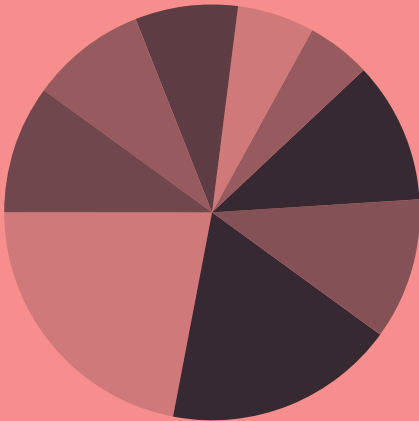


Minnesotans

ON PUBLIC SCHOOLS: HOPES, CONCERNS & PRIORITIES



“I think the first step is knowing that the problem exists, and hopefully that raises enough awareness to get the ball rolling.”

—anonymous poll respondent

Minnesotans care deeply about public education, and in fall 2014, we set out to learn more about this shared value. By polling people across the state, we investigated how Minnesotans believe our schools are doing, and what education issues matter most to them, at the ballot box and beyond.

We encourage you to explore the full results of the poll in ‘MinnCAN Education Survey Results, 2014.’ In this analysis, we explore key findings, including:

1. ***Minnesotans prize our public schools.*** Almost two-thirds of respondents said education was “very” or “extremely” important when deciding whom to support for elected office, making education one of the top three most important issues—along with the economy and health care—for Minnesotans going into the November elections. Respondents from Greater Minnesota, Democrats, females and parents of school-aged children were especially likely to view education as a priority when deciding which candidates to support.
2. ***Minnesotans see disparities across race and income in our schools as a real problem.*** Most Minnesotans would give our schools a “B” for white and Asian students, but are less optimistic about how well schools are serving other kids of color and low-income students. What’s more, while Minnesotans know that many students face persistent opportunity gaps, they underestimate how deep these gaps are for kids of color. Poll respondents overestimated high school graduation rates for black, Latino and Native American students.

Unfortunately, Minnesotans don’t believe we can easily close these gaps. In fact, 34.5 percent believe that we will never be able to completely close our achievement gap, while only 26.3 percent believe that we can mostly or completely close the gap in ten years. This is perhaps

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driven by the fact that respondents overwhelmingly saw family involvement and peer and community influences as the biggest contributors to the gap. While this belief cut across all demographics, white respondents were the most likely to feel this way, while respondents of other racial backgrounds were more likely to indicate institutional issues, such as school funding and rigorous standards and curriculum, as the root of the problem.

3. ***Minnesotans agree that teacher quality is critical.*** Having quality teachers was ranked as one of the biggest contributors to kids' educational success, second only to family involvement. Moreover, the majority of respondents said teacher quality is one of the education hot topics they'll consider at the polls this November, along with school funding, class size and curriculum.

While Republicans and Democrats hold different views on many issues, from funding to automatic tenure, respondents from both parties equally support prioritizing educator performance over seniority when making staffing decisions.

4. ***Annual student tests are important, but could be improved.*** For 41.3 percent of Minnesotans, standardized tests are not a major political issue. For the remainder—those who say that a candidate's views on testing will impact their vote—nearly 70 percent say that they prefer candidates who support annual statewide tests.

Many respondents are satisfied with the frequency of student tests, with 55.6 percent saying that we're testing the right amount, or even not enough. However, others see room for improvement. Overall, 28.8 percent of Minnesotans think we're testing too frequently, and 29 percent feel that current assessments are not ideal measures of student learning.

Testing is another area where white respondents and respondents of color diverged. White respondents were much more likely to think that kids are being tested too frequently (30 percent vs. 17.4 percent), while respondents of color were about twice as likely as white respondents to think that kids are not being tested frequently enough (23.9 percent vs. 12.5 percent).

Above all, this poll revealed that Minnesotans want great public schools for all children but know that we're not there yet. And despite recent and historic investments in public education, almost half of Minnesotans still worry that the Legislature does not prioritize education enough. In order to make a great school available to every child, Minnesotans believe our elected officials can—and must—take significant and immediate action to strengthen our schools, support and develop our teachers and implement rigorous and relevant standards and curriculum. And because education is one of the hot-button issues in the upcoming elections, Minnesotans are paying close attention to what candidates say about the achievement gap, teacher quality, testing and more.

This poll's findings are a powerful call to action for all Minnesotans. Let's tap into our collective commitment to great schools for our kids, candidly and humbly acknowledge our state's ongoing challenges and recognize the areas and solutions on which we all agree. Finally, let's make our ideas and voices heard, and hold our policymakers accountable as they offer bold solutions to improve learning for all Minnesota students.

Although change may be slow and there are no easy answers, at MinnCAN, we know that all kids can succeed. We've seen seeds of hope grow into full-blown success at changing-the-odds schools across the state, demonstrating that outstanding outcomes are possible for students of all backgrounds. With a clear vision and a collective will we can ensure that every child gets a world-class education, and that ten years from now, the gaps we know so well today will have become a thing of the past.

METHODOLOGY

MinnCAN commissioned PadillaCRT to conduct this poll. Between September 11–24, 2014, we surveyed 400 Minnesotan adults, ages 18–74, using 28-question survey, administered online and via telephone. The margin of error for the study is +/- 4.9 percent.

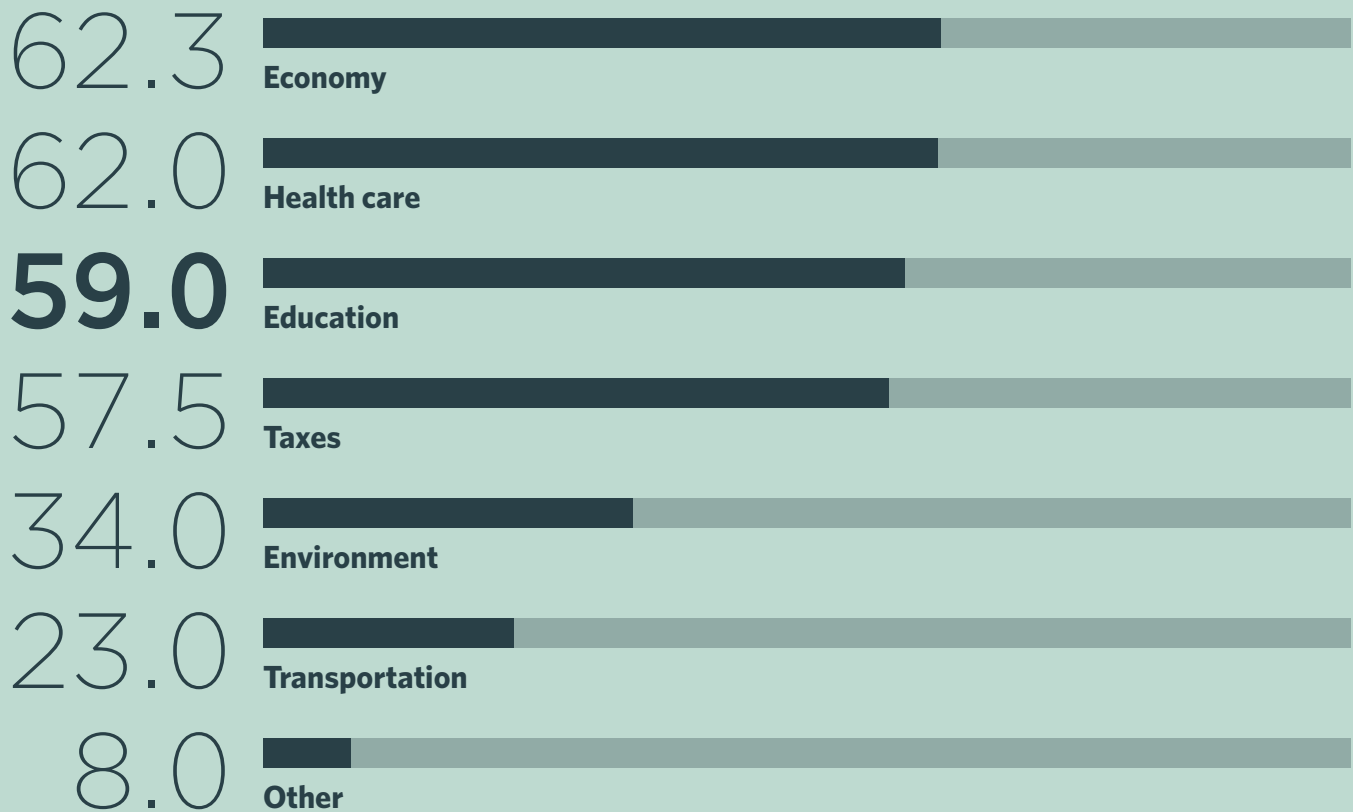
The survey primarily consisted of multiple-choice questions, with one additional open-ended question to uncover the attitudes and motivations behind respondents' choices.

Respondents were geographically representative of the state of Minnesota, with 54 percent of respondents living in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area, and the remaining 46 percent living in other counties in the state. Respondents represented various ages, races and political affiliations.

ISSUES IMPORTANT IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS

Education ranked among the top issues important to Minnesotans in the November election.

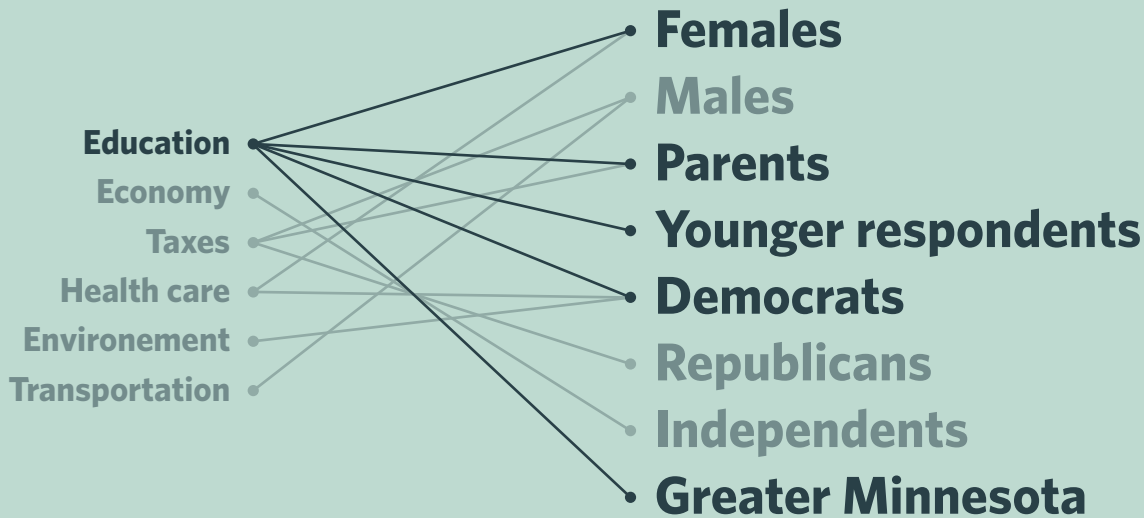
Which of the following issues will be important to you as you decide whom to support in the November election?



“Our children are used as political footballs and instead of really working on what is the best for them, our politicians work on what will read in a negative way for their opposition. So much time, energy and money is spent bickering that there is little that is actually accomplished. Our leaders rarely lead.”

—anonymous poll respondent

Issues with significantly higher incidence of importance to subgroups

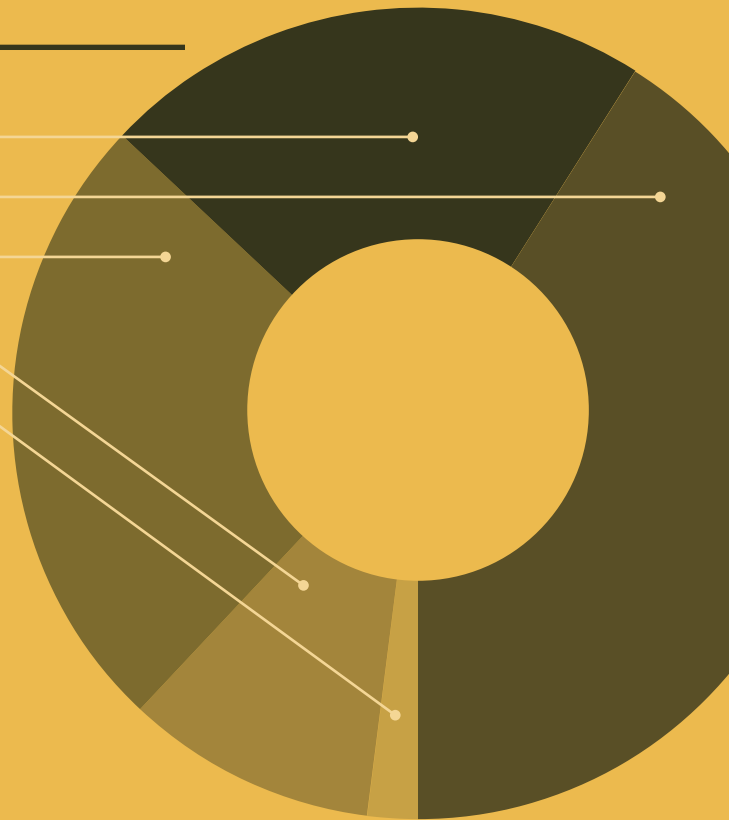


EDUCATION AND THE ELECTIONS

The majority of Minnesotans (62.6 percent) said education is “Extremely” or “Very” important to them as they consider which political candidates to support.

How important will education be as you decide whom to support in the November election?

- 21.3 **Extremely important**
- 41.3 **Very important**
- 25.0 **Somewhat important**
- 10.0 **Not too important**
- 2.4 **Not sure**



MOST IMPORTANT EDUCATION ISSUES

School funding, teacher quality, class size and curriculum and standards are all hot topics for the majority of Minnesotans, each with over 60 percent saying the issue will influence their support of a candidate.

What education-related issues will be important to you as you decide whom to support in the November election?

- 73.7% School funding**
- 67.8% Teacher quality**
- 60.2% Curriculum & standards**
- 60.2% Class size**
- 47.0% Bullying**
- 44.5% Testing**
- 41.9% Achievement gap**
- 39.4% Early learning and pre-K**
- 36.4% Teacher tenure and layoff policies**
- 31.8% All day kindergarten**
- 5.5% Other**

CANDIDATE'S POSITIONS

Minnesotans are looking for leadership on a variety of hot-button education issues, from funding to layoff practices to testing. Respondents—Democrats and Republicans alike—were most likely to show support for candidates who prioritize teacher performance over seniority when deciding both pay and layoff decisions.

If a candidate held each of the following positions, how would that impact your support for him or her?

Supports educator performance more than seniority in deciding who to lay off, if and when layoffs occur



Supports paying educators based on performance



Supports increased funding for early learning and pre-kindergarten to prepare students for kindergarten



Supports changing automatic teacher tenure rules



Supports testing using annual statewide tests to measure student proficiency and growth



CANDIDATE'S POSITIONS

“If we are able to legislate fair education practices for all, no matter what zip code you live in, or what school you go to, then yes I think we stand a chance in bringing fair education and learning practices into the 21st century.”

—anonymous poll respondent

Respondents more likely to support a candidate who supports educator performance more than seniority in deciding whom to layoff

59.0

*democrat
respondents*

vs.

59.9

*republican
respondents*

WHAT HELPS KIDS SUCCEED

Respondents said family involvement is the biggest contributor to kids' success. However, respondents of color were significantly less likely than white respondents to view family involvement as the most important contributor (31.4 v. 43.1 percent).

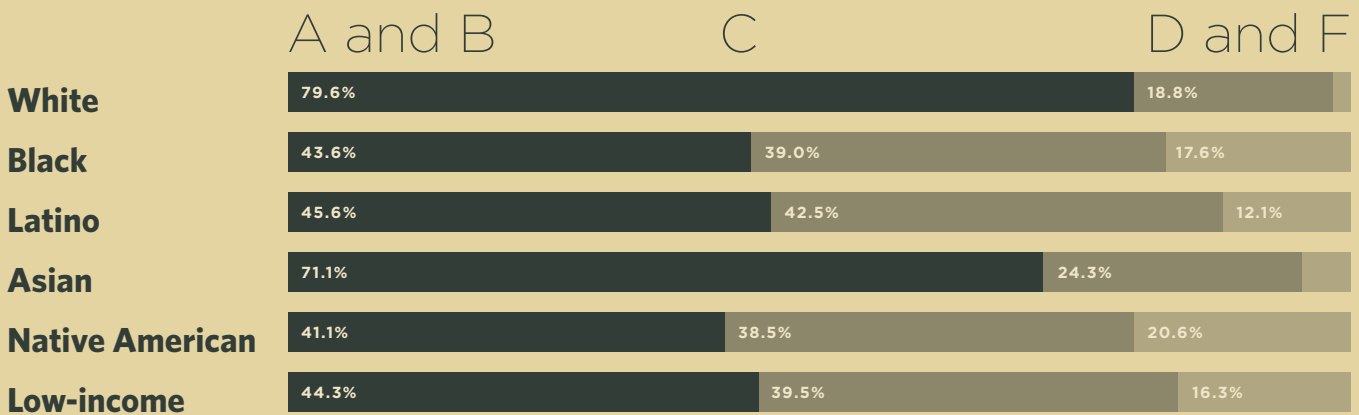
What do you believe is the biggest contributor to kids' success in K-12 education?



HOW OUR SCHOOLS ARE DOING

Respondents felt that Minnesota public schools are best serving white and Asian kids, with more than 70 percent giving schools an “A” or “B” for those groups. Minnesota’s ability to serve Native American kids was given the lowest grade, with more than 20 percent giving schools a “D” or “F” for those students.

What grade would you give public schools in Minnesota when it comes to how well they educate the following groups of kids?



DID MINNESOTANS GET IT RIGHT? PERCEIVED V. ACTUAL HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

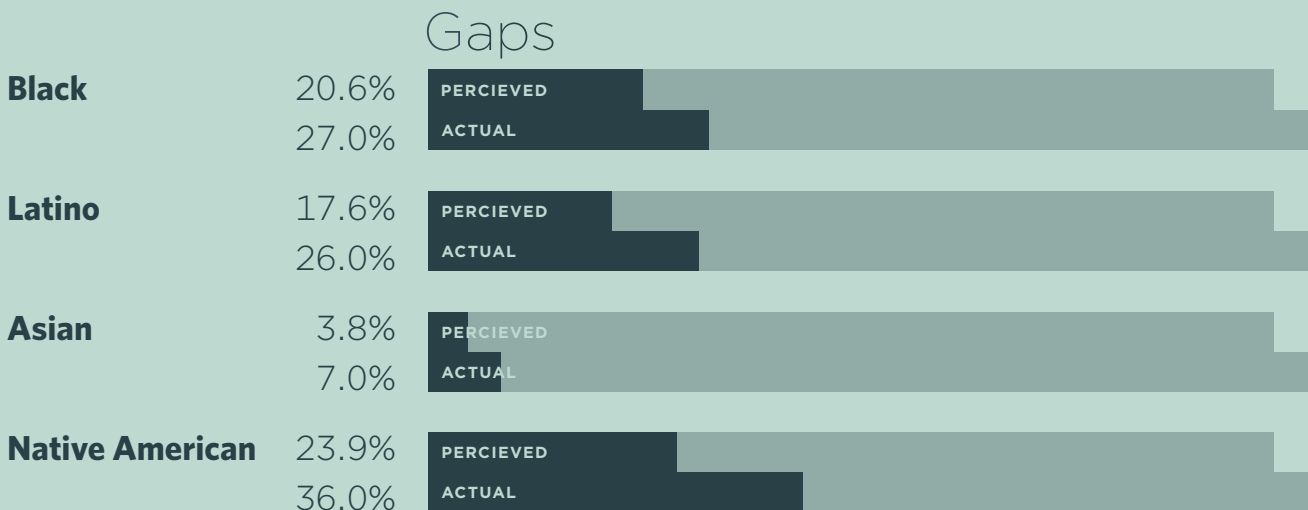
When asked to guess high school graduation rates for various groups of students, respondents underestimated achievement gaps between white students and students of color, and believed—incorrectly—that black, Latino and Native American students are doing better on average than low-income students.

If you were to guess, what do you think the high school graduation rate is for children in each of the following groups in Minnesota?

PERCEIVED RATE	ACTUAL RATE	
81.3%	85%	White
77.5%	78%	Asian
63.7%	59%	Latino
60.7%	58%	Black
60.3%	64%	Low Income
57.4%	49%	Native American

SOURCE The actual rates are four-year graduation rates for students in the class of 2013 and graduating in 2013. "State Report Card," Minnesota Department of Education, <http://rc.education.state.mn.us/>.

Perceived v. actual gaps in high school graduation rates (white students v. students of color)



WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Respondents viewed family involvement or peer and community influences as the biggest contributors to the achievement gap. However, white respondents were more likely than respondents of color to attribute the achievement gap to community/family-based issues. Respondents of color were more likely to indicate institutional issues, such as school funding and curriculum and standards, as the root of the problem.

What do you think is the single biggest contributor to the achievement gap?

46.0	Family involvement
14.5	Peer & community influences
7.5	School quality
6.0	Household income
5.3	Teacher quality
4.5	School funding
3.8	Other
3.5	Neighborhood safety
3.3	Curriculum & standards
3.0	Race/ethnicity
1.8	School leadership
1.0	State & local governments

“If we do something about it and stop talking about it we can achieve it!”

—anonymous poll respondent

Differences in perceived contributors to the achievement gap

Family involvement



Peer and community influences



School funding



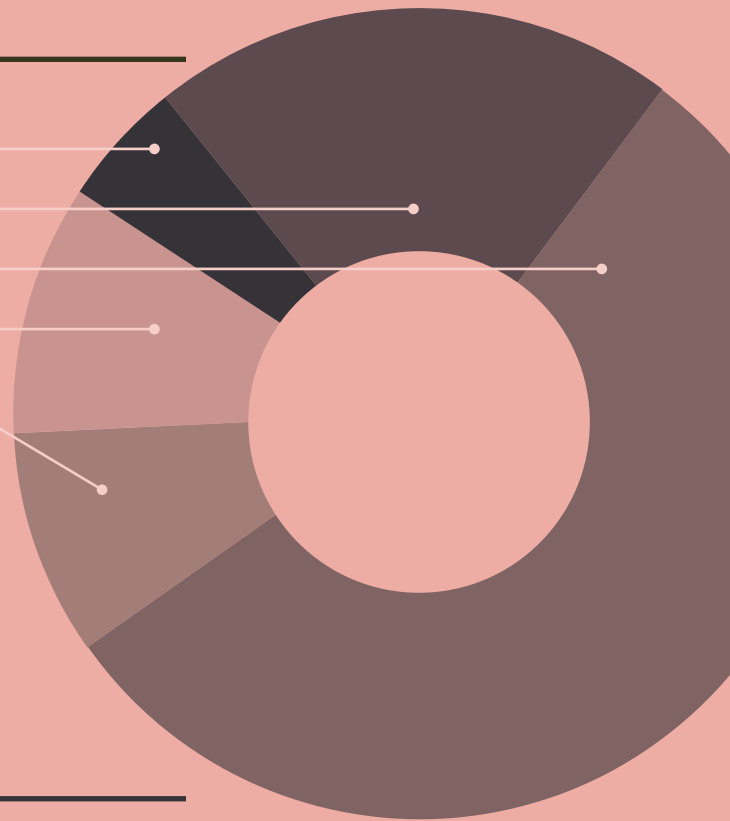
Curriculum and standards



Respondents were mildly optimistic about the ability to close the achievement gap in ten years. Most (54.5 percent) think the endeavor will have some success, while only 5.5 percent think there will be complete success within ten years.

How successful do you believe we can be in closing the achievement gap in ten years?

- 5.5 **Completely**
- 20.8 **Mostly**
- 54.5 **Some**
- 9.8 **Not at all**
- 9.5 **Unsure**



Minnesota can completely close the achievement gap.

- 6.8% **Strongly agree**
- 32.0% **Agree**
- 22.3% **Neutral**
- 26.0% **Disagree**
- 8.5% **Strongly disagree**
- 4.5% **Unsure**

VALUE AND FREQUENCY OF STUDENT TESTING

41.8 percent of respondents think that Minnesota is testing students the right amount. But perceptions of testing frequency vary significantly across different racial backgrounds. White respondents were more likely to think that Minnesotans are being tested too frequently than respondents of color (30 v. 17.4 percent), and respondents of color were about twice as likely to think that Minnesotans are not testing enough.

Which of the following best describes your opinion on the frequency of state, district and school- based assessment of students?

- 28.8 **Testing too frequently**
- 41.8 **Testing the right amount**
- 13.8 **Not testing as often as we should**
- 15.8 **Unsure**



VALUE AND FREQUENCY OF STUDENT TESTING

Minnesota’s annual statewide student tests accurately measure student growth, proficiency and the achievement gap.



Testing perceptions: Comparison by race

We are testing too frequently



We are testing the right amount



We are not testing as often as we should



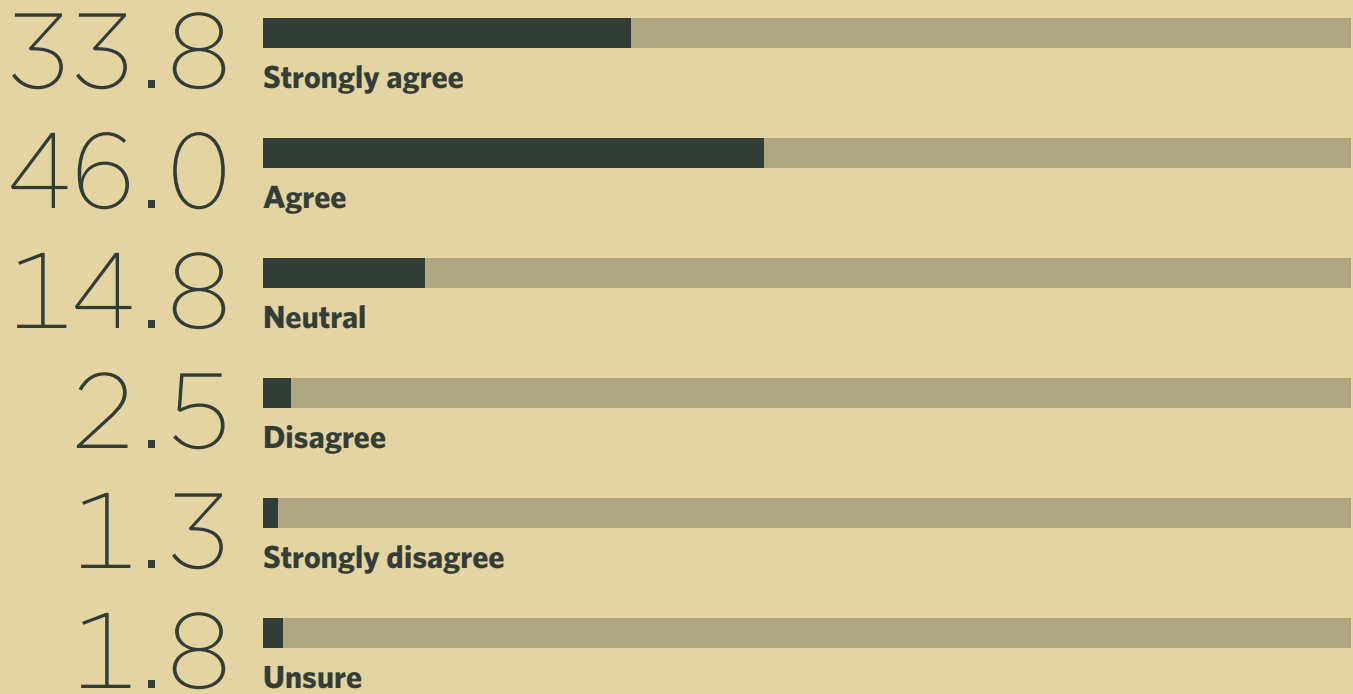
Unsure



SUPPORTING NEW TEACHERS

79.8 percent of respondents agreed that student teachers should be partnered with effective mentor teachers.

During teacher training, a student teacher is partnered with a veteran educator for a ten-week clinical experience. Student teachers should be partnered with effective mentor teachers, as determined by teacher evaluations.



About MinnCAN

Launched in 2011, MinnCAN: The Minnesota Campaign for Achievement Now is an education advocacy nonprofit. MinnCAN is a movement of nearly 12,000 Minnesotans—and growing—dedicated to creating the political will to enact smart public policies to ensure that every Minnesota child has access to a great public school.

www.minncan.org

