity and assessment literacy to be increased, and a revolutionary vision for assessment renewed.

Recommendation: State and local education leaders, researchers, and policymakers should work together to refine state assessment systems to address and measure the range of academic and nonacademic skills students will need for successful futures. This should not be accomplished by adding more tests and more testing time. Rather, we should work to create a coherent, balanced assessment system that takes into account what we learn about a student in assessments throughout the year so that end-of-year activity builds from and confirms what we already learned about that student during the year. This work should engage a diverse community of stakeholders to ensure that a wide array of perspectives and views are reflected.

2. Broaden understanding of the value of developing and assessing nonacademic skills in diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.

There is a need for our nation's education systems to understand their role in developing nonacademic skills. In addition, there is an opportunity for educators and families to clarify and deepen a shared understanding of which skills matter and of the various educational and social contexts for developing these skills in students. Since how these skills are valued, interpreted, and developed vary among diverse groups, educators need to better understand how these relate to students', families', and teachers' racial/ethnic identities as well as contextual factors such as community and culture.

Recommendation: Research-practice partnerships should be developed to advance our understanding of the importance of nonacademic skill development and assessment among different communities, schools, and families, with a specific focus on the cultural adaptations of such skills for those from diverse backgrounds.

3. Highlight parent optimism about assessments for learning to create better unity among educators.

While there is ongoing contention that there is too much testing, overall, parents do not believe that too much time is spent on testing. They are optimistic about the quality of education today, value assessments, and believe their children are learning what they need to succeed in the future. This optimism expressed by parents, especially parents of color, is refreshing and inspiring.

Recommendation: Districts should take the lead from this optimism by making sure families receive meaningful feedback about their students' learning, including the development of soft skills. Assessment publishers, teachers, and administrators should foster productive communication about learning and assessment and advocate for assessment systems that positively contribute to student learning. Educator preparation programs and education leaders should support teachers in how to communicate assessment data, their meaning, and their implications for student success to students, families, and the community.

Methodology

Results for the *Assessing Soft Skills: Are We Preparing Students for Successful Futures?* report are based on surveys conducted with parents, teachers, principals, and superintendents.

Parent telephone interviews were conducted March 16-31, 2018, with a sample of 1,011 parents with at least one child in grades five to 12.

Teacher telephone interviews were conducted March 14-April 7, 2018, with a sample of 1,000 teachers. Teachers who teach only art, only foreign language, only music or band, or only physical education or health were not included in this study because those subjects include fewer assessments.

Telephone interviews were conducted for teachers and parents currently living in all 50 states and the District of Columbia using a combination of two sample sources: the Gallup Panel and the Gallup Daily tracking survey. The Gallup Panel is a proprietary, probability-based panel of U.S. adults selected using random-digit-dial (RDD) and address-based sampling methods. The Gallup Panel is not an opt-in panel. Student and parent interviews were conducted in English only. The Gallup Daily tracking survey sample includes national adults with a minimum quota of 70% cellphone respondents and 30% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Prior to September 2015, a minimum quota of 50% cellphone respondents and 50% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within regions, was used. Landline and cellphone numbers are selected using RDD methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household based on which member had the most recent birthday. Eligible Gallup Daily tracking respondents who previously agreed to future contact were contacted to participate in this study. Teacher interviews were conducted in English only.

The parent sample is weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. Parent data are weighted to match national demographics of age, gender, education, race, ethnicity, and region. Demographic weighting targets are based on the Current Population Survey 2015.

Teacher samples are weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. The data are weighted to match national demographics of age, gender, education, race, ethnicity, and region. Demographic weighting targets are based on Gallup Daily tracking information compiled over the past three years.

All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting.

For results based on the total sample of parents (n=1,011), the margin of sampling error is ± 4.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

For results based on the total sample of teachers (n=1,000), the margin of sampling error is ± 3.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Web surveys were completed by principals and superintendents contacted using a sample provided by established education sample providers. The sample sources are comprehensive but not representative of all principals and superintendents currently in the U.S. Surveys were conducted in English only.



Assessing Soft Skills: Are We Preparing Students for Successful Futures?

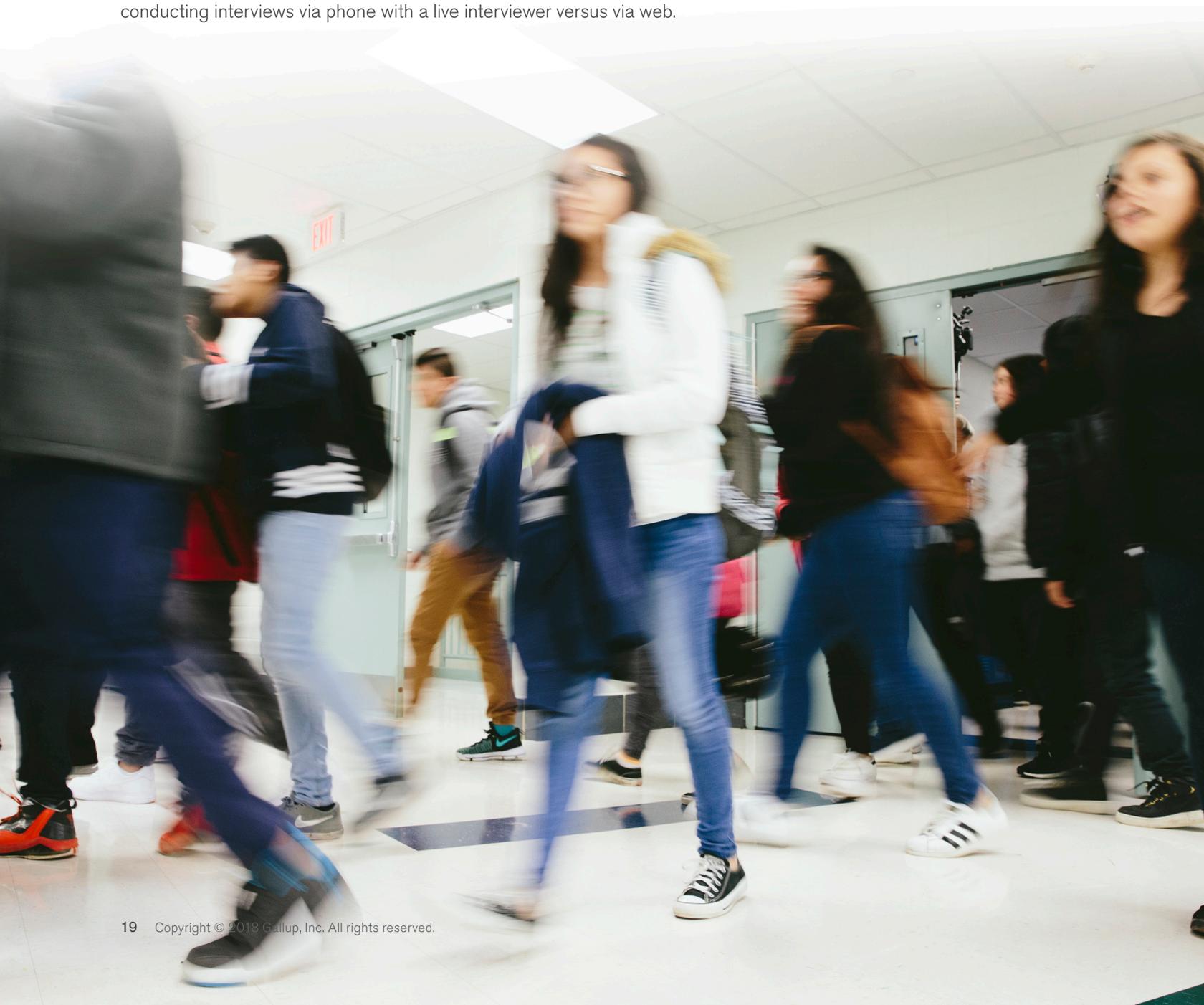
Principal and superintendent web surveys were conducted March 13-26, 2018. The sample of principals at the elementary, middle, and high school levels was 843, while the sample of school district superintendents was 1,220.

Superintendent and principal samples are weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. The data are weighted to match national demographics of urbanicity, size of enrollment and census region. Demographic weighting targets are based on information from the sample list.

For results based on the total sample of principals (n=843), the margin of sampling error is ± 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

For results based on the total sample of superintendents (n=1,220), the margin of sampling error is ± 3.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion surveys. Differences between telephone respondents and web respondents are not perfectly comparable because of the lack of representativeness of web samples and potential differences introduced by conducting interviews via phone with a live interviewer versus via web.



Appendix A

Interview Respondents Describe Nonacademic Skills in Their Own Words

“Nonacademic skills ... we’ve changed the names of them so many times.”

— Principal



When asked to describe what type of nonacademic skills schools should teach, interview respondents replied with a wide variety of life skills ranging from character development attributes to interpersonal soft skills to functional job training skills. The education community will need to come to an agreement on the baseline elements that make up a nonacademic skills curriculum before an assessment framework can be developed around it.

Character Development

Giving Back to the Community/Volunteerism
 Work Ethic
 Self-Confidence
 Thinking for Self Instead of Succumbing to Peer Pressure
 Personal Morals/Ethics/Right From Wrong
 Caring for Others
 Self-Discipline
 Coping With Emotions/Self-Regulation
 Taking Pride in Work
 Responsibility/Accountability
 Self-Determination
 Resiliency/Grit
 Honesty

Interpersonal Soft Skills/ Social Skills

Collaboration
 Mannerisms
 Developing Relationships
 Being Assertive Without Being Aggressive
 Leadership
 Communication Skills
 Handling Criticism
 Dealing With Bullying
 Problem-Solving/Critical Thinking
 Active Listening
 Taking Direction From Supervisors
 Managing Personal Conflict
 Accepting Different Opinions

Functional Life Skills

Managing Personal Finances
 Job Hunting
 Job Skills Training
 Time Management
 Public Speaking and Presentation Skills

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