



GALLUP®

Leadership Perspectives on Public Education

The Gallup 2017 Survey
of K-12 School District
Superintendents

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Executive Summary

Gallup developed this research study of K-12 superintendents of public school districts in the U.S. to understand their opinions on important topics and policy issues facing education. Since 2013, Gallup has conducted the survey at least annually. The following are key findings from the 2017 study.

Forty-two percent of superintendents are engaged in their job, a significantly higher percentage than Gallup finds among U.S. workers nationally and on par with the 45% of workplace “leaders” (those who manage teams of managers). Engaged workers tend to be more productive, and their work leads to better outcomes for their organizations. Superintendents in city, suburban and larger districts tend to show higher levels of work engagement.

Superintendents are most likely to believe their greatest challenges are improving the academic performance of underprepared students, the effects of poverty on student learning and budget shortfalls. Compared with 2013, far fewer regard rising demands for assessment from the state and federal level and revamping curriculum as challenges. Superintendents were most likely to name rising assessment demands as a challenge in 2013, but now it is a mid-range concern for them.

Superintendents express concern about being able to find talented teachers and principals to fill their district's positions. Two-thirds say the quantity of new teacher candidates is decreasing, while fewer than one in 10 say it is increasing. Superintendents are also much more likely to view the quantity of new principal candidates as decreasing (43%) rather than increasing (10%). Superintendents are somewhat less pessimistic that the quality of teacher and principal candidates is getting worse, but still more say it is decreasing rather than increasing. About one in four superintendents say that former teachers in their district are leaving the teaching profession entirely.

Not surprisingly, then, superintendents tend to rate their district as less effective at recruiting talented teachers and principals than they are at selecting, developing and retaining them.

Superintendents are generally positive about their relations with the school board. The vast majority indicate they agree with their board on most decisions, and two-thirds are confident their district is well-governed at the board level. But not all superintendents have a good working relationship with their school board — about one in five say they have considered leaving their position because of their relationship with the school board.

Superintendents are less likely today than a few years ago to positively evaluate their board's knowledge of K-12 education or the board's diversity and inclusivity. Forty-three percent strongly agree or agree their board is very knowledgeable about K-12 education, down from 55% in 2013. And 45% today, down from 52% in 2013, believe their district has a diverse and inclusive board.

Superintendents are much more likely to be engaged with their work if they strongly believe their district is very effective in recruiting teacher and principal talent and if they are very positive about their relations with the school board and about their board members' knowledge of K-12 education.

Among various strategies or initiatives designed to foster student success after graduation, superintendents are most likely to rate having teachers who create excitement for the future as extremely important to achieving that end. Most also see building student engagement and teaching a rigorous academic core as extremely important to students being successful later in life.

Superintendents are largely confident that their graduates are prepared to be good citizens, to lead healthy lives and to make informed decisions about postsecondary education. They are less confident that students are prepared to manage their finances well and to understand how their talents align with the needs of the community. Superintendents are about

equally likely to say their graduates will stay in the area and contribute to the local community as to say their graduates will migrate to other communities. Relatively few superintendents believe their students are prepared to be entrepreneurs and business builders in their communities.

Like many education leaders, superintendents believe early childhood care and education can have a substantial impact on student learning outcomes once they begin school. But they perceive early childhood education programs to be lacking in their state, and a majority disagree that most children are prepared to be successful when they start kindergarten.

Superintendents acknowledge that federal education policy affects their district, but they remain negative about the job the federal government has done in this area in the last five years. It is unlikely that those views will change under the new Donald Trump administration, since a majority of superintendents say they have no confidence at all in the Trump administration to handle K-12 education policy.

Reflecting that pessimism, 32% of superintendents strongly agree or agree they are excited about the future of K-12 education in the U.S., down from 44% in 2015. The vast majority of superintendents remain excited about the future of their own district.

Detailed Findings

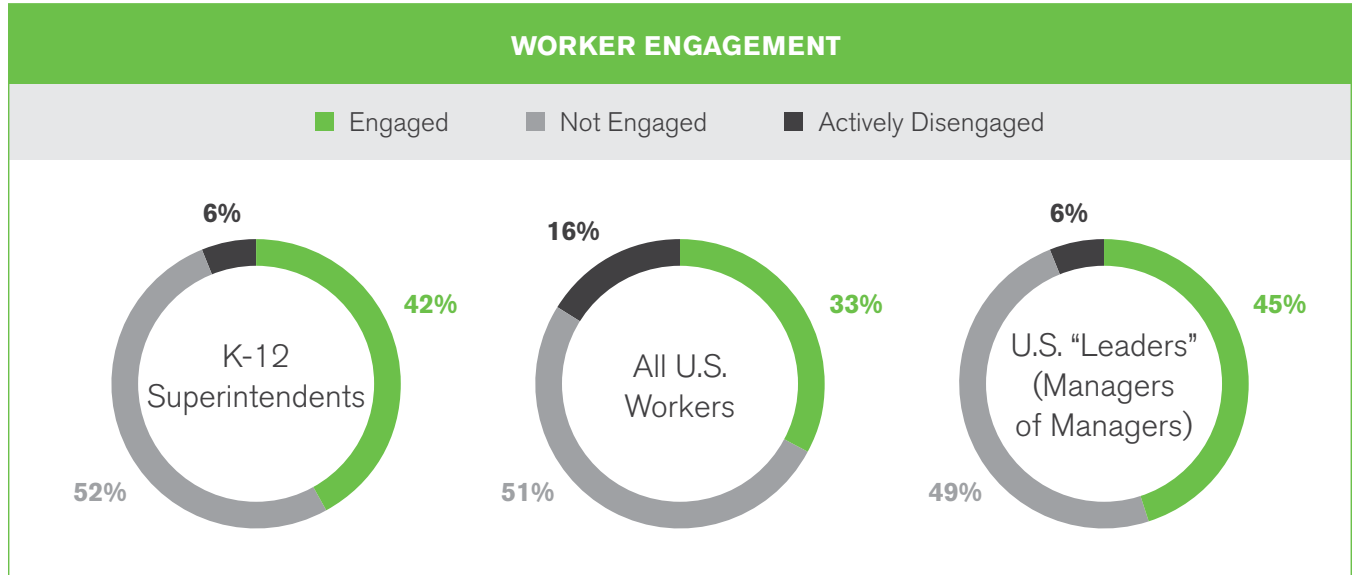
SUPERINTENDENT WORK ENGAGEMENT

Gallup has statistically defined three types of workers in the global workforce, representing a continuum of engagement: engaged, not engaged and actively disengaged. Employee engagement is a measure of the extent to which workers are psychologically committed and emotionally connected to their role as a result of having their performance-related needs met. Employees who are engaged at work tend to be more productive than other types of employees, and having engaged employees leads to better outcomes for organizations.

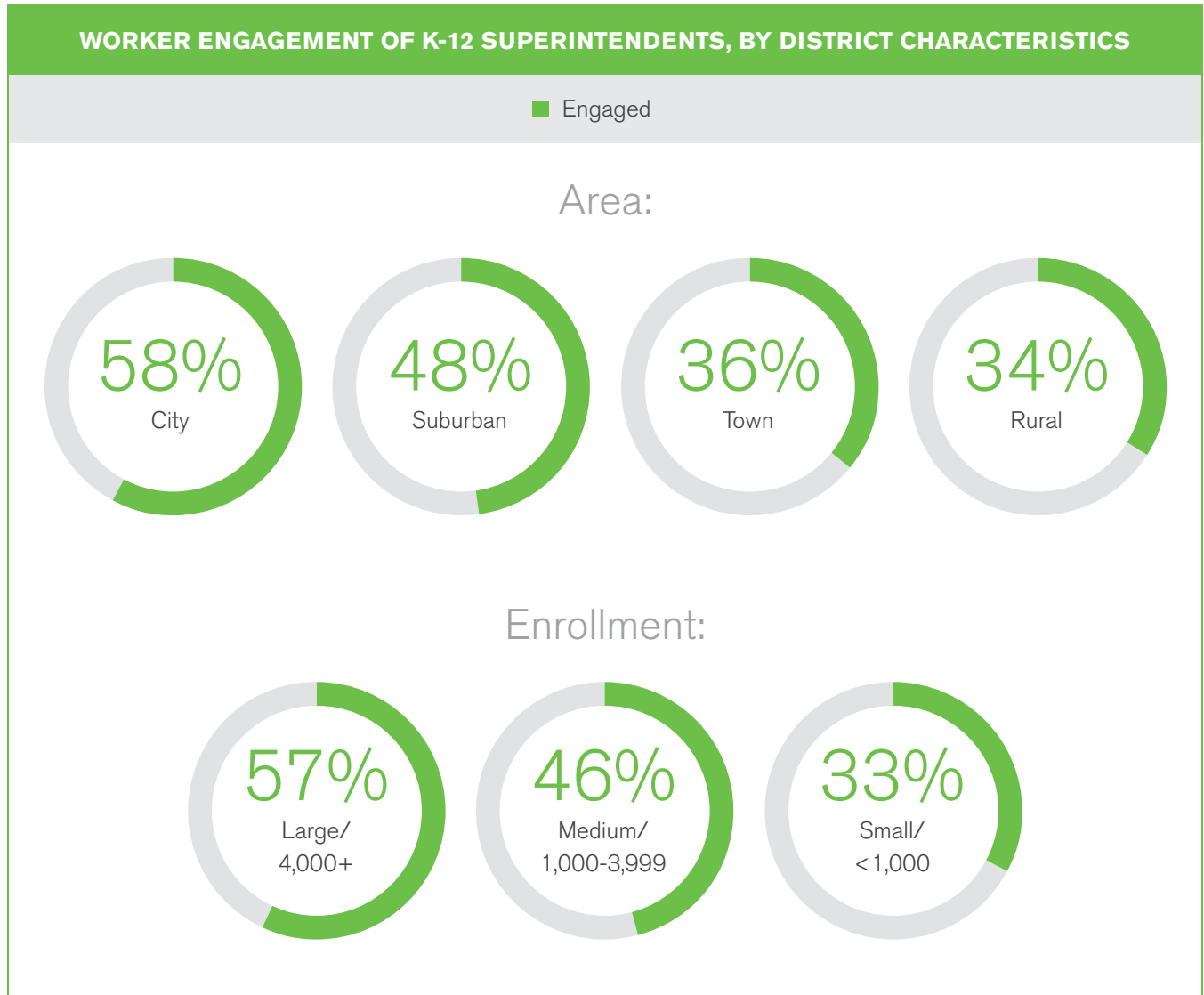
The survey assessed worker engagement among K-12 superintendents, with the Q12 employee engagement survey items used in Gallup's workplace research.

Overall, 42% of public K-12 superintendents are engaged at work, while 52% are not engaged and 6% are actively disengaged. Superintendents are much more likely than the average U.S. worker to be engaged in their job. According to Gallup's *State of the American Workplace* report, 33% of all U.S. workers are engaged at work. At the other end of the continuum, the 6% of superintendents who are actively disengaged is far less than the 16% of actively disengaged U.S. workers overall.

Superintendents' engagement levels are on par with U.S. workplace "leaders," which Gallup defines as management personnel who oversee other managers. Forty-five percent of leaders are engaged in their job, 49% are not engaged, and 6% are actively disengaged.



Superintendents from different types of districts have varying levels of engagement. Superintendents from city (58%) or suburban (48%) districts are much more likely to be engaged at work than those from town (36%) or rural (34%) districts. Similarly, superintendents from larger districts — based on the number of enrolled students — are much more likely to be engaged (57%) than those from medium-sized (46%) or small (33%) districts.



Among the 12 items that make up Gallup’s employee engagement index, superintendents are most likely to believe the mission or purpose of their organization makes them feel their job is important and to believe their opinions count at work. Roughly seven in 10 superintendents strongly agree with those statements. That is far higher than the percentage of U.S. workers nationally, among whom three in 10 say their opinions count at work and four in 10 say the mission or purpose of their organization makes them feel their job is important. It is also slightly better than workplace leaders’ scores on the same items, with six in 10 in that group agreeing with each statement.



The disparities on the “opinions count” item between superintendents and other workers might merely reflect superintendents being the highest-ranking official in their district. However, as a group, they seem highly mission-driven — presumably to educate students. Their commitment to that mission may have played a part in helping them to rise to the role of superintendent in their career.

Six in 10 superintendents also strongly agree they know what is expected of them at work, which essentially matches the proportions of U.S. workers nationally and workplace leaders. Slightly more than half of superintendents say they have opportunities at work to learn and grow, significantly higher than the four in 10 U.S. workers who say the same and on par with the reports of workplace leaders.

Two areas of engagement where superintendents are weaker include having a best friend at work and receiving recognition or praise for doing good work. U.S. workers and workplace leaders also tend to score lower in these areas, but superintendents' scores are slightly worse than those two groups' scores.

Beyond their engagement with work, most superintendents report being satisfied with their district as a place to work. On a five-point satisfaction scale ranging from “extremely satisfied” (5) to “extremely dissatisfied” (1), 46% give a rating of 5 and 41% a rating of 4. Only 4% give a rating of either 1 or 2.

How satisfied are you with your school district as a place to work?	
	%
5 (Extremely satisfied)	46
4	41
3	11
2	3
1 (Extremely dissatisfied)	1
Don't know/Does not apply	0

Unlike their engagement scores, superintendents' satisfaction does not differ meaningfully by district type.

CHALLENGES FACING K-12 EDUCATION

Superintendents say their district's greatest challenges are helping students whose circumstances affect their achievement and dealing with budget shortfalls. Of eight challenges included in the survey, the greatest percentage of superintendents (81%) strongly agree or agree that improving the academic performance of underprepared students will be a challenge for their district this year. Slightly less agree that the effects of poverty on student learning (74%) and budget shortfalls (73%) will be challenges.

About two-thirds of superintendents strongly agree or agree that strengthening academic rigor (66%) and rising federal and state assessment demands (64%) will challenge their district. Fifty-nine percent say the same about preparing students for higher education.

Superintendents are less likely to believe revamping curriculum (50%) or preparing students for engaged citizenship (50%) will be challenges for their district.

Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about issues facing your school district this year. This year, the following issues will be a challenge for my school district.

	% 5 (Strongly agree)	% 4	% 3	% 2	% 1 (Strongly disagree)	% Don't know/ Does not apply
Improving the academic performance of underprepared students	42	39	14	5	<1	0
The effects of poverty on student learning	48	26	17	6	2	1
Budget shortfalls	52	21	15	9	3	<1
Strengthening academic rigor	22	44	23	8	2	0
Rising demands for assessment from the state and federal level	31	33	25	9	1	<1
Better preparing students for higher education	17	42	25	10	2	2
Revamping curriculum	14	36	33	14	3	<1
Preparing students for engaged citizenship	12	38	35	11	3	<1

Gallup asked superintendents the same items in 2013, with the exception of the poverty item. The major changes since 2013 are steep declines in the percentages of superintendents who say rising assessment demands and revamping curriculum will be challenges for their district.

In 2013, 82% of superintendents said rising demands for assessment from the state and federal level would be a challenge for their district, making it the top overall concern. Now, at 64%, it is a mid-level concern relative to other issues.

Also, the percentage of superintendents saying revamping curriculum is a challenge for their district this year has fallen from 69% to 50%.

That decline could reflect that districts were in the process of adapting curriculum to meet Common Core State Standards back then, but by now those changes would have been implemented (or never adopted or implemented) in many states.

The only issue superintendents are more likely to perceive as a challenge this year than in 2013 is improving the academic performance of underprepared students. The modest increase has propelled it to the top of superintendents' list of challenges this year.

Changes in Perceptions of Issues as Challenges for District, 2013 to 2017			
	% Strongly agree/Agree, 2013	% Strongly agree/Agree, 2017	Change (pct. pts.)
Improving the academic performance of underprepared students	76	81	+5
Budget shortfalls	73	73	0
Strengthening academic rigor	71	66	-5
Rising demands for assessment from the state and federal level	82	64	-18
Better preparing students for higher education	62	59	-3
Revamping curriculum	69	50	-19
Preparing students for engaged citizenship	51	50	-1

For the most part, superintendents' perceived challenges are similar across district types. However, superintendents from city and large-enrollment districts are especially likely to strongly agree that improving the academic performance of underprepared students is a challenge for their district.

Agreement That Improving the Academic Performance of Underprepared Students Is a Challenge for the District, by District Characteristics			
	% 5 (Strongly agree)	% 4	Total % agree
District location			
City	63	27	90
Suburban	45	34	79
Town	36	40	76
Rural	35	45	80
Student enrollment			
4,000+	56	34	90
1,000-3,999	44	37	81
<1,000	36	41	77

Along the same lines, city and large-enrollment superintendents are most likely to say the effects of poverty on learning are a challenge for their district. Sixty-nine percent of city superintendents strongly agree the effects of poverty are a challenge.

Agreement That the Effects of Poverty on Student Learning Are a Challenge for the District, by District Characteristics			
	% 5 (Strongly agree)	% 4	Total % agree
District location			
City	69	19	88
Suburban	38	23	61
Town	54	26	80
Rural	42	30	72
Student enrollment			
4,000+	61	24	85
1,000-3,999	47	25	72
<1,000	44	26	70

EVALUATING TEACHER PERFORMANCE

The survey asked superintendents how important each of nine different inputs is in evaluating teacher performance. Superintendents widely regard four of these factors as “very important,” including overall teaching effectiveness (97% say it is very important), student engagement (97%), learning growth of students (88%) and feedback from the principal (81%).

A slight majority of superintendents, 52%, also believe feedback from students is very important. About four in 10 say the same about feedback from fellow educators.

Superintendents believe student test scores (24%), a teacher having earned a graduate degree (15%) and years of experience in the classroom (12%) are less important factors in evaluating teacher performance. But a majority believe all nine of the factors measured in the survey are at least “somewhat important.”

In your opinion, how important are each of the following factors in evaluating a teacher’s performance?					
	% Very important	% Somewhat important	% Not very important	% Not at all important	% Don’t know/ Does not apply
Overall teaching effectiveness	97	3	0	0	<1
The level of student engagement	97	3	0	0	0
Learning growth of students	88	11	1	<1	<1
Feedback from the principal	81	17	1	<1	1
Feedback from students	52	43	3	1	<1
Feedback from fellow educators	42	49	8	1	<1
Student test scores	24	61	12	3	0
Having earned a graduate degree	15	47	29	8	1
Years of experience in the classroom	12	54	26	9	<1

The top four factors today were also the clear leaders when Gallup last asked the question in 2014. One difference is that slightly more superintendents today (88%) than three years ago (78%) say student learning growth is very important in evaluating teacher performance.

Superintendents are also more likely now than in 2014 to say feedback from fellow educators, student test scores and years in the classroom are very important.

Changes in Ratings of Factors as Very Important to Evaluating Teacher Performance, 2014 to 2017			
	% Very important, 2014	% Very important, 2017	Change (pct. pts.)
Overall teaching effectiveness	96	97	+1
The level of student engagement	94	97	+3
Learning growth of students	78	88	+10
Feedback from the principal	79	81	+2
Feedback from students	n/a	52	n/a
Feedback from fellow educators	30	42	+12
Student test scores	16	24	+8
Having earned a graduate degree	n/a	15	n/a
Years of experience in the classroom	6	12	+6

Opinions about the best ways to evaluate teacher effectiveness are similar by district type. One modest difference is that superintendents of smaller school districts are less likely to see feedback from the principal as very important (77%) than superintendents of medium-sized (86%) or large (87%) districts. Small-district superintendents are also less likely to see student feedback as very important (48%) than medium-sized (54%) and large-district (59%) superintendents.

The extent to which superintendents value student feedback in teacher evaluations may depend on their beliefs about whether students can differentiate between effective and ineffective teachers. Most superintendents believe students are capable of making such judgments — 37% strongly agree they can do so, and 43% agree. Just 5% “strongly disagree” or “disagree.” Those views are largely intact from the prior asking in 2013, though the level of agreement is down slightly from 86% to 80%.

Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. Students are able to identify effective teachers.						
	% 5 (Strongly agree)	% 4	% 3	% 2	% 1 (Strongly disagree)	% Don't know/Does not apply
2017	37	43	14	4	1	2
2013	43	43	11	2	0	1

City (42%) and suburban (41%) superintendents are slightly more likely than town (33%) and rural (34%) superintendents to strongly agree that students can identify effective teachers.

As might be expected, superintendents who strongly agree that students can identify effective teachers (61%) are more likely than those who do not (47%) to say student feedback is a very important way to evaluate teacher performance.

Another way to evaluate teachers relies on statistical modeling of standardized test score data, known as value-added models. These models compare student test scores in a given year to their prior scores while also taking into account other factors that could affect those scores.

Superintendents are not highly convinced that value-added models of student achievement are effective in measuring teacher performance. Twelve percent say such models are “very effective,” while 52% believe they are “somewhat effective.” About one in four say value-added models are “not very effective” (20%) or “not at all effective” (7%). Those views are slightly less positive than in 2013.

In your opinion, how effective are value-added models of student achievement in measuring a teacher’s performance?					
	% Very effective	% Somewhat effective	% Not too effective	% Not at all effective	% Don’t know/ Does not apply
2017	12	52	20	7	8
2013	16	54	15	5	10

Some districts use teacher evaluations to determine part of a teacher’s pay, but this practice is uncommon, according to superintendents. Just 10% of superintendents say their district provides any compensation based on effectiveness in the classroom. Rather, it appears most teacher pay is based on tenure and education level.

Does your school district provide any compensation for teachers based on effectiveness in the classroom (as opposed to compensating solely on tenure and education level)?	
	%
Yes	10
No	89
Don’t know/Does not apply	<1

There is some variation in whether districts compensate teachers based on effectiveness by district type. City and large-enrollment districts are more likely to do so, while rural and smaller districts are less likely to.

District Provides Teacher Compensation Based on Effectiveness in Classroom, by District Type	
	% Yes
District location	
City	18
Suburban	10
Town	10
Rural	7
Student enrollment	
4,000+	17
1,000-3,999	11
<1,000	7

RECRUITING AND RETAINING TALENT

Of the various tasks needed to ensure talented staffing in schools, superintendents tend to rate their district better at selecting and retaining talented teachers and principals than they rate their district for recruiting or developing them. In most cases, they are more positive about their district's effectiveness in finding, choosing and keeping principals than in finding, choosing and keeping teachers. This may reflect that there are fewer principal positions than teacher positions to fill in a given year. Also, principal candidates may be working as teachers or in other positions in the district, while new teacher hires often come from jobs outside the district.

Specifically, 51% of superintendents believe their district is very effective in selecting talented teachers and principals. Forty-seven percent say their district is very effective in retaining talented teachers, and a higher 55% say the same about retaining talented principals.

About four in 10 superintendents say their district is very effective in developing teachers (38%) and developing principals (42%). Superintendents are least positive about their district's effectiveness in recruiting talented teachers (29%) and principals (37%).

Now, please think about your school district's programs for recruiting and developing talent for key roles in the schools. How effective would you say your district is at each of the following?					
	% Very effective	% Somewhat effective	% Not too effective	% Not at all effective	% Don't know/ Does not apply
Recruiting talented teachers	29	58	11	2	1
Selecting talented teachers	51	45	3	1	<1
Developing teachers	38	56	6	<1	0
Retaining talented teachers	47	44	8	1	<1
Recruiting talented principals	37	47	7	1	8
Selecting talented principals	51	37	3	1	8
Developing principals	42	48	5	<1	5
Retaining talented principals	55	35	4	1	5

Superintendents are no less likely now than they were in 2014 to say their district is very effective in recruiting, selecting and developing teachers. They are slightly less likely than three years ago to say their district is effective in recruiting and selecting talented principals.

Changes in Ratings of District Effectiveness in Ensuring It Has Talented Teachers and Principals, 2014 to 2017			
	% Very effective, 2014	% Very effective, 2017	Change (pct. pts.)
Recruiting talented teachers	29	29	0
Selecting talented teachers	51	51	0
Developing teachers	38	38	0
Retaining talented teachers	n/a	47	n/a
Recruiting talented principals	44	37	-7
Selecting talented principals	56	51	-5
Developing principals	44	42	-2
Retaining talented principals	n/a	55	n/a

Suburban superintendents are much more likely than their peers to believe their district is very effective in recruiting, selecting and retaining talented teachers. Superintendents rate their district about the same in developing teachers regardless of where the district is located. This may reflect income differences between suburban versus other locations, which often results in suburban districts having larger budgets, being able to offer teachers better pay and having students who, on average, perform better in school.

Rural superintendents are least likely to rate their district as very effective in recruiting talented teachers.

Ratings of District as Very Effective in Ensuring It Has Talented Teachers, by District Location				
	% Very effective, recruiting	% Very effective, selecting	% Very effective, developing	% Very effective, retaining
District location				
City	32	45	39	45
Suburban	46	62	40	60
Town	27	50	42	44
Rural	21	48	36	43

Superintendents in smaller districts (23%) are somewhat less likely than those in medium-sized (34%) or large (37%) districts to say their district is effective in recruiting talented teachers. However, there are not meaningful differences in perceived effectiveness of selecting, developing or retaining talented teachers by district size.

City and suburban superintendents are more likely than town or rural superintendents to say their district is very effective in recruiting, selecting and retaining talented principals. Less than half of rural superintendents say their district is very effective in selecting and retaining talented principals, compared with majorities of superintendents in other districts.

Ratings of District as Very Effective in Ensuring It Has Talented Principals, by District Location				
	% Very effective, recruiting	% Very effective, selecting	% Very effective, developing	% Very effective, retaining
District location				
City	42	58	44	71
Suburban	48	62	45	65
Town	35	51	48	55
Rural	31	44	37	45

Large- and small-district superintendents' ratings of their district's effectiveness in finding and keeping talented principals differ, especially when it comes to retaining talented principals. Whereas 70% of superintendents in large districts and 65% of those in medium-sized districts believe they have been very effective in this regard, only 44% of small-district superintendents say the same.

Ratings of District as Very Effective in Ensuring It Has Talented Principals, by District Size				
	% Very effective, recruiting	% Very effective, selecting	% Very effective, developing	% Very effective, retaining
Student enrollment				
4,000+	43	57	45	70
1,000-3,999	42	61	47	65
<1,000	33	45	38	44

There is a strong relationship between perceived effectiveness in talent acquisition and retention and superintendent job engagement. A majority, or close to a majority, of superintendents who say their district is very effective in finding and keeping talented teachers and principals are engaged in their job. That drops to slightly more than one in three superintendents who say their district is somewhat effective. Superintendents who believe their district is not effective in retaining a talented staff are unlikely to be engaged, with engagement levels among this group typically in the teens.

As an example, 56% of superintendents who rate their district as very effective in recruiting talented teachers are engaged in their job, compared with 39% of those who say their district is somewhat effective and 18% who say their district is not effective.

In addition to their own efforts at finding talent, school districts' success also depends on the available pool of potential teachers and principals. A new question in this year's survey asked superintendents to assess changes in the talent pool of new teachers and principals. Superintendents tend to be more pessimistic than optimistic about both the quantity and quality of new teacher and principal candidates. A majority, 67%, say the quantity of new teacher candidates is decreasing; 8% say it is increasing. Forty-three percent say the quantity of new principal candidates is decreasing, while just 10% say it is increasing.

Superintendents are somewhat less pessimistic about the quality of new candidates, but more than twice as many say the quality of new teacher and principal candidates is decreasing than say it is increasing.

Thinking about the applicants for various positions in your district, would you say — [RANDOM ORDER] — is [ROTATED: increasing, staying the same (or) decreasing]?				
	% Increasing	% Staying the same	% Decreasing	% Don't know/ Does not apply
The quantity of new teacher candidates	8	24	67	1
The quantity of new principal candidates	10	36	43	10
The quality of new teacher candidates	17	42	39	1
The quality of new principal candidates	13	44	32	10

Town and rural superintendents are much more likely than city and suburban superintendents to see the educator talent pool worsening, particularly with respect to new teachers. Roughly eight in 10 town and rural superintendents say the quantity of new teacher candidates is decreasing, compared with 58% of city and 46% of suburban superintendents. Slightly less than half of town and rural superintendents say the quality of new teacher candidates is decreasing.

Suburban superintendents are similar to town and rural superintendents in their assessments of the quantity and quality of new principal candidates. City superintendents are unique in saying the quality of new principal candidates is increasing rather than decreasing.

Ratings of Teacher and Principal Candidates, by District Location				
	% Increasing	% Staying the same	% Decreasing	% Don't know/ Does not apply
The quantity of new teacher candidates				
City	13	27	58	3
Suburban	14	40	46	0
Town	3	16	81	0
Rural	5	19	76	1
The quantity of new principal candidates				
City	14	51	30	5
Suburban	11	36	43	11
Town	6	35	54	5
Rural	11	31	45	14
The quality of new teacher candidates				
City	28	41	28	3
Suburban	25	48	27	0
Town	11	44	45	0
Rural	13	40	47	1
The quality of new principal candidates				
City	32	42	22	4
Suburban	11	45	33	11
Town	11	47	36	5
Rural	9	42	34	15

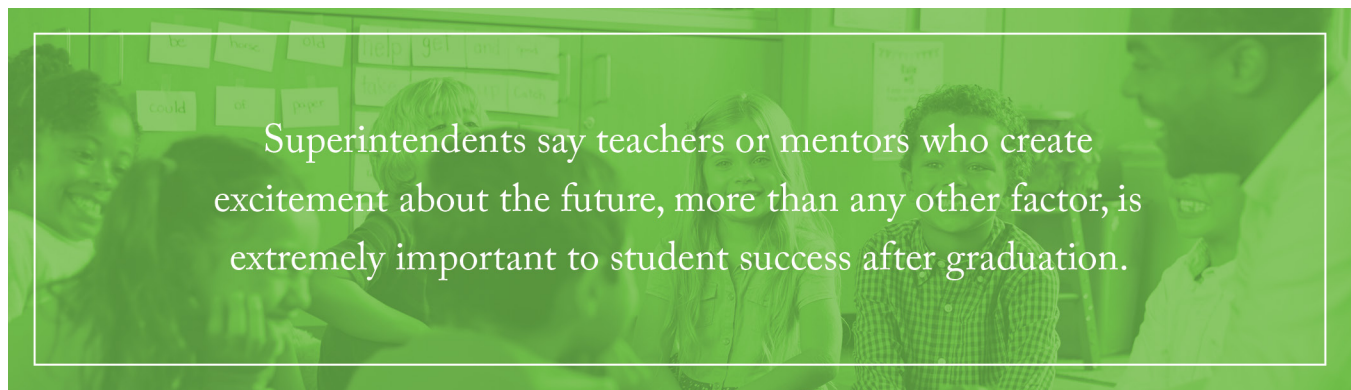
The teacher talent pool can suffer when teachers decide to leave the profession. When asked what career paths former teachers in their district take, 62% of superintendents say teachers are leaving for jobs in other districts, while 23% indicate teachers are leaving the profession entirely.

Based on what you know, are teachers who leave your district — [ROTATED: leaving the teaching profession entirely (or) getting teaching jobs in other districts]?	
	%
Leaving the teaching profession entirely	23
Getting teaching jobs in other districts	62
Don't know/Does not apply	15

There are not meaningful differences by district type in reports of whether former teachers are leaving the profession or taking jobs in other districts.

STUDENT SUCCESS AFTER GRADUATION

Gallup asked superintendents how important each of eight different strategies or initiatives is in leading to success for students after they graduate. According to superintendents, the approach most likely to lead to success is having teachers or mentors who create excitement for the future. Seventy-eight percent of superintendents say that is “extremely important” in promoting success later in life.



About six in 10 superintendents say building school engagement (65%) and teaching a rigorous academic core (62%) are very important ways to promote success after graduation. Slightly less than half say the same about increased use of technology (48%) and involvement in extracurricular activities (45%).

Fewer superintendents believe providing students with internships connected to what they are learning (37%), project-based learning (33%) and smaller class sizes (18%) are very important in fostering post-graduation success.

How important are each of the following education strategies or initiatives in leading to success for students after graduation — in their jobs, postsecondary education and adult lives?					
	% Extremely important	% Very important	% Somewhat important	% Not that important	% Don't know/Does not apply
Teachers or mentors who create excitement for the future	78	20	2	<1	<1
Building school engagement	65	31	4	<1	<1
Teaching a rigorous academic core	62	34	4	<1	<1
Increased use of technology	48	40	11	<1	<1
Involvement in extracurricular activities	45	44	10	<1	<1
Providing students with internships connected to what they are learning	37	41	18	1	4
Project-based learning	33	45	20	1	<1
Smaller class sizes	18	34	37	11	1

Superintendents of large districts are most likely to view school engagement as a critical factor in fostering long-term success in their students. Seventy-seven percent of large-district superintendents believe building school engagement is extremely important, compared with 69% of those overseeing medium-sized districts and 58% of those in small districts.

Superintendents in larger districts are also somewhat more likely to view internships as important to post-graduation success. Forty-eight percent of superintendents in large districts believe these are extremely important, compared with 38% of superintendents in medium-sized districts and 31% of small-district superintendents.

Perhaps reflecting the reality of their own situation, superintendents in smaller districts are more inclined to say small class sizes are extremely important to success later in life (26%) than those in medium-sized (11%) and large (6%) districts.

The survey asked superintendents how well their district is doing in preparing its graduates for a productive and successful life in a variety of areas, and how that, in turn, might benefit the local community.

Majorities of superintendents strongly agree or agree that graduates of their district are prepared to be good citizens (72%), to lead healthy lives (67%) and to make informed decisions about postsecondary education (66%). But they are less likely to agree that graduates understand how their talents align with the opportunities and needs of the local community (42%) and that they are prepared to manage their personal finances well (33%).

Superintendents are split evenly in their views of whether graduates will stay and contribute to the local community or move to a different community — 31% strongly agree or agree, and 29% strongly disagree or disagree. They also express more disagreement (31%) than agreement (25%) that graduates with entrepreneurial talent have been identified and guided on how to build a business in the local community.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about graduates of your school district and the local community.						
	% 5 (Strongly agree)	% 4	% 3	% 2	% 1 (Strongly disagree)	% Don't know/ Does not apply
Graduates of my school district are prepared to be informed, lawful and engaged citizens of the community.	23	49	20	2	1	5
Graduates of my school district are prepared to lead healthy lives physically, socially and emotionally.	15	52	25	3	1	5
Graduates of my school district are prepared to make informed decisions about postsecondary education.	21	45	21	4	1	9
Graduates of my school district understand how their talents, knowledge and skills align to the opportunities and needs of the local economy.	7	35	37	11	1	9
Graduates of my school district are prepared to manage their personal finances well.	4	29	44	11	2	10
Graduates of my school district are likely to stay and contribute to the local community rather than to migrate to other communities.	7	24	34	22	7	7
Graduates of my school district with entrepreneurial talent have been identified and guided on how to build a business within the local economy.	5	20	32	23	8	11

City (43%) and suburban (43%) superintendents are more confident than town (24%) and rural (24%) superintendents that their graduates will stay and contribute to the local community. Superintendents of different district types responded similarly to the other items in this sequence.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Many education experts see early childhood education as crucial to improving learning outcomes, and many communities and private organizations are funding programs to provide education to preschool-aged children. Superintendents believe that early childhood care and education programs have “a great deal” of impact on long-term student success — 77% hold this view, with most of the rest saying such programs have “a fair amount” of impact.

Based on what you have seen or heard, how much impact does early childhood care and education have on the long-term success of students in school?	
	%
A great deal	77
A fair amount	18
Not much	3
None at all	1
Don't know/Does not apply	1

But superintendents see early childhood education as lacking in their state. Just 16% strongly agree or agree, while 63% strongly disagree or disagree, that high-quality early childhood care and education is available to every family in their state. Also, 80% say their state is spending “too little” on early childhood education.

The lack of available early childhood education could be one reason superintendents do not believe that most young children in their state are prepared to be successful in school when they start kindergarten — 53% strongly disagree or disagree, while 16% strongly agree or agree.

Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.						
	% 5 (Strongly agree)	% 4	% 3	% 2	% 1 (Strongly disagree)	% Don't know/ Does not apply
Most young children in my state are prepared to be successful in school when they start kindergarten.	3	13	29	35	18	3
High-quality early childhood care and education is available to every family in my state.	5	11	18	28	35	3

In your opinion, is your state investing too little, about the right amount or too much in early childhood care and education programs?	
	%
Too little	80
About the right amount	15
Too much	2
Don't know/Does not apply	2

Superintendents of city school districts are most likely to reject the idea that high-quality early childhood care and education is available to every family in their state. Seventy-nine percent strongly disagree or disagree, compared with 56% to 68% of superintendents in other types of districts.

City superintendents are also less likely to agree that most students in their state are prepared for school success when they start kindergarten.

Views of Early Childhood Education, by District Location				
	% 5 (Strongly agree) / % 4	% 3	% 1 (Strongly disagree) / % 2	% Don't know/ Does not apply
Most young children in my state are prepared to be successful in school when they start kindergarten.				
City	9	21	69	2
Suburban	15	27	53	6
Town	14	33	51	2
Rural	18	31	50	1
High-quality early childhood care and education is available to every family in my state.				
City	8	11	79	2
Suburban	14	16	68	3
Town	19	17	61	2
Rural	20	21	56	3

EDUCATION POLICY

Most superintendents believe federal education policy affects what is happening in their own district — 25% say it has a great deal of impact and 49% a fair amount. The percentage saying federal policy affects their district a great deal is down from 36% in 2015.

How much does federal education policy affect what is happening in your school district?					
	% A great deal	% A fair amount	% Not much	% Not at all	% Don't know/ Does not apply
2017	25	49	24	1	<1
2015	36	48	15	1	0

Superintendents tend to view the federal government's role negatively — both in how it has performed over the last five years and also how the Trump administration is likely to handle federal education policy. Just 16% say the federal government has done an excellent or good job with K-12 education policy over the last five years. Forty percent say it has only done a fair job, while 45% rate it as poor. Opinions today are not as negative as in 2015, when 10% rated the federal government's job in education policy as excellent or good and 53% as poor.

How would you rate the job the federal government has done with K-12 education policy in the last five years?					
	% Excellent	% Good	% Only fair	% Poor	% Don't know/ Does not apply
2017	1	15	40	45	0
2015	1	9	36	53	0

A majority of superintendents, 55%, say they have no confidence at all in the Trump administration to handle K-12 education policy. Most of the rest, 26%, say they do not have much confidence. Just 16% are confident, including 4% who have a great deal of confidence and 12% a fair amount.

How much confidence do you, personally, have in the Trump administration to handle K-12 education policy?					
	% A great deal	% A fair amount	% Not much	% None at all	% Don't know/ Does not apply
2017	4	12	26	55	3

Likely reflecting political differences by area, superintendents in rural areas express relatively more confidence in the Trump administration's ability to handle federal education policy than other superintendents. Those in city and suburban districts have the least amount of confidence in the new administration.

Confidence in Trump Administration to Handle K-12 Education Policy, by District Location				
	% A great deal	% A fair amount	% Not much	% None at all
District location				
City	1	7	24	66
Suburban	2	6	20	67
Town	5	10	25	55
Rural	7	18	29	44

Superintendents also express concerns about state education policy and the information legislators use to support changes in policy. Just 16% strongly agree or agree that policymakers in their state consider the latest education research to inform decisions about public education policy. A majority of superintendents, 62%, strongly disagree or disagree. They are now slightly more skeptical that state policymakers consider the latest education research to inform public education policy. In 2014, 57% strongly disagreed or disagreed that state policymakers were doing this.

On a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following items. Policymakers in my state consider the latest education research to inform decisions about public education policy.						
	% 5 (Strongly agree)	% 4	% 3	% 2	% 1 (Strongly disagree)	% Don't know/ Does not apply
2017	4	12	21	26	36	1
2014	4	15	22	25	32	2

State and local policies regarding charter schools are another area that demands superintendents' attention. Many proponents of charter schools believe that the methods those schools use can lead to improvements in the way public schools operate. However, superintendents mostly reject that notion. Seventy-one percent strongly disagree or disagree that competition from charter schools leads to innovations and reforms in public schools. Only 10% strongly agree or agree this is the case.

Superintendents' views about charter schools have not changed meaningfully since 2014, when Gallup last asked the question.

On a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following items. Competition from charter schools leads to innovations and reforms in public schools.						
	% 5 (Strongly agree)	% 4	% 3	% 2	% 1 (Strongly disagree)	% Don't know/ Does not apply
2017	2	8	13	21	50	5
2014	3	8	18	25	44	4

SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS

Superintendents are mostly positive about their relations with their school board. Overall, 86% indicate their board agrees with them on most decisions, including 47% who strongly agree this is the case. Also, 68% strongly agree or agree their district is well-governed at the board level; only 15% disagree.

Superintendent-board relations tend to be positive, but this is not the case in all districts. While most superintendents strongly disagree or disagree they have considered leaving their position because of their relationship with the board, 19% agree they have had such thoughts.

Superintendents are more likely to agree than disagree that their board's members are knowledgeable about K-12 education, and that their board is diverse and inclusive. At the same time, less than a majority hold these views. Forty-three percent strongly agree or agree their board members are very knowledgeable about K-12 education, while 24% strongly disagree or disagree. Forty-five percent agree their board is diverse and inclusive, but 28% disagree.

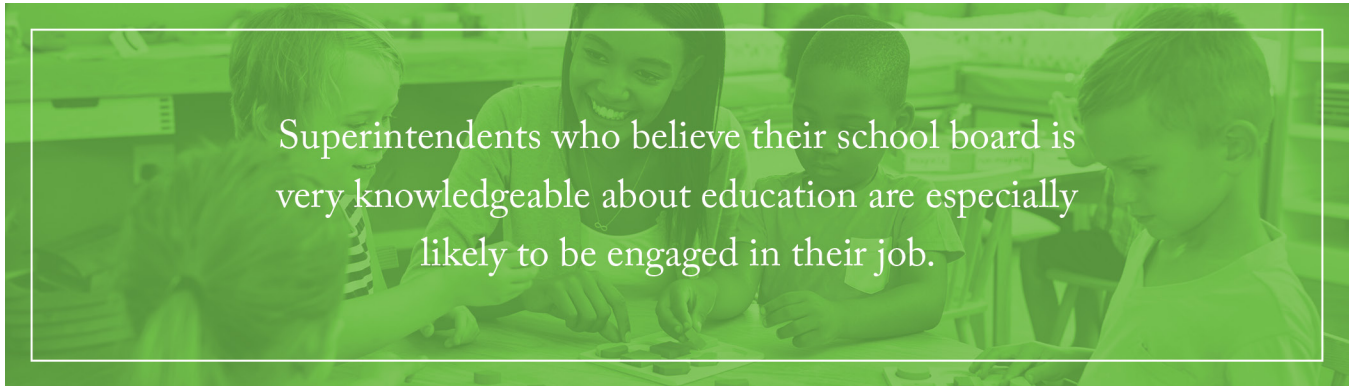
Asked for their opinions about school boards nationwide, superintendents are much less positive. Just 26% strongly agree or agree that they are confident U.S. school districts are well-governed at the board level. More, 36%, strongly disagree or disagree.

On a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following items.						
	% 5 (Strongly agree)	% 4	% 3	% 2	% 1 (Strongly disagree)	% Don't know/ Does not apply
My school district's board and I generally are in agreement on most decisions.	47	39	9	3	1	<1
I am confident that my school district is well-governed at the board level.	35	33	16	9	6	<1
My school district has a diverse and inclusive board.	17	28	27	18	10	1
The board members of my district are very knowledgeable about K-12 education.	11	32	32	17	7	<1
I am confident that school districts in the U.S. are well-governed at the board level.	5	21	34	23	13	3
I have considered leaving my current school leadership role because of the relationship with the local school board.	9	10	9	14	57	1

Fifty-two percent of city superintendents strongly agree or agree their school board is diverse and inclusive, compared with 38% of suburban superintendents. Rural (45%) and town (48%) superintendents fall in between.

Superintendents who are the most positive about their school board are highly likely to be engaged in their job. Two-thirds who strongly agree that they are confident their district is well-governed at the board level are engaged. That drops to 41% of those who agree (respond with a rating of 4 on the five-point scale) and falls to 14% of those who are neutral or disagree (respond 1, 2 or 3 on the five-point scale).

Having a board that is knowledgeable about K-12 education appears to be an especially strong correlate of superintendent engagement. Three-quarters of superintendents (76%) who strongly agree their board is very knowledgeable are engaged in their job, compared with 57% who agree and 26% who are neutral or disagree.



Also, 60% of superintendents who strongly agree that they and their board are in accord on most decisions are engaged at work. Among those who agree with the statement (give a rating of 4), 29% are engaged. And among those who are neutral or disagree (give ratings of 1, 2 or 3), 12% are.

Finally, 63% of superintendents who strongly agree their board is diverse and inclusive are engaged in their job, compared with 31% who are neutral or disagree.

Gallup asked many of these items in previous superintendent surveys. Superintendents today (86%) are just as likely as in 2013 (88%) to say they and their board agree on most decisions. They are slightly less likely now (68%) than in 2014 (77%) and 2013 (73%) to strongly agree or agree their district is well-governed at the board level. They are also less likely now (45%) than in 2013 (52%) to believe their district has a diverse and inclusive board.

The biggest change in recent years has been a decline in the percentage who strongly agree or agree board members are very knowledgeable about K-12 education, from 55% in 2013 to 43% today. This decline could be keeping superintendent engagement below what it could be, even if it is already above average compared with the engagement of other workers.

Relatively few superintendents, 10%, say their relationship with the school board is getting “worse.” The vast majority say it is getting “better” (40%) or is “about the same” (48%) as in the past.

Is your relationship with the local school district board of education better, worse or about the same as in the past?	
	%
Better	40
Worse	10
About the same	48
Don't know/Does not apply	1

In addition to local school boards, superintendents also must follow the directives of state boards of education. Superintendents express a desire for greater autonomy from their state's board of education. Nearly half, 46%, say their state's board affords "too little" autonomy, while 39% say it gives the "right amount" and 9% say "too much." These opinions are similar by district type.

Would you say that your state's board of education affords too much autonomy, too little autonomy or just the right amount of autonomy to local school districts?	
	%
Too much	9
Too little	46
Right amount	39
Don't know/Does not apply	7

THE FUTURE OF K-12 EDUCATION

Not surprisingly, given their negative views of how the federal government is handling education policy, superintendents are not overly optimistic about the future of K-12 education in the U.S. Thirty-two percent strongly agree or agree, and 38% strongly disagree or disagree, that they are excited about the future of K-12 public education in the U.S. Those views are much less positive than in 2015, when 44% expressed excitement and 24% did not.

In stark contrast to their lack of optimism about U.S. public education, superintendents are very positive about the future of their own district. Eighty-five percent strongly agree or agree they are excited about the future of their school district, essentially the same as the 86% Gallup measured in 2015.



Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.						
	% 5 (Strongly agree)	% 4	% 3	% 2	% 1 (Strongly disagree)	% Don't know/Does not apply
I am excited about the future of K-12 public education in the U.S.						
2017	12	20	30	23	15	0
2015	14	30	33	18	6	0
I am excited about the future of my school district.						
2017	55	30	9	4	2	<1
2015	52	34	9	4	2	0

The level of excitement about one's own district varies by district type. Sixty-four percent of city and 63% of suburban superintendents strongly agree they are excited about their district's future, significantly higher than the 50% of both town and rural superintendents who say the same. Also, 65% of those overseeing large-enrollment districts strongly agree they are excited about the future, compared with 62% of those in medium-sized districts and 48% of those in small districts.

Conclusion

Superintendents face many challenges in educating children in their district, but the vast majority say they are satisfied with their district as a place to work and an above-average 42% are engaged in their job, according to Gallup's assessment of their workplace engagement.

Superintendents believe having teachers who create excitement about the future is, more than any other proposed strategy or initiative, extremely important for preparing students for success later in life. But finding enough quality teachers is a difficult task, and superintendents are much less likely to see their district as effective in recruiting new teachers as effective in selecting, developing or retaining them. A majority also see the quantity of new teacher candidates decreasing, and more view the quality of those candidates as decreasing rather than increasing. It may not be a coincidence that superintendents who say their district is very effective in recruiting teachers are much more likely to be engaged in their job than those who rate their district as less effective in this area.

Some of the ongoing challenges education leaders face are budget shortfalls and improving the learning of underprepared students. Early childhood education could help with the latter mission, but superintendents see such opportunities as lacking, presumably for those families that do not have the means to pay for quality preschool or childcare.

One area in which superintendents appear to be faring well is in getting along with the school board. Most rate their relations with the school board positively, and most say they are generally in accord with the school board on important decisions. Superintendents do believe their board could be more informed about K-12 education and that their board could be more diverse and inclusive. Having better-informed and more diverse boards could promote greater workplace engagement among superintendents.

It is unclear if superintendents prioritize or value keeping graduates in the local area after they finish schooling as a way of benefiting the community. Superintendents are evenly divided as to whether their graduates are more likely to stay in the community or migrate away from it. For graduates who do stay, superintendents are confident that they will be good citizens and lead healthy lives, but are less confident that they will manage their finances well. Superintendents are not highly confident that graduates with entrepreneurial talents will be identified and guided on how to build a business within the local community. Personal finance and entrepreneurship are two areas in which superintendents might develop strategies, in coursework or counseling, to help their students achieve more success after they graduate.

Methodology

This survey is an attempted census of U.S. public school district superintendents. Gallup used a purchased sample list of 12,432 K-12 school districts across the U.S. to email their superintendents to invite them to participate in a web survey. Gallup conducted 2,326 web interviews from June 15-July 9, 2017, achieving a 19% response rate. The sample of superintendents was weighted to correct for possible nonresponse bias by matching the obtained sample to targets for all U.S. school districts from the National Center for Education Statistics database on district enrollment, geographical region and location of the district in a city, suburb, town or rural area. The weighted sample thus can be projected to represent public school district superintendents nationwide.

Respondent and District Characteristics

What is your age?	
	%
Younger than 30	<1
30 to 39	4
40 to 49	30
50 to 59	41
60 to 69	23
70 or older	3

What is your gender?	
	%
Male	73
Female	27

How many years have you served as the superintendent in this school district?	
	%
Less than six months	1
Six months to less than three years	37
Three years to less than five years	24
Five years to less than 10 years	25
10 years or more	13
Don't know/Does not apply	0

How many years have you served as the superintendent in any school district?	
	%
Less than six months	2
Six months to less than three years	25
Three years to less than five years	18
Five years to less than 10 years	25
10 years or more	28
Don't know/Does not apply	2

How would you categorize your school district?	
	%
City	10
Suburban	21
Town	8
Rural	61

About how many students are currently enrolled in your school district?	
	%
0-999	53
1,000-1,999	17
2,000-4,999	11
5,000-9,999	8
10,000+	10

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For more information, visit Gallup's [K-12 Schools](#) page or follow [@GallupEducation](#).

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