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## Education in America: The Views of Millennials

A summary of key findings from the first-of-its-kind bimonthly survey of racially and ethnically diverse young adults

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<http://www.genforwardsurvey.com/>

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# About GenForward

The GenForward Survey is the first of its kind—a nationally representative survey of over 1,750 young adults ages 18-34 conducted bimonthly that pays special attention to how race and ethnicity influence how young adults or Millennials experience and think about the world. Given the importance of race and ethnicity for shaping the diverse perspectives and lived experiences of young adults, we believe researchers make a mistake when they present data on young adults in a manner that assumes a monolithic Millennial generation and young adult vote.

Millennials now represent the largest generation of Americans, and they are by far the most racially and ethnically diverse generation in the country.<sup>1</sup> About 19 percent of millennials identify as Latino or Hispanic, 13 percent as Black or African American, and 6 percent as Asian American. Thus, to fully understand how young adults think about elections and politicians, issues such as terrorism or gun violence, as well as their economic futures and race relations, we apply an intersectional lens and pay attention to characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

In this report, we present GenForward survey data collected between June 23 and July 10, 2017. We provide an extensive look at Millennials' views about education in America today, including their current evaluations of public schools, their thoughts about what makes a school great, the ways in which they are reimagining education, their perspectives on issues of equity in schools, and their beliefs about the promises and challenges of higher education.

## Special Thanks:

We want to give special thanks to our colleagues at Data Quality Campaign and the Gates Foundation for both their intellectual and financial contributions to this report. Their knowledge about education and their dedication to bettering the educational opportunities for families was evident throughout our work together and helped to make this report better. Thank you to Maeve Ward, McKenzie Young and Chapin Springer at Gates as well as Abigail Cohen, Elizabeth Dabney and Dakari Aarons at Data Quality Campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/>.

## Key Findings

- > **Grading Education.** Majorities of Millennials, particularly whites and Asian Americans, give their own education a high grade. Seventy-five percent of Asian Americans give their own education an A or B, along with 65% of whites, 59% of Latinxs and 56% of African Americans. By contrast, Millennials give much lower grades to the nation's public schools. Only 26% of African Americans, 31% of Asian Americans, 32% of Latinxs and 20% of whites give the public schools in the nation a grade of A or B.
- > **How to Improve Education.** Majorities of Millennials across race and ethnic groups agree on the three best ways to improve kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade education in their local school districts: (1) increase school funding, (2) improve teacher training, and (3) increase teacher pay.
- > **Purpose of Public School Education.** Millennials say the main goal of a public school education is to prepare students academically (39%), rather than to prepare them for work (29%) or to be good citizens (31%). However, while African Americans (44%) and Latinxs (47%) are somewhat more likely to say the main purpose of public schools is academic preparation, Asian Americans (42%) are more likely to emphasize their contributions to citizenship.
- > **School Choice.** A majority of Millennials support charter schools, including 65% of African Americans, 61% of Asian Americans and 58% of Latinxs. Support is stronger for a voucher proposal that would use government funds to pay some of the tuition of low-income students than for a universal voucher program.
- > **Role of Race in Determining Education.** There is a racial and ethnic divide among Millennials in their views about the importance of race to education: majorities of African Americans (59%) and Asian Americans (56%) say that students of color get a worse education than white students, while majorities of Latinxs (55%) and whites (51%) say that race plays very little role in determining the quality of education.

- > **The Importance of Integration in Education.** Majorities of African Americans (54%) and Asian Americans (52%) believe that students should go to racially diverse schools even if that requires travel, whereas Latinxs (61%) and whites (73%) say that students should go to local community schools even if that means most students are of the same race.
- > **School Discipline.** African American Millennials (34%) cite lack of sensitivity among teachers and administrators to issues confronting Black and Hispanic students as the primary reason these students are suspended at higher rates than other students. Asian Americans (35%), Latinxs (39%) and whites (40%) attribute disproportionate suspensions to Blacks and Hispanics attending schools with fewer resources that have to rely on strict discipline.
- > **Holding Schools Accountable.** Overall, a majority (55%) of Millennials agree that U.S. schools are not being held accountable for the performance of students of color, including strong majorities of African American (69%) and Asian American (67%).
- > **Importance of College Education.** There are big differences across racial and ethnic groups in the belief that a college education is necessary today to be successful. Asian American (62%) and Latinx (57%) Millennials tend to endorse this view, while white (55%) and African American (51%) young adults are more likely to say that there are many ways to succeed today without a college degree.
- > **Free Tuition.** Over 70% of Millennials in each racial/ethnic group support free tuition at public colleges.
- > **Limits of Free Speech on College Campuses.** Large majorities of Millennials support limiting, in at least extreme cases, offensive speech on college campuses. A majority also believes that schools are not being held accountable for the performance of students of color.

# I. Introduction

Despite being among the most important drivers of social and economic advancement for both individuals and the country, opportunities for obtaining a quality education are not equally available to every American. As noted in a 2017 [report](#) by the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, large disparities across racial and ethnic groups exist on indicators of academic achievement ranging from test scores to graduation rates. While the report notes that much progress has been made in reducing the academic achievement gap between whites and students of color over the past 25 years, a large gap remains.

This GenForward report presents the views of young adults between the ages of 18 and 34 on education in the United States. We asked our nationally representative and diverse sample of young adults to provide their evaluations of their own school system, their thoughts about what makes a good school, their preferences regarding proposals for reforming education, their perceptions about issues of equity in schools, and their beliefs about the promise and challenges of higher education in America today. Who better to assess the strengths and weaknesses of our educational systems than those most proximate to the American educational experience? Many Millennials recently graduated from high school, while some are currently pursuing higher educational opportunities and/or navigating educational systems for their children.

Our findings indicate that young adults care a lot about education. In fact, education was the second most important issue facing the country commonly identified by our respondents in our July [survey](#) (25% of whom listed education as one of the three most important problems today). However, while education is one of the more important issues for everyone, different racial and ethnic groups—reflecting their different opportunities and experiences—often have varying perceptions about education in America and how best to improve it.

We present our data and findings in the pages that follow, paying special attention to the differences we observe across racial and ethnic groups. By providing crucial and otherwise unavailable data on the educational experiences and beliefs of Millennials from different racial and ethnic groups, we hope to draw attention to the remaining challenges in American education and propel young adults, activists and policy makers

to make informed decisions and take actions that make education an engine of advancement for all Americans.

## II. K-12 Education

### A. Evaluations of the School System

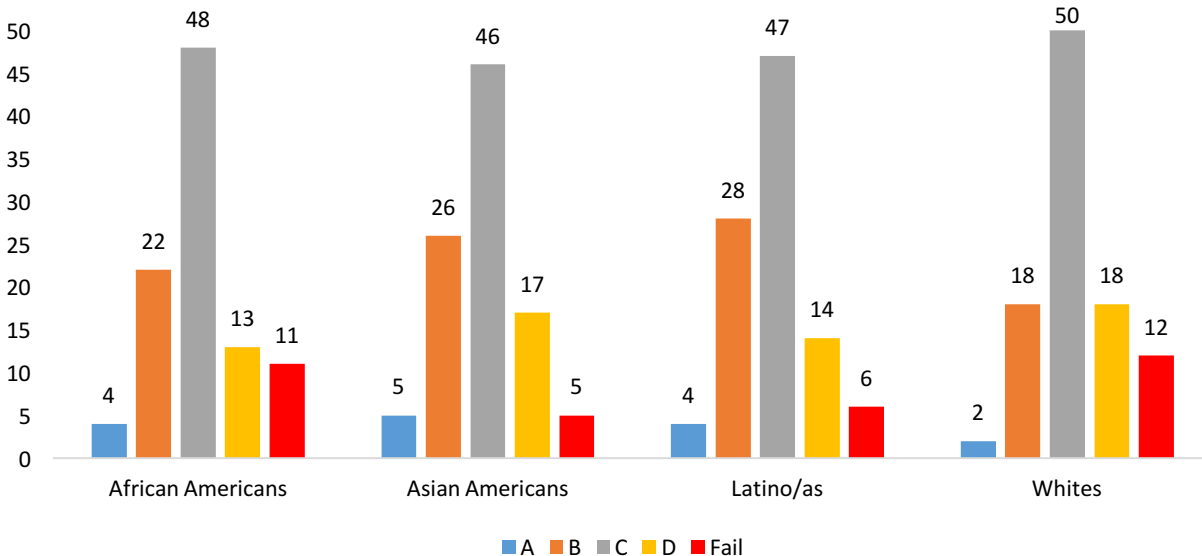
While there are many indicators one can use to evaluate a public school system—including test scores and graduation rates—one valuable indicator of the performance of education is the public’s own evaluation of the effectiveness of their schools.<sup>2</sup> This section presents Millennials’ evaluations of school systems in the United States. Given their recent experience in schools and being at the stage of life where they are starting to have children and thinking about their children’s future, Millennials’ views about the quality of education are especially valuable.

We asked respondents to evaluate public schools using the familiar grading system, ranging from an A as the highest mark to a Fail grade at the bottom. As Figure 1 shows, when asked to grade public schools in the nation as a whole, the most common grade provided by respondents is a C, a mark that is commonly believed to represent average; not terrible but certainly not exceptional. This indicates that Millennials believe there is abundant room for improvement in the nation’s school system. However, it is notable that few give the public schools a failing grade. We also observe similar patterns across racial and ethnic groups, with pluralities and majorities of African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinxs, and whites all providing relatively similar evaluations of the nation’s public schools.

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<sup>2</sup> For other recent reports of public opinion about education in America, see: (1) <https://www.edchoice.org/research/2016-schooling-america-survey/>; (2) <https://publicagenda.org/pages/public-opinion-higher-education-2016>; (3) <https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/varying-degrees/>.

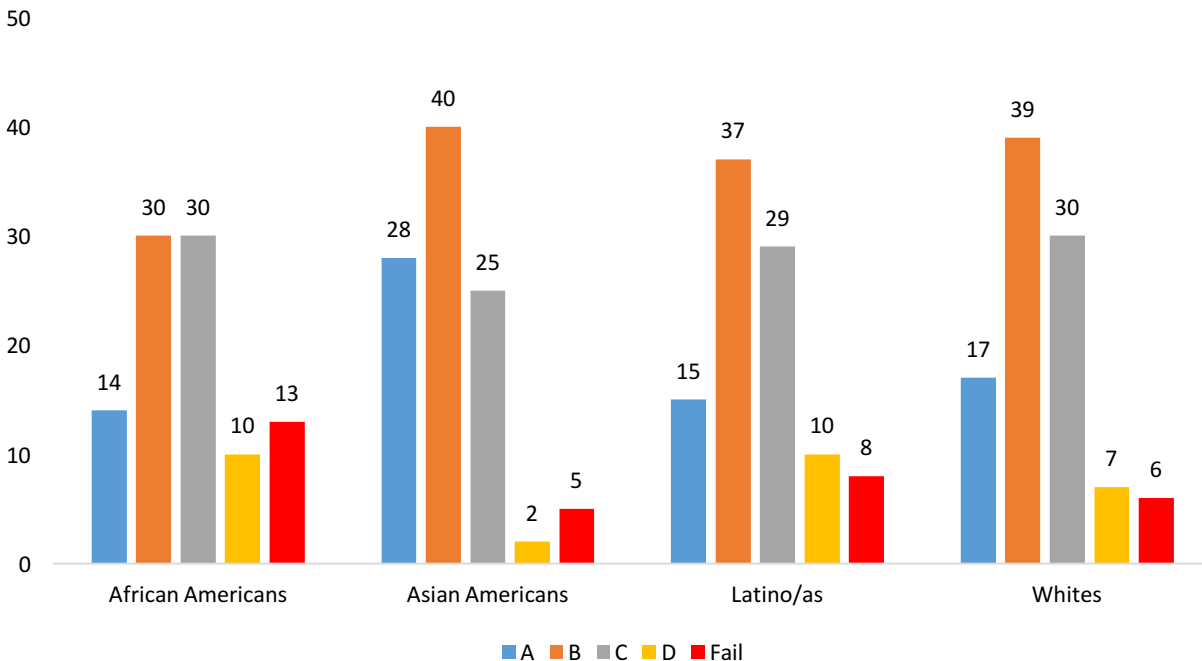
**Figure 1. What grade would you give the public schools in the nation as a whole?**



When also asked our respondents to grade the public school systems in their communities, we find that Asian American, Latinx, and white Millennials report significantly higher grades. As Figure 2 shows, the most common grade—at least for Asian Americans, Latinxs, and whites—awarded to public schools in one’s community is a B – a full letter grade higher than that for the nation. Among African Americans, however, the most frequent response was evenly divided between a B and a C. Perhaps reflecting their more limited educational opportunities, African Americans are the least likely to give their community’s public schools a positive evaluation and are more likely to give them a poor grade of D or Fail.

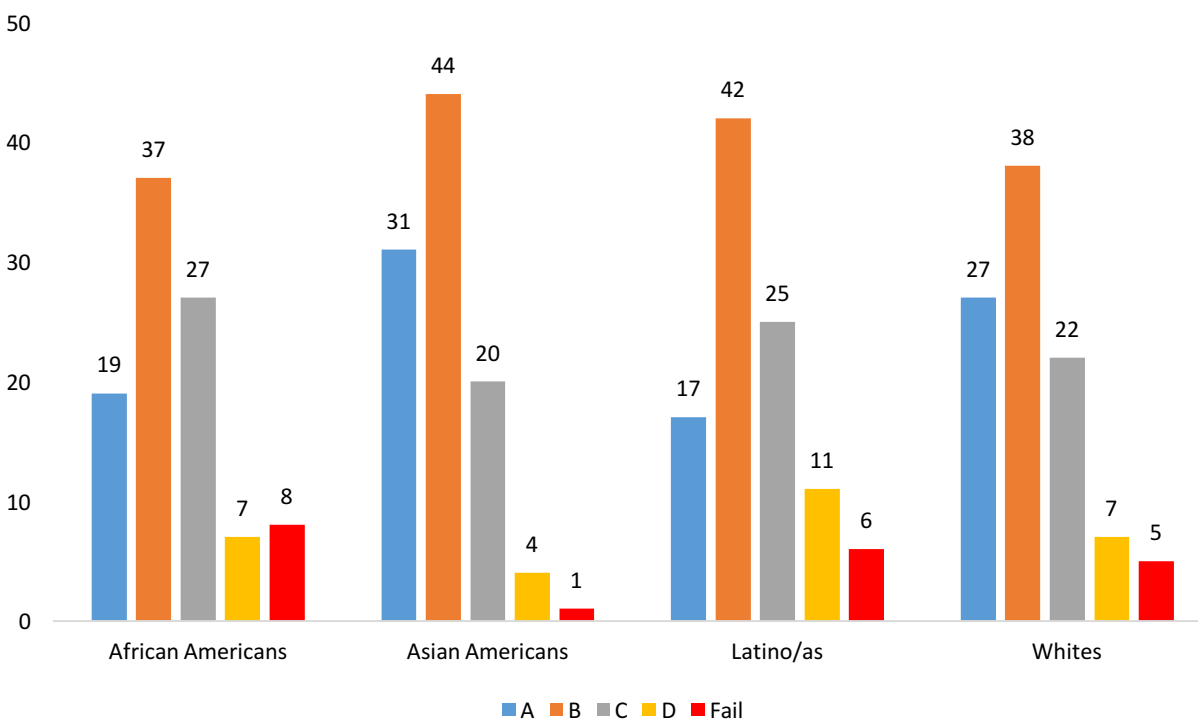


**Figure 2. What grade would you give the public schools in your community?**



We find that Millennials provide the highest grades when asked to evaluate their own education, as Figure 3 shows. When assessing their own schooling, the most common grade given by respondents in each group—including African Americans—is a B, and the percent of respondents providing the highest grade—an A—is markedly higher when evaluating their own education than either their community’s public schools or the public schools throughout the nation. Notably, though a majority of respondents in each racial and ethnic group gives their own education a grade of A or B, however, whites and Asian Americans give their own education a higher grade than African Americans and Latinxs, as 75% of Asian Americans and 65% of whites give their own education an A or B, compared with 59% of Latinxs and 56% of African Americans.

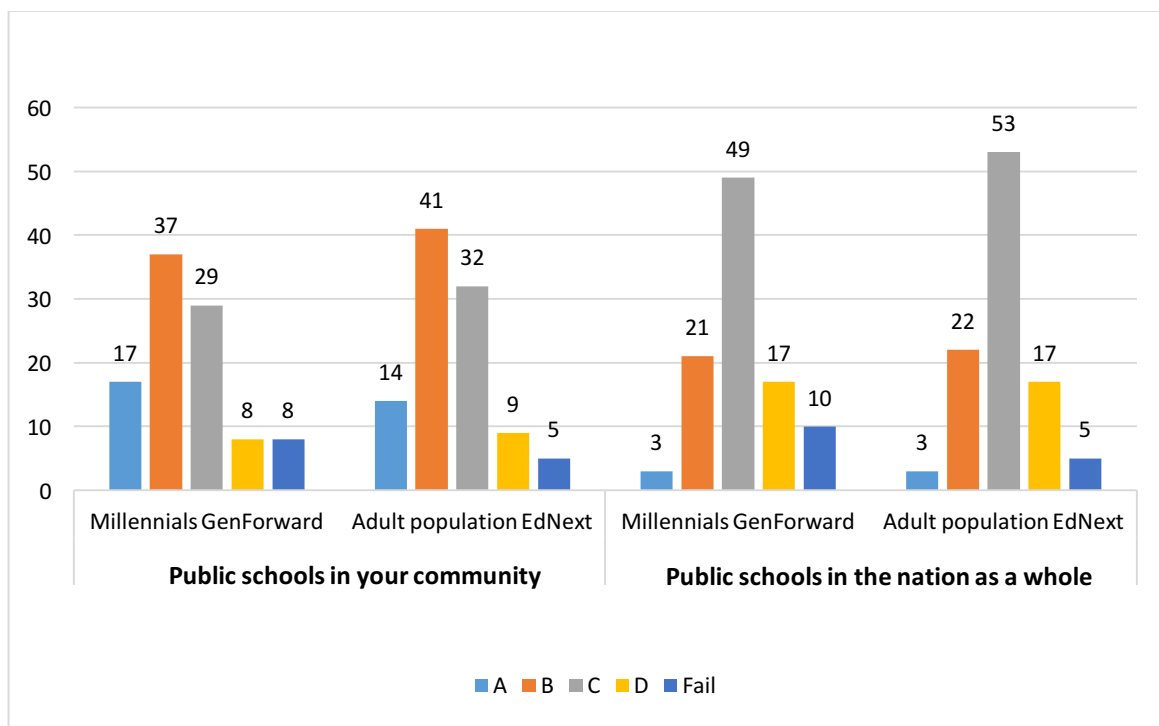
**Figure 3. What grade would you give your own education?**



We also compare Millennials' grades of education to the grades given by a general population survey. Specifically, we compare our results to a [2016 EdNext survey](#) that asked identical questions about the grading of national and local community schools.<sup>3</sup> Overall, we find that the grades of Millennials are similar to the grades given by the general adult population. As Figure 4 shows, there is very little discrepancy between Millennials in 2017 and the general adult population of 2016 in evaluations of either local community schools or the schools in the nation as a whole. Millennials are neither more pessimistic nor optimistic in their evaluations of schools but seem closely aligned with the views of the general population.

<sup>3</sup> The EdNext survey did not ask respondents to grade their own education.

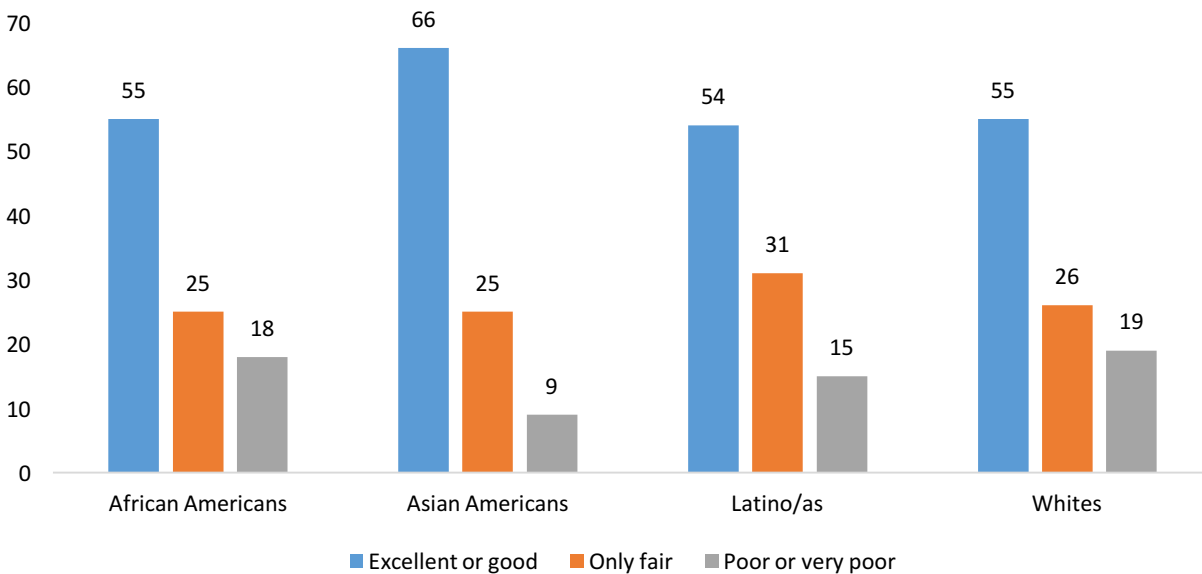
**Figure 4. The Grades Given to Schools by Millennials in 2017 Closely Resembles the Grades from a 2016 EdNext General Population Survey**



It is generally believed that schools provide training for a variety of career paths. Whether students decide to continue their education or join the workforce, Millennials vary in how well they believe their school prepared them for these different career paths. Consistent with higher evaluations of their own schools, Millennials across racial groups also believe that their schools prepared them well for college.

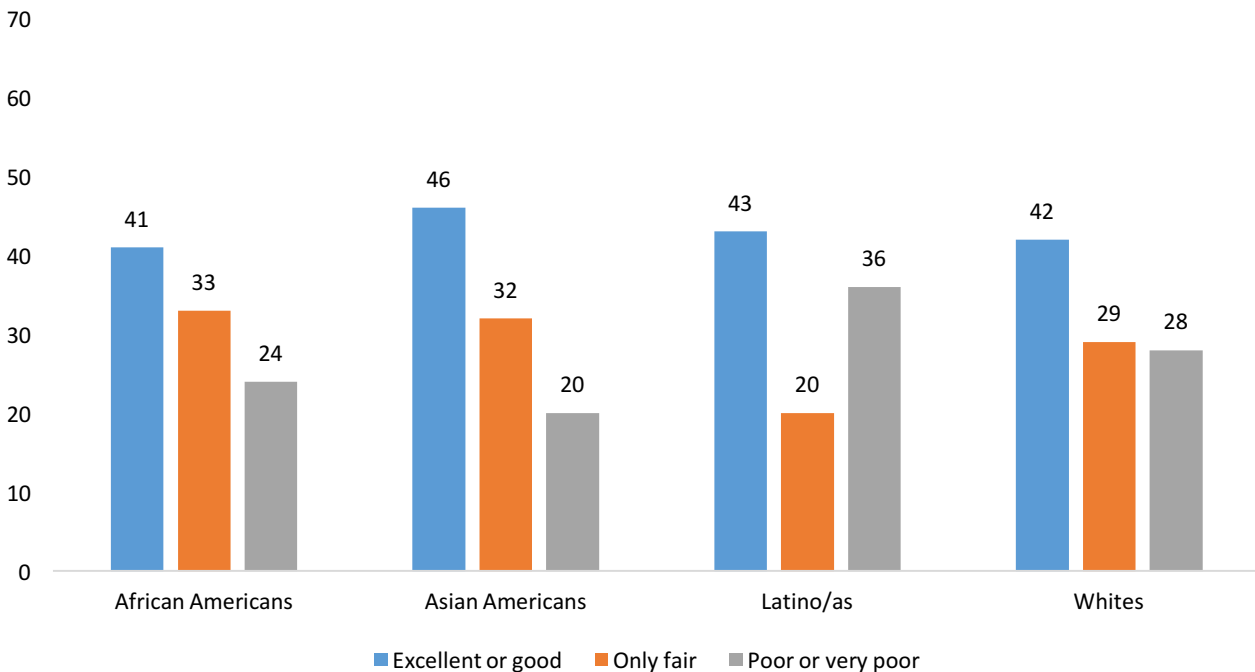
Figure 5 shows that majorities of young adults in every racial group said that their school did a good or excellent job preparing them for college, with Asian Americans reporting the highest rates by over ten percentage points.

**Figure 5. How good a job did your own school do in preparing you for college?**



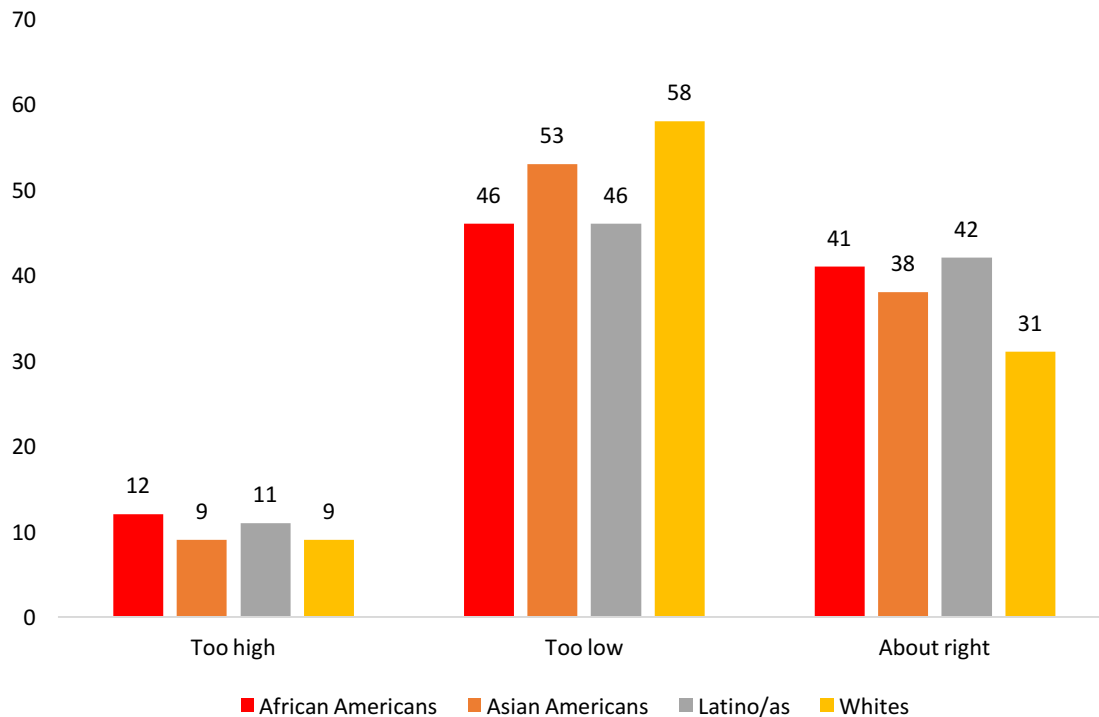
Evaluations were slightly more varied when asked if their school prepared them for the workforce. Figure 6 shows that fewer people say that their schools were good or excellent at preparing them for the workforce than they were are preparing them for college, though still a plurality of each racial and ethnic group believed their school provided an excellent preparation for the workforce. Latinxs stand out as most likely to say their school did a poor or very poor job preparing them for the workforce.

**Figure 6. How good a job did your own school do in preparing you for the workforce?**



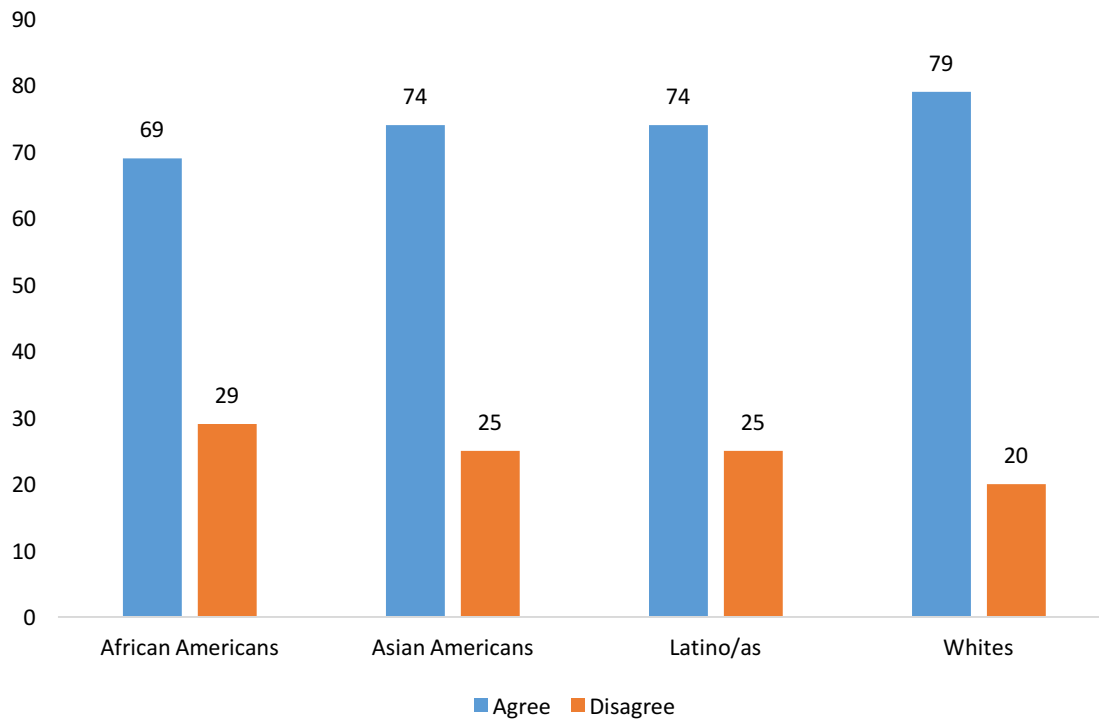
Another concern we measured among young adults focused on educational standards. Specifically, we asked Millennials whether they believed that educational standards are: too high, too low, or just about right. As seen in Figure 7, majorities of Asian Americans (53%) and whites (58%), along with pluralities of African Americans (46%) and Latinxs (46%), said that education standards are too low. Very few Millennials said that education standards are too high.

**Figure 7. Do you think the educational standards for what students should learn are too high, too low, or about right?**



Of the issues we asked about, the one that received the most criticism was the amount of standardized testing in schools. Many respondents say that there is too much standardized testing in schools, as shown below in Figure 8. Large majorities of African Americans (69%), Asian Americans (74%), Latinxs (74%), and whites (79%) agree that there is too much standardized testing in schools.

**Figure 8. Do you agree or disagree that there's too much standardized testing in schools?**



Overall, our data reveal that young adults have mixed evaluations of the current system of education in America. Most young adults give relatively high marks to their own education and to the public schools in their community, but give lower grades to public schools in the nation. And despite many young adults giving high marks to their own schools and those in their community, they also have some critical remarks about the current system. Specifically, Millennials believe schools do not do enough to prepare students for the workplace, have insufficient education standards, and spend too much time on standardized testing.

This discrepancy between how people evaluate their schools and education in general may be a product of the different sources from which people form attitudes of schools. Evaluations of one's own education and community schools are likely to reflect direct experiences, whereas evaluations of the nation's schools must rely on outside sources, like the media and other opinion leaders. While schools may be an easy target as a source of blame for societal ills, our findings indicate that many young adults—who recently completed their education and many of whom now have their own children in

school—actually give the schools they have direct experiences with relatively positive marks.

## **B. Rethinking Public Schools and Making Them Better**

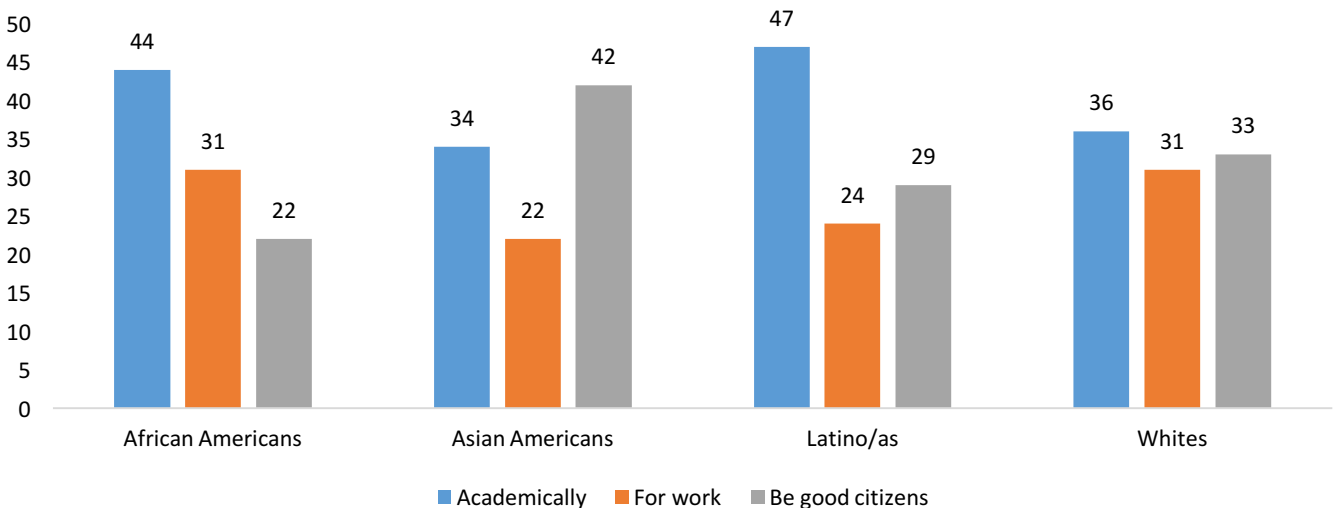
Before we discuss Millennials opinions on different approaches to making public education better, we start with their understanding of the goal of public education. Interestingly, 31% of all Millennials said that preparing good citizens should be the main goal of public schools, just slightly lower than the 39% who said the main goal should be preparing students academically and higher than the 29% who said it should be to prepare students for work.

As shown in Figure 9, Asian Americans were especially likely to say that preparing good citizens should be the main goal of public schools, with a plurality giving this response (42%). By contrast, the plurality response among African Americans (44%), Latinxs (47%) and whites (36%) was that preparing students academically should be the main goal of public education.

These findings indicate that young adults have heterogeneous views about the goals of public education. These diverse visions about public schooling provide helpful context for understanding the proposals young adults support and oppose in their reimagining of public education.



**Figure 9. Should the main goal of a public education be to prepare students academically, for work, or to be good citizens?**



Given how Millennials think about the main goal of public education, we wanted to know how they think schools can best ensure student success? We start by focusing on five popularly debated domains of education that are believed to make a good school: (1) high expectations for all students, (2) the use of data in the classroom, (3) the importance of school leaders, (4) great teachers and (5) collaboration of schools with families and the local community.

When asked to rank these five factors from most important to least important, we find that **“great teachers” is the most important factor that Latinx, Asian American and white Millennials think makes a school a good school.** African American Millennials, however, think “high expectations for all students” is the most important factor.

Overall, twenty-nine percent of all young adults identified great teachers as the most important factor to making a school a good school, followed by high expectations for all students (23%), strong school leaders, including principals and teachers (19%), strong collaboration with families and the local community (14%), and consistently using data to improve and inform teaching and learning (11%). Table 1 presents the percentage of respondents in each group who lists each factor as being the “most important” in terms of making a good school and helping students succeed.

As Table 1 shows, there is an important difference across racial and ethnic groups in the rank-ordering of these five factors. Whites (35%), Asian Americans (30%) and Latinxs (23%, tied with strong school leaders) identified great teachers as the most important factor for making good schools. However, **African Americans identified high expectations for all students (29%) as the most important factor in making a school a good school.**

African American Millennials, given their different educational experiences and backgrounds, seem to have a different idea of what is most important to making schools effective at helping students succeed. When thinking about how to improve education in America, these differences in perceptions about what makes for a good school and what is most important to helping students succeed should be recognized and addressed.

**Table 1. Percentage of Respondents in Each Group Who Identify Each of the Five Factors the “Most Important” to Making a Good School and Helping Students Succeed.**

	High Expectations for all students	Consistently using data to improve and inform teaching and learning	Strong school leaders, including principals and teachers	Great teachers	Strong collaboration with families and the local community
<b>African American</b>	<b>29%</b>	12%	19%	17%	16%
<b>Asian American</b>	19%	13%	19%	<b>30%</b>	14%
<b>Latinx</b>	20%	15%	<b>23%</b>	<b>23%</b>	16%
<b>White</b>	23%	10%	17%	<b>35%</b>	13%
<b>N=</b>	421	208	346	541	259

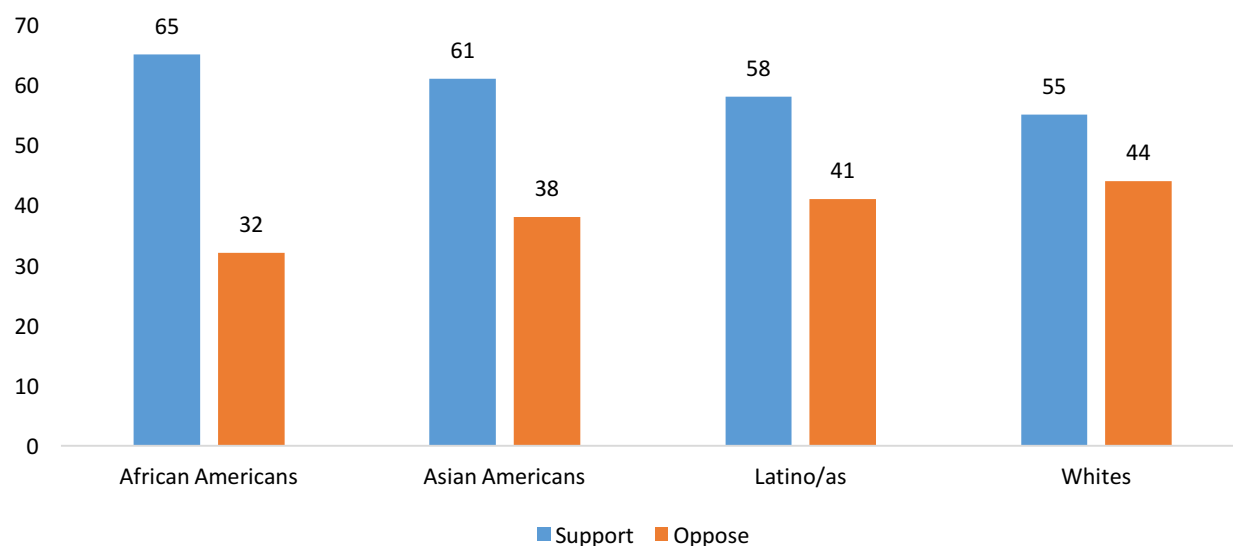
We also asked Millennials about a range of proposals currently being debated to reform public schooling in America in order to understand which proposals young adults support and oppose and how to best improve America’s schools.

### Charter Schools and Vouchers

Two of the main proposals currently being debated in public education are charter schools (publicly funded, privately managed schools that are exempt from many state regulations) and voucher programs (allowing students to use government funds to attend a school of their choice). Do Millennials support or oppose these proposals?

When we ask directly whether they support or oppose charter schools, we find that many Millennials—especially Millennials of color—do support them, as we show in Figure 10.

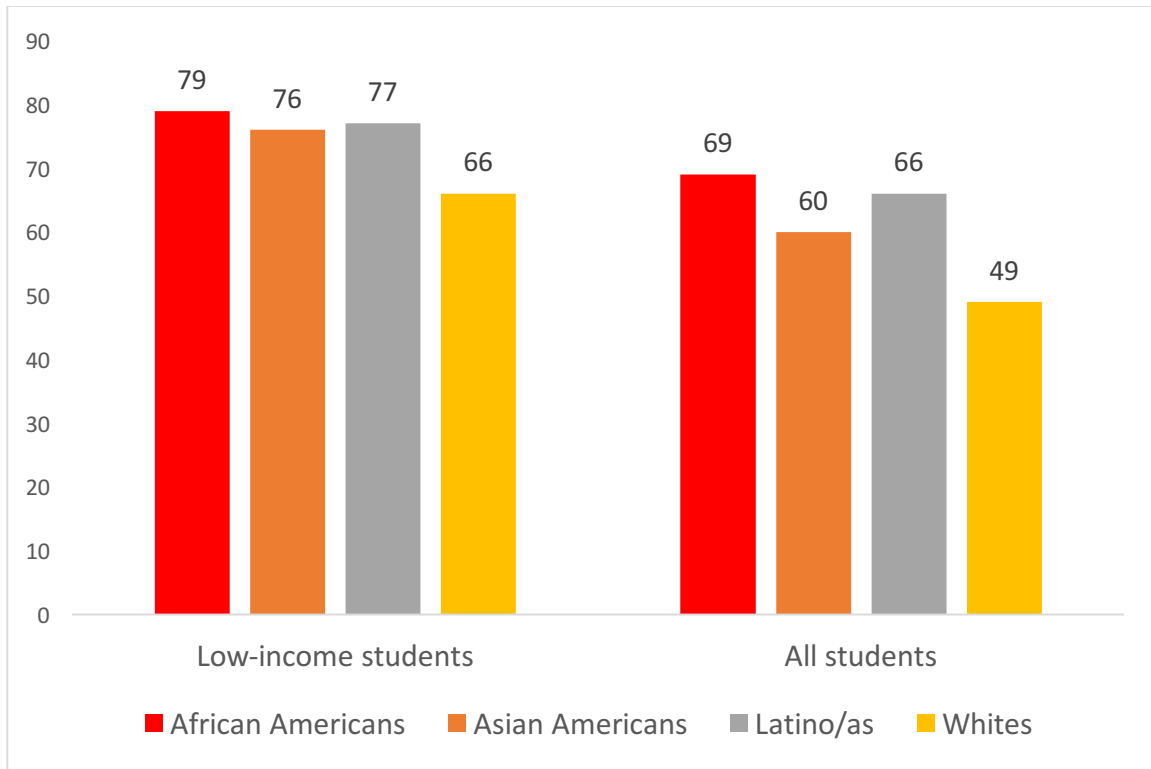
**Figure 10. Do you support or oppose charter schools?**



We also find widespread support for vouchers—again, especially among Millennials of color—that would pay some of the tuition for students to attend private schools. As Figure 11 shows, support for vouchers is especially high when those vouchers are targeted to *low-income students*.

As the left-hand side of Figure 11 shows, large majorities of African American (79%), Asian American (76%), Latinx (77%) and—to a lesser extent—whites (66%), support vouchers when targeted specifically to low-income students. However, support drops when respondents are asked to consider vouchers for all students: 69% of African Americans support this proposal, along with 60% of Asian Americans, and 66% of Latinxs. Whites are evenly divided in support and opposition to vouchers for all students, with 49% of whites on either side.

**Figure 11. Percentage of Respondents in Each Group Who Support Vouchers to Pay Some of the Tuition for Students to Attend Private Schools**



The above data *suggest* that school choice in the form of charter schools and voucher programs—at least when targeted to low-income students—receives significant support among Millennials as an avenue to improve public education. But we should note that when we ask young adults to list the three best ways to improve K-12 education in their local school districts, increasing school choice (i.e., charter schools, vouchers) does not register as one of the three most popular proposals for any group. Only 16% of Millennials overall place increasing school choice among their top three proposals for improving education.

Table 2 lists the proposals most commonly listed by Millennials for improving kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, from a list of the following 13 options: increase school choice (i.e., charter schools, vouchers), investment in neighborhood schools, increase school funding, improve teacher training, give states more flexibility, diversify teacher workforce, increase teacher pay, give parents better information about their schools, back to basic curriculum (reading/writing/math), more parental involvement, better

discipline, hire more teachers, spend more time in school (longer school days or longer school year).

As Table 2 shows, there is remarkable consistency across racial / ethnic groups in the identification of the best ways to improve public schooling. **At the top of Millennials' list of best ways to improve kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade is increasing school funding, followed by improving teacher training, and increasing teacher pay.** These findings suggest that young adults believe that a reinvestment in public schools along with efforts to improve and incentivize good teaching, provide the best solutions to improve public education in America.

**Table 2. In your opinion, what would be the best way to improve kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade education in your local school district [choose 3], by Race and Ethnicity**

	African American	Asian American	Latinx	White
Most cited improvement	Increase school funding (50%)	Increase school funding (50%)	Increase school funding (60%)	Increase school funding (44%)
Second most cited improvement	Improve teacher training (41%)	Improve teacher training (47%)	Improve teacher training (47%)	Improve teacher training (40%)
Third most cited improvement	Increase teacher pay (31%)	Increase teacher pay (32%)	Increase teacher pay (29%)	Increase teacher pay (39%)
N=	506	251	521	510

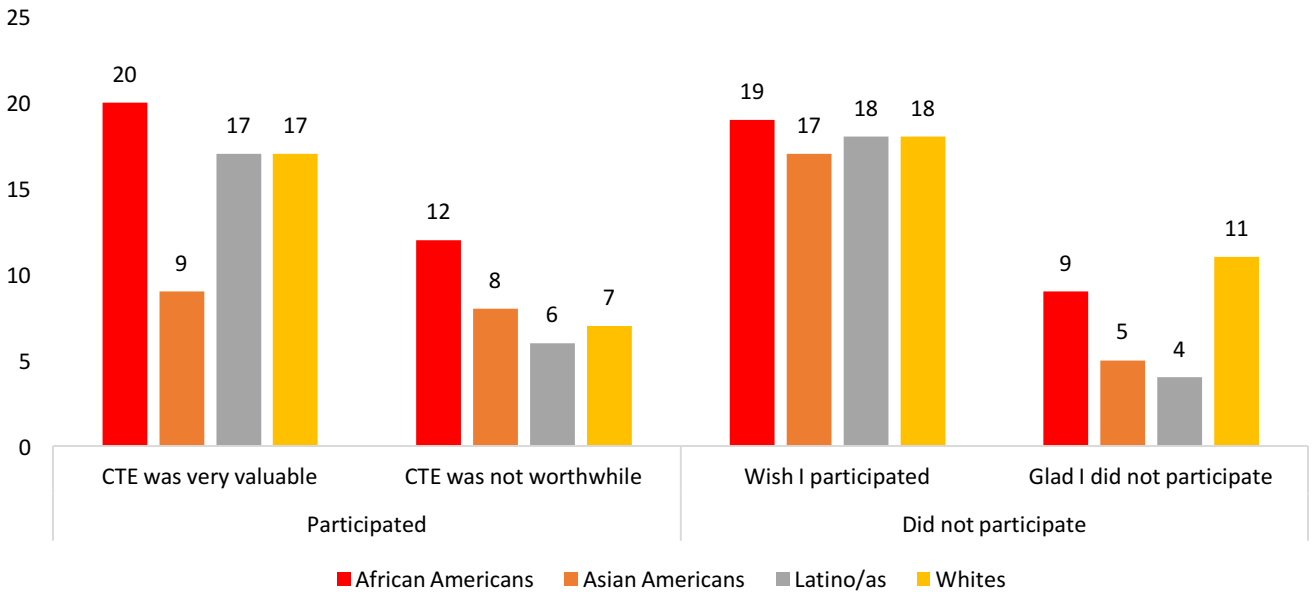
## Career Training and Technical Education (CTE)

Another prominent program offered to expand learning opportunities in public schools is career training and technical education, or CTE. CTE provides students with a sequence of technical and academic courses focused on a particular employment sector. CTE includes things like courses towards certification as a nursing assistant, pharmacy technician, or automotive technician. We wanted to know whether Millennials had experienced these programs when they were in school, whether they found them valuable, and—if they did not participate in these programs—whether they now wish they had taken the opportunity.

First, we find relatively stark differences across groups in access to CTE programs. Forty-five percent of Latinxs and 39% percent of Asian Americans said that they had the opportunity to participate in CTE programs in high school. By contrast, 60% of African Americans and 53% of whites said that these programs were available to them in high school. **African Americans and whites appear to have greater access to CTE programs in high school which might suggest that some school systems are targeting certain, possibly poor communities, with more CTE programs.**

Figure 12 presents evaluations of CTE programs among young adults who had access to them. Of those who did have the **opportunity** to participate, we find that CTE programs are generally viewed positively. Among those who **did participate**, more say that they thought the program was very valuable than not worthwhile. And among those with the opportunity but who **did not participate**, larger percentages expressed regret at not taking advantage of them than satisfaction with their choice not to do so.

**Figure 12. Views about CTE programs among those who had the opportunity to participate in high school**

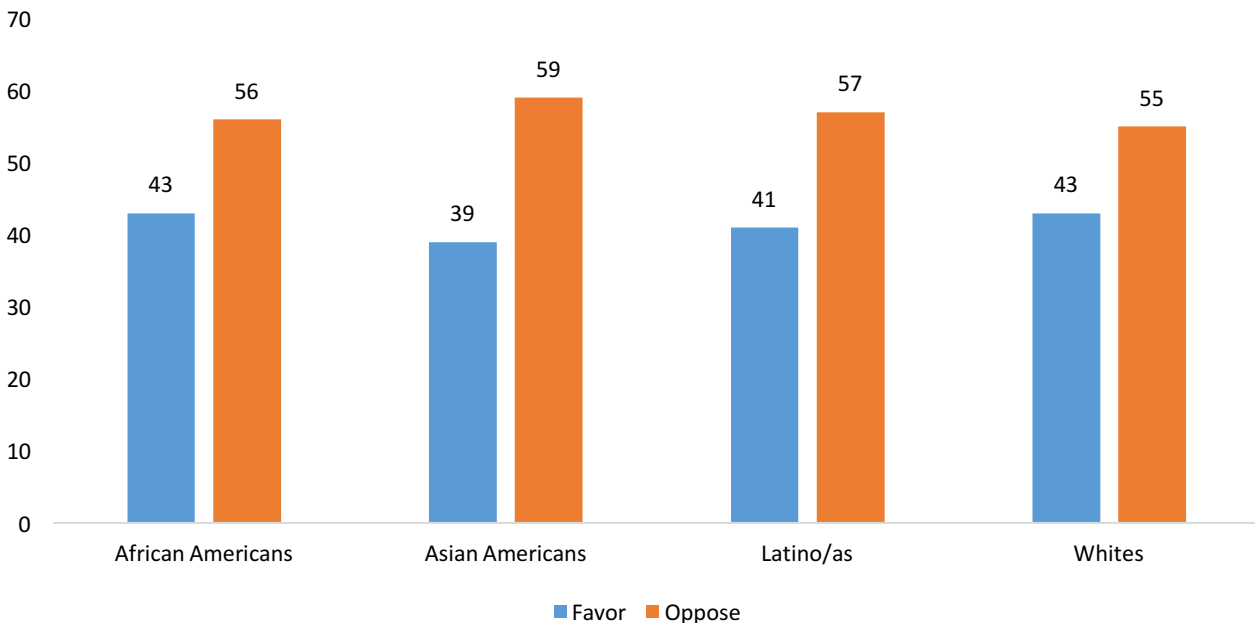


## Standardized Testing

Testing has also received a significant amount of attention in the discussion on how to improve public education and, as we reported in Section II, remains largely unpopular among Millennials. We asked Millennials their views regarding policies that allow parents in public schools to excuse their children from taking standardized state tests. Given the large numbers of Millennials who said that there is too much standardized testing in schools (Figure 8), one might think that Millennials would support this proposal. But, as the data in Figure 13 shows, this is not the case. More respondents—in all racial and ethnic groups—say they are opposed to this proposal than support it.



**Figure 13. Do you favor or oppose allowing public school parents to excuse their children from taking standardized state tests?**

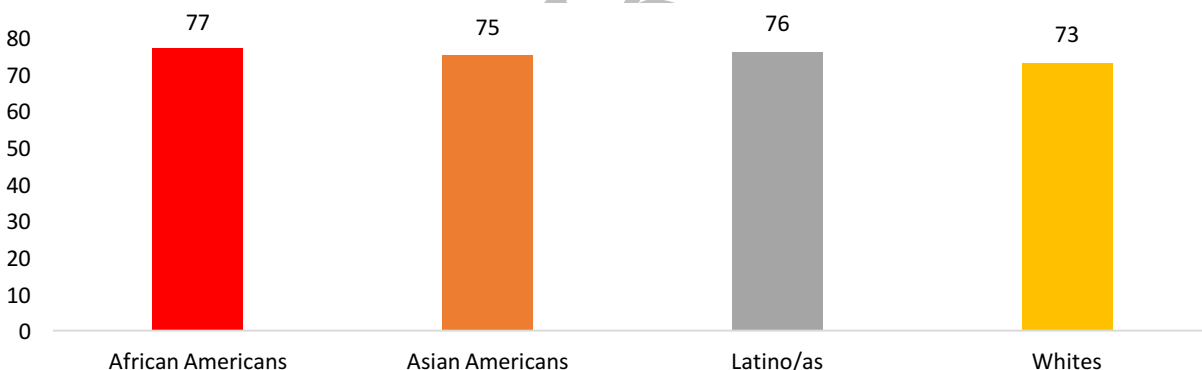


So how are Millennials rethinking public schooling in America? Our data suggests that they are open to a number of proposals. Large numbers of young adults said they were most supportive of increasing school funding, improving teacher training, and increasing teacher pay. Millennials also seem open to expanding CTE programs, as those who participated are more likely to report positive than negative experiences. While many Millennials express support for charter schools and vouchers, these proposals were not frequently identified as their preferred solutions among a larger list of options. And finally, Millennials—who certainly believe there is too much standardized testing in schools—do not support the idea of allowing parents to excuse their children from taking standardized tests. Altogether, these findings suggest that Millennials’ educational priorities are to reinvest in the nation’s public schools by expanding existing resources and focusing on improving the training of teachers.

## C. Equity Issues in School

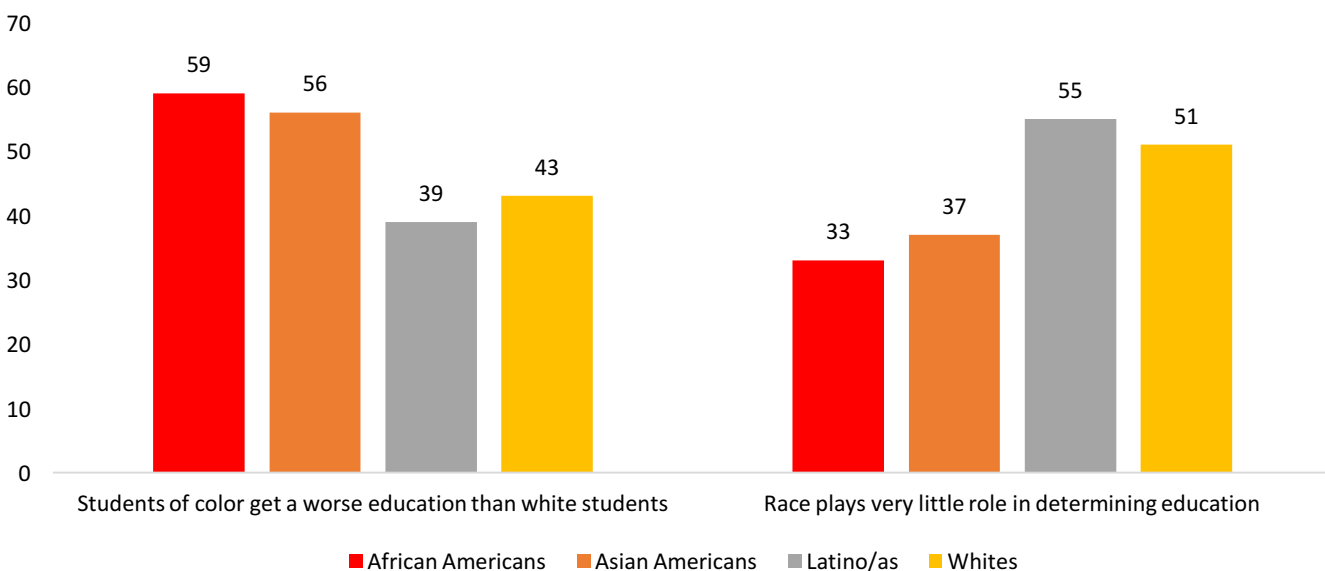
One of the most important issues confronting public education today is the challenge of racial and economic equity in educational opportunities and achievement. We asked our respondents a series of questions about racial and economic educational equity and found both agreement and significant differences across groups in how to think about equity issues. For example, echoing the findings of the Stanford Center for Poverty and Inequality [report](#) on academic achievement disparities, Millennials expressed concerns about issues of equity, or fairness, in the nation's public schools. In particular, nearly three-fourths of all Millennials agree with the statement that students with less economic resources get a **worse** education than those from wealthy backgrounds, as shown in Figure 14.

**Figure 14. Agree that students with less economic resources get a worse education than those from wealthy backgrounds**



While there is broad agreement that socioeconomic resources affect education, there is less agreement among Millennials about the importance of race to the quality of education one receives. As Figure 15 shows, many Millennials—especially African American and Asian American Millennials—agreed with the statement that students of color get a worse education than white students. In contrast, majorities of Latinxs and whites said that race plays very little role in determining education.

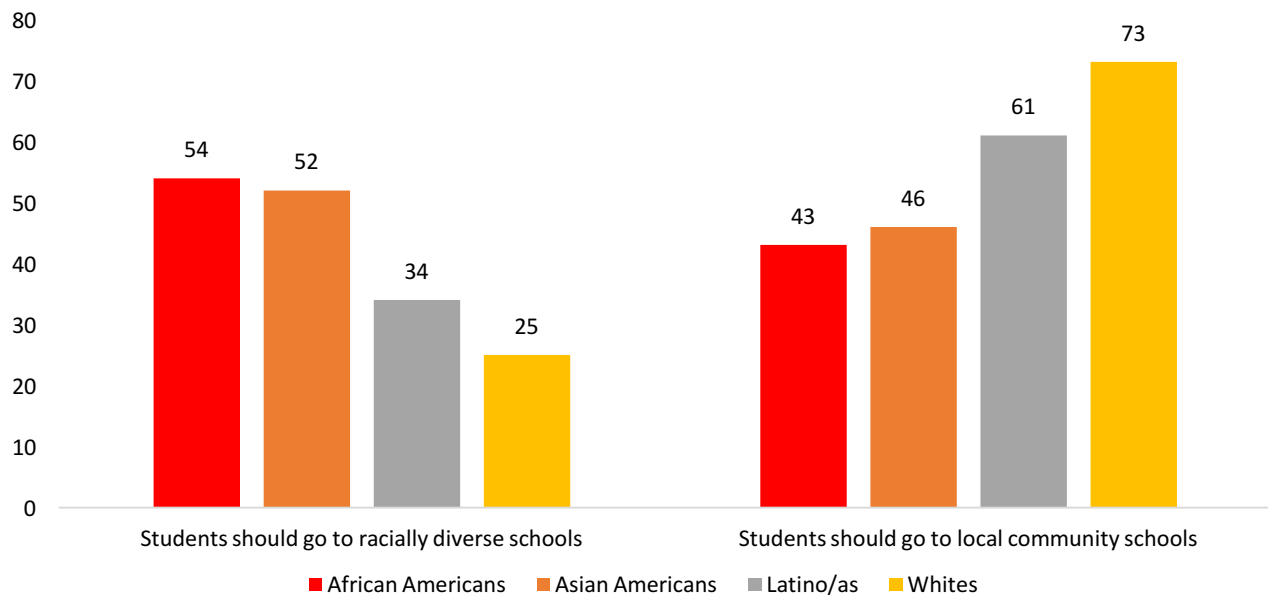
**Figure 15. How does race affect education?**



These differences between African Americans and Asian Americans, on one side, and Latinxs and whites on the other, in evaluations of the role of race in education extend to other questions we asked about equity in schools.

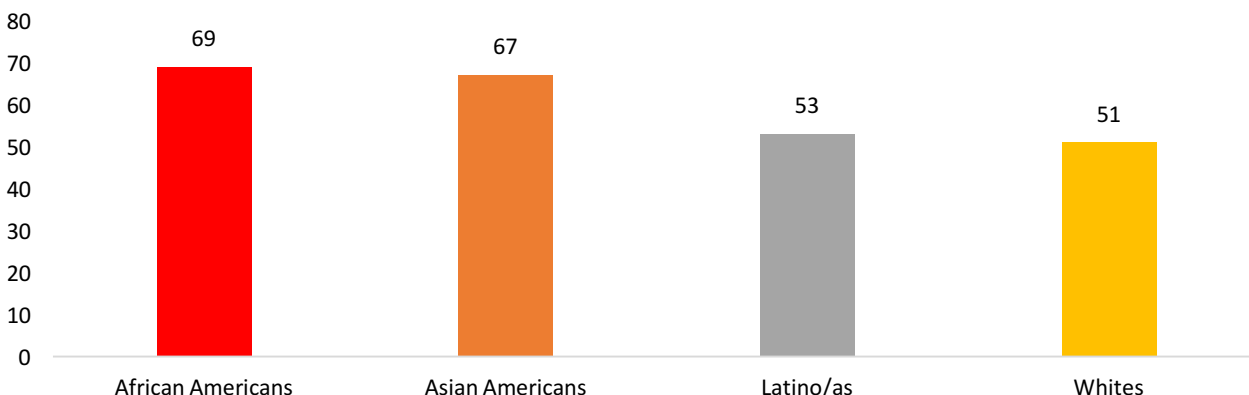
For example, Figure 16 indicates that majorities of African Americans (54%) and Asian Americans (52%) agreed with the statement that students should go to racially diverse schools even if many of the students do not live nearby. In contrast, majorities of Latinxs (61%) and whites (73%), agreed with the statement that students should go to local community schools even if it means most students are of the same race.

**Figure 16. Should students go to racially diverse schools even if they don't live nearby, or should they go to local schools even if most students are of the same race?**



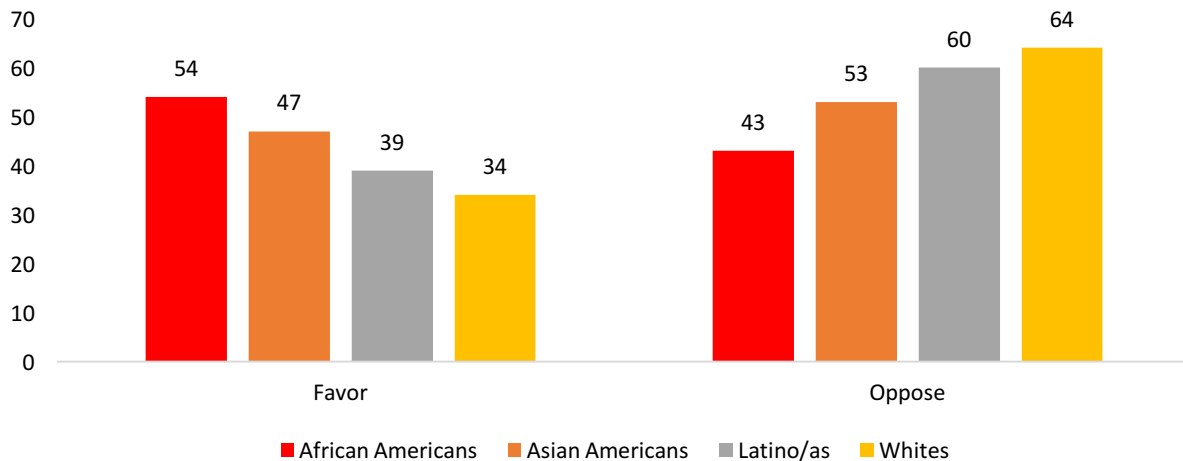
We observe a similar—though less pronounced—divide in Millennials' views about whether U.S. schools are held accountable for the performance of students of color. While majorities of all groups are more likely than not to agree that **U.S. schools are not being held accountable for the performance of students of color**, African Americans and Asian Americans agree with this statement at the highest levels, as shown in Figure 17.

**Figure 17. Agree that U.S. schools are not being held accountable for the performance of students of color**



We also see this divide in the extent to which Millennials favor policies that would prevent schools from expelling or suspending Black and Hispanic students at higher rates than other students, presented in Figure 18. While African Americans (54%) represent the only group for whom a majority favor such policies, Asian Americans are not far behind (47%). However, majorities of whites, Latinxs and Asian Americans oppose policies that would prevent schools from expelling or suspending Black and Hispanic students at higher rates than other students.

**Figure 18. Do you favor or oppose policies that prevent schools from expelling or suspending black and Hispanic students at higher rates than other students?**



We were also interested in understanding the causes that Millennials attribute to the [higher rates](#) of suspension among African American and Latinx students in schools. We informed respondents that “research has found that Black and Hispanic students are suspended at higher rates than other students.” We then asked them why they think this happens, from the following list: (a) Black and Hispanic students have more behavioral problems, (b) Most teachers and administrators are white and lack sensitivity to the issues confronting Black and Hispanic students, (c) Black and Hispanic students are in schools with fewer resources that have to rely on strict discipline, or (d) bad behavior of white students is ignored because of their privilege. Table 3 presents the results.

As Table 3 shows, there is no overall consensus among Millennials as to the main explanation for racial and ethnic disparities in suspension rates. The most common response option provided by Asian Americans, Latinxs, and whites is that the lack of resources in the schools attended by Black and Hispanic students leads to disparities in suspension rates. The most common response among African American Millennials was that a lack of sensitivity among white teachers and administrators caused higher suspension rates.

Whites and Asian Americans were also much more likely than African Americans and Latinxs to say that Black and Hispanic students are suspended at higher rates because they have more behavioral problems. And African Americans and Latinxs more likely than other groups to attribute the racial disparity in suspensions to the bad behavior of white students being ignored due to their privilege.

**Table 3. Research has found that Black and Hispanic students are suspended at higher rates than other students. Why do you think this is the case?**

	African American	Asian American	Latinx	White
<b>Black and Hispanic students have more behavioral problems</b>	13%	24%	15%	31%
<b>Most of the teachers and administrators are white and lack sensitivity to the issues confronting Black and Hispanic students</b>	34%	29%	23%	15%
<b>They are in schools with fewer resources that have to rely on strict discipline</b>	26%	35%	39%	40%
<b>Bad behavior of white students is ignored because of their privilege</b>	25%	9%	23%	11%
<b>N=</b>	506	251	521	510

In sum, while we find agreement among Millennials that the availability of socioeconomic resources affects schooling opportunities, there are differences across racial and ethnic groups in views about issues of racial equity in school. African Americans and Asian Americans believe that students of color get a worse education than white students, while Latinxs and whites say that race plays very little role in determining education. These fundamental differences in views about the importance of race go on to structure attitudes about students attending racially diverse schools, the accountability of schools for the performance of students of color, and support for policies designed to promote racial equity in school punishment.

However, the views of many white and Latinx Millennials are belied by the [many statistics](#) about the continued [education achievement gap](#) between students of color and white students. In order to make education an engine of advancement for all Americans, it is important to overcome this divide in perceptions about the continued importance of race to education in America and to design policies and programs that address the very real racial and ethnic disparities that exist in our education system.



### III. College Education

#### A. The Promise and Challenge of Higher Ed

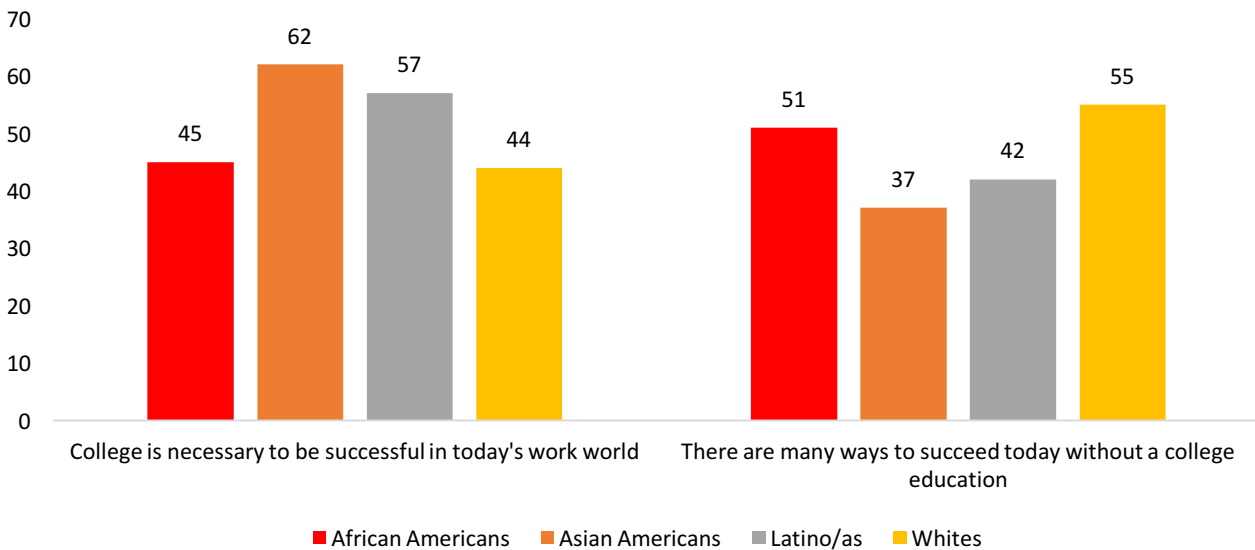
Higher education has received a lot of attention in recent months. Earlier this year, New America published an extensive [report](#) on the public's views of higher education. In July of this year, the Pew Research Center published a provocative [finding](#) that Democrats and Republicans are now sharply divided in their views about higher education; Republicans now say that colleges are negatively impacting the United States, breaking from the previous partisan consensus that colleges provided positive benefits to the country. And issues of free speech on campus have generated increased attention as protests have broken out on college campuses against public speakers, particularly those espousing hateful beliefs. Despite increased interest in these topics, there has been little attention to the views of Millennials in particular. Given that many Millennials have recent—and in some cases ongoing—experience in institutions of higher education, and because of their increased diversity relative to older generations, their perspectives on higher education are especially valuable to add to these ongoing debates.

##### Pathways to Success

We note first that many Millennials are divided on whether a college education is necessary to be successful in today's work world. As shown in Figure 19, African Americans (45%) and whites (44%) are less likely to believe that a college education is necessary for a person to be successful in today's work world compared to majorities of Latinxs (57%) and Asian Americans (62%) who say that a college education is necessary today.

While African Americans and whites are less likely to believe that college education is necessary for success in today's work world, we would caution readers from interpreting that finding as an indicator that these groups do not value a college education. Instead, these findings suggest that both African Americans and whites believe that there are many roads to success, including but not exclusively through college.

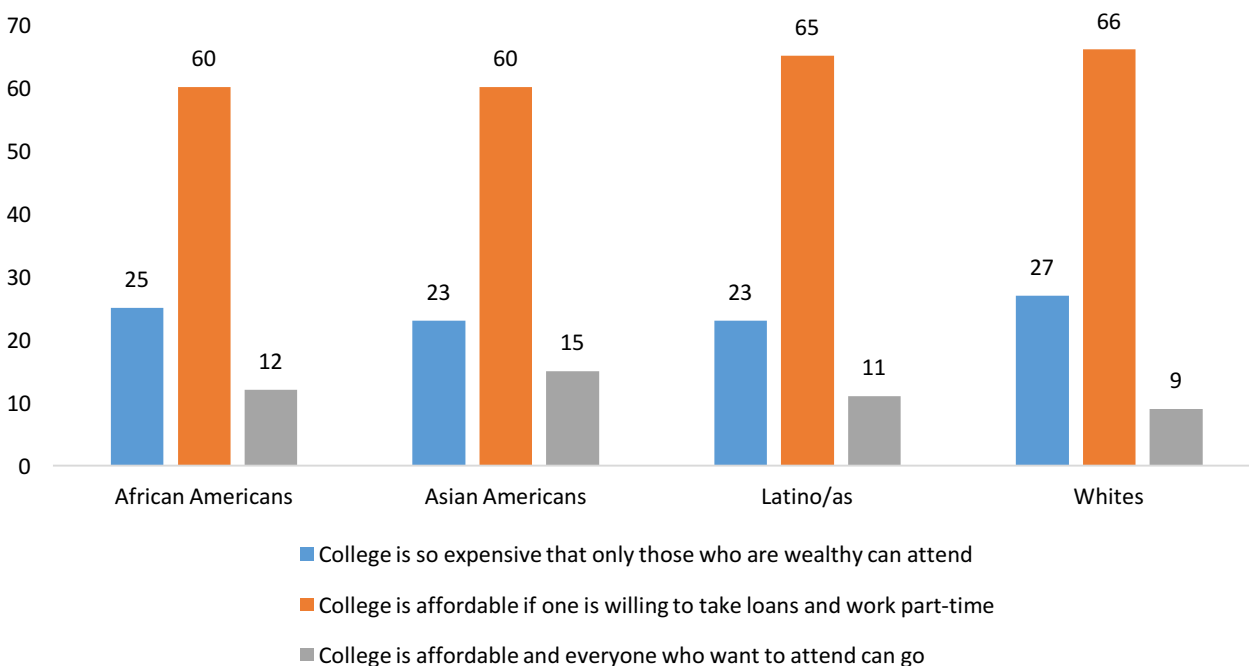
**Figure 19. Is a college education necessary for a person to be successful in today's work world?**



### College Affordability

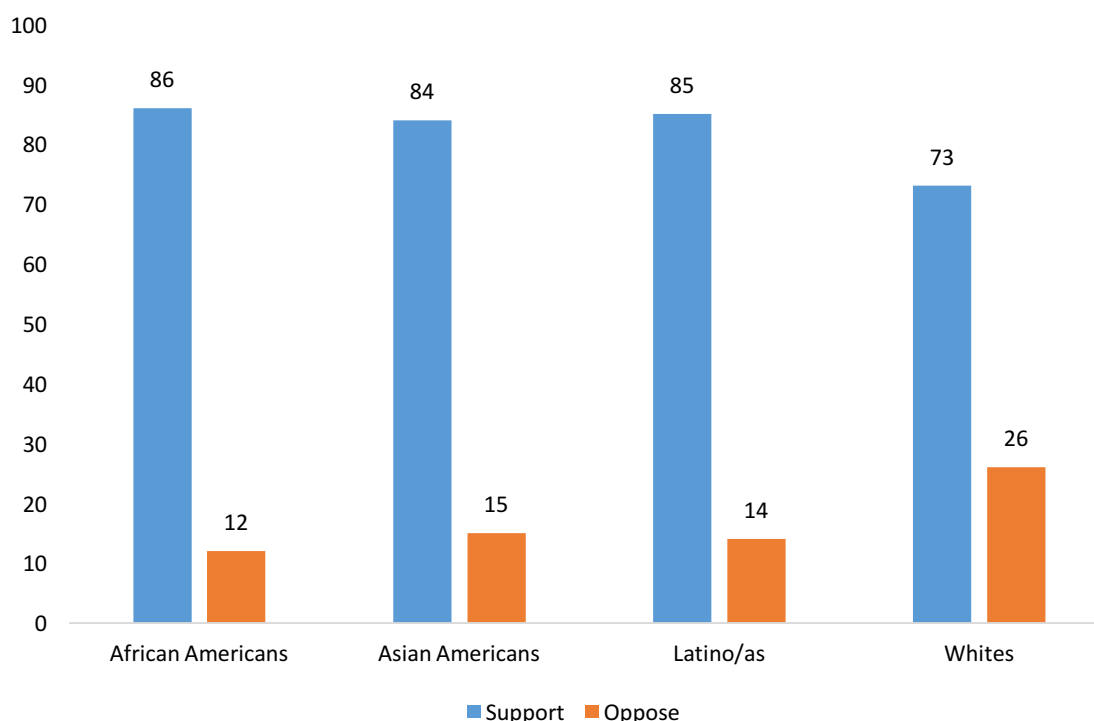
We also asked young adults their views about the costs of college. As Figure 20 shows, we find that only a minority—though certainly a sizable and important minority—say that college is so expensive that only those who are wealthy can attend. Instead, a majority in all groups said that college is affordable if one is willing to take out loans and work part-time. A smaller number say that college is affordable and everyone who want to attend can go.

**Figure 20. Which of the following comes closer to your view?**



Even while most young adults believe that college is relatively affordable given a willingness to take loans and work part-time, large majorities of Millennials support free tuition at public colleges, as presented in Figure 21. Few policy issues of the many GenForward has asked about over the past year have generated this high and across-the-board level of support from Millennials. Free tuition at public colleges appears to be a prime issue that could mobilize and engage Millennials, particularly but not exclusively Millennials of color.

**Figure 21. Do you support or oppose free tuition at public colleges?**



## Freedom of Speech

Finally, we asked Millennials their views about issues of free speech and expression on college campuses. Overall, we find fairly strong support for limiting some kinds of free speech on campus, especially for language that is intentionally offensive to certain groups and for wearing costumes that stereotype racial and ethnic groups. As Figure 22 shows, majorities or pluralities of Millennials of color support limiting speech that is offensive to certain groups in all cases. **Majorities of all Millennials support limiting (in all and extreme cases) language that is intentionally offensive to certain groups.**

**Figure 22. Should colleges be able to limit language that is intentionally offensive to certain groups?**

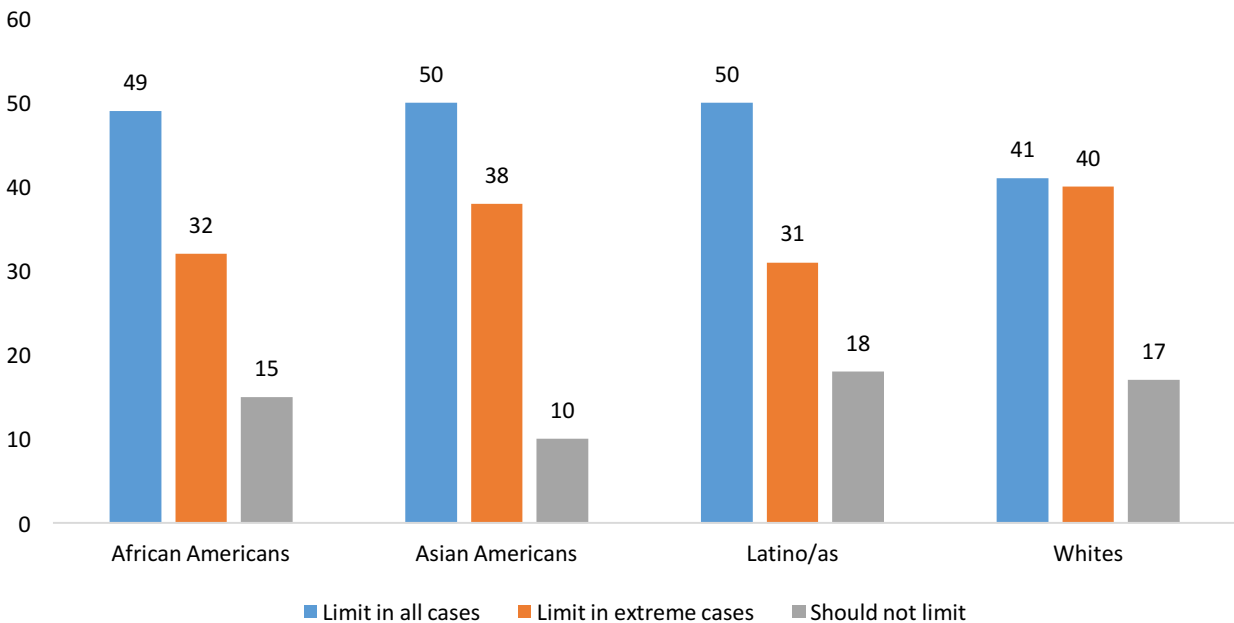
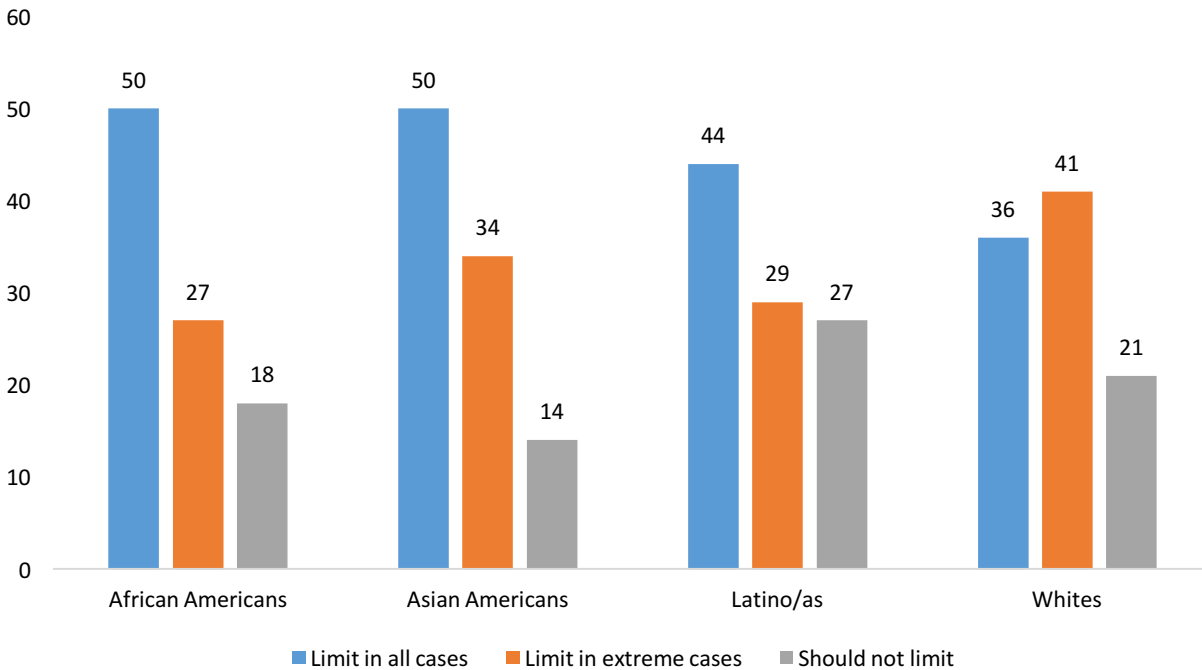


Figure 23 shows a similar pattern with respect to the wearing of costumes that stereotype certain racial and ethnic groups. In general, large majorities of all Millennials support limiting these two types of speech to some extent, including those who say it should be limited in all cases and those who say it should be limited in extreme cases. Few young adults say that colleges should not be able to limit these types of expression at all. These results are similar to those found in a [survey](#) of college students by the Knight Foundation: sixty-nine percent of college students said colleges should be able to restrict language that is intentionally offensive to certain groups, and 63% said colleges should be able to restrict wearing costumes that stereotype certain racial and ethnic groups.

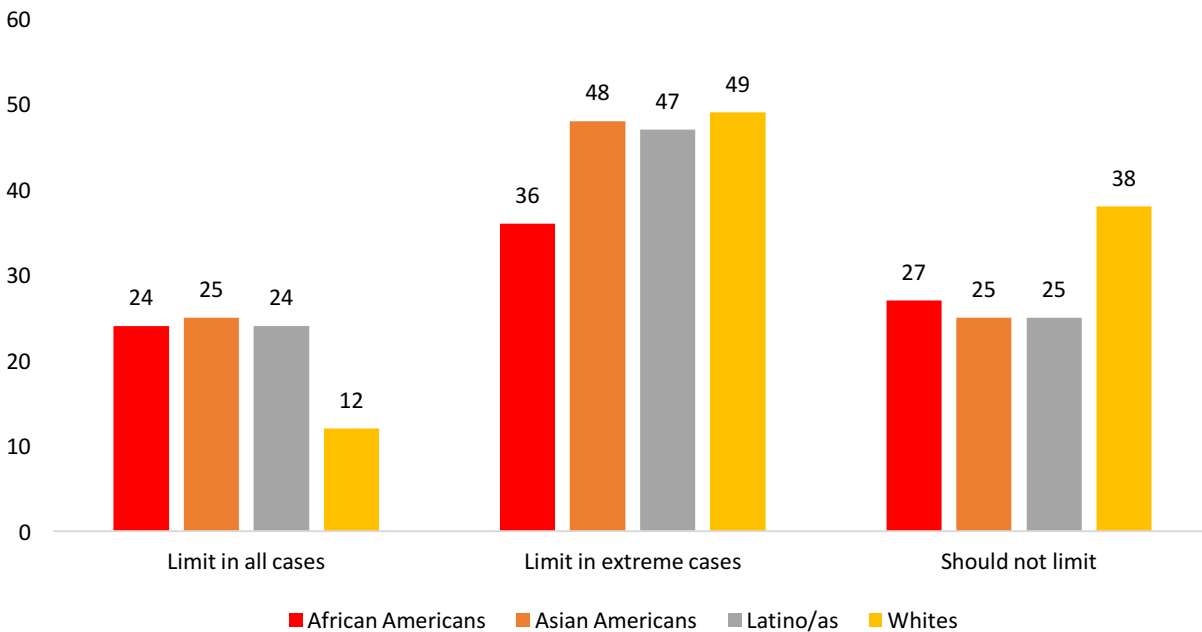
**Figure 23. Should colleges be able to limit wearing costumes that stereotype certain racial and ethnic groups?**



However, unlike results in the Knight Foundation survey of college students, among whom only 27% said colleges should be able to restrict the expression of **offensive political views**, we find much higher levels of support for limiting political views that are offensive to certain groups. We should note, however, that support for this restriction is slightly lower than support for restricting intentionally offensive speech and wearing racially stereotypical costumes.

As Figure 24 shows, even with respect to political speech, most Millennials favor some restrictions. The biggest difference with respect to political speech is that Millennials are more likely to say they want it limited only in extreme cases; there is still only a minority who say that such speech should not be limited on college campuses. White Millennials appear the least comfortable with limiting political speech on campus, with fewer whites stating that offensive political speech should be limited in all cases and more saying that such speech should not be limited at all than Millennials of color.

**Figure 24. Should schools be able to limit the expression of political views that are upsetting or offensive to certain groups?**



This section documents Millennials' views about higher education in America. Our results show that many young adults, particularly African American and white young adults, do not see college education as necessary to succeed in today's work world. But if one decides to pursue a college education, majorities of all Millennials believe that college is affordable if one is willing to take out loans and work part-time. And while Millennials may see college as affordable with significant sacrifice, young adults do widely and uniformly support the proposal championed by Bernie Sanders and others to make tuition at public colleges free. Thus, one of the challenges for higher education moving forward, then, is to communicate what are the concrete returns from what [some report as](#) the growing benefits of a college degree. Finally, we also provide timely data on young adult's thoughts about issues of free speech on college campuses. In today's era where issues of free speech have risen anew in response to intentionally provocative speeches by often conservative activists and opinion leaders, generating protests that have sometimes turned violent, many Millennials are supportive of limiting at least extreme cases of offensive speech on college campuses.

## *Conclusion*

This report provides an extensive look at the views of Millennials about education in America. This includes an in-depth look at their evaluations of public school systems, their thoughts about what makes a school good at helping students succeed, their ideas about how to move public education forward, their concerns about issues of equity in schools, and the promises and challenges they see with higher education in America.

As we noted at the outset, there continue to be large racial disparities in academic achievement and opportunities, from test scores to graduation rates to advance placement classes. Our survey too identified a gap between Millennials of color, particular African Americans and Latinxs, and white and Asian American Millennials in evaluations of their own schooling. Whites and Asian Americans were notably more likely to give their own education a higher grade than African Americans and Latinxs.

But these racial disparities do not neatly map onto many other views about education in America. For example, all Millennials across racial and ethnic backgrounds agree on the three best ways to improve K-12 education: increase school funding, improve teacher training, and increase teacher pay. In contrast to such agreement, we found significant differences in perceptions about whether race affects education: African Americans and Asian Americans are most cognizant of the role of race in education, while whites and Latinxs assert that race plays little role in education outcomes. Finally, we found that whites and African Americans were most in agreement in their view that there are many ways to be successful today without a college education. Together, these findings hint at the challenges of building a coalition and consensus on how best to address racial disparities in the public education system moving forward. As Millennials age and come to have their own children in school, the experiences and preferences documented here are likely to ground their approach to reshaping education in America.



## VI. Study Methodology

The GenForward June/July survey is a project of the University of Chicago. Interviews were conducted with a representative sample from GenForward<sup>SM</sup>, a nationally representative survey panel of adults ages 18-34 recruited and administered by NORC at the University of Chicago and funded by grants to the University of Chicago from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

A total of 1,836 interviews were conducted between June 23 and July 10, 2017 with adults ages 18-34 representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia, including completed interviews with 506 African American young adults, 251 Asian American young adults, 521 Latinx young adults, 510 white young adults, and 48 young adults with other racial and ethnic backgrounds. The survey was offered in English and Spanish and via telephone and web modes.

The GenForward survey was built from two sample sources: Sixty-one percent of the completed interviews are sourced from NORC's AmeriSpeak® Panel. AmeriSpeak is a probability based panel that also uses address-based sample but sourced from the NORC National Frame with enhanced sample coverage. During the initial recruitment phase of the AmeriSpeak panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face).

Thirty-nine percent of the completed interviews are sourced from the Black Youth Project (BYP) panel of young adults recruited by NORC. The BYP sample is from a probability-based household panel that uses an address-based sample from a registered voter database of the entire U.S. Households were selected using stratified random sampling to support over-sampling of households with African Americans, Latinxs, and Asian Americans ages 18-34. NORC contacted sampled households by U.S. mail and by telephone, inviting them to register and participate in public opinion surveys twice a month.

Panelists on both the BYP and AmeriSpeak panels are invited to register for the panel via the web or by telephone to participate in public opinion surveys.

Of the 1,836 completed interviews in the GenForward June survey, 94 percent were completed by web and 6 percent by telephone. The survey completion rate is 29 percent. The weighted household panel recruitment rate is 20.5 percent and the weighted household panel retention rate is 91.1 percent, for a cumulative AAPOR Response Rate 3 of 5.4 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is  $\pm 3.94$  percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. Among subgroups, the margin of sampling error at the 95 percent confidence level is  $\pm 5.83$  percentage points for African Americans,  $\pm 8.09$  percentage points for Asian Americans,  $\pm 6.19$  percentage points for Latinxs, and  $\pm 6.02$  percentage points for whites.

To encourage cooperation, respondents were offered incentives for completing the survey that ranged from the cash-equivalent of \$3 to the cash-equivalent of \$10.

The interviews from the two probability-based sample sources were combined for statistical weighting and analysis. The combined panel samples provide sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings. The statistical weights incorporate the appropriate probability of selection for the BYP and AmeriSpeak samples, nonresponse adjustments, and also, raking ratio adjustments to population benchmarks for 18-34 year old adults. A poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and over-sampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. The poststratification process was done separately for each racial/ethnic group and involved the following variables: age, gender, education, and census region. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults ages 18-34, and the 18-34 year old populations for African Americans, Latinxs, Asian Americans, and non-Latinx whites, were used for all analyses.