



# MILLENNIAL PARENTS AND EDUCATION

WALTON FAMILY  
FOUNDATION

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# INTRODUCTION

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By 2016, around half of all Millennial women were moms, and each year more than one million more become mothers.<sup>1</sup> As the oldest edge of the Millennial generation – those born between 1981 and 1996 – enter their mid-thirties, many Millennials now have children who are public school students, and some even have children who are high-school aged.

The Millennial generation has grown up in a time of rapid change. Technological change has meant that their entire adult lives have happened alongside the rise of the internet and mobile technology. Economic change has made education after high school more essential than ever, but at the same time, tough economic circumstances for many Millennials have raised doubts for some about the value of college. Cultural change has re-shaped families and parents' roles, with even more two-income and single-parent households trying to find ways to raise their children and make ends meet.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, the Walton Family Foundation and Echelon Insights wanted to better understand what these Millennial parents think about today's public schools, and specifically what their expectations are for what schools will do for their children. We conducted a series of focus groups of Millennial parents in Orlando, FL, Minneapolis, MN and Richmond, VA and listened firsthand to a demographically diverse group of young parents discuss their hopes and dreams for their children, and the role they expect their public schools to play. Then, we conducted a representative national survey of 800 Millennial parents to better understand their expectations for the public schools, and the responsibilities they place on themselves and on the public schools.

We explored how Millennial parents think their schools are doing, and what they think schools should be doing in terms of equipping students with academic and life skills. We sought parents' opinions on ways to measure how schools and students are doing. And we got their take on how schools should be held accountable. What they shared is examined in the pages of this report, broken out into five sections:

**I. How are schools doing?**

**II. What *should* schools be doing?**

**III. How can we measure how *students* are doing?**

**IV. How can we measure how *schools* are doing?**

**V. How should we hold schools accountable?**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/04/more-than-a-million-Millennials-are-becoming-moms-each-year/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today/>

## Our key takeaways included:

- + **Millennial parents expect a lot out of their children's schools, in part because the rise in two-income households has shifted what parents these days can do for their kids.** Parents want the best for their kids but can't do it all, placing high expectations on the schools where they send their children.
- + **Socioeconomic status is a key driver of views about public schools.** Throughout the survey, lower-income parents and parents without a college degree have views on the role of education that diverge from higher-income or college educated peers. Lower-income parents and Latinx parents in particular are less likely to say they feel that schools are providing kids with a good education.
- + **Millennial parents expect that their children's schools will prepare their children both academically and with the other skills they'll need to thrive.** While they view academics as a top responsibility for schools, they also lean on schools to help their children build the character, life and workforce skills they'll need to be independent, successful, and happy.
- + **Millennial parents use many different data points to judge whether their child is getting the skills he or she needs to succeed.** While data points like test scores are one piece of the puzzle, the wide range of skills they expect schools to provide their children means there are a wide range of ways they as parents assess how their child is doing, with a high priority on grades and talking to their child's teachers.
- + **When judging the quality of a school as a whole, Millennial parents look to test scores, school culture, extracurricular offerings, and graduation rates.** They are more comfortable looking to test scores as a measure of school quality than as a measure of their individual child's performance. But they also want information about things that aren't measured by assessments that outline what a child's experience at that school will be.
- + **Millennial parents believe schools should be held accountable for performance and are very open to a wide range of methods of holding schools accountable and responsible for giving kids a good education.** They see their children's teachers as sharing responsibility (and accountability, as Millennial parents view the concepts of "accountability" and "responsibility" as very similar) for turning around struggling schools. Beyond that, there is some variation; wealthier or more highly-educated parents expect parents to play a larger role, while lower income parents place more responsibility on institutions like school districts and state governments to step in. Millennial parents are open to allowing parents to choose from multiple school options and even closing a school if it consistently fails to prepare students for success.

Education and income level often have a meaningful relationship with a parents' experiences and beliefs about the public schools and their own child's education.

**Lower-income parents are less likely to think schools are giving kids a good education.**

**Less than 50%**

parents with incomes under \$50,000 per year think that schools are generally giving students a good or very good education...

**...while over 8 in 10**

parents who earn \$75,000 per year or more think schools these days are giving students a good or very good education.

**Higher-income parents are more likely to view the primary purpose of a good education to be about preparation for future learning.**

**Less than 1/3**

of parents with incomes under \$50,000 per year think that the primary purpose of a good education is to prepare a student for future learning like college or trade school...

**...while over 50%**

of those parents who earn \$75,000 per year or more think the primary purpose should be preparation for college or trade school.

**Lower-income parents feel less satisfied with the information they receive about the quality of their child's school and the assessments their children take.**

**Fewer than 6 in 10**

parents earning under \$50,000 per year feel satisfied with the information they have about the quality of school their child attends...

**...while over 8 in 10**

parents earning over \$75,000 per year or more feel satisfied with the information they have.

**Parents with a higher level of education are more concerned with how their child stacks up to others academically, while parents without a college education are more concerned with knowing the types of problems their child struggles with.**

**Parents without a college education**

were slightly more likely than parents with a bachelor's degree or higher to say they wanted to know what their child struggled with on tests...

**...while parents with a bachelor's degree**

or higher were nearly twice as likely as parents with only a high school diploma to say they wanted to know how their child stacked up to others in the school or district.

**Lower-income parents are more likely to think school districts and states should be primarily responsible for turning around struggling schools, while higher-income parents place that responsibility more on the parents of the students in the school.**

**Nearly 50% of all parents**

with an income of less than \$50,000 per year think a school district should be primarily responsible for helping a struggling school improve, while just over one-third think the parents should be primarily responsible...

**...while only 15% of parents**

with a in income of over \$75,000 place responsibility primarily on the district, and over half think it should be the responsibility of the parents in the school.

## SECTION I: HOW ARE SCHOOLS DOING?

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Millennial parents expect a lot out of their children's schools, in part because the rise in two-income households has shifted what parents these days need for their kids. Economic, technological, and cultural shifts have meant the Millennial generation takes on parenting in a somewhat different way than their parents' generation. In our focus groups, we asked respondents if they felt that "Millennial parenting" was somehow distinct from how parents in the past raised their children, and most agreed that parenting today has changed.

"... we don't have as much time to spend. If you work full time, you don't have as much time to spend with your kids doing homework, and things like that. It's kind of, like, you get home and you have to fix dinner. And before you know, it's time to jump in the bathtub and get ready for the next day. So I think that's one big difference, for women anyway."

**RICHMOND MOM**

"Financially, I feel like it's different. I went to morning school and after school at school that my mom dropped me off. And it was fairly inexpensive. Now you have to have your kids go to daycare and pay for the daycare, and then they shift them over. And, you know, you can't

leave them at school. Someone has to pick them up. And you have to pay for someone to pick them up. So it's - and you have to pay for sports. It's just a lot different in that way."

**RICHMOND MOM**

"I think to being a Millennial parent, that - different from my mother and father, is that I do allow my kids to have an opinion and let them tell me what's going on with them, rather than saying this is how I say it should be done. You kind of talk about it. You have more discussions rather than, no, that's it. And it's my way or no way."

**RICHMOND MOM**

“I still feel like our parents want the same thing that we want but we're willing to accept tablets and technology.”

**ORLANDO DAD**

“I think for me personally, I'm more involved in that education of my child, my son, and daughter because I have the information at my fingertips.”

**ORLANDO DAD**

“With my kids, I've been a little bit more selective about school, whereas when I was in school, it was just you go to whatever school it is in the area. I think there's more options available, and I just feel like I parent differently than my mom did.”

**MINNEAPOLIS MOM**

**Generally, Millennial parents think that students in America are getting a good education these days, but there are significant divisions by gender, race, and socioeconomic status.** While nearly three-in-four Millennial dads (74 percent) say students are getting a good or very good education these days, that falls to about half (48 percent) among Millennial moms. And while majorities of white, black, and Asian-American parents give schools good marks, only 45 percent of Hispanic parents also think students are getting a good or very good education, with slightly more (49 percent) saying that students are generally getting either a fair or poor education.

Do you think that on average, students in America today get an education that is very good, good, fair, or poor?

	GENDER			RACE			
	Total	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Asian
<b>TOTAL GOOD</b>	60%	74%	48%	62%	57%	45%	71%
<b>TOTAL FAIR OR POOR</b>	38%	24%	52%	38%	43%	49%	26%
<b>Very good</b>	26%	41%	12%	29%	27%	9%	26%
<b>Good</b>	35%	33%	36%	33%	31%	37%	45%
<b>Fair</b>	31%	18%	43%	30%	39%	44%	22%
<b>Poor</b>	7%	5%	9%	8%	4%	6%	4%

Education level and household income are also related to beliefs about the quality of schools these days. Lower-income parents are more likely to say that students in America only get a fair or poor education, with only 44 percent of parents earning less than \$30,000 per year and 42 percent of parents earning between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per year saying schools are good or very good. This rises dramatically for those of higher incomes, up to 81 percent of those earning \$75,000 per year to \$125,000 per year, and to 90 percent of those earning over \$125,000 per year. Parents with a high school diploma or less are divided over whether schools are good/very good (49 percent) or fair/poor (49 percent), while sizable majorities of those with a bachelor's degree (74 percent) or graduate degree (92 percent) think schools these days are providing students with a good or very good education.

## Do you think that on average, students in America today get an education that is very good, good, fair, or poor?

	INCOME						EDUCATION			
	Total	<\$30k	\$30k-\$49k	\$50k-\$74k	\$75k-125k	>\$125k	HS or less	Some college	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
<b>TOTAL GOOD</b>	60%	44%	42%	64%	81%	90%	49%	55%	74%	92%
<b>TOTAL FAIR OR POOR</b>	38%	52%	58%	36%	19%	10%	49%	45%	25%	8%
<b>Very good</b>	26%	12%	13%	22%	46%	60%	17%	20%	31%	63%
<b>Good</b>	35%	32%	29%	42%	35%	30%	31%	35%	44%	29%
<b>Fair</b>	31%	42%	49%	29%	15%	7%	41%	33%	20%	8%
<b>Poor</b>	7%	10%	9%	8%	3%	3%	8%	11%	4%	0%

**But if Millennial parents think schools are generally doing a “good” job, how are they defining a “good education?”** In our focus groups, we asked respondents to discuss what they viewed as the purpose of a “good education” and provided a variety of options, such as preparing students for future learning and college, preparing students for careers and the workforce, to prepare students with life and social skills, and to prepare students to be engaged citizens. Across all of our focus groups, there was little consensus around any particular individual answer.

“I hope that it (graduation) means that they’re prepared to—again, I go back to the workforce—that they’re prepared to go out and start living—begin living, you know, as a responsible adult.”

**RICHMOND MOM**

“I put the purpose of a good education is to prepare students with life and social skills to be ready for the challenges of adult life.”

**ORLANDO MOM**

"I felt like when kids are going to school to be engaged and educated citizens, it teaches you to be a good person first. And I think that's the foundation. Once you get your education, you learn how to be social, I think, and then know laws and understand and have morals and things like that, that's the foundation for everything else."

**RICHMOND MOM**

"You can't say the education was good if you don't got nothing to show for it. That means it wasn't good 'cause from an aspect of financing, realistically the technical thing to say is that, just because the education didn't turn a dollar sign that doesn't mean that it was bad...If I went to Harvard, I'm looking for a Harvard paycheck."

**ORLANDO DAD**

"When you apply for a job, the question is: Do you have a degree? So that's mainly why people go to college, so they can get a job, because they feel like if you don't have a degree you can't get a decent job out of it."

**RICHMOND MOM**

"I think it's important that they teach career skills, but if you put them ... what do I wanta say? They're not teaching them the basics like he said. They don't know how to apply for a credit card, or do your taxes, apply for an apartment. I feel like that should be more towards the forefront because everybody can use that. Not everybody goes on to college and further education."

**MINNEAPOLIS DAD**

"You learn a lot from being in public school, as far as how to work with other people, people that you don't like, people that are in charge of you that you don't like. So I think it prepares kids for a lot of different walks of life. How to be kind to people who aren't nice to you and how to make friends. I think that's the most important thing because those are skills that are gonna carry you through life, no matter what you decide to do. I think that's like the training ground."

**ORLANDO MOM**

We then put this question to the test in our survey, and with similar results; **Millennial parents have a wide range of views of what they think the most important purpose of an education ought to be.** In the survey, the plurality of parents – 38 percent – selected, **"To prepare students for further learning, like college or trade school."** The more highly educated a parent, or the higher their household income, the more likely they were to select this response. Rising from one-third of parents with a high school diploma or less all the way to a clear majority (55 percent) of parents with graduate degrees, the more education a parent has, the more they believe education should primarily be about preparing for future learning.



The **more education a parent has**, the more they believe education should be about **preparing for future learning.**

## Which of the following do you think best describes the purpose of a good education?

	EDUCATION				
	Total	HS or less	Some college	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
To prepare your child for further learning, like college or trade school	38%	33%	35%	42%	55%

## Now, when it comes to your own child or children, which of the following would you say best describes the purpose of a good education for your child?

	EDUCATION				
	Total	HS or less	Some college	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
To prepare your child for further learning, like college or trade school	35%	30%	34%	36%	52%

The second most common answer is that the purpose of a good education is **“to prepare students for the workforce so they can succeed in a career and make a living.”** Overall, some 30 percent of Millennial parents think this is the most important purpose of an education, the same number who say this is what they view as the most important for their own children. Interestingly, there is little relationship between a parent’s gender, education level, or income on this question, and it is only Asian-American parents who significantly over-index for this question; some 43 percent of Asian-American parents select this option, making workforce preparation the clear top priority for this group. Among parents who think workforce preparation is the most important purpose of an education for their own children, two-thirds believe that students these days are getting a good or very good education.

Next, 21 percent of Millennial parents believe that the main purpose of a good education is to **“prepare students with the life and social skills to be ready for the challenges of adulthood.”** This tended to be prioritized more by moms (27 percent) and stay-at-home caregivers (30 percent), while fathers (13 percent) and those employed full-time (16 percent) were slightly less likely to choose this option. Given that moms were generally less satisfied with the state of schools today than fathers, it was unsurprising to see that those who most prioritize these life and social skills for their own child were divided over whether students are getting a good/very good education (50 percent) or only a fair/poor education (50 percent).

Finally, nine percent of Millennial parents believe that the main purpose of a good education is to **“prepare students to be educated and engaged citizens who participate in civic life.”** Only six percent of parents say this is the top priority for their own children, and these parents are not pleased with how students are being educated today; only 29 percent think schools are doing a good or very good job, while 71 percent say students are getting only a fair or poor education these days.

## SECTION II: WHAT SHOULD SCHOOLS BE DOING?

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**Millennial parents expect a lot out of their children's schools. Those expectations include academics, but also go beyond academic preparation.** As we discussed in the last section, while a plurality of parents think the main purpose of an education is to prepare for college or trade school, there is a wide belief that schools must ensure their children have the academic skills they need. Millennial parents also believe schools should provide more than just academic preparation. Throughout our research, Millennial parents have underscored the wide range of skills they believe students should have upon high school graduation, and the significant responsibility they place on schools to prepare students with those skills.

It is common in focus groups for parents to bemoan the ways that skills they were taught as a child are no longer taught in the schools, and Millennial parents are no exception. For instance, in most of our focus groups, at least one parent mentioned that schools are no longer teaching children “how to balance a checkbook” (a curious skill for Millennial parents to focus on given the dramatic decrease in the use of checks as a method of payments in general<sup>3</sup>).



**Millennial parents also believe schools should provide more than just academic preparation.**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/06/the-rise-and-fall-of-checks/372217/>

“I think people can survive without college but you can't survive without knowing about credit score, taxes, things like that. Balancing checkbooks, you can't survive without that.”

**ORLANDO MOM**

“I mean, before we had to actually, like, study and learn the material. Now it's like they give them these word problem questions where the answer is already, like, embedded in the problem, so you just have to pick out the key word and, oh, there's the answer right there. They're not really learning a whole bunch, except to look for a key word.”

**RICHMOND DAD**

“High school doesn't really teach that nowadays, how to balance a checkbook, credit card.”

**MINNEAPOLIS DAD**

“The cursive ... We learned cursive when we were growing up. My kids aren't learning that in school... Yeah, and see, I've taken it upon myself to try to teach mine. I just think it's crazy.”

**MINNEAPOLIS MOM**

“They're not retaining anything...when we took tests, it was like your test was – you had a pop quiz, you had a test, and it was focused on algebra, chapter two, three and four. And you knew, you were studying that all weekend or whenever you studied. And that was your test. And you knew what you got. It wasn't trick questions or anything – or, maybe it was – but now the standardized test is just so many – it's so much information embedded to it, it's impossible for kids to know everything on them.”

**RICHMOND MOM**

## As a result, we wanted to better understand two things:

1. What skills do Millennial parents truly expect students to have upon graduation, and,
2. Who do Millennial parents think should be responsible for teaching those skills?

In order to assess each of these areas, we asked survey respondents to rate each of 17 different skills along each of those dimensions. We first asked them to rate each skill, on a scale of zero to ten (with 0 meaning the skill is “not at all important” and 10 meaning the skill is “one of the most important things”). In the table below, we have coded the skills into three different categories: **academic skills**, **social and emotional skills**, and **workforce skills**.

	MEAN: IMPORTANCE
Be able to get and keep a job	8.54
Be able to handle their personal finances	8.53
Be able to read at a 12th grade level	8.52
Be able to feel confident in themselves	8.51
Be able to be self-sufficient	8.50
Be able to set personal goals and achieve them	8.48
Be able to succeed in college if they choose to attend	8.44
Be able to write at a 12th grade level	8.42
Be able to build good personal relationships	8.32
Be able to earn a comfortable living	8.31
Be able to do math at a 12th grade level	8.15
Be able to succeed in trade school if they choose to attend	8.14

<b>Be able to engage with the community</b>	<b>8.11</b>
<b>Be able to balance a checkbook</b>	<b>8.06</b>
<b>Be able to comfortably use new technology</b>	<b>7.95</b>
<b>Be able to understand a lease document</b>	<b>7.91</b>
<b>Be able to change a tire</b>	<b>7.5</b>

All of the skills we presented were viewed as important, and the vast majority of skills were rated at least an “8” out of 10 by our respondents. The top tier of skills valued by parents are a blend of academic, social, and workforce skills; they certainly think a diploma should mean a student is prepared at grade level in reading, writing, and arithmetic, but they also think a diploma should mean much more than that. **For these parents, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, the ability to handle one’s personal finances and to get a job are all valued as much as the ability to read at a 12th grade level.**

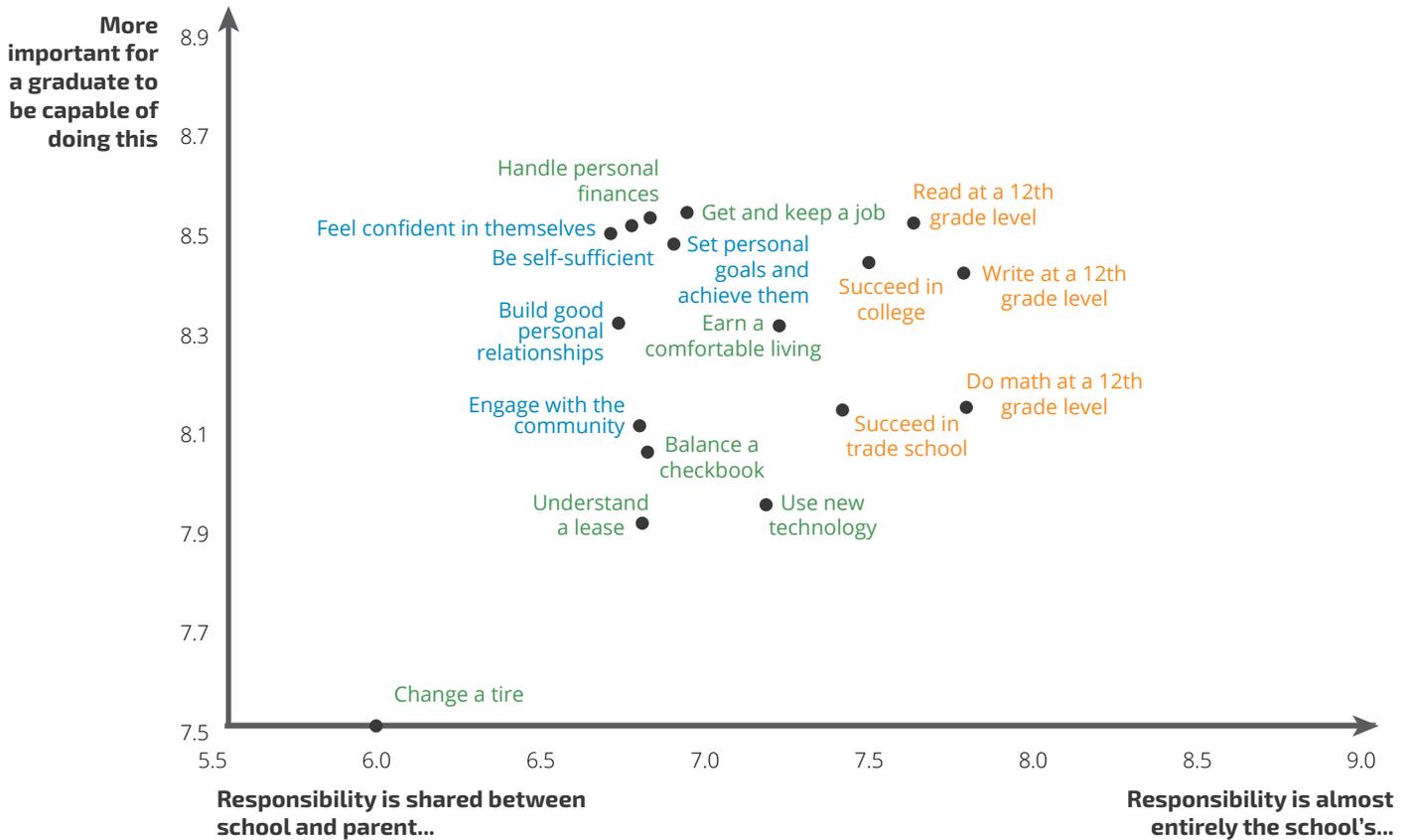
However, there is also the question of whether or not parents expect a child’s school to provide them with the tools to build confidence, self-sufficiency, and key life skills, in addition to the academics. To better tease this out, we presented parents with the same list of 17 skills and asked them to indicate if something should be primarily a parent’s responsibility, primarily a school’s responsibility, or something shared between the two.

Respondents were invited to place a slider on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning something was entirely a parent’s responsibility, 10 meaning it was entirely a school’s responsibility, and 5 meaning the parent and school equally shared responsibility for educating a child on that skill. The higher the number, the more responsible they feel schools are for providing that skill.

And indeed, on all seventeen skills – everything from reading and math all the way to changing a tire – parents place more responsibility on the schools than on themselves. This becomes particularly pronounced when it comes to academic skills, which parents rated most significantly as a school’s responsibility; but given that the average response is above a “5” for all skills tested, it is clear that Millennial parents believe that schools should shoulder a large amount of responsibility for developing students on all fronts, not just academically.

	<b>MEAN: SCHOOL'S RESPONSIBILITY</b>
<b>Be able to write at a 12th grade level</b>	<b>7.79</b>
<b>Be able to do math at a 12th grade level</b>	<b>7.79</b>
<b>Be able to read at a 12th grade level</b>	<b>7.63</b>
<b>Be able to succeed in college if they choose to attend</b>	<b>7.48</b>
<b>Be able to succeed in trade school if they choose to attend</b>	<b>7.40</b>
<b>Be able to earn a comfortable living</b>	<b>7.19</b>
<b>Be able to comfortably use new technology</b>	<b>7.16</b>
<b>Be able to get and keep a job</b>	<b>6.90</b>
<b>Be able to set personal goals and achieve them</b>	<b>6.86</b>
<b>Be able to handle their personal finances</b>	<b>6.78</b>
<b>Be able to balance a checkbook</b>	<b>6.78</b>
<b>Be able to understand a lease document</b>	<b>6.76</b>
<b>Be able to engage with the community</b>	<b>6.75</b>
<b>Be able to feel confident in themselves</b>	<b>6.73</b>
<b>Be able to build good personal relationships</b>	<b>6.68</b>
<b>Be able to be self-sufficient</b>	<b>6.66</b>
<b>Be able to change a tire</b>	<b>5.91</b>

When we plot out the results along the two axes—mean importance and mean belief in the school’s responsibility—we can see where Millennial parents see themselves playing more of a role in helping their children build important skills. While they view things like reading and writing on grade level as a core responsibility of the schools, they also believe that schools should be leading the way and sharing the responsibility with parents in terms of workforce preparation and supporting their child’s social and emotional development.



## SECTION III: HOW DO WE MEASURE HOW STUDENTS ARE DOING?

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We know that Millennial parents have a lot of expectations for their child's school, and that those expectations go far beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic. So how, then, are Millennial parents evaluating whether their child is being prepared properly for the future?

In our survey, we asked parents to tell us one or two of the most important things they look at to know if their child is acquiring the skills that matter. Parents perhaps unsurprisingly, use different sources of information to evaluate how their child is doing on different skills. And while test scores are part of the mix, they are not usually the top thing a parent looks at when evaluating the progress of their own child, especially on those critical workforce and social skills where they see parents sharing more responsibility with the schools.

"I think also talking to other parents will help you. Because you might have one situation, but another parent has seen something completely different. So if you talk to other parents at the same school, then you'll get a feeling as to how as a whole everyone's being treated or everyone's doing their job."

**RICHMOND MOM**

"Well, I engage a lot with the teachers and the principals, and I also participate in PTA and try to get involved in as many activities as I can with the school. And then judge it by what type of homework they're bringing home. You can kind of scale it from there as well, to see if you feel like they're behind or they're a little bit more advanced than what you think."

**RICHMOND MOM**

“The problem, I think, with testing is it creates this idea that, so this is where your kid should be, and then this is where your kid is, and it's like my kid is not that. That is not my kid. My kid is not a dot on a line. My kid is my kid and this is how my kid learns. And you're expecting my child to learn like all these other children because they've memorized the answer of who won this battle. They've memorized that. They didn't learn anything. They memorized it. That's, to me, is what a test is.”

**MINNEAPOLIS MOM**

“I would look at the classrooms. I would say, yeah, you'd need to look at the classrooms collective tests. I mean, sadly, that's all that we can really, because you're not going to be able to go, “Okay, how'd Johnny do? How'd Suzy do?” You're not going to be able to do that and then think of the teacher. You do have to take collective.”

**ORLANDO MOM**

For reading, writing, and math, parents rely on their child's grades, test scores, and conversations with their children's teachers to know if their child is on the right track. A majority of parents – 56 percent – say their child's grades are how they measure their child's performance at reading, and 42 percent say they lean on those grades to measure their child's math skills. When it comes to writing, 40 percent say grades are a top way they see how their child is doing.

When it comes to test scores, 30 percent of parents name test scores as the key way they track how their child is doing in math. A quarter say they rely on test scores to know how their child is doing at reading (25 percent) and writing (26 percent).

However, it isn't just grades and test score results that drive parents' understanding of how their child is doing. Some 35 percent say they gather information about their child's performance in reading or writing by talking to their child's teachers and 39 percent say the same for math.

When it comes to assessing whether or not their child is prepared for the next step in their learning, Millennial parents believe that talking to their own child is the top way to evaluate how their child is doing. When it comes to preparation for future learning, for instance, 39 percent say those conversations are how they know if their child can succeed in college or trade school, and 77 percent say those conversations are how they gauge if their child is able to build good personal relationships.

In our focus groups, we were struck that parents felt like they had a sense of what tests looked like for their children, though it was unclear how accurate or informed that sense was.

**30%**

of parents use test scores as a key way to track how their child is doing in math.

**39%**

of parents gather information about their child's performance in math by talking to their child's teachers.

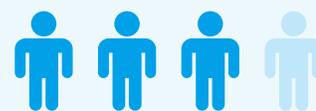
Overall, parents seem reasonably happy with the information they have about what is involved in the tests their children take, and how their own children are performing on those tests. Some 58 percent of parents surveyed said they felt they had “extremely” or “very useful” information about what knowledge and skills their child is tested on, and over half (55 percent) said they had extremely or very useful information on how their own child performs.

However, as with many other items on the survey, there was a relationship between a parent’s income and education and their perception of how much useful information they actually had, with fewer than half of parents with a high school diploma or less saying they felt they had very or extremely useful information about the assessments given to their child and their child’s performance on those assessments.

Getting information about how their child is doing on assessments is important to parents—three out of four parents we surveyed said that they believe “standardized assessments should be a tool that helps parents and teachers diagnose where a student may be struggling and need more help,” and this result held firm across key demographic groups.

When we then asked parents what they *wanted* to know about how their child performs on assessments, responses varied greatly, with at least one-third of parents saying they wanted more information about how their child can improve: the most important skills their child needs to learn (39 percent), the types of problems their child struggles with (39 percent), and what they as a parent can do to help their child improve (33 percent).

Additionally, a quarter to a third of Millennial parents are interested in how their child’s performance compares to that of other children: 35 percent of Millennial parents said they wanted to know how their child stacked up to the average at his or her school, while 31 percent said they were interested in comparisons to the average in the county or district, and a quarter (25 percent) said they were interested in comparisons to the state average. Interestingly, parents with higher incomes or higher education levels were much more interested in information that showed how their child compared to others in the school or district, while parents with less education and lower income wanted more information on the specific areas where their child struggled, and how best they could help them improve.



## 3 out of 4

parents we surveyed said that they believe **“standardized assessments should be a tool that helps parents and teachers diagnose where a student may be struggling and need more help.”**

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## 35%

of parents wanted to know how their child stacked up to the average at his or her school.

When it comes to standardized assessments that your child may take in school, which of the following do you think would be helpful to you as a parent?

	EDUCATION				
	Total	HS or less	Some college	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
Knowing which types of problems my child struggled with	39%	44%	41%	37%	20%
Knowing the most important skills my child needs to learn	39%	39%	45%	40%	26%
Knowing how my child stacks up to the average in his or her school	35%	26%	38%	45%	46%
Knowing what I can do as a parent to help my child improve	33%	32%	40%	34%	21%
Knowing how my child stacks up to the average in our county or district	31%	21%	32%	38%	47%
Knowing how my child has progressed over time	28%	31%	30%	26%	15%
Knowing how my child stacks up to the average in the state	25%	20%	26%	35%	23%
I would not find any of these useful	2%	2%	0%	1%	1%

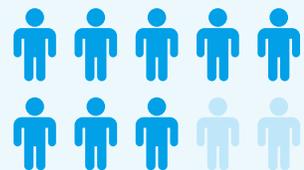
We also asked parents what else might help them find test scores more valuable. Nearly three-in-four parents felt it would be valuable if they had an assurance that a passing score on a test meant a child was “on track” for college, if the scores were seen as valuable in college admissions, or that passing meant a student could succeed in college-level coursework in the state or in the workforce. On each of those four items, 71 percent of parents said they agreed that it would make them find tests more useful. Additionally, over three-in-four parents (76 percent) said they would “find standardized tests more useful if [they] knew that passing the test would make my child eligible for scholarships for college.”

## SECTION IV: HOW CAN WE MEASURE HOW SCHOOLS ARE DOING?

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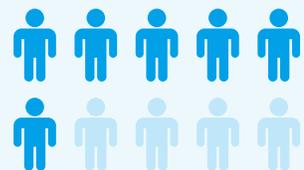
We know that Millennial parents look to a variety of measures to assess whether their child is getting the skills he or she needs. And accordingly, Millennial parents look at a range of types of information, such as test scores, information about a school's culture, extracurricular offerings, and graduation rates, in deciding whether a school is a "good school."

For the most part, as with the tests their children take, Millennial parents say they *feel* like they have pretty good information about the quality of their kids' schools; although like so many other data points, there is a significant split by income and educational level. Some 66 percent of all Millennial parents say they are satisfied with the information they have. Broken down, over eight in ten parents with incomes over \$75,000 per year felt satisfied with the information they had, while fewer than six in ten with incomes under \$50,000 per year felt the same.



**More than 8 in 10**  
parents with incomes of  
\$75,000+ were satisfied with  
the information they had  
about their child's school.

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**Less than 6 in 10**  
parents with incomes of less  
than \$50,000 felt the same.

# How satisfied would you say you are with the information you have about the quality of the schools your children attend?

	INCOME						EDUCATION			
	Total	<\$30k	\$30k-\$49k	\$50k-\$74k	\$75k-125k	>\$125k	HS or less	Some college	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
<b>TOTAL SATISFIED</b>	66%	59%	56%	63%	82%	88%	57%	65%	73%	91%
<b>TOTAL NOT SATISFIED</b>	7%	7%	16%	6%	2%	3%	9%	9%	4%	3%
<b>Extremely satisfied</b>	32%	25%	23%	27%	44%	55%	27%	29%	35%	50%
<b>Very satisfied</b>	35%	34%	33%	36%	38%	33%	29%	37%	38%	40%
<b>Somewhat satisfied</b>	26%	31%	27%	31%	17%	9%	33%	26%	21%	6%
<b>Not that satisfied</b>	6%	5%	16%	5%	1%	3%	8%	7%	4%	3%
<b>Not at all satisfied</b>	1%	2%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%	0%	0%

In our focus groups, we asked our focus group participants to sketch out for us what criteria they'd use to measure the quality of a school.

"I had attendance rate, pass – I guess pass/fail rate, student teacher ratios, and I guess turnover rates – based on teacher turnover rates."

**RICHMOND MOM**

"I had attendance, classroom test scores, classroom participation, how well children pay attention, and how interactive are the teachers with the kids."

**RICHMOND MOM**

"Whether or not the school is providing the resources to help the kids that may have reading disability or learning disability. That's going to determine if the school is good or not."

**ORLANDO DAD**

"So the first thing I did, was I looked at the ratings from the general population. I looked at the teacher to student ratio. I looked at how responsive any of the administrators were in answering questions."

**MINNEAPOLIS MOM**

"The big things for me were the teacher-child ratios. The smaller class sizes definitely were a big thing for me. I don't want my son to kind of get lost in the crowd. Also, the communication. There's a little piece of paper that gets sent home at the end of the week with what they did that week, and anything he struggled with, so that I kind of have ongoing knowing of what's going on."

**MINNEAPOLIS MOM**

*“I have teacher retention rates, school safety, teacher experience, test scores/whether or not they pass or fail – their pass rates... when I put teacher retention rate, that tells you a lot about the school, the administration, whether or not that teacher feels like they need to move on. And then experience falls into if you’re there, you got that passion of learning, you want to stay there. You have an attachment to the kids. You don’t want to leave.”*

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**RICHMOND DAD**

In our survey, the top three things parents look for to evaluate a school are how a school stacks up on state tests (53%), whether a school has a positive culture (42%), and whether a school offers good extracurricular activities (40%). Following those criteria, parents said they would consider graduation rates (30%) and what percentage of students go on to college (26%) as key pieces of information. Parents with a bachelor's degree or higher tend to place slightly more emphasis on arts, music, athletics and extracurricular activities, while for parents with less than a bachelor's degree, there is significantly higher interest in knowing what percent of a school's students graduate or progress to the next grade level.

	EDUCATION				
	Total	HS or less	Some college	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
<b>Whether the school is above or below average on state tests</b>	53%	50%	58%	55%	52%
<b>Whether the school has a popular school culture</b>	42%	41%	48%	40%	37%
<b>Whether the school offers good art, music, or extracurricular activities</b>	40%	37%	38%	44%	47%
<b>What percentage of the school's students graduate/go to the next grade level</b>	30%	35%	35%	25%	15%
<b>What percentage of the school's students go on to college</b>	26%	26%	28%	26%	20%
<b>What rating a school receives from the state department of education</b>	23%	26%	24%	19%	16%
<b>What the teacher to student ratio is at the school</b>	23%	21%	29%	23%	16%
<b>What I hear from word-of-mouth about the school</b>	22%	24%	25%	21%	12%
<b>Whether the school offers good athletics programs</b>	21%	20%	18%	24%	28%
<b>What rating a school receives based on parent reviews or surveys</b>	21%	23%	24%	18%	12%
<b>What percentage of the school's students go on to good jobs</b>	19%	20%	20%	16%	20%
<b>What rating a school receives on school ratings sites like GreatSchools</b>	14%	12%	16%	17%	12%
<b>What rating a school receives on real estate websites like Zillow</b>	7%	6%	7%	9%	6%
<b>None of these</b>	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%

“They literally have all that information – like, I’m in the process now – I mean, you go on Zillow and you look at a house, man, they tell you, middle school, high schools, elementary school, the ratings. You know graduating percentages. All that’s there for you.”

**RICHMOND DAD**

“When I purchased my home, it’s the greatschool.org rating, and that is really based upon, it’s subjective, so it’s really based upon parents putting in what they believe is a great school. And so therefore, that’s what skews that data.

So, that’s how I chose the home. It wasn’t based upon what the test score was, it just happened to be an A-rated school district.”

**ORLANDO MOM**

“There were five sites that I used. One was like, oh, I researched this, but one of them was a Yelper sort of thing. And then another one was an internal one from the teachers and how the teachers felt the school did as well. They were actually rated pretty comparatively, like comparably, so it was ... so that’s what I did.”

**MINNEAPOLIS MOM**

Items like word of mouth, ratings and real estate websites, and state’s school ratings were ranked lower, though in our focus groups, these were often where parents said they were getting information.

The bottom line? **Millennial parents may not think tests tell the full story when it comes to their own child, but they think they’re useful for providing information about school quality.** However, as noted in Section II, reading, writing, and math aren’t the only things parents want out of a school – they want students to develop a wide range of personal and workforce skills, and want to see that schools are providing a culture and opportunities to grow in those ways, too.

## SECTION V: HOW SHOULD WE HOLD SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE?

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We know that Millennial parents have high expectations for schools and believe they should be accountable for supporting students in building academic, social, and workforce skills. And in this research, we found that Millennial parents are very open to a wide range of methods of holding schools accountable and responsible for giving kids a good education.

Millennial parents strongly support the concept of schools being held accountable – 83 percent in our survey felt that schools should be held accountable for ensuring children can read, write, and do math on grade level. And to them, the concept of “accountability” is similar to the concept of “responsibility.” For various questions, we tested responses to both the term “accountability” and “responsibility”, finding that Millennial parents respond to them quite similarly. For instance, some 83 percent of Millennial parents think schools should be “accountable” for ensuring children can read, write, and do math on grade level; when we replaced “accountable” with “responsible” in the same statement, some 78 percent of Millennial parents agreed.

But who should be accountable—or responsible— for ensuring improvement when a school is not living up to the high expectations Millennial parents have for their children’s schools? We asked our respondents who they would hold accountable for making sure a struggling school improves. And as with the skills parents expect kids to learn before graduation, parents view accountability for improving a struggling school as shared between parents and teachers: 43% say parents should be primarily accountable for improving struggling schools, and 42% say teachers should be primarily accountable. (They think students should be involved, too, with 33% saying the students themselves should be accountable in getting a school to improve.)

However, there are big differences between parents at different income and education levels. Parents with higher incomes and educations are more likely to believe parents should be accountable for stepping in to address the problems in a struggling school, while parents with lower incomes or only a high school education or less tend to hold the teachers, district, and state more accountable for improving a struggling school.

Sometimes a school consistently fails to ensure children can read, write, or do math on grade level. Who do you think should be primarily accountable for making sure a struggling school improves?

	INCOME						EDUCATION			
	Total	<\$30k	\$30k-\$49k	\$50k-\$74k	\$75k-125k	>\$125k	HS or less	Some college	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
The parents of students in that school	43%	37%	36%	44%	50%	50%	36%	42%	55%	47%
The students in that school	33%	30%	32%	29%	37%	41%	27%	35%	32%	50%
The teachers at that school	42%	55%	39%	36%	42%	36%	43%	46%	43%	30%
The principal at that school	24%	29%	35%	14%	25%	10%	27%	24%	23%	12%
The school district	34%	45%	47%	36%	15%	12%	44%	35%	23%	14%
The state education department	25%	35%	34%	23%	13%	12%	28%	34%	19%	9%
Other	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%

Across race and political parties, parents overwhelmingly agreed that government should protect “consumers” like parents and students of public schools, in a similar way that they protect consumers by holding companies accountable. Seven in ten respondents agreed with the need for government to provide consumer protections to parents and students, and this transcended political party, with 79 percent of Republicans and 76 percent of Democrats agreeing.

In our survey and focus groups, we also asked Millennial parents what they thought should happen when a school is struggling to ensure that students can consistently read, write and do math on grade level. Millennial parents are supportive of a variety of different approaches to improve education opportunity for students in such cases:

Sometimes, a school consistently fails to ensure children can read, write, or do math on grade level. When this happens, a school district or state may decide to take action regarding the school. For each of the following, tell me if you would support or oppose this action.	TOTAL % SUPPORT	TOTAL % STRONGLY SUPPORT
<b>That school should receive additional help and resources from the state, such as new curriculum or training for teachers.</b>	90%	60%
<b>Students attending that school should be able to transfer to another public school in the district or attend a public charter school.</b>	70%	37%
<b>That school's principal and administration should be replaced with new leadership.</b>	64%	22%
<b>After multiple warnings, that school should be closed and the students should be re-assigned to other public schools in the area.</b>	59%	23%

Some 90 percent said that they believe such schools should first get additional help and resources, such as new curriculum or training for teachers. There is very little difference between key demographic groups on this, and it is a popular measure across the board.

Furthermore, seven in ten supported the idea that students attending that school should be able to transfer to another public school in the district or to attend a public charter school. There is also very little difference across key demographics on this question, with large majorities across all major demographic groups supporting this policy.

Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) said that if a school is consistently failing to ensure children can read, write, or do math on grade level, that the school's principal and administration should be replaced with new leadership. Support here is higher among parents with higher incomes and higher education levels, though it is supported by around six-in-ten of those with incomes under \$75,000.

And a clear majority of 59 percent said that after multiple warnings, that school should be closed and the students should be re-assigned to other public schools in the area.

## WRAP UP

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The most critical takeaways from this project are:

- **Expectations:** Millennial parents have high expectations for schools and want them to provide kids with core academic skills – and more. They view schools and teachers as being their partner in the work of raising their children to be self-sufficient, independent, confident young adults.
- **Prepared for college, work and life:** They think college readiness is important, but so too is workforce readiness and preparation for the challenges of life. And though they hold schools most responsible for academic preparation, parents think schools have a role to play in all three areas.
- **Student success:** They take a multi-faceted approach to gauging how their child is doing. Parents rely on grades and tests for academic subjects, and on observation to gauge progress on other skills.
- **Tests plus:** While parents believe tests only tell a part of the picture of how their own child is doing, they think they're a valuable way to measure school quality, along with taking a look at a school's culture and extracurriculars.
- **Taking action:** Finally, when a school unfortunately isn't living up to those expectations, Millennial parents are open to making changes within a school or giving those children a chance to get that quality education elsewhere.
- **Income and education level differences:** There are big differences between how higher and lower income Millennial parents, as well as those with different levels of education, feel about the schools.
  - Lower-income parents and those without a college education are much less likely to think that schools are doing a good job and are less satisfied with the information they have about the schools and how their children are doing. This may be linked to the importance they place on things like teaching students workforce, life and social skills that may not be measured as effectively by schools as the core academic disciplines. They see teachers, the state, and the district as playing a bigger role in holding schools accountable for providing kids with a good education.
  - Higher-income parents, meanwhile, are more likely to say they expect a good education to put their own child on a path to education beyond high school, and to view themselves as playing a major role in holding their child's school accountable. They are quite satisfied with the schools, and the information they feel they get from the schools and are eager to know more about how their child stacks up.

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