



# SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS' VIEW OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION REFORM

July 2018

## INTRODUCTION

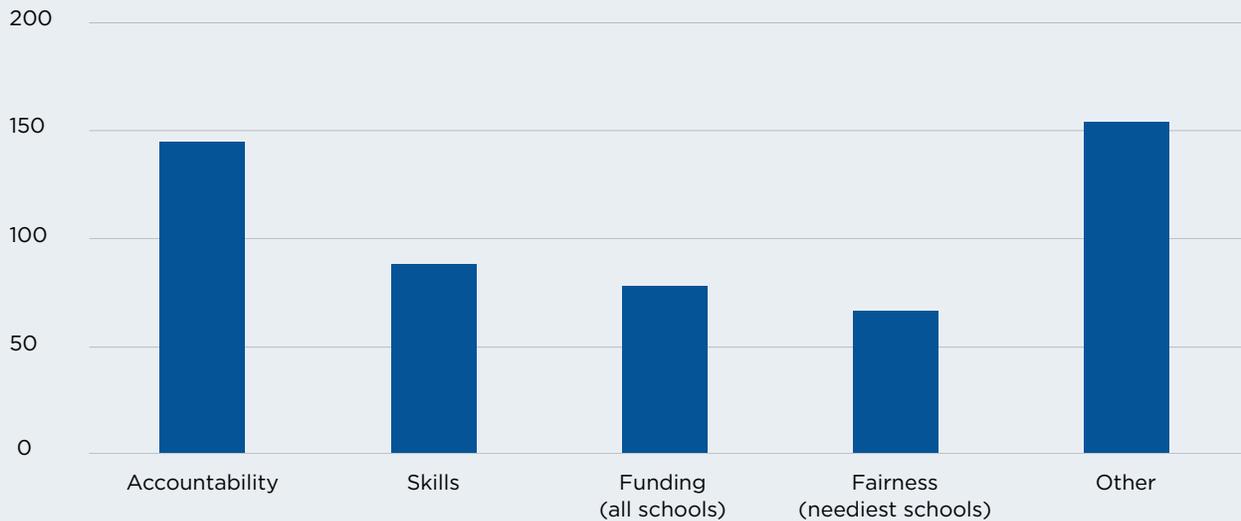
Business Forward surveyed our network of business leaders on the state of their public schools and how to improve them. 234 business leaders responded to the survey. These business leaders represent a range of industries, businesses sizes, and more than 40 states and territories.

Two-thirds either have children currently enrolled in public school or have children who have graduated from public school.

A majority of these business leaders believe our schools are on the wrong track. One in four worries that poor schools will hurt her business's ability to compete. Half believe our schools are underfunded. And 85% support one or more market-driven reforms: 59% support greater school autonomy, 39%

support replacement of underperforming schools, and 34% support the expansion of charter schools.

189 respondents provided one or more additional, personal statements (more than 500 statements, in total). We believe these statements offer a compelling take on how business leaders approach education reform. These statements cover a wide range of issues (from school boards to trade skills, gun safety, parent involvement, and test scores). But three out of four related to one of three concepts: (1) greater accountability and autonomy for teachers and principals, (2) practical skills and technical training, and (3) more/equitable funding for schools in poor communities.



These statements also demonstrate that business leaders view teachers far more positively than they view the bureaucracy that governs them. As noted above, 59% of respondents favor greater accountability,

and nearly one third of additional statements discussed it. Yet, only 10 of those 144 leaders calling for more accountability had something negative to say about teachers. Twice as many spoke positively about teachers.

## THE BUSINESS CASE FOR REFORM

Taken together, our survey and the additional statements provided demonstrate a complex, but encouraging, perspective.

They worry about funding, in general, but dwell more on funding for our neediest schools.

They believe in holding teachers and principals accountable for their performance, but also trust them to choose the best approach for their particular students.

They want to hire local (and feel an obligation to do so), but they worry that local schools are failing to teach the basic skills, technical skills, and work ethic their companies' need.

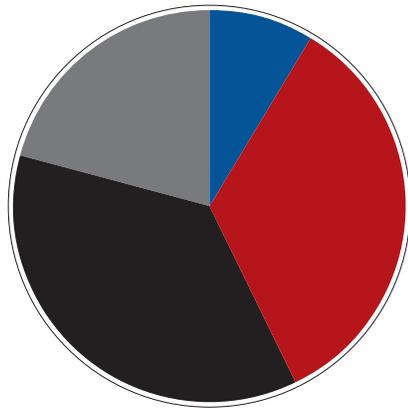
They believe business leaders should help schools build co-op programs, develop curriculum, and counsel students on career options – but they recognize the need for the larger community to be involved, as well. One leader recommended that business leaders interested in working with their local school “take the time to understand the students’ life situations, backgrounds, work ethic...”

Finally, while they support greater accountability, they are careful about treating schools like a business. Several leaders criticized reforms that approach schools as factories, because they treat students as “outputs” (and, in some cases, “widgets”). Instead, reformers should see schools as service providers – with students as the “customer.”

## ARE SCHOOLS ON THE RIGHT TRACK?

A majority (56%) of business leaders believe their local schools are on the wrong track. Less than one in 10 think their local schools are completely on the right track, while 34% say their schools are “mostly” on the right track.

### ARE YOUR LOCAL SCHOOLS ON THE RIGHT TRACK?



**Current curriculum and methodologies do not meet needs of business or society, in general. There needs to be a serious restructuring of the system.**

K. Penn Atlanta, GA

**The school system of today is preparing our children for the economy of yesterday... [T]he United States is significantly behind some of our Asian counterparts (particularly China) in building the skills needed to be competitive in the economy of tomorrow.**

S. Bhatti Bellevue, WA

**Common Core is a disaster. K-3 CC curriculum is poorly preparing children for upper grade learning. Basic skills [are] lacking.**

B. Dacey Bridgeport, CT

**The curriculum does not spend enough time on the basics... reading, writing, arithmetic. Students are blasted through basic concepts that they need to master before learning more difficult material.**

D. Berndt Berwyn, IL

**Too many administrators.**

W. Banks Portland, OR

**I don't like that teachers have to focus their efforts on preparing the children to take a test.**

A. Downs Washington, DC

**Our local schools are not preparing students well; are not pushing trades as viable career paths; and there is a disconnect between career counselors and business leaders.**

J. Perez El Paso, TX

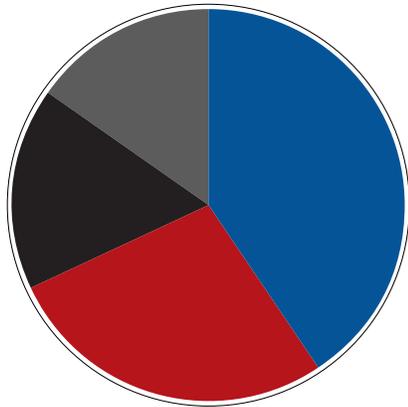
**[P]ublic education needs to be aligned with the needs of the business community in teaching more of the skilled trades and basic IT coding.**

G. Bowens Grosse Pointe , MI

# IMPACT OF SCHOOLS ON LOCAL BUSINESSES

Two-thirds of the business leaders we surveyed say local schools affect their ability to recruit and retain talent. Of these, slightly more business leaders believe their local districts help.

## DOES THE QUALITY OF LOCAL SCHOOLS AFFECT YOUR BUSINESS'S ABILITY TO HIRE AND RETAIN EMPLOYEES?



- 40.7% Helps
- 27.4% Hurts
- 16.8% No Effect
- 15% Unsure

**When considering relocating, good schools are a primary consideration for both companies and prospective employees.**

P. Morgan San Antonio, TX

**We need to invest in our public schools so we can be competitive as a nation.**

R. West Columbus, OH

**Retired, but school quality impacts property values. Consider a state-wide property tax increase to fund public education.**

R. Butler Tucson, AZ

I believe if we had to recruit outside our area, the academic and public reputation of [our] local public schools may be an impediment.

M. McGuinness Groton, NY

Schools are an essential part of the equation for deciding where to locate a business. I am currently considering leaving my state primarily due to the declining quality of the schools.

K. Patrick-Ferree Iowa City, IA

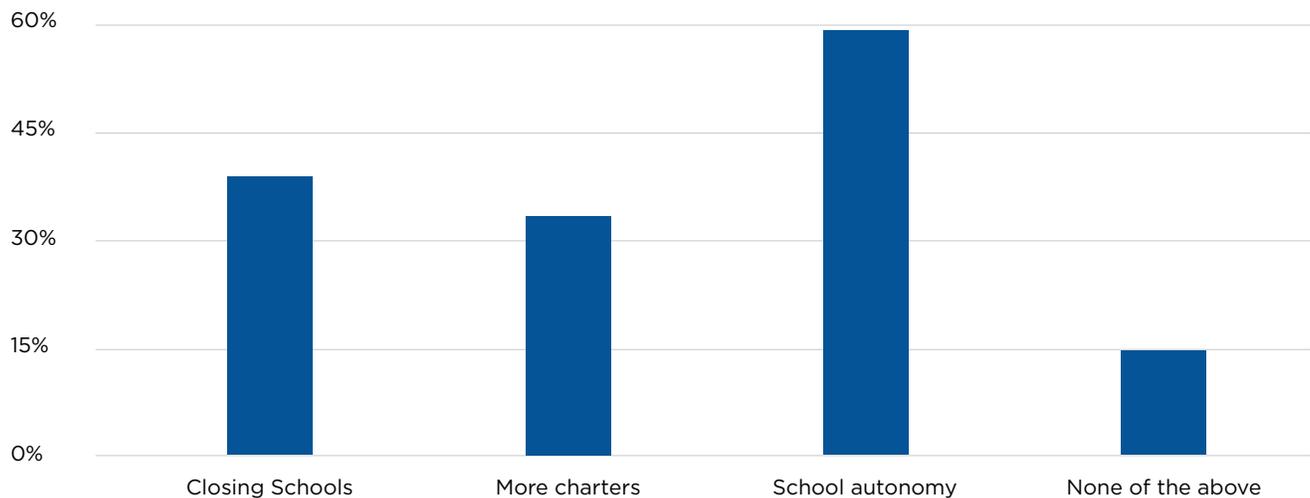
I believe the community of Camas is a great example of how schools and the city can work in tandem to make this a more desirable place to live and work.

S. Truitt Camas, WA

## SUPPORT FOR MARKET-DRIVEN REFORMS

Eighty-five percent of respondents support one or more of three common reform options: (1) giving school leaders more autonomy in budget and hiring decisions (59%); (2) closing low-performing schools (if there is another close, better school available) (39%); and, (3) incorporating more charter schools into local districts (34%). Only 15% of respondents preferred traditional school management systems

### DO YOU SUPPORT ANY OF THE FOLLOWING MARKET-DRIVEN REFORMS?



It is important for the business community to... advocate for increased flexibility around school models, staffing plans, and performance-based pay. It also is important for the business community to support increased accountability for student and school performance. Poor performing schools should not remain open.

L. Talbot New York, NY

I think that many in the community are concerned that we are not getting the most bang for our tax dollars... [S]chools should be in session longer in the school year... [T]eachers should be given more leeway...

J. Terrell Mokena, IL

**We should study what the strong performing schools are doing and try to emulate them. We need people in charge who understand how to teach and a system for accountability.**

B. Whittaker Bloomfield Hills, MI

**I know that the charter school my daughter attends has the same economic/racial make up as the poorest performing public schools in our area, and [it] succeeds on par with the higher performing schools with different socioeconomic make up, with half the budget.**

J. Ficklin Austin, TX

**There should be an INCREASE in performance management of teachers and administrators, as in for-profit businesses.**

R. Bowles Portland, OR

## BUSINESS LEADERSHIP ON SKILLS

The business community should get more involved in ensuring that the local schools prepare local students for local jobs rather than always looking to recruit from out of area.

K. Stadelman Sunnyvale, CA

[M]ore co-op programs might help with career goals...

L. Holley Dayton, OH

We need more opportunities to partner with school systems... apprenticeship or internship programs for meaningful on-site learning.

J. Attas Waco, TX

There is much the business community can do to help with the local schools. Talent 2025 in Western Michigan is a prime example of business leaders illuminating the issues for the business community, convening the educational sectors, and evaluating alternative leading practices...

F. Keller Grand Rapids, MI

Local and state businesses should be actively involved in [deciding] curriculum and assuring more than adequate funding.

C. Campbell Austin, TX

Our schools are working well with our businesses, and we continue to put many workforce education programs in place.

R. Aldom Somerset, PA

[We need] more work opportunities within the school system and re- sources for the students like skill centers (car, media, nursing, carpentry, arts, design, etc.).

K. Schwarzkopf Seattle, WA

More and better mentoring programs would help.

C. Bybel Winter Park, FL

Although some businesses are very interested in supporting schools, they often don't take the time to understand the students' life situations, backgrounds, work ethic, or even how to correctly pronounce their names. It would be good if they could go back to school for a few days.

J. Engle Lancaster, PA

## NOT JUST COLLEGE

Schools only prepare students for college not for any trade skills. Not all student should go to college.

F. Groenteman Frisco, TX

Focus more on apprenticeship programs and trade schools and help students overcome the stereotypes about pursuing careers in manufacturing.

N. Nevshehir Troy, MI

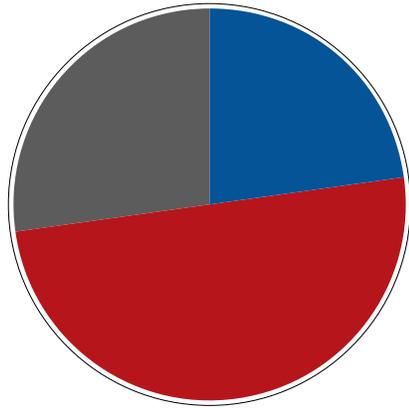
Not everyone is a "college" student and I don't think we do a good enough job giving knowledge of trades and practical applications.

V. Jester Middletown, DE

# FUNDING

Half of respondents believe their local schools are underfunded. Only one in four believes funding is adequate.

## ARE YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL ADEQUATELY FUNDED?



- 23% Yes
- 50% No
- 27% Maybe/Sometimes

**Tax erosion has harmed ALL schools in AZ. Time to step up at the Chamber.**

R. Butler Tucson, AZ

**Florida has lousy public schools because our taxes are low.**

I. Greenberg Pompano Beach, FL

**For some reason, education seems to be one of the top three items that continually are having their budgets cut and contracts renegotiated... An educated public is a productive public.**

S. Hausberger Nashua, NH

**Our District needs more money and more schools.**

A. O'Connor Fort Lauderdale, FL

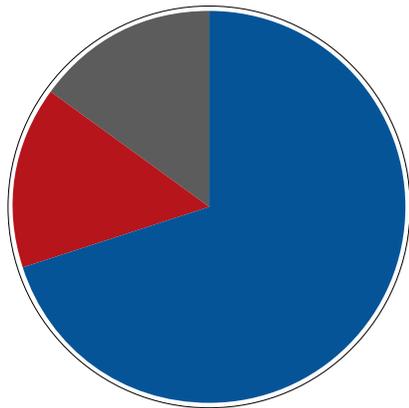
**My children have graduated. The schools seem worse since then. We need a strong commitment to education across the country or we will have trouble finding qualified employees... Whatever else we must skimp on to save money, we must not skimp on our schools.**

E. Karle Lexington, KY

**I believe the community of Camas is a great example of how schools and the city can work in tandem to make this a more desirable place to live and work.**

S. Truitt Camas, WA

# FAIRNESS



- 70% Equitable Funding
- 15% Funding, In General
- 15% Other Issues

Half of the business leaders who commented on school funding were more concerned with poor students than their own. Three out of 10 personal statements related to school funding (approximately 150 of 500). Half of those statements focused on the need to increase funding across the board. Half focused on increasing funding for the state’s neediest schools. Business leaders talked about eliminating the opportunity gap between rich and poor districts, reducing income inequality, and providing critical talent to their businesses.

**It is time to act responsibly and equitably.**

R. Landin Detroit, MI

**Our local schools in Chandler are excellent, but that is unfair for lower income areas that cannot afford to train and staff to the same level and have far inferior facilities.**

J. Davis Chandler, AZ

**Our urban schools fare far worse than most suburban schools. We have to do a better job... addressing the issues of urban communities or we will continue to have the same problems with schools that we’ve always had.**

J. Paulateer Troy, MI

**Continue to make sure all children are getting a quality education, so when they go off to college all of our children have gotten the same quality of education.**

L. Mensah Arlington, VA

**Public schools are essential to our country, we must see that they are adequately funded.**

C. Shannon McLean, VA

**In many cases, an A from this district is not equal to an A from a neighboring district. That is not fair.**

C. Gonzalez Bridgeport, CT

**Wake County has many superb schools, but there is wide disparity between neighborhood schools and high schools in different parts of the City of Raleigh and the county.**

R. Smith Raleigh, NC

**The schools in South Fulton county are disgraceful. No one cares about the students in the lower income areas... There are not enough school books for each student in South Fulton County, [while the] students in North Fulton county have an abundant supply...**

O. Randle Atlanta, GA

**In 2018, we still are facing the inequality of education.**

R. Harrison Midland City, AL

**The last 40 years shows in our social fabric today. We can do better.**

T. Robinson Brooklyn, NY

## ABOUT BUSINESS FORWARD

**Network and Programming.** Business Forward works with more than 100,000 local business leaders nationwide. We organize local roundtable briefings, national calls and webinars, online media trainings, and Washington fly-ins on a range of policy issues, including immigration reform, climate change, infrastructure investment, health care reform, trade deals, and education reform.

**Advocacy.** Business Forward staffs each briefing and helps participants work with media, write op-eds, submit testimony, and organize other leaders in their home markets. We have hundreds of leaders in each Congressional District and thousands in every major media market.

**Content & Media.** We also publish reports that summarize the recommendations and case studies offered at these briefings, promoting the most compelling examples across multiple formats (white papers, infographics, and social media) to reach more people, in a more relevant manner.

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