

Who's to blame for problems in our education system? Adults say parents are the problem

SEATTLE (AP) — Blaming teachers for low test scores, poor graduation rates and the other ills of American schools has been popular lately, but a new survey wags a finger closer to home.

An Associated Press-[Stanford University](#) Poll on education found that 68 percent of adults believe parents deserve heavy blame for what's wrong with the U.S. education system — more than teachers, school administrators, the government or teachers unions.

Only 35 percent of those surveyed agreed that teachers deserve a great deal or a lot of the blame. Moms were more likely than dads — 72 percent versus 61 percent — to say parents are at fault. Conservatives were more likely than moderates or liberals to blame parents.

Those who said parents are to blame were more likely to cite a lack of student discipline and low expectations for students as serious problems in schools. They were also more likely to see fighting and low test scores as big problems.

"Nobody is too busy to raise a child for a successful future," said Wilfred Luise Vincent, 65, of Coppell, [Texas](#). Vincent worked early or late shifts for [Delta Airlines](#) during most of his career so his two daughters would have a parent at home after school.

Now he's retired and home after school to help guide his granddaughter while his daughter works.

The problems children and their parents deal with inside and outside of school every day are growing, said Julie Woestehoff, executive director of Parents United for Responsible Education, a [Chicago](#) advocacy group.

Children are tired, they're hungry and they need someone to help with their homework. Some kids face violence at home or in their neighborhood. Some parents are trying so hard to keep a roof over their family that they can't help with school.

More than half of those polled said student discipline and fighting, violence and gangs were extremely or very serious problems in schools. Nearly as many expressed concern about getting and keeping good teachers.

Most said education in their local public schools is excellent or good, but 67 percent also believe the U.S. is falling behind the rest of the world when it comes to education.

But a majority of parents see improvement in the system since they were in school: 55 percent believe their children are getting a better education than they did, and three-quarters rate the quality of education at their child's school as excellent or good. Most say their child's school is doing a good job preparing students for college, the work force and life as an adult.

A variety of research in past years backs up the poll respondents' sense that parenting plays key roles in school performance.

One in 10 kindergarten and first-grade students misses a month of school every year, which can put them behind their classmates for years, according to Attendance Counts, an advocacy group. By ninth grade, missing 20 percent of school is a better predictor of a student dropping out than test scores are, said Attendance Counts director Hedy Chang. In the poll, 41 percent said students not spending enough time in school is a serious problem.

Exposing kids under 2 to too much television can cause them to develop language skills later, researchers at the University of [Washington](#) have found.

Hungry students do worse on standardized tests and are absent more often, according several studies that have connected poor nutrition with students who have trouble concentrating.

Educating parents about how the school system works and welcoming them to get involved may also help their children, according to Joyce L. Epstein, research professor of sociology at **Johns Hopkins University**, who focuses on school, family and community partnerships.

"Without programs to educate parents, everyone is working in some stage of ignorance." Epstein said.

Some things just can't be fixed by schools or even the community, says Mike Principe, 62, of **Melrose Park**, a suburb of Chicago, Ill.

In addition to worrying about school violence, a lack of student discipline, low expectations for achievement, difficulty attracting good teachers and unimpressive student test scores, Principe is concerned about divorce, the economy, single parents and the national debt.

"These are tough times we're living in," Principe said. "What's our world going to be like when our 2-year-old is an adult?"

The AP-Stanford Poll on Education was conducted Sept. 23-30 by Abt SRBI, Inc. It involved interviews on landline and cellular telephones with 1,001 adults nationwide and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

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Online:

AP polls: <http://surveys.ap.org>

Attendance Counts: <http://www.attendancecounts.org/>

Parents United for Responsible Education: <http://www.pureparents.org/>

Johns Hopkins University program on school partnerships: <http://partnershipschools.org>