

# National Journal Education Poll Overview of Results

September 2010



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- I. Research Objectives and Methodology
- II. Respondent Profile
- III. Results



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## Research Objectives

This study aims to enlighten the dialogue on education policy through:

- Opinion research on the policy priorities and direction of education in the United States
- Awareness benchmarks of key facts and statistics related to the state of education

## Quantitative Data

The data consisted of two types of questions: opinion-based and fact-based. In total, respondents were given seven fact-based questions and eleven opinion-based questions. For each fact-based, multiple-choice question, the poll offered one correct response and three incorrect choices. The poll also included fill-in fact-based questions. Statistics tested were chosen to present a range of education policy elements and come from data provided by the Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau, including the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) Public Teacher Questionnaire and the Public Education Finances 2008 study.

More than 300 respondents contributed to the survey during the two weeks the survey was available: 207 from Capitol Hill, 10 from the U.S. Department of Education and Executive Office of the President, 73 education advocacy professionals. Respondent lists were based on publicly-available information from the KnowWho database (Capitol Hill), CQ Press' Federal Staff Directory, and Columbia Books' Lobbyist.info database.

## Qualitative Data

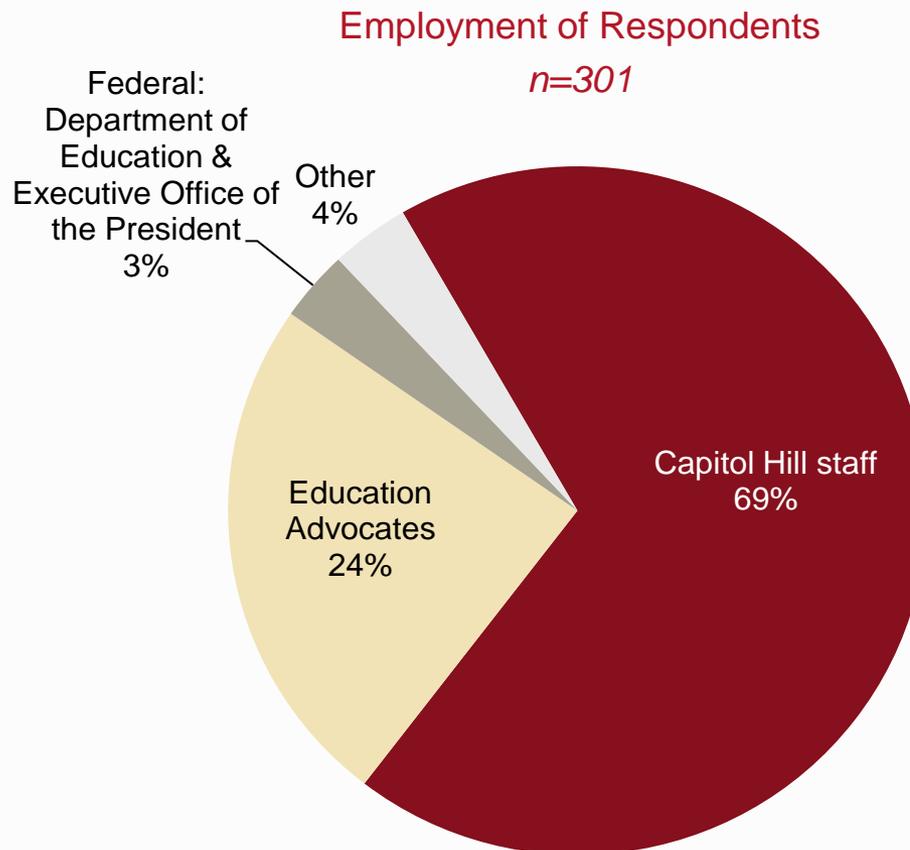
Ten interviews, each 15 to 20 minutes in length, were conducted by phone to solicit qualitative feedback to bring context to the opinions shared in the survey. Interviewees work on and off Capitol Hill, and as education advocates. In addition, within the opinion section of the survey, respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on their answers.

# Respondent Profile



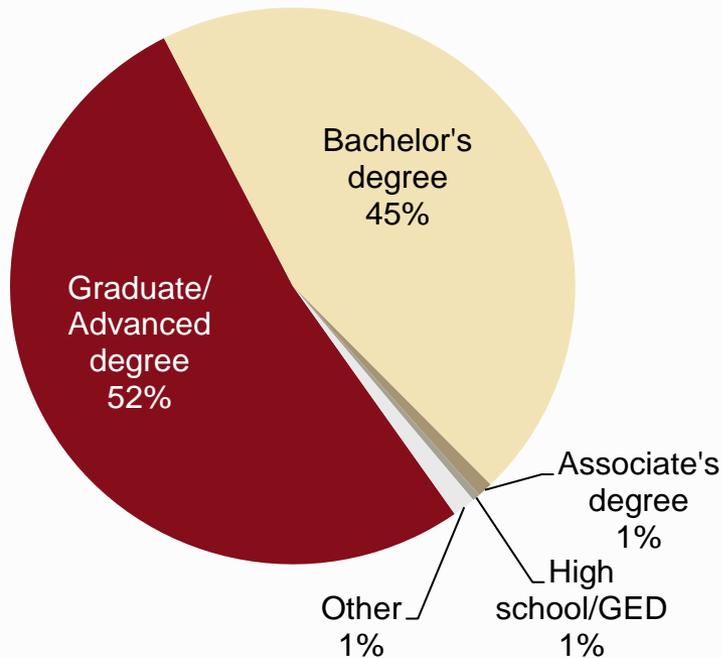
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- A total of 301 Washington Insiders responded to the survey: 207 staff on Capitol Hill, 10 from the U.S. Department of Education and Executive Office of the President, and 73 education advocates. More than three-quarters of respondents completed the survey.
- The majority of respondents (69 percent) are Capitol Hill staff, and almost a quarter (24 percent) are lobbyists and advocates for education issues. The remaining respondents are federal employees from the Department of Education, the Executive Office of the President, and other Washington institutions.

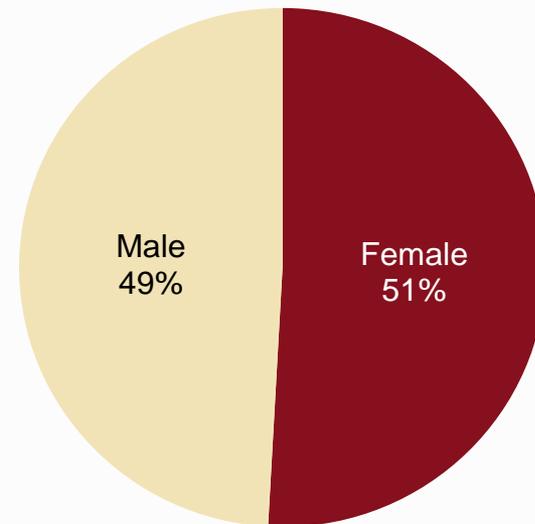


- Poll respondents are highly educated: 97 percent have obtained a Bachelor's or Graduate degree.
- Fewer than one percent received an associate's degree, and only one respondent completed his highest level of education at the high school level.
- Nearly equal numbers of male and female Washington Insiders responded to the survey (51 percent female, 49 percent male).

Highest Level of Education of Respondents\*



Respondent Gender\*\*

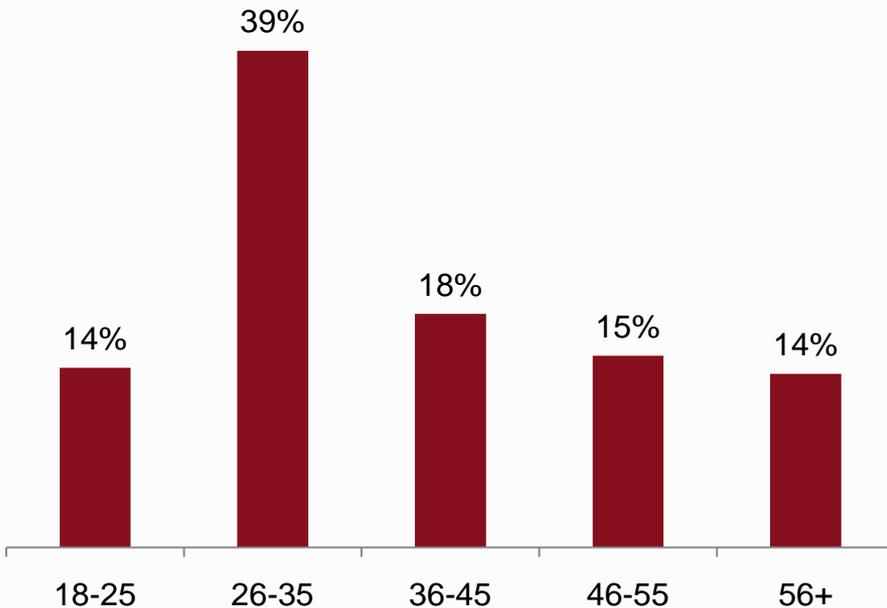


\*What is your highest level of education?

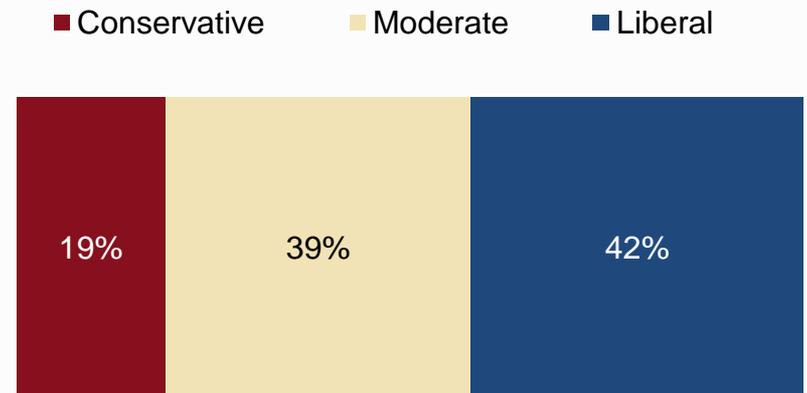
\*\*Are you male or female?

- The largest respondent group is 26 to 35 year-olds (39 percent), and 36 to 45 year-olds make up the second largest share of respondents (18 percent).
- Most respondents identify as “Liberal” (42 percent) or “Moderate” (39 percent) .

Age of Respondents\*



Political Views of Respondents\*\*



\*In what year were you born?

\*\*How would you describe your political views?

- Ten interviews with Washington Insiders followed the poll distribution. Upon conclusion of the survey, interviewees opted to participate in the more in-depth discussion of the issues.

Interviewee Number	Employment	Self-Reported Knowledge of Education Issues
1	U.S. Senate Staff	Moderate
2	U.S. Senate Staff	Low
3	Education Advocate	High
4	Education Advocate	Moderate
5	U.S. House of Representatives Staff	High
6	Education Advocate	Moderate
7	U.S. House of Representatives Staff	Moderate
8	Education Advocate	High
9	U.S. House of Representatives Staff	Moderate
10	Education Advocate	Moderate

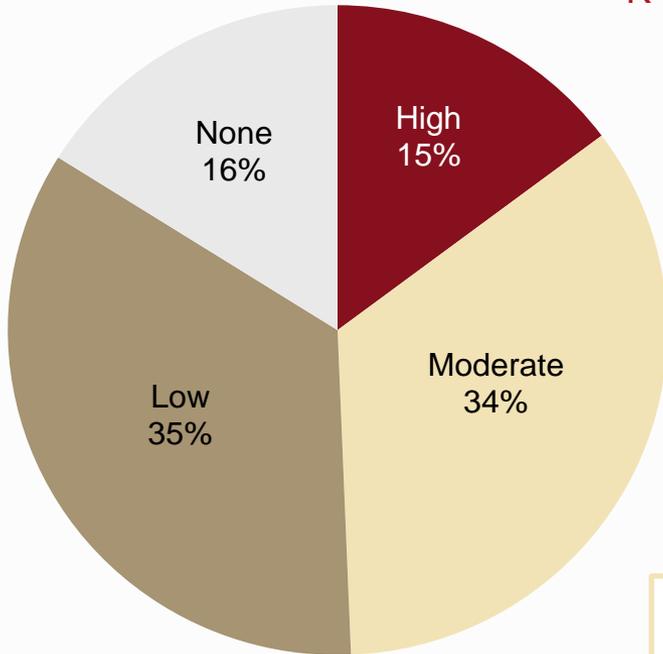
# Detailed Results



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K-12 Education Knowledge Level\*



“Even though I don't work on education issues, **my personal interest in them causes me to keep abreast of them.**”

*- U.S. House of Representatives (“None”)*

“I have worked and published on education issues **full-time (or close to full-time) for over 20 years.** Also, I have taught education policy/ and law classes at the graduate school level.”

*- Department of Education (“High”)*

“I do more work on **higher education** than on K-12 education”

*- Education Advocate (“Low”)*

“I worked as a **middle school teacher for 15 years**, a school administrator for three years, and a consultant for five years.”

*- Department of Education (“High”)*

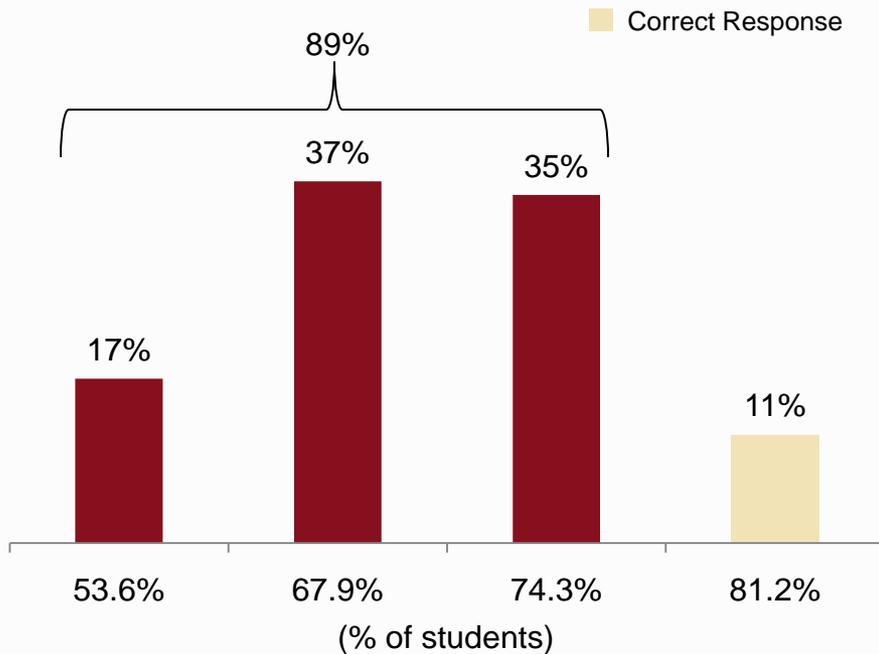
“I have taught K-12 as well as **lobbied for and administered federal education programs.**”

*- Education Advocate (“High”)*

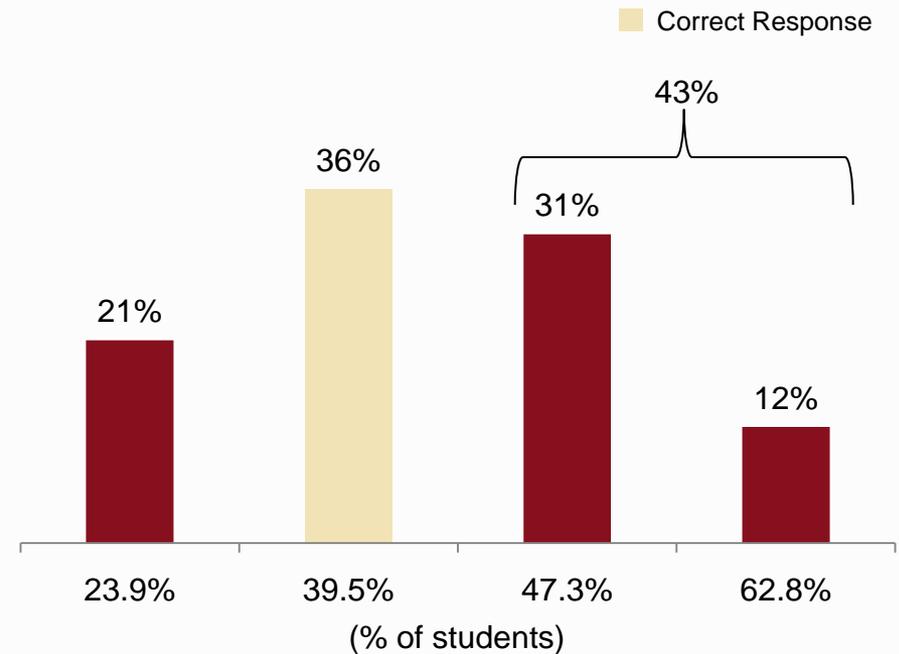
\*How would you describe your level of knowledge about K-12 education issues? Answer choices: High – I work(ed) on education issues full-time, Moderate – I work(ed) on education issues some of my time, Low – I work(ed) on education issues only rarely, None – I do not/have not work(ed) on education issues

- Respondents overwhelmingly underestimate the 12<sup>th</sup>-grade graduation rate in the United States. Just above one-tenth of respondents correctly identify the 12<sup>th</sup>-grade graduation rate as 81.2 percent.
- More respondents correctly identified the 4-year college attendance rate as 39.5 percent, but 43 percent of respondents overestimated the statistic.

12<sup>th</sup> Grade Graduation Rate (2006-2007)\*



4-year College Attendance Rate (2007-2008)\*\*

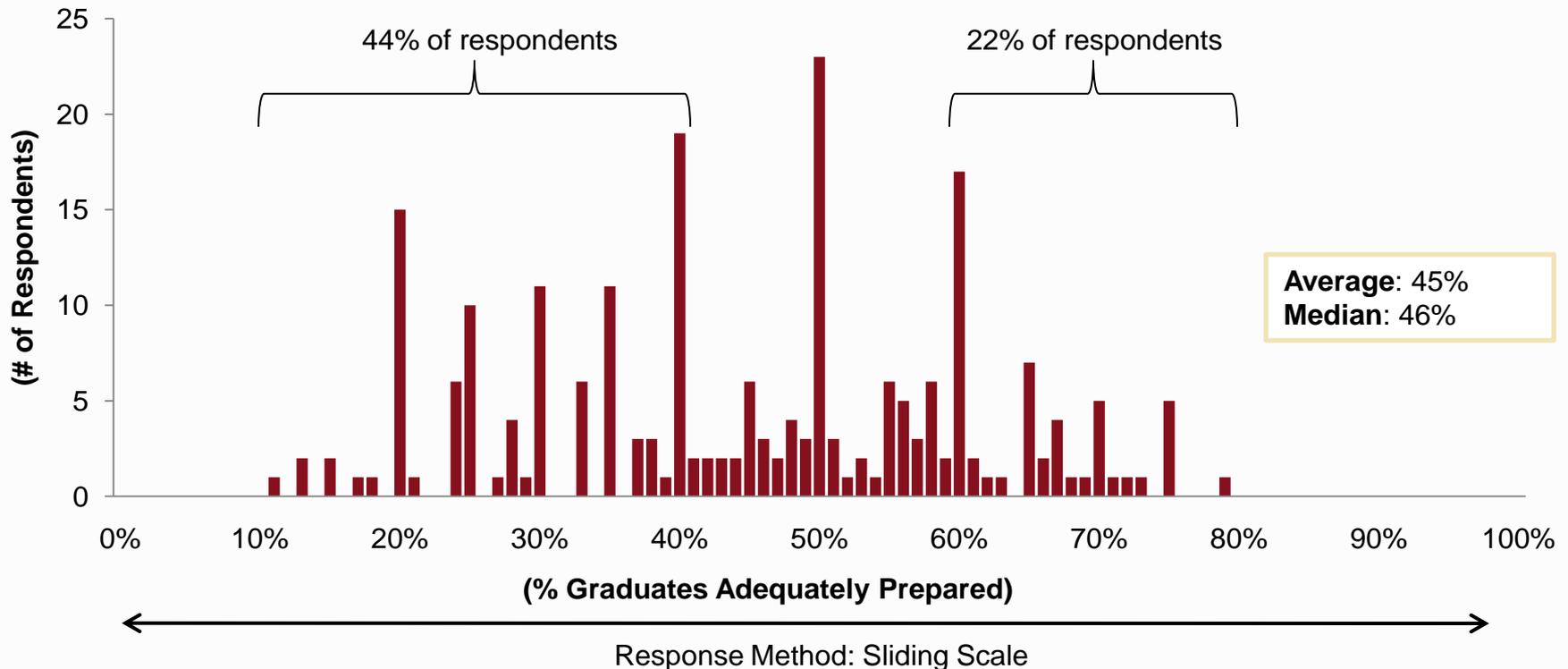


\*What was the graduation rate for 12th-graders in public high school during the 2006-2007 academic year?

\*\*What was the 4-year college attendance rate of 2006-2007 high-school graduates in 2007-2008?

- When given an open-ended question, respondents are even more unsure about measures of student outcome. Respondents submitted more than 50 different estimates of the percentage of high school graduates who are prepared for post-secondary study. Their responses range from 11 percent to 79 percent.
- 44 percent of Washington Insiders believe that less than 40 percent of high school graduates are prepared for post-secondary study, while only 22 percent of Washington Insiders believe more than 60 percent of high school graduates are prepared for post-secondary study.

## Respondent Opinion: Percentage of High School Graduates Adequately Prepared for Post-Secondary Study\*



\*In your opinion, what percentage of high school graduates are adequately prepared for post-secondary study?

“Student outcome means: are students able to find and maintain a job? Do they earn a decent wage from their job? What is their career potential?”

**- Education Advocate**

“I think that adequately prepared means having learned the skills it takes to become a good college student and future worker: the ability to find, distill and understand information, curiosity and basic organizational and executive functioning skills.”

**- Education Advocate**

“Student outcome is hard to measure. The ability to go into the next grade level or class in some sequence and have a solid foundation—so that you can do next year’s work—is what defines student outcome.”

**- U.S. Senate**

“Students should be work-ready, college-ready, literacy-skills capable.”

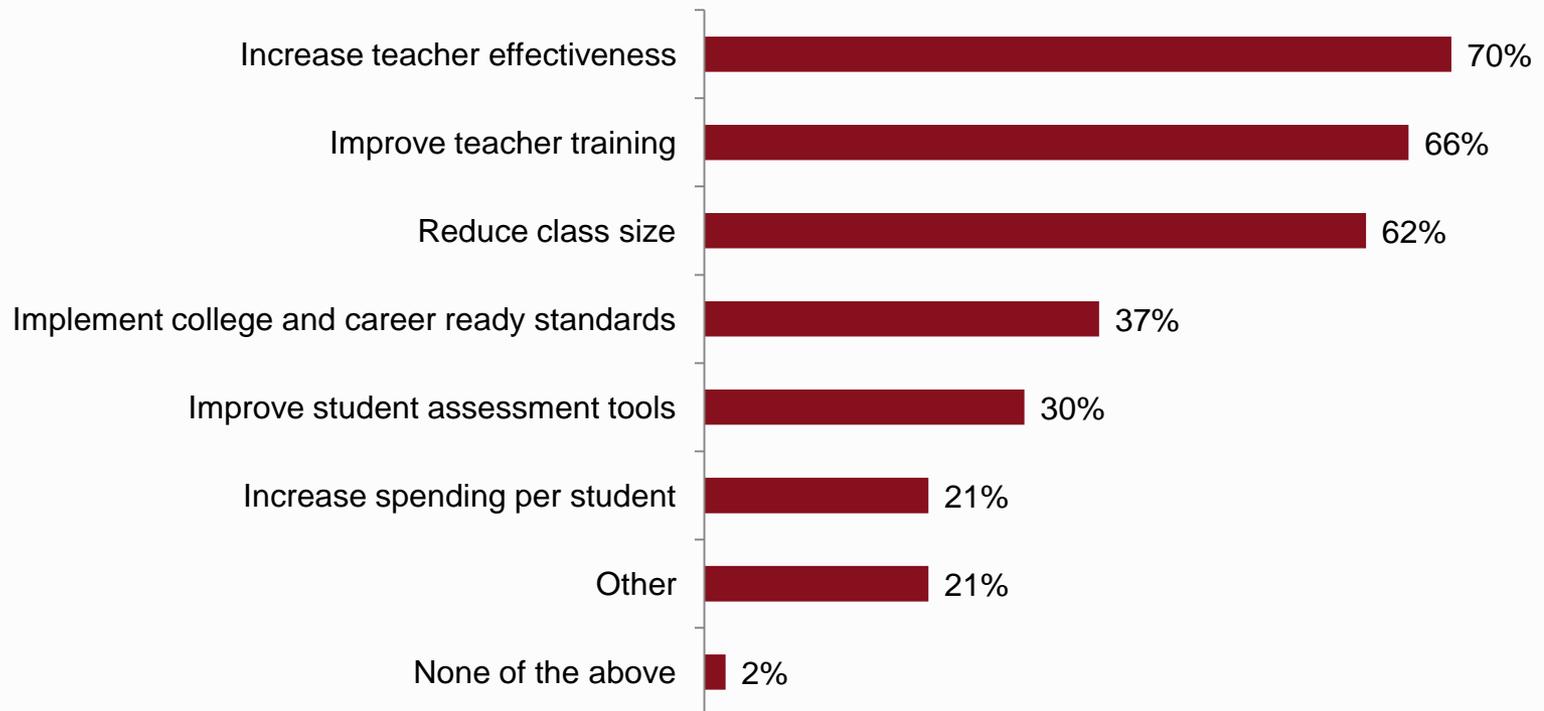
**- Education Advocate**

“An adequately prepared student does not require remedial courses before starting freshman courses in college.”

**- U.S. House of Representatives**

- Many Washington Insiders focus on teachers; more than two-thirds suggest increasing teacher effectiveness (70 percent) or improving teacher training (66 percent) will improve K-12 student outcome.
- A number of respondents (62 percent) indicate that reducing the number of students per class would translate to better results for K-12 students in the United States.

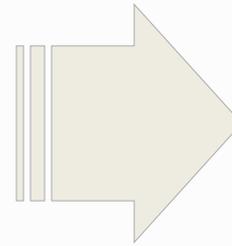
## Ways to Improve K-12 Education Outcomes\*



\*In your opinion, which of the following will significantly improve student outcome as it pertains to K-12 education in the United States. Please select all that apply.

- Washington Insiders point to academic standards and spending as top priorities in federal education policy, yet identify teacher effectiveness and academic standards as the ideal foci of education policy in the United States.
- Respondents believe academic standards currently attract much attention in the education policy sphere, as almost half (49 percent) identify it as the top current priority in education policy.
- Only 12 percent of respondents report that teacher effectiveness is the top priority in education policy, while nearly two-thirds (62 percent) said it *should* be the top priority.

Current Priorities* (Average Rank)	
Academic Standards	1.8
Education Spending	2.1
Teacher Effectiveness	2.9
Class Size	3.1



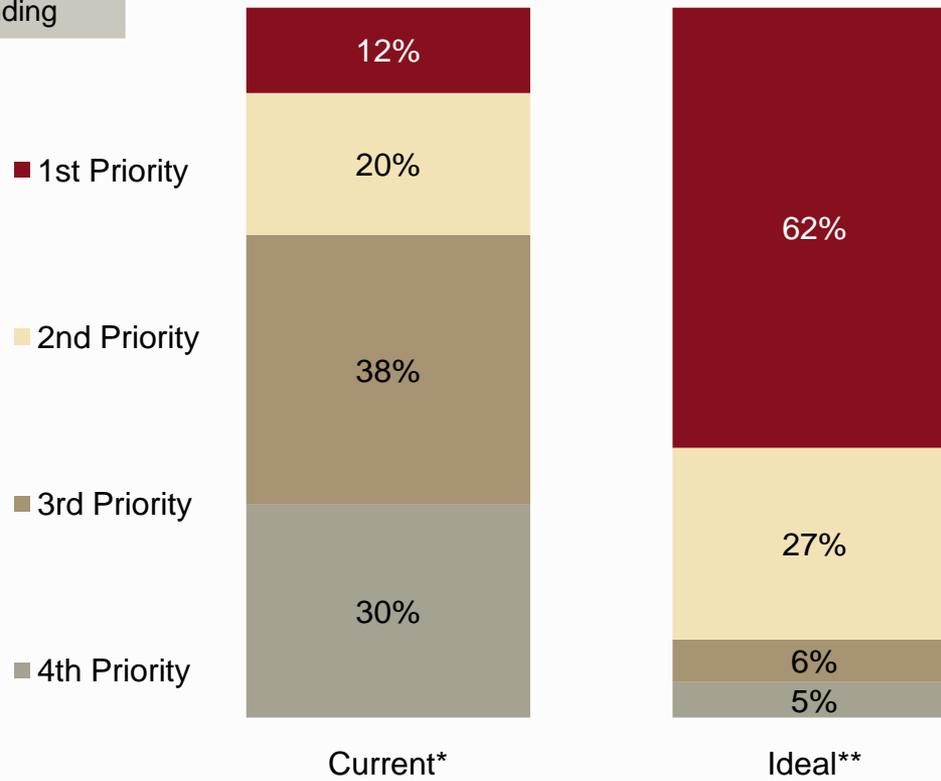
Ideal Priorities** (Average Rank)	
Teacher Effectiveness	1.6
Academic Standards	2.5
Class Size	2.7
Education Spending	3.2

\*Please rank the following factors in K-12 student outcomes based on the importance currently given to them by federal education policies.

\*\*Please rank the following factors in K-12 student outcomes based on the importance should be given to them by federal education policies.

- Ideal Priorities**
- Teacher Effectiveness**
  - Academic Standards
  - Class Size
  - Education Spending

## Priority of Teacher Effectiveness in Student Outcome



“There is no way of measuring how effective trained teachers are.”  
- **U.S. Senate**

“Teachers are undervalued and underpaid.”  
- **U.S. Senate**

“There is not a school in the country that doesn’t know who its good teachers are.”  
- **Education Advocate**

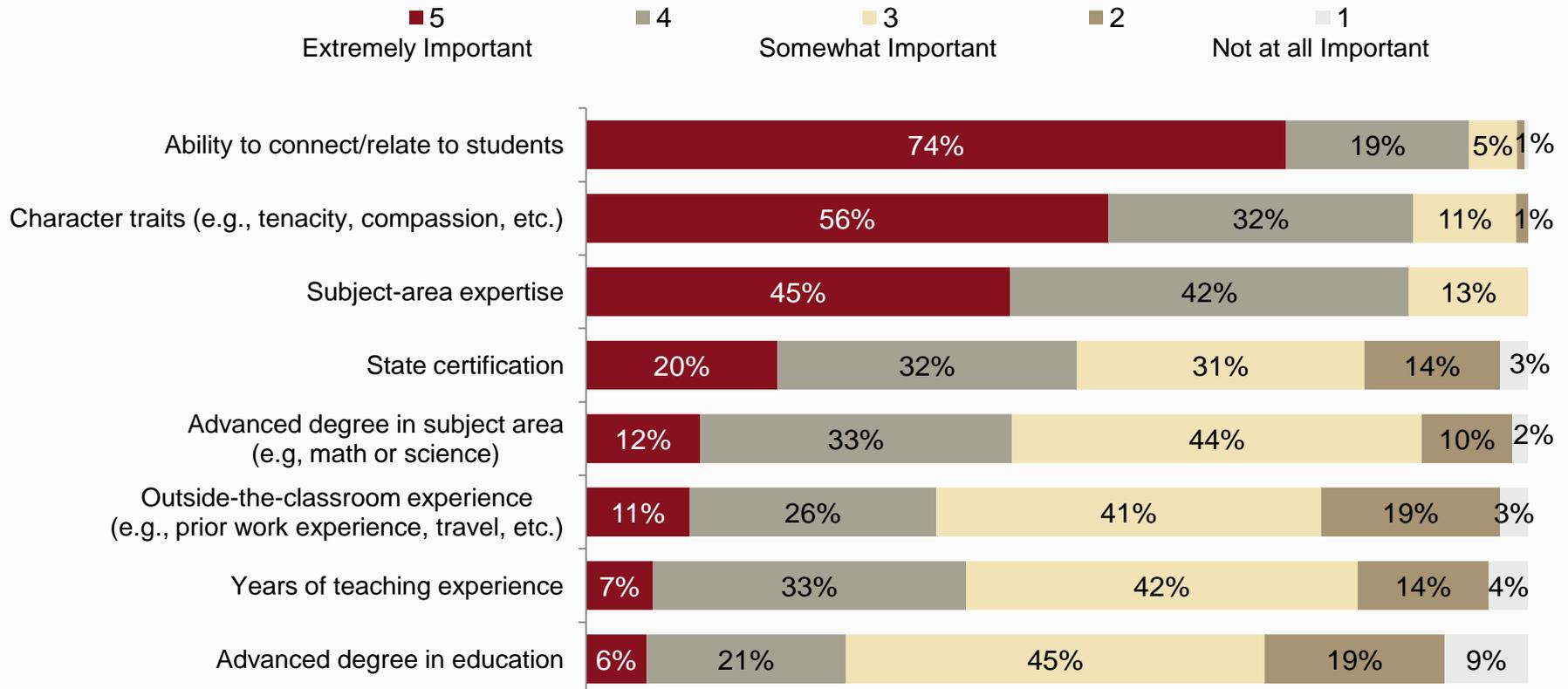
“Teachers need to be of high quality. With a bad teacher, the standards mean nothing. They can’t be implemented.”  
- **U.S. Senate**

\*Please rank the following factors in K-12 student outcomes based on the importance currently given to them by federal education policies.

\*\*Please rank the following factors in K-12 student outcomes based on the importance that should be given to them by federal education policies.

- Washington Insiders believe that specific knowledge and personal characteristics, and not necessarily experience, are the most important components in teacher effectiveness. Respondents identified “ability to connect” (74 percent), “character traits” (56 percent), and “subject-area expertise” (45 percent) as “extremely important” components in teacher effectiveness.
- Less than half of all respondents cited “years of teaching experience” (40 percent) or “advanced degree in education” (27 percent) as more than “somewhat important.”

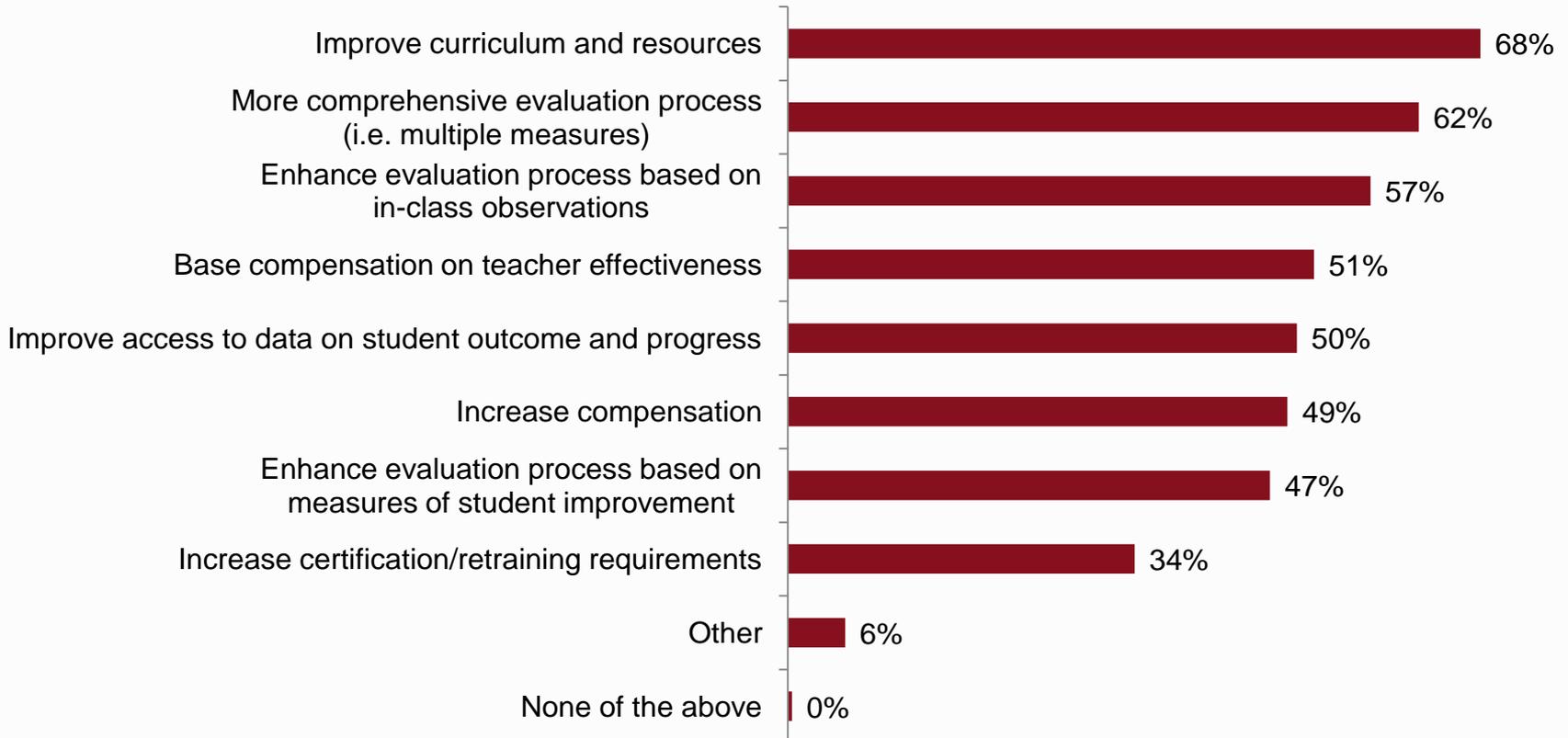
## Important Components in Teacher Effectiveness\*



\*Please rate the importance of the following factors in teacher effectiveness..

- In general, Washington Insiders believe that improved resources and more comprehensive evaluations are the best ways to improve teacher effectiveness. More than half of respondents identified “improve curriculum and resources” (68 percent), “more comprehensive evaluation process” (62 percent), or “enhance evaluation process based on in-class observations” (57 percent) as ways to improve teacher effectiveness.
- Only 34 percent of respondents believe that increasing certification or training requirements is likely to improve teacher effectiveness.

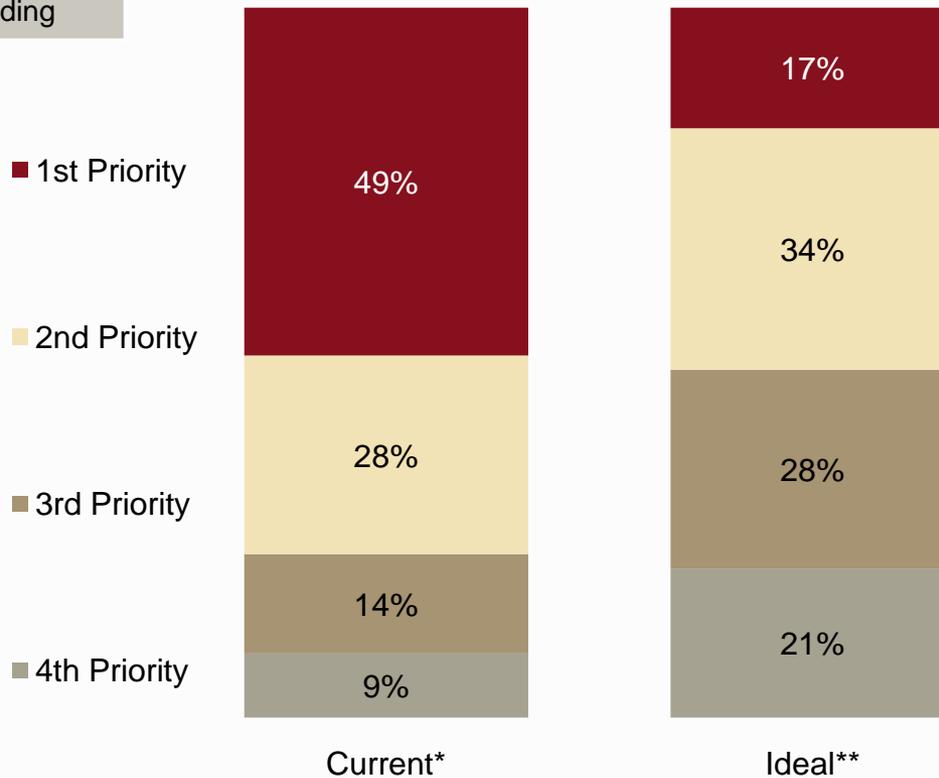
## Ways to Improve Teacher Effectiveness\*



\* In your opinion, which of the following is likely to improve teacher effectiveness? Please select all that apply.

- Ideal Priorities**
- Teacher Effectiveness
  - Academic Standards**
  - Class Size
  - Education Spending

## Priority of Academic Standards in Student Outcome



“A lot of people are confused and think academic standards equal a curriculum or tell teachers how to teach.”

- **U.S. Senate**

“Academic standards go beyond workforce preparation.”

- **Education Advocate**

“I believe in standards, but narrowly defined ones.”

- **U.S. House of Representatives**

“Standards are currently a mile wide and an inch deep. There is no in-depth teaching of the most important topics.”

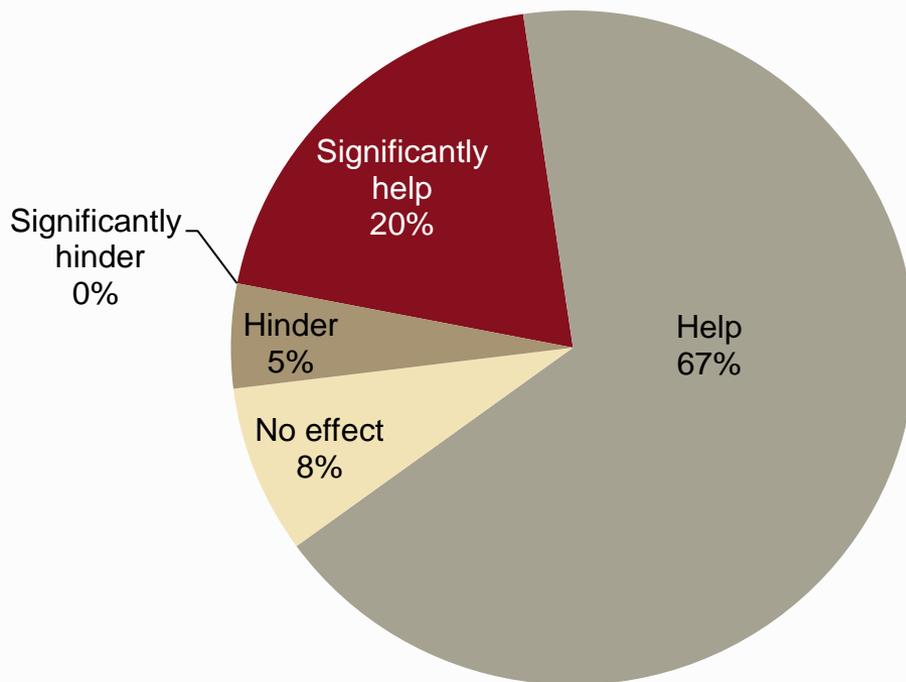
- **U.S. Senate**

\*Please rank the following factors in K-12 student outcomes based on the importance currently given to them by federal education policies.

\*\*Please rank the following factors in K-12 student outcomes based on the importance that should be given to them by federal education policies.

- Washington Insiders believe overwhelmingly that academic standards help student outcome; 87 percent of respondents think that academic standards “help” or “significantly help” student outcome.
- Among those who support standards, respondents relay caveats about “teaching to the test” and the need for standards to be skill- and career-oriented.

## Effect of Academic Standards on Student Outcome\*



“Academic standards can help when implemented wisely-- teaching to a test can hinder outcomes while having goals and standards in general are helpful.”  
- **U.S. House of Representatives**

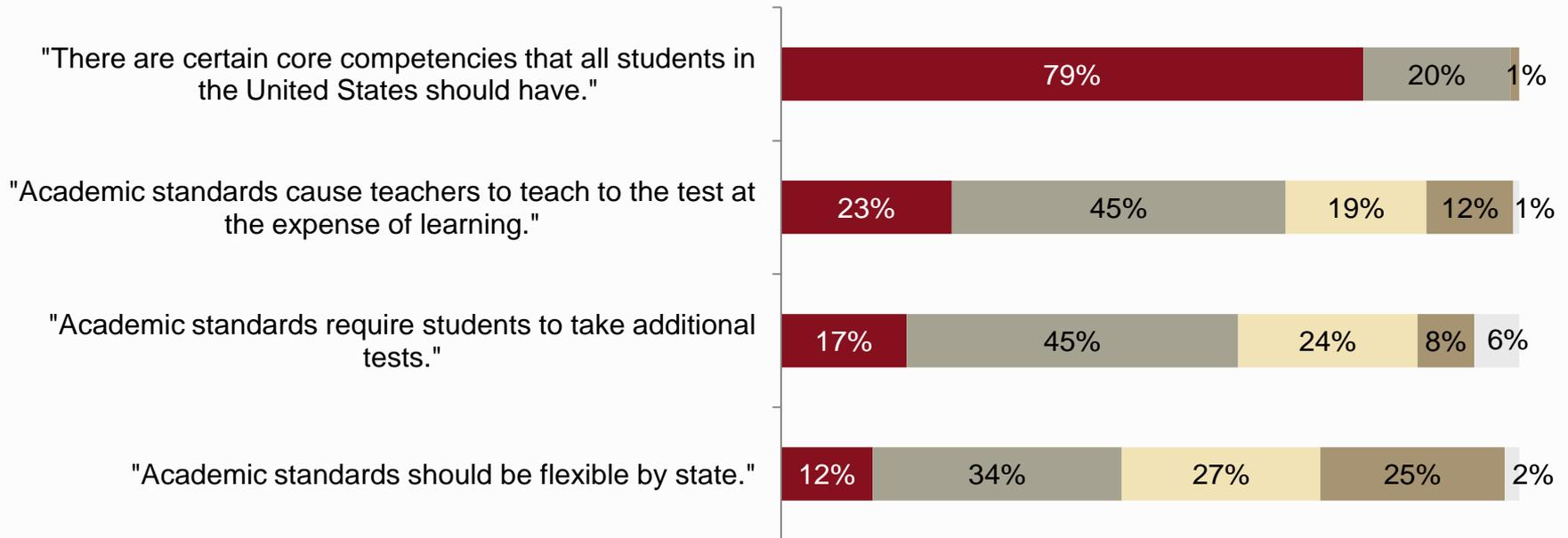
“It depends on the standard. There have to be standards, but they need to be career oriented .”  
- **U.S. House of Representatives**

\*In your opinion, how do academic standards affect student outcome?

- A strong majority of respondents (99 percent) agree that all students should have certain core competencies; only one percent of those surveyed disagreed.
- A lesser, but still strong majority of those surveyed (68 percent) believe that academic standards cause teachers to “teach to the test” and that they require students to take additional tests.
- Respondents are almost evenly split with respect to whether academic standards should be flexible by state; 46 percent believe standards should be flexible, while 52 percent believe they should not.

## Effect of Academic Standards Student Outcome\*

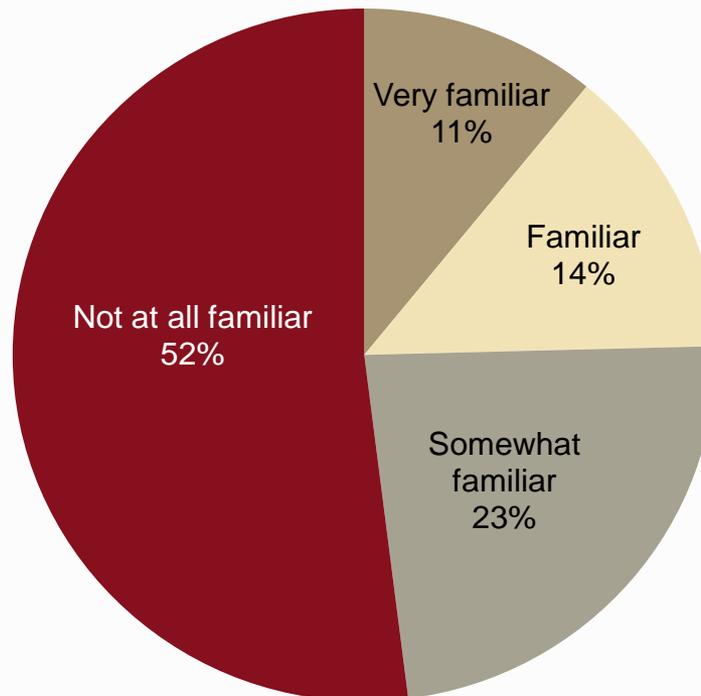
■ Strongly agree   
 ■ Somewhat agree   
 ■ Somewhat disagree   
 ■ Strongly disagree   
 ■ I don't know



\*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about K-12 education?

- Only a small fraction of Washington Insiders (11 percent) self-identify as “very familiar” with the Common Core State Standards Initiative.
- More than half of respondents self-identify as “not at all familiar” with the Common Core State Standards, and almost one-quarter (23 percent) respond that they are “somewhat familiar” with the standards.

## Familiarity with Common Core State Standards Initiative\*



“The Common Core State Standards need to make sure that the important skills—the ones that will prepare students for college and careers—are addressed.”

**-U.S. House of Representatives**

“It is no longer viewed as a truly state led effort and will, inevitably, collapse or reduce to the lowest common denominator as Washington gets involved.”

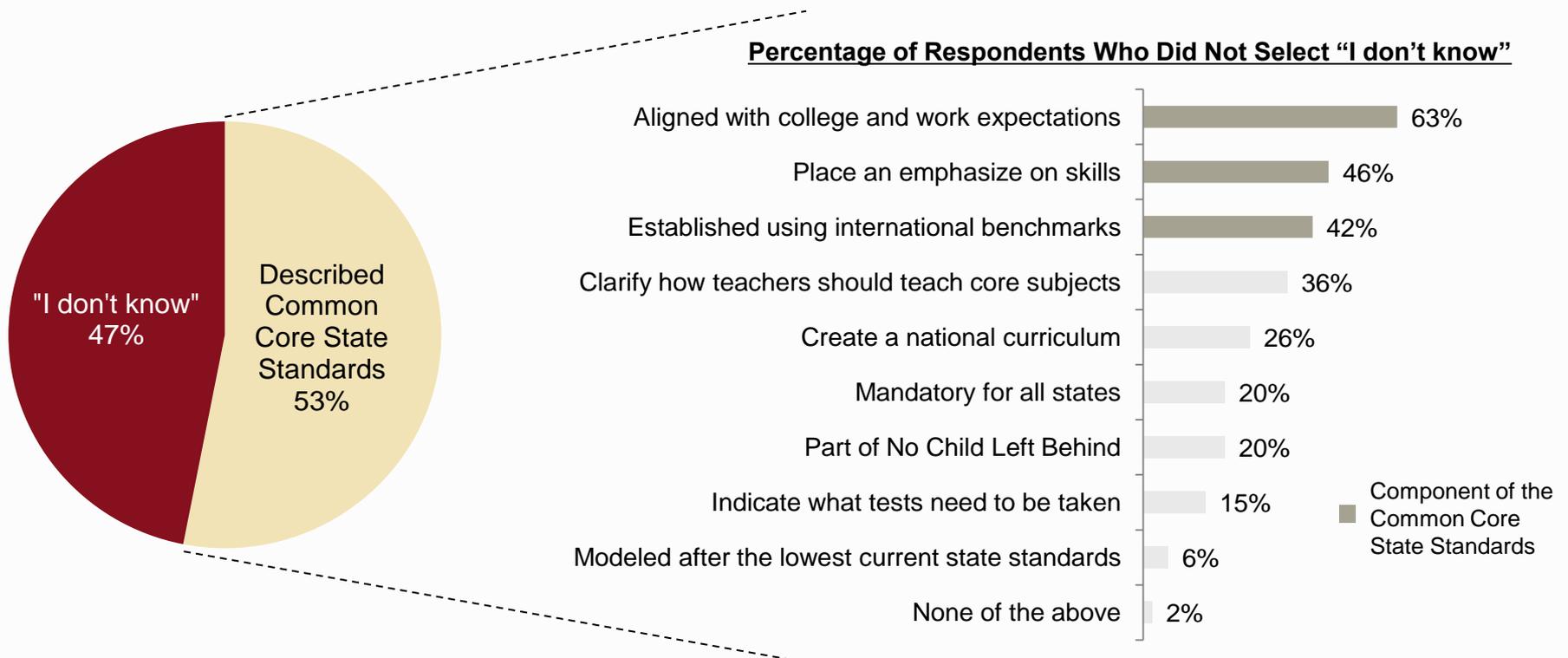
**- U.S. Senate**

“Even after states ‘adopt’ them, they are unlikely to change curriculum and instruction in the classroom.”

**- Department of Education**

- Almost half of all respondents (47 percent) are unable to identify descriptions of the Common Core State Standards Initiative.
- Almost two-thirds of those respondents who did not select “I don’t know” recognize that the Common Core State Standards are “aligned with college and work expectations” (63 percent) and nearly half say that they “place an emphasis on skills” (46 percent) or were “established using international benchmarks” (42 percent).

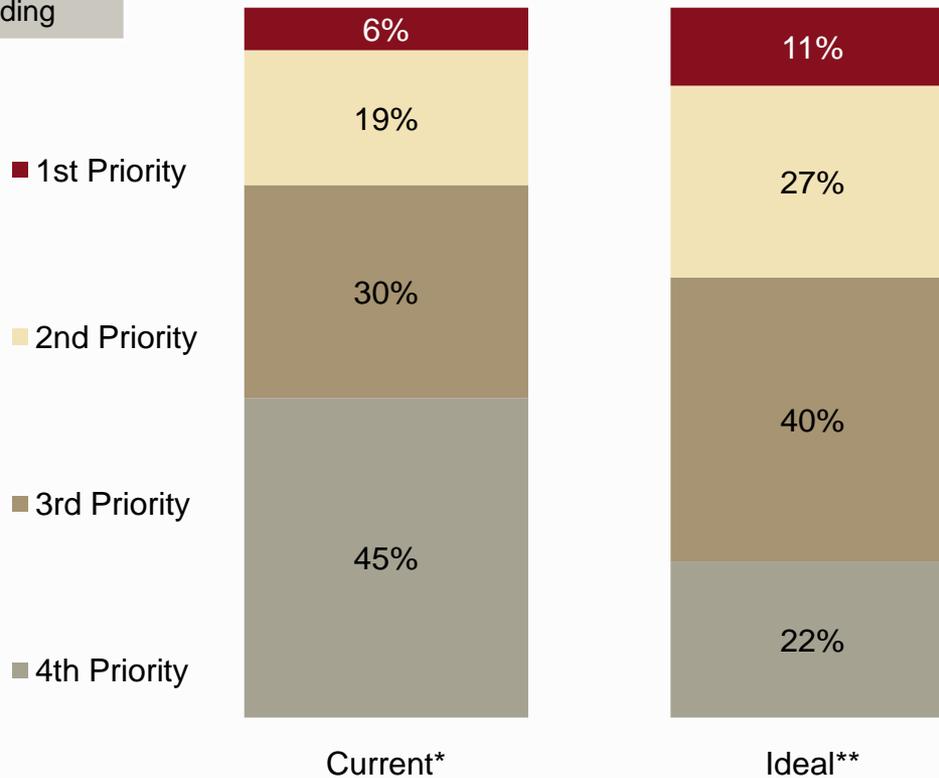
## Knowledge of Common Core State Standards Components\*



\*To the best of your knowledge, which of the following describe the Common Core State Standards Initiative? Please select all that apply.

- Ideal Priorities**
- Teacher Effectiveness
  - Academic Standards
  - Class Size**
  - Education Spending

## Priority of Class Size in Student Outcome



“I would not consider class size the main issue.”  
- **Education Advocate**

“Class size is an impossible part of the puzzle. Of course, it would be great to have small classes, but it is too costly for the school district to hire twice as many teacher and build twice as many classrooms.”  
- **Education Advocate**

“The science is still out on class size.”  
- **Education Advocate**

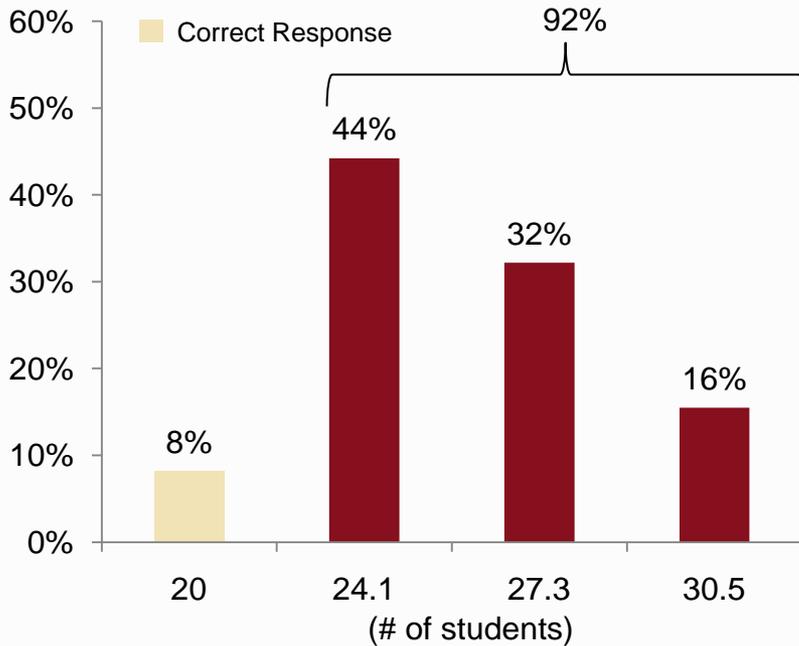
“Class size is not immaterial.”  
- **U.S. House of Representatives**

\*Please rank the following factors in K-12 student outcomes based on the importance currently given to them by federal education policies.

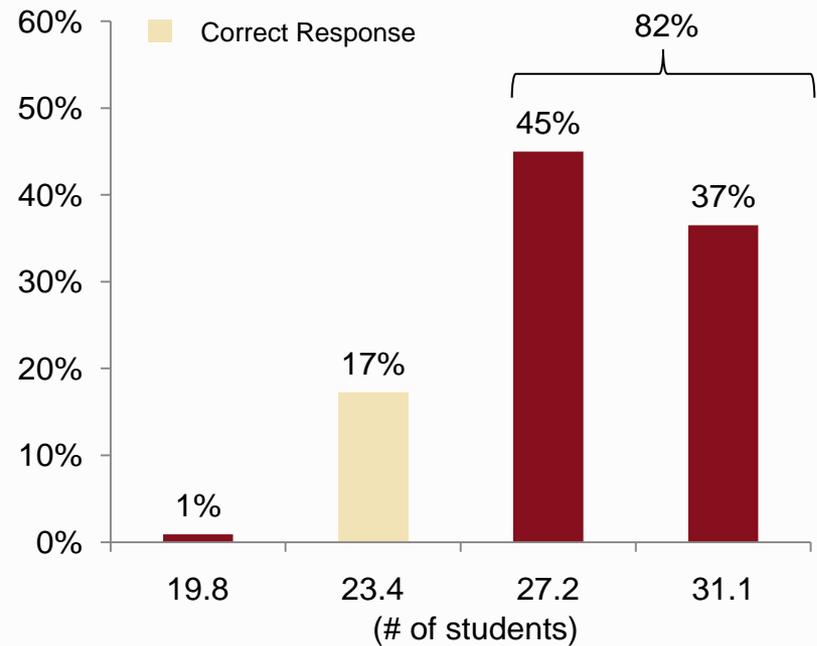
\*\*Please rank the following factors in K-12 student outcomes based on the importance that should be given to them by federal education policies.

- Survey respondents correctly identify the average class size less than 20 percent of the time; 17 percent of respondents correctly identify the average secondary class size, while only 8 percent are aware of the average elementary class size.
- Respondents overwhelmingly overestimate the average class size, with 82 percent overestimating secondary class size and 92 percent overestimating elementary class size.

**Average Elementary Class Size  
(2007-2008)\***



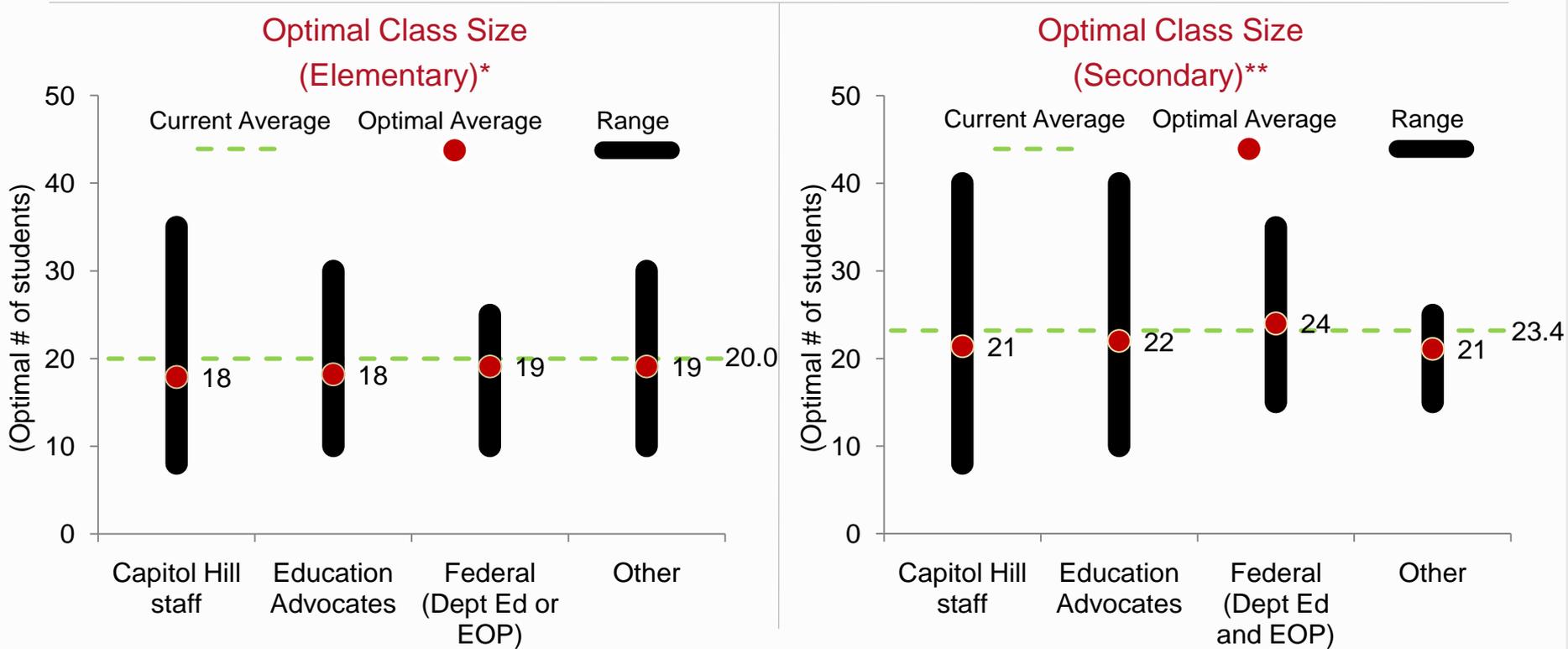
**Average Secondary Class Size  
(2007-2008)\*\***



\*What was the average class size in the United States during the 2007-2008 academic year? (Elementary)

\*\* What was the average class size in the United States during the 2007-2008 academic year? (Secondary)

- With respect to elementary class size, all respondent groups (e.g., Capitol Hill, Education Advocates, etc.) think that the optimal class size is smaller than the current average class size.
- With the exception of Federal respondents, Washington Insiders think that the optimal secondary class size is smaller than the current average class size; among all respondent groups, the range of responses for optimal secondary class size is larger than responses for optimal elementary class size.

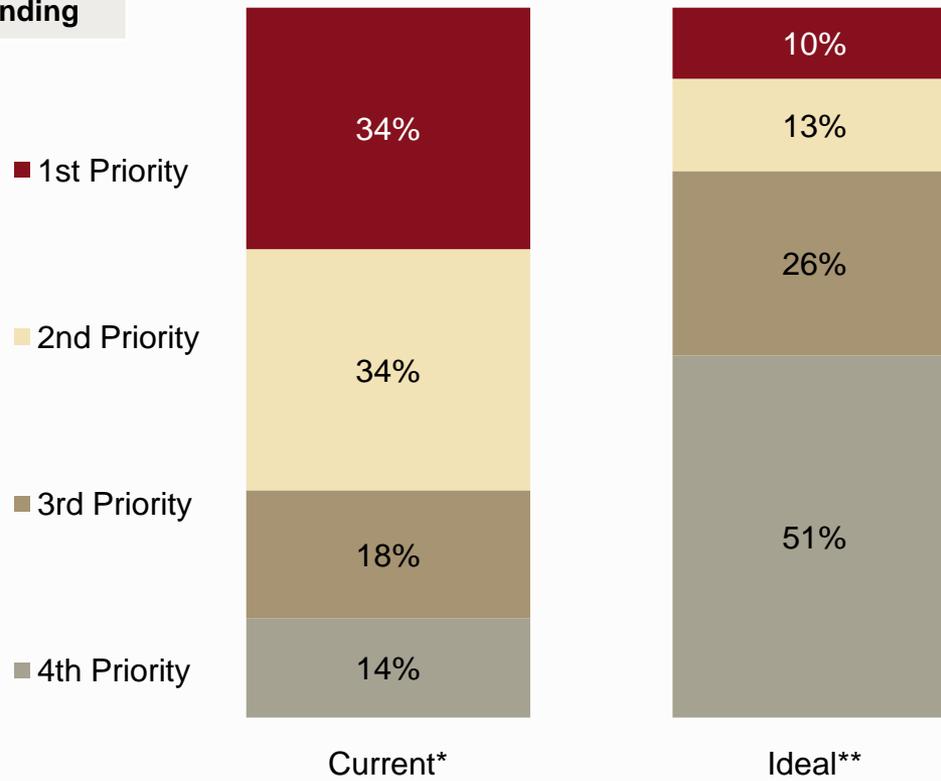


\*In your opinion, what would you consider the optimal class size in the United States (number of students per classroom)? (Elementary)

\*\* In your opinion, what would you consider the optimal class size in the United States (number of students per classroom)? (Secondary)

- Ideal Priorities**
- Teacher Effectiveness
  - Academic Standards
  - Class Size
  - Education Spending**

## Priority of Education Spending in Student Outcome



“Because spending is a state and local concern, the federal role can only be limited to demonstrations of and support for excellence.”  
- **Education Advocate**

“We spend too much on administration.”  
- **U.S. Senate**

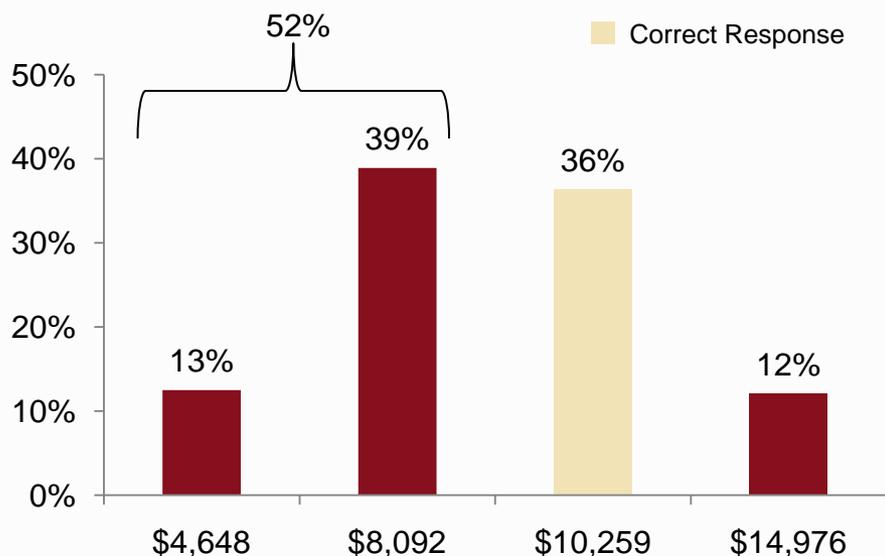
“Education spending varies by state. Southern, poorer states spend less.”  
- **Education Advocate**

\*Please rank the following factors in K-12 student outcomes based on the importance currently given to them by federal education policies.

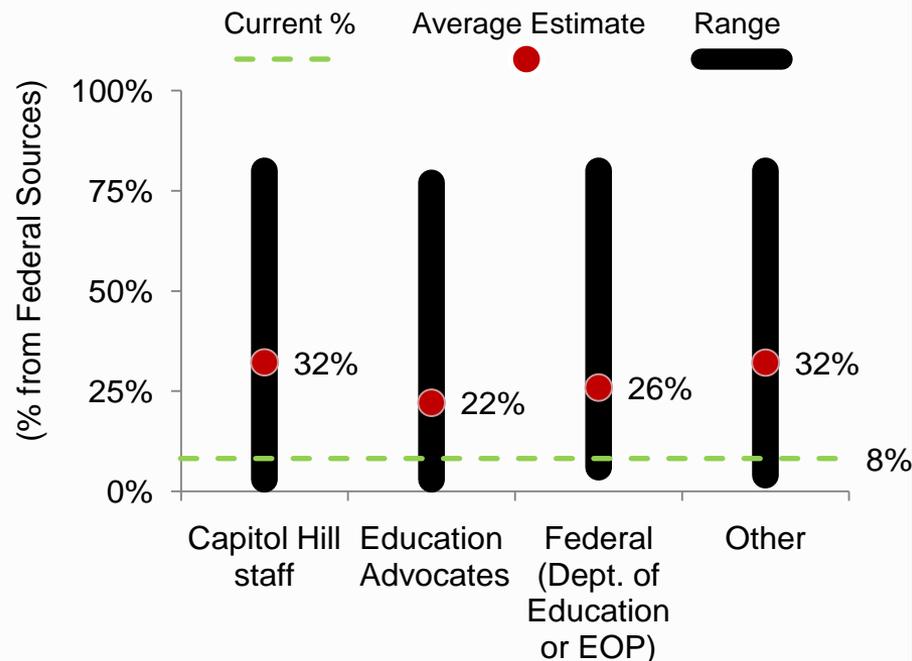
\*\*Please rank the following factors in K-12 student outcomes based on the importance that should be given to them by federal education policies.

- In general, respondents underestimate the amount of money spent on K-12 education in the United States. Only 36 percent of those surveyed correctly identified \$10,259 as the amount of per student spending in 2007-2008.
- On average, respondents from all groups surveyed overestimate the amount of K-12 education revenue from federal sources. The range of federal spending estimates is more than 70 percentage points wide for all groups surveyed.

**Per Student Spending on K-12 Education (2007-2008)\***



**% Revenue from Federal Sources (2007-2008)\*\***



\*On average, how much was spent per student on K-12 education in the United States during the 2007-2008 academic year (federal, state, & local sources combined)?

\*\*During the 2007-2008 academic year, what percentage of K-12 education funding was from federal sources?

### **Washington Insiders Support Academic Standards But Lack Knowledge About Implementation**

Despite support for academic standards, Washington Insiders know little about how the recently proposed Common Core State Standards Initiative would operate. Almost 90 percent of respondents think academic standards have a positive effect on student outcome. Yet, more than half are not at all familiar with the recently introduced Common Core State Standards Initiative. Of those who identified themselves as familiar with the Initiative, many were unable to correctly describe it, even in general terms.

### **Teacher Effectiveness Critical But No Single Way to Ensure It**

Washington Insiders agree that teacher effectiveness is the most important component in determining student outcome. Those surveyed agree that personal characteristics and in-depth knowledge—and not necessarily experience—are the most important components of effective teachers. However, there is no clear-cut opinion among Washington Insiders as to how to ensure that students are taught by teachers with those characteristics.

### **Washington Insiders Unsure of Class Size**

Washington Insiders consistently overestimate elementary and secondary class size, with over 80 percent of respondents doing so. Although they do not identify class size as a key factor in student outcome, respondents believe the optimal class size to be smaller than current elementary and secondary averages.

### **Lack of Knowledge and Consensus Around Education Spending**

More than half of all respondents (52 percent) underestimate spending on K-12 education. Of all spending on education, Washington Insiders largely overestimate the percentage coming from federal sources. They also lack consensus on their estimates of the federal portion, with guesses ranging from single-digits to above 75 percent.

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