BIG IDEAS 2022: 10 Broad Trends In K-12 Education In 10 Charts

Results of a National Survey
About Editorial Projects In Education

Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization based in Bethesda, Md. Its primary mission is to help raise the level of awareness and understanding among professionals and the public of important issues in American education. EPE covers local, state, national, and international news and issues from preschool through the 12th grade. Editorial Projects in Education publishes Education Week, America’s newspaper of record for precollegiate education, the online Teacher, EdWeek Market Brief, and the Top School Jobs employment resource. It also produces periodic special reports on issues ranging from technology to textbooks, as well as books of special interest to educators.

The EdWeek Research Center conducts surveys, collects data, and performs analyses that appear in Education Week and special reports such as Quality Counts, and Technology Counts. The center also conducts independent research studies.

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Executive Summary

Drawing upon the results of two nationally representative surveys, this report sums up 10 broad K-12 trends in 10 accompanying charts.

The surveys were conducted as educators continued to grapple with the turmoil caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the debates that sometimes draw education policies into the culture wars surrounding social and political issues.

The survey results highlight educators’ perspectives on equity and equality including their views on two major federal laws aimed at addressing disparities in student achievement: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Findings also shed light on how educators see the pandemic’s lasting impact and the degree to which they believe it has transformed K-12 education.

Introduction

Each year for the past five years, Education Week has produced a special report on big ideas in K-12 Education. The reports focus on critical topics educators have dealt with over the past year.

The September 2022 report examined how educators view equity versus equality, the long-term outcomes of the pandemic, and the factors promoting or limiting major transformation in K-12 schools. It included data from surveys that informed reporting by Education Week’s journalists.

This additional report elaborates on findings from two nationally representative online surveys that the EdWeek Research Center, the independent research arm of Education Week’s nonprofit publisher, fielded May 25th-June 1st and June 29th-July 18th of 2022. In all, 1,897 educators (384 district leaders, 404 school leaders, and 1,109 teachers) responded to the first survey and 1,099 educators (280 district leaders, 255 school leaders, and 564 teachers) participated in the second survey.

The following pages summarize 10 broad ideas addressed in the surveys using 10 accompanying charts.
Support that Empowers Student and Educator Success

Now more than ever, teachers need resources that support their classroom capacity and accelerate student learning.

The Learning Ally Audiobook Solution™ is a proven-effective support to empower student and educator success. Studies have found that students reading with it can double the rate of their reading growth in just 50 days!

The Learning Ally Audiobook Solution™ is not just an audiobook — it’s a research-backed resource for today’s classrooms.

To learn more, download our whitepaper on audio technology today!
1. Only about 1 in 10 educators think the term “equity” is being weaponized.

Most survey respondents express broad agreement on how the term “equity” can be defined and relatively few cite concerns about the way it is being used. Educators were asked whether they see “equality” as distinct from “equity.” Seventy-eight percent of teachers, principals, and district leaders agreed with this definition: “Equality is about giving all students the same opportunities; equity is about outcomes and giving some students, who have tended to have lower performance or higher needs, additional resources.”

Only 13 percent say the term “equity” has become controversial or has been weaponized. Although tensions within schools can make news headlines when concepts such as equity are considered controversial, survey results suggest that there is more consensus than controversy.

How do you define the word “equality” vs. the word “equity” in K-12 education?

- Equality is about giving all students the same opportunities; equity is about outcomes and giving some students, who have tended to have lower performance or higher needs, additional resources
- The concepts are similar, but “equity” has become controversial/weaponized
- Other
- I use them interchangeably/I don’t see a difference
2. Most educators support both equity and equality.

More than three-quarters of educators say they support both equity and equality even though they define them differently. Another 12 percent indicate they support both and do not make distinctions between them. Roughly 10 percent support one of the concepts but not the other. Only 2 percent support neither equity nor equality.

Which of the following best describes your views of equity and equality in K-12 education?

- 76% I support equity and equality, even though I define both in different ways
- 12% I support equity and equality, and do not make a distinction between them
- 6% I support equality but not equity
- 6% I support equity but not equality
- 2% I support neither equity nor equality
3. A slight majority of educators say their districts have formally committed to both equity and equality.

Even though educators almost universally support both equity and equality, only a narrow majority (52%) indicate their school districts have made formal commitments to both of those concepts. Fifteen percent say that their districts are formally committed only to equity while 9 percent report that their districts have committed only to equality in a board resolution, policy, or other format.

Nearly a quarter of teachers, principals, and district leaders say their districts have not formally committed to equity or equality, highlighting a potential disconnect between educators’ beliefs and the policies of the districts that employ them.
4. Most educators think NCLB and ESSA have achieved something positive but they vary on what the most significant accomplishment is.

Most survey respondents believe that NCLB and ESSA—the most far-reaching recent federal legislative efforts in the K-12 arena—accomplished something. But when asked to identify the laws’ most positive outcome, they point to different things.

Almost one-quarter cite additional Title I and other funding. About 1 out of 5 educators think the laws’ requirements to disaggregate student data are their most positive feature. Another 15 percent highlight requirements to improve/intervene in schools or with student groups with low performance.

Fewer educators point to identification of schools or student groups with low performance, mandated testing, or consequences for low-performing schools or districts as successful impacts of the federal legislation. More than one-quarter say there was nothing positive about NCLB or ESSA.

In your opinion, what was the most positive outcome accomplished under the federal No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds acts?

- There was nothing positive about these laws: 26%
- Additional Title I and other funding: 23%
- Requirement to look at disaggregated data to see how student groups performed: 21%
- Requirements to improve/intervene in schools or with student groups with low performance: 15%
- Identification of schools or student groups with low performance: 8%
- Other: 4%
- Mandated annual testing in reading and math: 2%
- Consequences for schools or districts with low performance: 1%
5. Educators consider mandated testing to be the most damaging aspect of NCLB and ESSA.

Nearly all educators (97%) believe that NCLB and ESSA had some type of negative effect. Two out of five respondents cite mandated annual testing in reading and math as the most adverse outcome. Although some educators dislike mandated testing, some value the disaggregated data that the testing mandates provide (see page 6). About 3 in 10 survey participants see consequences for low-performing schools or districts as the most problematic feature associated with these two prominent accountability laws.

In your opinion, what was the most negative outcome accomplished under the federal No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds acts?

- Mandated annual testing in reading and math: 38%
- Consequences for schools or districts with low performance: 29%
- Other: 14%
- Requirements to spend Title I in certain ways: 8%
- Identification of schools or student groups with low performance: 4%
- Requirements to improve/intervene in schools or with student groups with low performance: 3%
- There was nothing negative about these laws: 3%
- Requirement to look at disaggregated data to see how student groups performed: 2%
6. Educators are split on the scale of pandemic impact.

When asked about the degree to which the pandemic reshaped public K-12 education, 52 percent of teachers, principals, and district leaders say it’s been a major transformation but 43 percent say they would describe it as more of a minor change than a transformation. Only 6 percent of educators believe COVID-19 hasn’t transformed K-12 education at all.

- Yes—it’s been a major transformation
- I’d describe it as more of a minor change than a transformation
- No, not at all
Accelerating Student Learning with Audio Technology

Reading skills are the gateway to success in every classroom subject. As we approach the beginning of another school year, it is worth taking a step back and asking ourselves: Are we making use of all the resources available to us to accelerate student learning?

Audio technology is a proven effective support for all students, particularly those who struggle to read. It ensures they receive equitable access to authentic, grade-level content in an easy-to-absorb, engaging format and can serve as a key resource for educators, who need more support than ever to ensure successful academic outcomes in today’s challenging school environments.

Meeting Students Where They Are with Audio Technology

Only 35% of students in the fourth grade read at or above proficiency according to the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The reasons vary widely, including learning disabilities, speech and hearing issues, or even a lack of access to diverse reading materials. Whatever the individuals’ challenges, schools and districts require solutions that enable educators to meet students where they are in their reading journeys.

Audio technology is a time-tested alternative for access to literacy skills. Audiobooks, in particular, have long been used to provide a way for readers with physical and cognitive difficulties to access content. However, when paired with additional supports, they become a truly effective resource for any struggling reader.
To maximize efficacy and create the most equitable outcomes for struggling readers, an audiobook solution must offer tools beyond simply reading stories aloud. One that provides a multisensory reading experience — such as audiobooks that allow students to view highlighted text while hearing the text’s narration — can reinforce students’ word identification and the development of decoding skills, both of which are key for increasing comprehension and encouraging oral language usage. Built-in tools like dictionaries and note-taking capability are essential scaffolds for classroom use and can also help in the development of vocabulary, background knowledge, and summarization skills. While audiobooks can’t replace practicing reading with decodable text, they do give struggling readers access to the curriculum, allowing them to read the same books as their peers so they can confidently participate in class discussions and feel good about themselves.

The library of content available is just as important. It must be extensive, featuring not only curriculum-aligned titles but also popular fiction and series so that struggling readers are able to develop a love of reading outside their required reading. And while computer-generated audio has come far in recent years, students with processing issues can have difficulty deciphering synthetic, computer-generated words. On the other hand, human-read narration provides a good model of fluency, expression, and prosody and more effectively conveys the texts’ appropriate emotion and tone, allowing students to emotionally connect with the characters and identify and visualize the story elements.

High-quality, human-read audiobooks can level the playing field, helping struggling readers access grade-level content aligned to their cognitive level rather than their reading ability.

**Supporting Educators by Expanding their Instructional Capacity**

To be an effective classroom tool, an audiobook solution must also support the educators responsible for implementing it. Progress-monitoring tools allow educators to ensure that all students are on the same page; being able to track how many pages a student has read as well as the amount of time spent reading allows teachers to manage assignments and update parents and administrators. This also makes differentiated instruction easier — a crucial part of meeting students where they are. While the benefits of differentiation are well-documented, many educators lack the time and resources to create new lesson plans for every student. Progress monitoring tools help educators track student progress and hold them accountable for time on task while allowing students to set their own reading pace, customizing the experience to their individual learning needs.

While audiobooks are typically thought of as an aid for Reading/ELA classes, they can unlock new learning for students across the curriculum. If a student struggles to read a math problem or understand a history passage, audiobooks can bridge the gap between what they can read and what they can comprehend. The result is
improved reading skills and greater learning in other content areas as well as an overall boost to their self-esteem, social-emotional skills, and imagination.

**Accelerating Student Learning and Confidence with the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution™**

Struggling readers and overextended teachers deserve an audiobook solution that meets all these needs. That’s where the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution™ comes in.

The Learning Ally Audiobook Solution™ is a multisensory reading resource for struggling readers that provides anywhere, anytime access to the largest library of curriculum-aligned, human-read audiobooks paired with highlighted text. With a library of more than 80,000 culturally relevant, curriculum-aligned audiobooks, rather than struggling to decode text, students are able to read and learn along with their classmates in all subjects.

The Audiobook Solution also features a host of student-centric programs to ensure engagement, including highlighted read-along text, embedded dictionaries, and annotation capabilities. That allows students to easily follow narrated words, look up new vocabulary, and practice summarizing what they read without leaving the audiobook — meeting students where they are while growing their comprehension and language skills.

With the Audiobook Solution’s built-in monitoring tools, educators can also track how many pages a student has read and the amount of time spent reading, supporting teachers of all subjects in a differentiated instruction approach.

With all of these tools, Learning Ally’s Audiobook Solution is proven to effectively build reading skills. In 2017, a large Denver-area school system chose our solution to support their students who were at risk of falling behind. Students reading with the Audiobook Solution doubled the rate of their reading growth in just 50 days compared to those reading without it.

Audio technology might not immediately come to mind when you think about how to accelerate student learning, but the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution™ is a proven-effective tool to empower student success. It meets struggling readers where they are while ensuring they are able to access the same curriculum as their peers, provides reporting and progress-monitoring tools for educators to expand their capacity, and features a host of student-centric programs to ensure engagement and help stimulate a love of reading. Altogether, the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution represents a prime example of how audio technology can be an effective resource for accelerating student learning in today’s classrooms.

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**Learning Ally** is a leading nonprofit education solutions organization dedicated to equipping educators with proven solutions that help new and struggling learners reach their potential. Our range of award-winning literacy-focused offerings for students pre-k to 12th grade and catalog of professional learning allow us to support more than 200,000 educators across the us.

**For more information, call 800-221-1098 or visit LearningAlly.org**
7. Educators think politicians and their policies are problematic.

Teachers, principals, and district leaders are clear about what they feel prevents major transformation in K-12 education: elected officials and their policies. Forty-two percent of educators say that local, state, or federal officials or their policy measures are the biggest obstacles to change. Another 23 percent cite funding levels, which are also determined by policymakers.

Few educators identify parents, students, teachers, administrators, curriculum/standards, or technology as the most significant obstacles to change. In their eyes, it’s elected officials who are standing in the way of transformation.

In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle preventing major transformations in K-12 education?

- Funding levels: 23%
- Elected officials—local and state: 17%
- Other: 15%
- State/local laws/policies: 11%
- Federal laws/policies: 9%
- Parents/family members of students: 7%
- Elected officials—federal: 5%
- Administrators: 4%
- Teachers: 4%
- Curriculum/standards: 3%
- Students: 1%
- There are no major obstacles to transformation in K-12 education: 1%
- Technology: <1%
8. Teachers are number 1 when educators are asked to think about change agents.

Relatively few respondents point to elected officials as enablers of change and most commonly point to teachers as change agents. Thirty-five percent of educators say that teachers are the most significant force for change or transformation in education.

Thirteen percent think funding levels are the key to major change with another 10 percent highlighting the role of administrators.

The picture is not pretty for politicians. While 4 in 10 educators see political leaders and their policies as barriers to transformation (see page 9), just 16 percent think they enable change.

**In your opinion, what is the biggest enabler of change/transformation in K-12 education?**

- **Teachers**: 35%
- **Funding levels**: 13%
- **Administrators**: 10%
- **Parents/family members of students**: 7%
- **State/local laws/policies**: 6%
- **Other**: 6%
- **Elected officials—local and state**: 5%
- **Technology**: 4%
- **Nothing enables transformation in K-12 education**: 4%
- **Federal laws/policies**: 4%
- **Students**: 3%
- **Curriculum/standards**: 2%
- **Elected officials—federal**: 1%
9. While 9 in 10 educators say the overall impact of the pandemic has been negative in their schools or districts, most also see some lasting positive impacts, including increased flexibility.

Survey respondents believe the pandemic will have some enduring positive effects in their districts or schools. Three out of five expect added flexibility for moving some meetings online to be the top lasting positive impact a decade from now. Additionally, the majority point to more attention to student mental health (57%), better integration of technology (55%), and the ability to offer remote learning when necessary (54%) as long-term effects with some advantages.

Select all that apply. In my district or school, I expect that LASTING positive impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on education a decade from now will include:

- Added flexibility of moving at least some meetings/gatherings online: 61%
- More attention given to student mental health: 57%
- Better integration of technology: 55%
- Ability to offer remote learning when necessary: 54%
- More/better technology: 46%
- More attention given to staff mental health: 40%
- Improved cleaning protocols: 36%
- Better ventilation/HVAC systems: 36%
- More wraparound services for student well-being: 27%
- More asynchronous learning: 20%
- Less focus on standardized testing: 12%
- More flexibility for teacher work hours: 12%
- I don’t expect the pandemic to have any lasting, positive impacts: 12%
- Other: 4%
10. Educators hope the pandemic will result in more attention for mental health and less focus on standardized testing a decade from now.

When educators are asked to identify the pandemic impact they would most like to see in their school or district a decade from now, they most commonly hope there will be more attention for student mental health (21%) and less focus on standardized testing (20%). Along the same lines, 11 percent would like to see more wraparound services for student well-being. Eleven percent would like to see more attention for staff mental health.