

# Public Supports Higher Pay for Teachers

By [Cindy Long](#)

Ask Americans what they think of public education and their answers may surprise you.

According to the “[2009 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools](#),” Americans think more money should be spent on early childhood education; they’re weary of the No Child Left Behind Act; and they feel inadequate funding is the biggest problem facing our schools.

They’re also in favor of higher starting salaries for public school teachers, to the tune of \$43,000, about \$7,000 more than the average starting salary of education majors graduating in 2009.

Seven out of 10 respondents also said they’d like a child of theirs to become a public school teacher -- and with higher salaries, it's a lot more likely that they will.



“If we want to attract, retain, and motivate the best and the brightest, we need to raise the starting salaries of teachers to be competitive with other professions,” says Bob Willoughby, Associate Director of Research with the New Jersey Education Association. “Otherwise we’re not going to raise the standard of teaching and invite a broader spectrum into the field – graduates who might otherwise have thought to become lawyers, doctors, or accountants.”

In states across the country, the public is beginning to recognize that a quality education begins with quality teachers who earn professional pay – even in states with a high number of conservative GOP voters, like Wyoming.

“With an average beginning salary of nearly \$43,000 state-wide, Wyoming’s teachers can attest to the sense of professional respect that comes with a fair salary,” says Wyoming Education Association President Kathryn Valido.

Phi Delta Kappa (PDK), an international association of educators, has conducted this survey with Gallup every year since 1969. According to PDK Executive Director William Bushaw, Americans have consistently shown support and respect for educators.

“I think Americans recognize what an important role teachers play in shaping future generations, and as a result, see the need for increasing teacher salaries,” he says.

### **Key Findings of the 2009 Poll:**

**NCLB Fatigue?** Americans are growing weary of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In fact, support for NCLB, which was passed in 2002, continues to decline as almost half of Americans view it unfavorably and only one in four Americans believe that it has helped schools in their communities.

**Split Views on Teacher Tenure.** American views are split on teacher tenure depending on how the question is phrased. They disapprove of teachers having a “lifetime contract” but agree that teachers should have a formal legal review before being terminated.

**Dropout Rate of Top Importance.** Almost nine out of 10 Americans believe that the U.S. high school dropout rate is either the most important or one of the most important problems facing high schools today. Offering more interesting classes was suggested most often when asked what could help reduce the dropout rate.

**Support for Required Kindergarten.** Americans strongly endorse making either half-day or full-day kindergarten compulsory for all children. Five out of 10 Americans believe preschool programs should be housed in public schools, with parents even more supportive of that idea. This is a significant change from 18 years ago when Americans were evenly divided between public schools, parent workplaces, and special preschool facilities. Almost six out of 10 Americans would be willing to pay more taxes to fund free preschool programs for children whose parents are unable to pay.

**Americans Well-Informed by Newspapers.** Almost 75 percent of Americans say they are either well-informed or fairly well-informed about their schools, citing newspapers as their primary source of information about schools, despite the declines in the newspaper industry, and school employees as their secondary source.

**Support for Higher Teacher Salaries.** Overall, Americans demonstrate a deep respect for public school teachers, stating that beginning teachers with a bachelor’s degree and teaching certificate should earn an average starting salary of approximately \$43,000, a substantial increase over the current average starting salary of \$35,300. Additionally, seven out of 10 would like a child of theirs to become a public school teacher, the highest favorable rating in three decades.