

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the role of K-12 education in the United States? What should it be?
2. Why do you think schools are where debates on race keep playing out?
3. How do different conceptions of racism influence this debate?
4. Why is there such a big focus on equity in education? Shouldn't we just treat all students equally?
5. Should the curriculum be colorblind? How could a colorblind curriculum be harmful?
6. What do you think about the complaint that teaching certain subjects makes students uncomfortable?
7. How should governments attempt to fix past wrongs if not through public education?

Critical Race Theory Frequently Asked Questions

Critical Race Theory...

| COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS | TRUTH |
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| Is the same thing as Anti Bias, Anti Racism Education, Culturally Relevant Teaching, Diversity and Inclusion Training, Multicultural Education, Anti-Racism training | Is an academic framework used mostly in higher education. It is a tool rather than a training. |
| Focuses on racism as an individual act. | Focuses on systemic / structural racism. |
| Blames white people for all racial inequities in society and atrocities in the past | Recognizes that race and racism are woven into the very fabric of our institutions. |
| Teaches students with a socialist, communist, anti-American agenda. | If incorporated in education, it equips students with the tools to think critically about issues of race, racism, and inequity. |
| Educators are asked to teach material that makes everyone uncomfortable | Provides educators with a new lens for examining their schooling practices and rethinking their teaching. |
| Makes Black, Indigenous and students of color feel like powerless victims and white students guilty. | If incorporated in schools, it would raise students' awareness of how policy shapes life outcomes for people of different races. |
| Reinvents historical narratives | Encourages educators to critique historical narratives that they are teaching. |
| Creates division into "oppressed" and "oppressor" groups | Increases awareness of how intersecting identities impact one's power and privilege in society |
| Reinforces racial stereotypes and traumatizes students | Recognizes that race is a social construct |

By Sylvia Duckworth

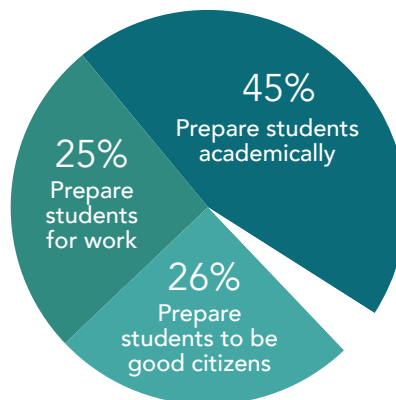
1 What is the purpose of public K–12 education?

Many Americans believe the purpose of K–12 education is not only to teach academics, such as math and science, but to prepare students for work and to be good citizens. In fact, most believe K–12 education has a lot of responsibility for ensuring workers have the skills and education they need to be successful in today’s economy.

- **Although preparing students academically is the most often cited goal of public education, Americans also believe that schools should prepare students to be good citizens and for work.** While about half—45 percent—of Americans believe that the main goal of public education should be to prepare students academically, 26 percent believe that the main goal should be to prepare students to be good citizens and 25 percent say it is to prepare them for work; see figure 1.⁸ Preparing students academically may encompass a range of goals, including ensuring their success in college or providing the academic skills they need for the workforce.

Preparing students academically is the most often cited goal of public education.

Figure 1. Percent of Americans who indicate they think the main goal of a public school education is to prepare students academically, to prepare them for work or to prepare them to be good citizens:



NOTE: Respondents who refused the question or provided answers outside the three provided choices are not represented in the graph.

Source: PDK International, “Why School? The 48th Annual PDK Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools,” 2016.

Beliefs about the purpose of education vary by political affiliation and residency. Residents of rural areas are more likely to indicate the main goal of education is to prepare students for work, while those in urban areas more often cite preparing students academically. Only 22 percent of conservatives and 24 percent of moderates believe the goal of public education should be to prepare students to be good citizens, as compared to 33 percent of liberals.⁹

8 PDK International, “Why School? The 48th Annual PDK Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools” (Bloomington, IN.: PDK International, 2016), https://www.heartland.org/_template-assets/documents/publications/PDKpollpublicopinion2016.pdf.

9 Ibid.

- **Most Americans believe the public K–12 education system has a lot of responsibility for preparing people for the workforce.** Sixty percent of Americans indicate the public K–12 education system should have a lot of responsibility for ensuring the American workforce has the skills and education to be successful in today’s economy. A slightly smaller proportion—52 percent—feels this way about colleges and universities, and 49 percent believe employers hold a lot of responsibility; see figure 2.¹⁰
- **Even more Americans—72 percent—indicate that individuals themselves should have a lot of responsibility for making sure the American workforce has the right skills and education to be successful in today’s economy.**¹¹ This sentiment also emerged in Public Agenda’s focus groups with employers from small businesses and organizations.¹² Many participants in the employer focus groups said they believed individuals are responsible for their own learning and success in school and in the workforce. As discussed below with regard to the challenges public education faces today, the employers in the focus groups believed laziness is a major hindrance to success; see page 32. Upon probing, however, participants also admitted that other factors, such as variation in quality among schools, can also affect students’ learning and success.

“I think the biggest part of the human condition is to continue learning. And I think that a lot of kids don’t realize they need to continue learning as they’re getting older.”

– Employer in Greenville, South Carolina¹³

“You do get some basic skills from schooling, but real-life experience is more valuable to me than an education. I have a master’s degree, but it doesn’t change how I fight fires.”

– Employer in Blue Ash, Ohio

Surveys of the general public show, perhaps not surprisingly, that Republicans and independents who lean Republican emphasize the importance of individuals’ own role in making sure they are prepared for the workforce, while Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents are more likely to point to public schools, colleges and the state and federal governments as being responsible for ensuring the workforce has the right skills and education to be successful in today’s economy.¹⁴

10 Pew Research Center, “The State of American Jobs: How the Shifting Economic Landscape Is Reshaping Work and Society and Affecting the Way People Think About the Skills and Training They Need to Get Ahead” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, October 6, 2016), http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/10/ST_2016.10.06_Future-of-Work_FINAL4.pdf.

11 Ibid.

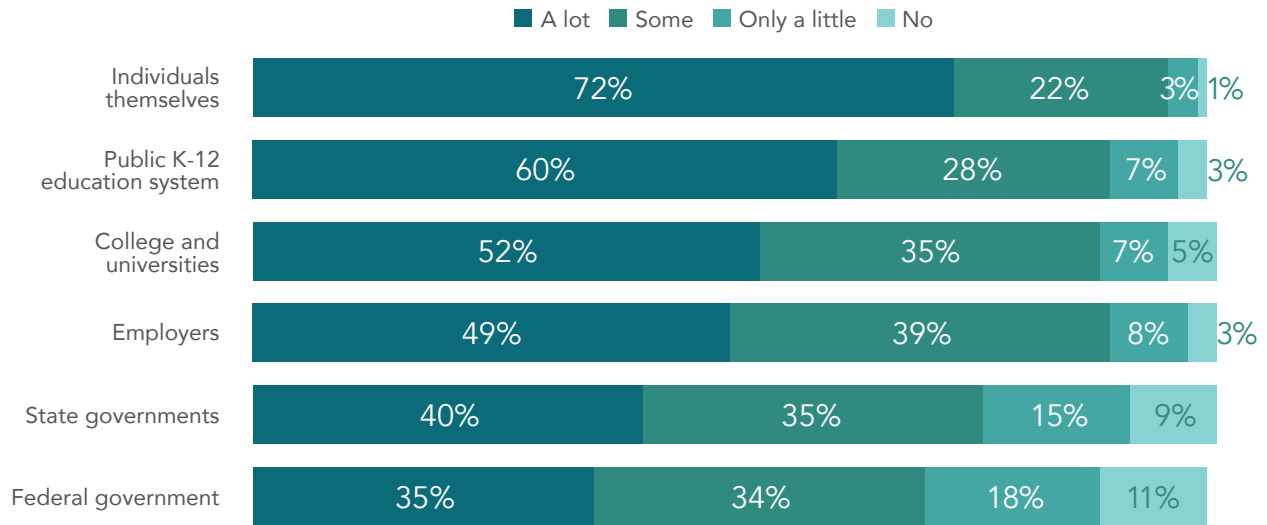
12 Although Public Agenda’s focus groups with employers concentrated on the views regarding public K–12 education of supervisors, managers and other professionals from small businesses and organizations who are involved in hiring, participants in these groups also spoke as parents or community members with vested interests in K–12 education.

13 Focus group quotations have been minimally edited for clarity.

14 Pew Research Center, “The State of American Jobs” 2016, http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/10/ST_2016.10.06_Future-of-Work_FINAL4.pdf.

Most Americans believe the public K–12 education system has a lot of responsibility for preparing the workforce.

Figure 2. Percent of Americans who say each of the following should have a lot, some, only a little or no responsibility in making sure the American workforce has the right skills and education to be successful in today's economy:



Source: Pew Research Center, "The State of American Jobs: How the Shifting Economic Landscape Is Reshaping Work and Society and Affecting the Way People Think About the Skills and Training They Need to Get Ahead," 2016.

- Most high school students believe they will pursue a college degree after high school, and most parents expect their children to attend college full time.** Seventy-one percent of high school students indicate they plan to attend a two- or four-year college, while only 5 percent say they will work full time after high school.¹⁵ Among parents with children in public schools, 61 percent expect their child to attend college full time, and 22 percent expect their child to work part time and study part time. Only 7 percent of parents expect their child to work full time upon completing high school.¹⁶

Students' and parents' expectations about college enrollment are not far off: according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in October 2017, 61 percent of high school graduates were enrolled full time in a university or college, with women more likely to enroll than men.¹⁷

While 81 percent of Asian students, 75 percent of black or African-American students and 71 percent of white students expect to attend a two- or four-year college, only 65 percent of Hispanic or Latino students indicate this.¹⁸ Likewise, fewer Hispanic public school parents—47 percent—say their child will go to college full time than do black—57 percent—or white—64 percent—public school parents. Additionally, more public school parents of girls—67 percent—indicate their child will go to college full time than public school parents of boys—55 percent.¹⁹

15 YouthTruth, "Learning from Student Voice: College and Career Readiness" (San Francisco, CA: YouthTruth, 2016), <http://www.youthtruthsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/YouthTruth-Learning-From-Student-Voice-College-and-Career-Readiness-2016.pdf>.
 16 PDK International, "The 49th Annual PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools" (Arlington, VA: PDK International, 2017), http://pdkpoll.org/assets/downloads/PDKnational_poll_2017.pdf.
 17 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "College Enrollment and Work Activity of Recent High School and College Graduates Summary" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, April 26, 2018), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgec.nr0.htm>.
 18 YouthTruth, "Learning from Student Voice: How Prepared do Students Feel for College and Career?" (San Francisco, CA: YouthTruth, 2017), <http://youthtruthsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Learning-from-Student-Voice-College-and-Career-Readiness-2017.pdf>.
 19 PDK International, "49th Annual PDK Poll," 2017, http://pdkpoll.org/assets/downloads/PDKnational_poll_2017.pdf.