

December 13, 2021

To: Interested Parties

Fr: Brian Stryker

Re: Reforming Assessments in Education

As policymakers think about the direction of education in their states and communities and how to address learning loss as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and related school closures, they should not ignore voters' strong preference for accountability.

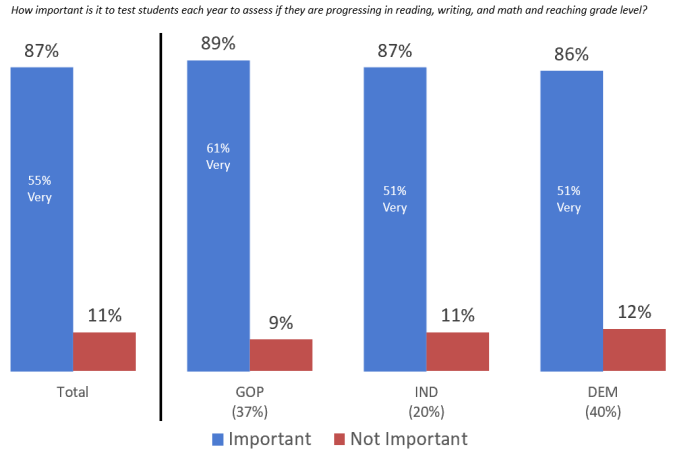
While a minority of voices may speak out against testing, a clear majority of voters – including Democrats and people of color – support it. Voters acknowledge that tests are not perfect and should be fixed, but they believe testing is part of the solution to improve education and get students back on track.

KEY FINDINGS

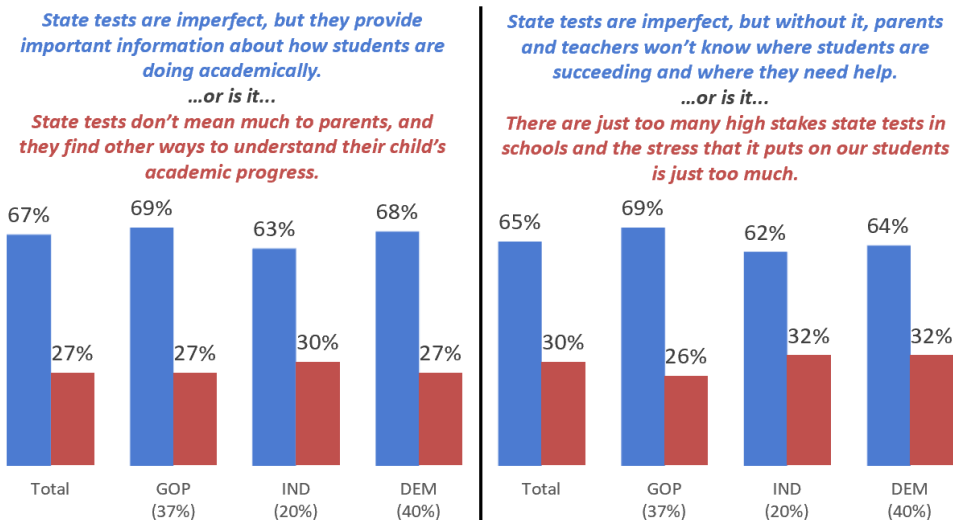
- **Americans—and Democrats-- are unhappy with the direction of their schools and think their children have fallen behind.** Pluralities of Democrats (19% better / 33% worse) and voters overall (13% better / 44% worse) think the quality of their state's public schools has gotten worse. A majority of voters (54%) and public school parents (55%) are frustrated with how their child's school handled the pandemic. And more than 68% of parents believe their child began the year academically behind.
- **Voters want to see changes to get students back on track.** Fully 71% of voters—including 85% of Democrats—want to see changes and adopt new ways of doing things to get students back on track.

On behalf of the Walton Family Foundation, ALG Research (D) completed a national survey among N=2,500 registered voters (credibility interval $\pm 2.23\%$) October 18-26, 2021, in conjunction with Public Opinion Strategies (R). The purpose of this memo is to review some of the key findings from this survey.

- Voters think testing is crucial to identifying problems and fixing them.** Almost all voters (85%) say it is important to test students to understand learning loss that may have occurred from the pandemic and 87% of all voters say testing every year is important.



- Voters also believe that tests, while imperfect, are needed to understand how students are doing:**



- Voters want tests fixed instead of ended.** They want to see what's working, what isn't, and how we can make them better work for students. The most convincing argument to voters (83%) about testing is the following:

Though these tests may not be perfect, we should fix them, not end them. Rather than just ending testing, students, parents, educators, and policymakers in our state should have a real review to see what is working, what isn't, and how we can change these important tests to meet the needs of students and educators.

- **Voters want tests to be more responsive to the needs of parents, teachers, and students.** A plurality of Democrats say that we should “Make tests part of a broader array of information that helps parents and teachers understand each student’s strengths and areas for growth.” Only 10% of Democrats said making tests more useful for policymakers was the most important way to improve them.
- **The improvements that Democrats (and all voters) want: focus testing more on student improvement.** Democrats chose “ensuring tests are used as a tool for improvement, not punishment” (42%) as the top way to improve tests, followed by “ensuring tests are used to advance equitable outcomes for all students, especially low-income students and students of color” (33%). Voters overall picked improvement (46%) over equity (23%) more decisively. Reducing the amount of time teachers spend on testing (12%) was far behind.
- **Voters of color think testing is important and want to see it improved, not ended.** Like the broader electorate, they think students started the year academically behind (77%) and that tests are important tool for assessing learning loss (68%). They find the same messaging persuasive that testing should be continued and improved, not ended, in order to better assess students’ needs (82%), and want testing to focus on useful feedback on how students are progressing rather serving as a tool for punishment.