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## EVENT BRIEF

### **GALLUP AND THE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION IN EDUCATION UNVEIL ANNUAL POLL ON EDUCATION POLICY**

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On Wednesday, August 25, the Professional Association in Education, in partnership with Gallup, hosted a briefing to release their 42nd annual poll pertaining to education in the United States titled, “School of Thought: Data-Driven Insights to Inform Education Policy.” The event, featuring two panels to review the two separate surveys, kicked off with opening remarks from the Chairman and CEO of Gallup, Jim Clifton. Clifton framed the conversation that followed by describing the national economic conundrum of the states’ dire straits and the resulting effects on the education system. Clifton stated, “In 30 years the GDP of the US is expected to be \$30 trillion while China’s is expected to be \$60 trillion and the 50 million kids moving through the K-12 education system will be driving the economic engine” at this time.

#### **PANEL ONE**

- William Bushaw, Ph.D., Executive Director, PDK International
- Jack Jennings, President and CEO, Center on Education Policy
- C. Kent McGuire, Ph.D., Dean College of Education, Temple University
- Andrew Rotherham, Co-founder/Partner, Bellwether Education
- Joanne Weiss, Chief of Staff, U.S. Department of Education

#### **SUMMARY**

**William Bushaw** opened the first panel with highlights from the poll titled, “Public Opinion & the Future of Education Reform.” This survey ascertains the public’s attitude toward the public schools in the US. Bushaw summarized some of the findings related to the school turnaround models supported by the Obama administration, charter schools, the importance of college, and the quality of schools in this country. When asked about school turnaround models, it is evident most Americans do not favor these options and specifically don’t like school administrators or teachers being removed or schools being shut down. Over 90 percent of Americans think their child will attend college, and over 70 percent believe they can afford college. While most Americans are beginning to believe that the country’s schools don’t provide quality education, the survey revealed that close to 60 percent are satisfied with the school their child attends (although 40

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percent were moderately satisfied or unsatisfied). And, while charter schools rose in favorability in the public eye, they were not named as the solution to the nation's education woes – teacher quality was a popular fault, however. To that end, the public viewed merit pay favorably, although stipulated it not be based solely on student achievement.

Responding to these results for the Administration was **Joanne Weiss**. Alarmed by the paradoxes of the results, Weiss cited the example that parents don't want schools to be closed due to poor performance—an opinion at odds with their opposition to enrolling their own children in a chronically failing school. Overall, what is important is “knowing the truth” and understanding, at a fundamental level, the performance of each school in the U.S. to make the proper decisions for students. Weiss stated, “It is clear most don't think we know what will work in schools, and I don't think we have the knowledge or the information to know what works in schools, either.”

**Jack Jennings** stated that while it is “important to consider public opinion in public policy, we must still remember this is public opinion.” This survey, he explained, clearly demonstrates the American public is “not on the same page” with the federal government when it comes to education reform. The administration or Congress would be “smart” to respond to the items the public favors – such as improving teacher quality, according to Jennings. The “good news revealed is that the public believes effort counts more than innate ability,” he added. Compared to prior years, this sentiment is growing.

This poll led **Kent McGuire** “to beg for a series of more questions.” McGuire wondered if the public's increased approval for charter schools was due to choice, flexibility or simply an idea that has had ample time to assimilate among the general population. He also questioned what made the public collectively concerned with teacher quality. But, most importantly, McGuire wondered why this policy debate hasn't reached the “world of higher education”, given the widespread ambition to attend college. There are questions about cost, disparity of resources in the higher education marketplace, retention, and graduation rates. **Andrew Rotherham** said McGuire is “over thinking” why the public supports charter schools and stated the public's favor of charter schools “means nothing” given that “the majority of the public could not define a charter school, nor can one in every four teachers.” The public's perception of charter schools is positive for reasons unrelated to effectiveness, according to Rotherham. He said, “Polls are good at exposing broad trends in the national conversation,” and what was exposed in this poll is the “large disconnect” between the public and the education community. The higher education community is not prepared to support the percentage of students that this survey revealed are interested in attending college. Education policy should look to address this issue, Rotherman suggested.

## **PANEL TWO**

- Shane Lopez, Ph.D., Research Director, The Clifton Strengths School Senior Scientist in Residence, Gallup
- Daniel Cardinali, President of Communities in Schools
- Karen Pittman, CEO Forum for Youth Investment

- Dr. John Mackiel, Superintendent of Omaha Public Schools
- Dr. Adey Stembridge, Senior Research Associate, Columbia Teachers College

## SUMMARY

**Dr. Shane Lopez** presented the results of the “Youth Readiness for the Future” 20-item survey measuring hope, engagement and well-being. The goal of the survey was to evaluate the thoughts and feelings of students and how they affect their progress. The results show that 53 percent of youth are hopeful and that 9 out of 10 youths believe they will graduate high school, and also have a caring adult in their lives. Over 60 percent are engaged in school, and 70 percent are thriving. “Thriving” was defined as being well rested, fed, well supported and having access to health resources. Unfortunately, only 34 percent of youths are actually hopeful, engaged and have a good state of health. This percentile achieves 20 percent more credits during their freshman year, earns a GPA one letter-grade higher than their peers, has fewer health concerns and is better rested. This survey reveals the importance of engaging teachers and students and increasing the hope children have for their futures in order to achieve higher academic outcomes.

This survey highlighted the importance of teaching teachers how to better use data to positively affect classrooms, **Dr. Adey Stembridge** began. This information requires the education community to define what college-and career-ready means and to outline teaching methods that support students’ goals. While many view the achievement gap as a teacher quality issue, Stembridge views it as a teacher retention issue. Within the first one to three years of entering a classroom, a high percentage of teachers leave the profession. Many cite lack of support as a significant cause of this exit that loses professionals who could ultimately be talented, bright teachers. The drain could be easily stopped by addressing their needs, many assert. Stembridge noted, “This poll gives teachers items to initiate new points of improvement” for both schools and individual educators.

“Legitimate reform comes with skillful teaching,” **Dr. John Mackiel** stated, “which is what this survey suggests.” Citing examples from his district in Omaha, Mackiel explained that this Gallup poll dictates the strategy implemented by the district to meet the needs of youths. Agreeing with Mackiel, **Karen Pittman** added that it was also about “skills that prevent people from engaging in risky behaviors.” This is a community-wide issue that has yet to be clearly defined, although this poll cites the importance of youth having hope and being engaged as methods for improvement and “that is something,” Pittman said. Building on Pittman’s statement, **Daniel Cardinali** expressed that these indicators address the achievement gap from a different lens and that linking these outcomes with student achievement is critical.

The one question submitted by the audience involved Singapore’s close study of the U.S. education system and their quandary about how to inspire creativity and innovation in their own nation. While Singapore scores higher on tests than the U.S., students in the U.S. are far more creative. Panelists acknowledged that the positive emotions captured in this survey may be key indicators to creative thoughts, but Jim Clifton added that it could also be Singapore’s stifling environment that minimizes creativity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Wrapping up the briefing, Dr. Jerry Weast, Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools (MD), summarized how he is using the Gallup polls to dictate front-line action worked in his district where, after addressing a number of indicators in the survey, his district currently graduates the highest number of students in the country, including the highest rate of African-American males. In addition, the Montgomery County district has the highest percentage of Latino and African-American males taking Advanced Placement tests at a greater rate than all students in the nation. In sum, Weast's opinion is "the polls work."

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